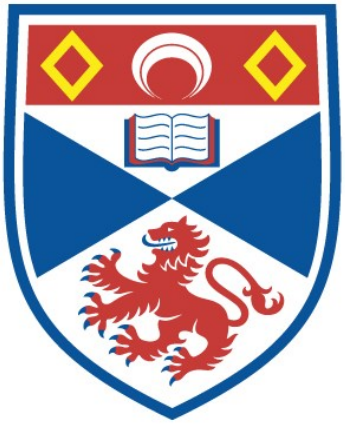
ROBERT JENSON'S REVISIONARY METAPHYSICS AND THE CORRESPONDENCE OF TRUTH

Jonathan Mark Olson

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil
at the
University of St Andrews



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Jonathan Mark Olson

University of
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of

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Abstract

The following examines the relationship between reason and faith through the lens of Robert Jenson's metaphysics. It explores Jenson's concerns around 'classical metaphysics' but critically engages on the question of the correspondence of truth. It is the opinion of the present author that the loss of objective truth is a serious failing among postliberal theologians. Jenson's brand of revisionary metaphysics, being committed to revision in light of the gospel, presents a unique take on this issue in light of his narrative, historical focus. Jenson was committed to a solution that avoided contemporary subjectivism and nihilism, which he considered incompatible with the gospel. He was likewise opposed to an abstract, 'timeless' notion of eternity, which shaped the possibility of the correspondence of truth. Namely, it must be found within time. I explore this by asking how it is that knowledge arising from faith may be objective for Jenson. I do so under two primary headings, redemption and creation. The first concerns the perspective of the believing community, following through to Jenson's highly original anthropology. The second heading is Jenson's alternative to natural theology and explores what knowledge of God creation may bring and how this relates to the knowledge of faith. Jenson's metaphysics is not without its challenges under both headings – redemption and creation – these being partly related to his collapsing of the distinction between the two. Despite that, Jenson does indeed articulate a version of the truth which is more than subjective. The key conceptual move is that, for Jenson, the truth must correspond to God, not to human reason apart from God.

Contents

Introduction

Christianity is unique among the religions in that it attributes to the truth a personal status. That Jesus is himself the truth is no doubt partly why the question of what truth actually is, and the difficulty of articulating, theologically, a metaphysic which may support that claim, has laid at the heart of Western intellectual history. Christian theology has been preoccupied not with how to describe the world, or paint imaginatively a picture of the divine. It is not myth. Neither, however, has it ever been pure philosophy. Theology, however abstracted, must trace itself back to lived experience of truth. It is part of the *way.* In that sense, some accommodation between the two sides must be made. There is a little of both. In Ingolf Dalferth's memorably phrase, Christianity is neither 'mythos' nor 'logos.' It is, rather, a new thought form.[1]

Wherever this new thought form has appeared, the controversy of its relation to other parallel, or contradictory, ways of thinking has not been far behind. The polemic behind Robert Jenson's thought is thus part of a long tradition. The question which lays at its heart is not 'how to do metaphysics without Greek philosophy.' True to the roots of the faith, the lived experience, the question which lay at the heart of Jenson's revisionary project was how to think in light of the gospel. How may we philosophise without lapsing into something which is in fact alien to the faith which begins in Jesus? There is always a danger in theological reflection that it may become purely metaphysical, detaching itself from its necessary moorings in the life of faith. The temptation for the scholar is to reach for the *truth* apart from the *way.* This concern is programmatic to Jenson's revisionary metaphysics, and it is a laudable aim. But already we employ terms in need of provisional definition.

'Revisionary metaphysics' is one of those terms that can come to be defined by the authors writing under its heading. Worse than that, those authors are seldom the ones who describe their work as revisionary. As such, we will have to take care to read Jenson on his own terms so as to avoid prejudicing our inquiry. In Jenson's own case there is some precedent for understanding his metaphysics as 'revisionary,' even apart from those who have helpfully organised his work under that title.[2] A short response Jenson gave to criticism of his work is helpful, both for understanding what made Jenson's metaphysics 'revisionary' and what he understood to be its central concerns.

[1] Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Crucified and resurrected: restructuring the grammar of Christology,* trans. Jo Bennett. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), xi
[2] Robert Jenson, *Theology as revisionary metaphysics: essays on God and creation,* ed. Stephen John Wright (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014)

'Some thinkers,' claims Jenson, 'find themselves compelled to what has been called "revisionary metaphysics," urging changes not merely in affirmations made within a particular discipline, but in the conceptual ways commonly followed by all disciplines within an historical culture.'[3] Immediately we are signalled with the breadth of what Jenson hoped to accomplish. Revisionary metaphysics is more than a dialogue internal to academic theology. It is not, for instance, a discussion of what 'Greek' ideas we may keep, and which ones throw away. 'Christian theologians,' he finds, 'are especially liable to' the revisionary 'urge.'[4] This is because the gospel retains a certain 'contrariness to human proclivity.'[5] The thinking which accompanies the gospel is not intuitive to any given historical culture. Rather, 'Christian theology within any culture can always be read as a sustained effort to dislocate at culture's common sense.'[6] In the broadest sense, this is the aim that Jenson set himself. To do Christian theology is in some sense to 'revise' the culture in which one finds oneself, challenging its assumptions according to the gospel. In that context, it is not difficult to see why Jenson considered it important that his metaphysics strike a 'revisionary' path. Jenson sought to challenge the assumptions of the culture in which he found himself. We would do well to bear this in mind. Doing so will aid in avoiding the danger of interpreting Jenson's thought unduly by others or by the historical context in which he wrote. As mentioned, Jenson must be read on his own terms. His originality deserves at least that, as does his commitment to the gospel and its aims.

Jenson is quite clear about what needs to be revised. In his words, '…my systematic theology urges that the metaphysics that construes being as perdurance, and contingency as an ontological deficit, is antithetical to the gospel.'[7] The precision of this focus examines why Jenson's metaphysics has often been oversimplified, and its subtlety under-appreciated. We may, however, gloss these comments for simplicity's sake without falling into this trap, bearing in mind that a fuller exposition will need to introduce considerable nuance later. By way of introduction, we may highlight that the issue surrounding 'perdurance' and also 'contingency' is in fact time. It was a particular notion of abstracted and static eternity that Jenson felt ill-fitting, even opposed to, the gospel's God. The reader will note the relation this bears to Christianity's classical heritage. I need only comment that this arises from Jenson's concern to retain the distinct flavour of the scriptural narrative and purpose of theology. Theology must point toward the God described in scripture. The centrality of this concern

[3] Robert Jenson, "A Reply," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52, no.1 (February 1999): 132-132
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

means that Jenson is not more opposed to classical thought than any other. Indeed, Jenson's critique of metaphysics is more than cultural. It is also methodological and soteriological. Though this remains broad, further definition of 'revisionary metaphysics,' as well as what is being revised, must await our first chapter.

The responses to Jenson's theology have been many and varied, both sympathetic and critical. Regarding the latter, a key issue highlighted among scholars has been that of the pre-existence of the Son according to Jenson's conception. Of these, Oliver Crisp has provided a balanced, though critical account, which duly highlights the extent to which Jenson breaks with tradition.[8] The question of the *logos asarkos* is one to which Jenson would be forced to return (though reluctantly) throughout his career.[9] Important as this issue is, it will not be a central focus of the present work, given that it has received more than adequate treatment elsewhere. Other scholars are more sympathetic to Jenson's eschatological bent. Of these, Francis Watson is of note, and has received lengthy and generally sympathetic response from Jenson.[10] Watson's comments concern not the shape of Jenson's theology as a whole, but the areas in which Jenson may have overlooked the opportunity to buttress his account, such as regarding the unity of God's trinitarian works *ad extra.*[11] Apart from this, Jenson's thought has continued to generate substantial interest. An example of recent work is that of Jonathan M. Platter who, seeing merit in Jenson's contribution as a whole, attempted to explore elements of Jenson's theology in relation to divine simplicity, seeing avenues of dialogue between Jenson and more traditional thinkers.[12] As mentioned above, Jenson's work is of considerable scope and therefore provides room for different interpretations and possibilities. Neither is the discussion limited to questions of metaphysics, as the ecumenically broad volume produced in response to Jenson and edited by Colin Gunton, shows.[13] That *Trinity, Time, and Church,* considers issues as diverse as eschatology, theology of culture, soteriology, and Jenson's theology of history alongside more narrowly metaphysical concerns such as Jenson's understanding of time shows the fertility and breadth of Jenson's published works.

It also signals another problem. With such a broad catalogue to interpret, written over many years, it is necessary that the interpreter restrict focus. One natural way to do that is to focus on later works. In

[8] Oliver Crisp, "Robert Jenson on the Pre-existence of Christ," *Modern Theology* 23, no.1 (January 2007)
[9] Jenson, *Revisionary Metaphysics,* 119-124
[10] Robert Jenson, "Response to Watson and Hunsinger," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no.2 (May 2002)
[11] Francis Watson, "'America's theologian': an appreciation of Robert Jenson's Systematic Theology, with some remarks about the bible," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no.2 (May 2002), 216
[12] Jonathan M. Platter, *Divine Simplicity and the Triune Identity: a critical dialogue with the theological metaphysics of Robert W. Jenson,* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2021)
[13] Colin E. Gunton, ed., *Trinity, time, and church : a response to the theology of Robert W. Jenson,* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2000)

Jenson's case, this is recommended given the considerable development in his thought over the course of his adult life. Helpfully in this regard, Jenson's two-volume *Systematic Theology* is a relatively late work.[14] It thus represents a good starting point on most issues, though we will have caused to look directly at numerous other texts, too. I will focus less on Jenson's earlier work as a result. The exception to this will be in the first chapter where beginning (briefly) with some of Jenson's earlier work will demonstrate well the development in his thought and its central impetus – but to say more would be to pre-empt my argument. Although early works such as *Knowledge of Things Hoped For*[15] clearly express Jenson's early interest in and engagement with epistemology, this thesis focuses on Jenson's mature theological and philosophical work.

On a similar note, though we will touch upon many issues indirectly in our examination of Jenson, I must signal a bias at the outlet. The question to which I will dedicate myself will be Jenson's articulation and presentation of truth. This is a central issue to any metaphysic and, in allowing Jenson to speak on his own terms, it will require us to cut across diverse sections of Jenson's thought, without specifically resting on important but narrower themes such as Jenson's understanding of history, or the relationship between time and Trinity. Indeed, due to their complexity, these questions would deserve dedicated works. Jenson's articulation of truth is important because it generates differing interpretations but has received no sustained treatment.

On that heading, it is worth mentioning a particularly important recent work, Francesca Aran Murphy's *God is Not a Story: Realism Revisited.* The subtitle of Murphy's work is perhaps enough to reveal its importance to the question at hand. Though we lack space to examine the intricacy of Murphy's work in detail, it is useful to highlight a few areas in which it has made helpful contributions to scholarship. One area stands out in particular.

A significant merit of Murphy's account is the precision with which it highlights the epistemic difference between realism and twentieth-century postliberalism (under which heading she includes Jenson, for better or worse).[16] Murphy's own position is clear from her title; she defends realism. A primary distinction is that, for the realist, metaphysics is, by nature, 'referential.'[17] This requires a

[14] Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Triune God, Vol.1*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) and Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Works of God. Vol.2,* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)
[15] Robert Jenson, *The knowledge of things hoped for; the sense of theological discourse,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969)
[16] Francesca Aran Murphy, *God Is Not a Story: Realism Revisited,* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2007), 17-18
[17] Ibid., 18

little explanation. For Murphy, everyday language has a 'referential' character. It participates in a 'metaphysical impulse.' This means that even in ordinary circumstances, such as speaking of the weather, we 'speak *about* things.'[18] In other words, 'we want to affirm something real.'[19] This is what gives even ordinary language a 'metaphysical trajectory.'[20] We mean to refer to some*thing*. Thus, language is by nature 'first order.'[21] It has ontological content. In essence, what Murphy is saying is that our language assumes the things we are talking about. It is *realist* because it points beyond the words to mind-independent reality.

In Murphy's view, narrative theology misses this 'first order' aspect of language. It postures itself as a second-order reflection and, 'swallowing its own tail,' replaces content with method.[22] Murphy finds Jenson a particularly good example of this, which earns him the descriptor 'story Barthian.' The problem is the confusion between method and content.[23] The result is language which refers to the discipline of theology itself, rather than its content.[24] We may suppose that, for Murphy, the epistemological questions to which Jenson addresses himself, and which we will trace in detail, would be symptoms of this underlying disease.

In what follows I mean to interrogate Jenson's presentation of truth along these lines. I believe theological language should be metaphysical in the deepest sense; that is, I believe it should have ontological content. I cannot, of course, demonstrate here that this is the only viable way of conceiving truth, still less evaluate all arguments for or against that prospect. However, my first chapter, as well as the early part of my second, will, in excavating Jenson's revisionary metaphysics, find that Jenson was committed to articulating a concept of truth which is no less robust than Murphy's and which flows directly from his understanding of the gospel. For Jenson, as we will see, truth must be a mind-independent reality – and our theological language must reach for it. This understanding of a truth which corresponds to mind-independent reality will be a useful evaluative tool in assessing whether Jenson's presentation of truth constitutes a 'realism' that has ontological content.

On that note, we need to define terms. I propose to use the term 'correspondence' rather than referential, with more or less the same meaning. For a system of thought to be 'coherent,' it must be

[18] Murphy, *God Is Not a Story,* 18
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 17-18
[24] Ibid.

consistent according to its internal propositions. This is the kind of truth that could be found in a language game. To say that the truth must also *correspond* is to say that it must describe extra-linguistic, mind-independent reality. At other times I will also refer to correspondence as 'mind-independent' or 'objective' truth. It is clear, to me at least, that Jenson believed he was making statements with first-order implications. When he makes statements of ontological intent, we may assume them to have ontological content. Of course, it may still be the case that much of the language Jenson employs in articulating his metaphysic is shared with other twentieth-century theologians. However, as stated above, it will be a primary concern of mine to let Jenson speak for himself and – where possible – define his own terms.

As a technical aside, we also need to add a gloss to the word objective before proceeding. I have attached it to correspondence and mind-independence. However, it must be noted that, properly speaking, the opposite of objective is *subjective.* Seen from that angle, one may object that something may be objective in that it 'corresponds' to a coherent web of propositions. This may avoid subjectivism in so far as a tradition or – say – a believing community is in some sense independent of the perceiving subject. However, this is not the kind of correspondence I mean to refer to. This kind of correspondence may reach beyond my personal subjectivity, but it still presents the truth as mind-dependent. A tradition, for example, is dependent upon its human adherents, a community. This falls short of what I mean by 'correspondence', 'objectivity', and 'mind-independence.' The chief reason it does so is that, while avoiding subjectivism, it does not avoid historical relativism; but much of the problem here is merely linguistic.

An example will help. If the death and resurrection of Jesus forms a primary part of the gospel (as indeed it must for the believing community), then the gospel makes a particular kind of truth claim. In other words, whatever one tradition or another may affirm, whatever agreements made or not made by a community, the resurrection must be as final and absolute as death itself. With such an audacious claim – that a man moved from death to life – contrary to all we normally observe, there is little wiggle room. The claim 'he is risen' cannot be a reference to a tradition or culture alone. It implies, beyond doubt, an epistemic certainty. It has ontological content. It means the community is defined by its access, privileged or otherwise, to a piece of historical knowledge. Moreover, if that knowledge is to have power, as it does according to the gospel, it must be something found, a sheer given, a mind-independent realty. If not, it is less than it claims to be, just another thought rather than one which brings life in the face of death. The truth claim 'Christ is risen' is not merely a 'second-order' cultural expression or an identity-marker for a certain tradition or community. The resurrection is a mind-independent reality, true even if there should be a time when there are no longer minds or linguistic

communities that articulate or confess this truth. I mean to explore Jenson's thought on that basis. Indeed, if the gospel really is about proclaiming 'Jesus' story,' as Jenson affirms, we can do nothing less.[25]

On that heading, we described above what Jenson thought he was revising, highlighting the centrality of time. Within that, the reference to 'classical metaphysics' below it is not under the assumption that all ancient and/or medieval thinkers shared the same metaphysical views. It should be contextually clear that the target for Jenson is not 'realism' in general, even where I suggest that a more overtly realist position would be helpful, such as in the third chapter. It should be clear to any attentive reader that Jenson engages widely and creatively with 'the tradition' of theology he has inherited. He is often critical and appreciative of the same thinker. 'Classical metaphysics' is a kind of placeholder I have used to refer to traditional ideas of the timeless God, nothing more.

It remains to say something of the structure of the present work. Chapter one attempts to get to grips with Jenson's problem with metaphysics. The central question is why it needs revising at all. On this heading, we will quickly signal Jenson's original understanding of the purpose of metaphysical language, which must be soteriologically conditioned. It must, in other words, be 'saving talk.'[26] Metaphysical language must correspond in the sense that it must accurately refer to the gospel's God, not another. We will also consider Jenson's critique under this heading, not least his understanding of the *hiddenness* of God, which is substantially Lutheran. In this chapter and others, the central contention will be that faith must be at the base of any Christian metaphysic and I seek to interpret that in Jenson's terms.

Our second chapter will follow on from there by asking how it is that the knowledge born of faith – if indeed that is what Jenson's metaphysic must be – can correspond to mind-independent reality. A central theme of my interpretation of Jenson is introduced and put to work, the unity of creation and redemption. This second chapter concerns the knowledge of redemption, beginning with the *coherence* of the believing community's faith and moving on to ask how it may correspond. Jenson, it is argued, understands that faith corresponds in God directly and we will explore this in detail.

[25] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 199
[26] Robert Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God according to the Gospel,* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 26

The final chapter will ask how, according to Jenson, creation may mediate the knowledge of faith, without lapsing into 'natural' knowledge that does not rely on faith. In large part this is developed as an exposition of Jenson's key revisionary move, the removal of 'substance' from the understanding of created things. From there we will press on to see how it is that this relates to a central pillar of Jenson's metaphysic of creation, harmony. My interpretation here will be partly deductive as I seek to reconstruct less explicit implications of Jenson's revisionary programme. Jenson is often extremely brief, which means some interpretive deduction is necessary. Much of this will concern the relationship between creature and Creator, which is key to understanding the possibility of mind-independent truth given the relative underweight he gives to traditional metaphysical lynchpins such as transcendentals. We will touch on this briefly in the third chapter. Our engagement at this juncture will be critical, precisely for what, in conjunction with the removal of substance, this implies for the reliability of human reason. The launch-point of this critique will be the lack of space Jenson affords creaturely causality in his system, but to say any more would be to pre-empt our later discussion. We will close chapter three with a potential solution to this problem.

The heart of my argument will be that Jenson articulates a concept of truth which does indeed 'correspond.' As it is faith-based, it corresponds in God, and is no less for doing so. Though not without weaknesses, Jenson's thought introduces a fresh perspective that, for the most part, succeeds in its aim: to do metaphysics in a way that reflects the importance of the gospel and of saving faith.

1. The problem with metaphysics

The problem with revisionary metaphysics is where to begin. It would be easier to focus solely on Christian theology but that would be historically dishonest. Many of the church's metaphysical ideas did not originate within the church. Nevertheless, we cannot analyse everything. The focus must be narrowed. How we do so reflects our starting point. For that reason, we must take care. In Jenson's case our focus must be historical. If we do not take this step, it will be difficult to appreciate what revisionary metaphysics is all about. Indeed, revisionary metaphysics *requires* a historical perspective. That is part of what it is, critique and beyond. And so, the most relevant ideas are those that have provided a context for the church's mission. This means Graeco-Roman thought, though that remains perilously broad.

The problem is that there is no neutral launch point. We cannot step outside our own history, so we must contend with the classical heritage. Our thought is a dialogue, a response. We must respond to what has come before but, in so far as we are to move beyond it, we face the problem of what tools we may use. If we cannot step beyond history, we seem trapped. Of ourselves, we can but respond. We cannot initiate and our thought is not the starting point. But if it is to be thought at all it must answer this question. It must find the criteria by which it responds to history, the originator. We cannot revise classical metaphysics according to its own tenets. That would be an implicit refutation of Jenson's project from the beginning, because of our beginning. The tools we use to revise already reflect a metaphysical stance. Hence the common start in theological prolegomena, of which Jenson is quite rightly critical.[27] Were we to begin with epistemology proper, we would fall into the same trap. Our epistemology cannot so break free as to start afresh. Our knowledge cannot be *a*historical. This is the mainstay of Jenson's problem with metaphysics, and it is our starting point. What comes from beyond history cannot be us, or accessible on our own grounds, because our reason is not timeless.

Instead, we start with the ideas as received in history. Even the gospel is to be taken, firstly, as a fact of history.[28] The only way to avoid the epistemological black hole is to change the question. We must start *within* the problem, anything else presumes upon the metaphysics being revised. We cannot take an outside position if we are to understand what Jenson is trying to accomplish. The metaphysics of the past cannot be normative for our discourse. We dialogue, as equal partners. Naturally this

[27] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 6
[28] Ibid., 11

approach refracts back, demanding dialogue with modern ideas too. Viewed historically, the priority of ancient metaphysics is only temporal. Both ancient and modern must be judged according to faith's knowledge.

We must get one thing straight in the beginning. Revisionary metaphysics is not a 'postmodern' refutation of absolute reason. It is not simply about conflicting notions of eternity or historical consciousness, though any metaphysic worth its salt must decide these issues. Appealing to tradition is avoiding the question; that is not what we mean by faith's knowledge. Mere tradition cannot bear the existential weight faith requires. In his *Systematic Theology,* Jenson follows Luther on faith: 'To have a God is nothing other than to trust and believe him from the heart…The two are inseparable, faith and God. So whatever you hang your heart on…is actually your God.'[29] Tradition cannot determine the issue of where we 'hang our hearts.' As Jenson puts it, 'What is actually *my* God may nevertheless be no God.'[30] We will come to idolatry when we discuss the hiddenness of God below. For now, we point out the actual issue at stake: our ideas may lead to what is not God. If we are to talk in these terms, we need a robust concept of truth, not a weak, relativistic one. Faith is outward looking, not merely subjective, but its objectivity must come from God, not from us. In large part, revisionary metaphysics is an attempt to remain faithful to this insight.

Neither can we forget Jenson's own context. He was as much a critic of modern as ancient epistemology. Truth in revisionary metaphysics must be mind-independent. We may be approaching the issue from within, but the truth must correspond objectively. It cannot merely cohere. This is because faith is a 'personal relation of a creature to the Creator' and 'has its whole import from the side of the object.'[31] The heart must hang outside of us. As we examine Jenson's understanding of history and faith in greater detail, it will be clear that he means to articulate a notion of truth in no way reduced from that of classical antiquity. There can be no fudging the issue. If our ideas are historical happenstance, then they are not true in any meaningful sense of the word. These questions will shape our later chapters explicitly, here they are recommended as an implicit background. Whatever we may call metaphysics, it cannot lapse into relativism. This is not to denigrate opposing views. The intention of the above remarks is to clear the ground and bring Jenson's concerns into the foreground so he may be judged on his own terms. Some of these concerns are shared by all metaphysicians, some rejected, but just as faith admits no outside tribunal, faith's knowledge will not be judged by criteria other than its own.

[29] Luther's Large Catechism, in Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 69
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

In short, if we want to understand Jenson's theological concerns, we would be well advised to take his lead. There are concerns that remained priorities throughout his career, even as his thought developed. One rubric under which to consider these may be the relationship between truth and history. Another may be to ask after the correspondence of faith's knowledge. As we consider these in detail, we will get to the root of the critical aspect of revisionary metaphysics.

Proclamation without metaphysics, a changing background

Jenson's early work is programmatic, laying out core concerns to which he would return throughout his career. Its comparative simplicity makes it a convenient place to start. A good example is the article 'Proclamation without Metaphysics,' originally published in 1962 when Jenson was in his early thirties. This article has one question at its core: do we need metaphysics to proclaim the gospel? This is a thread we can follow into his later work; namely, the separation of the gospel's proclamation from the metaphysics accompanying it. The distinction is of no small consequence, pivoting as it does from thought to language, and that as actually spoken in history. The gospel exists as it is proclaimed, not as an abstract – that is the historical perspective we have been tracing. Its objectivity, its correspondence, will be found in history, not in an absolute metaphysical reason. Whatever the manner of its proclamation, the gospel – 'the telling of Jesus' story' – and the words we use to posit 'eternal reality' are not synonymous.[32] For Jenson, this positing is what we do to manage the uncertainty of what we cannot control.[33] The gospel offers no such control. It is promise, dependent on God. The two are related historically but they are distinct.

Historically the church's discourse has always involved metaphysical language and ideas. These ideas have been used to comprehend the gospel but are not the gospel. Jenson's question is whether this 'positing of eternity' serves or obstructs proclamation. Given the intellectual context of the church's early centuries, the dialogue, perhaps even the accommodation, may have been inevitable, but it may not be so today. Of course, this does not invalidate metaphysical ideas. If the objectivity of the gospel is to be found in history, and if the gospel is to be proclaimed, we may well assume that God had a hand in the conditions of its proclamation. Thus, the sharp edge of the question in 1962 was how to proclaim the gospel without the shared Graeco-Roman background it once assumed. 'Against such a

[32] Jenson, *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics,* 4-6.
[33] Ibid.

background every event of life is meaningful.'[34] Not so in a context where 'the gods flee and metaphysics become ever more implausible' as 'scientific description annexes one area of reality after another.'[35] Some of the old words will not do, but that does not mean that the dialogue was not good. Nonetheless, for Jenson at this stage of his career, the gospel has lived into the modern era, but its previous metaphysical accompaniment may not have. The problem is that the old words have lost their plausibility which, in turns out, reflected a particular historical context. This does not mean they are wrong inherently. However, if they are not to be seen on the level of the gospel, they must be as tools. History has shown them to be means, not ends. The gospel is beyond the philosophical language used to convey it. It is beyond its initial cultural setting.

This is still very broad. The entire background of Graeco-Roman thought is in view. In fact, the problem relates to all interpretive language beyond the gospel narrative: incarnation, death, resurrection; that is, beyond the story of Jesus. However, we must not over-stress this, or we may get lost in trying to dissect what is and what is not secondary in this way. We will get further if we understand that Jenson's point concerns the manner of our salvation. All face uncertainty. All face the void of death, before which we must reckon a manner of life. European civilisation has coined 'a mode of apprehending the future without flinching.' Yet even the 'absolute man of the existentialists'[36] cannot escape the need for faith. His is a 'secularised version of justification by faith.' This is the new background against which the church proclaims the gospel.[37] Once the church could presume upon a comparatively germane Graeco-Roman heritage (which was not without its problems, as we will see). Now, the church must proclaim the gospel in a context where Nietzschean nihilism is in the ascendency.

The gospel is not synonymous with the metaphysical ideas it has historically accompanied. The gospel is essential, the metaphysic, to some degree, interchangeable. However, there is no value neutrality or timeless abstraction (that would be part of the problem). Still less may we strip down to 'bare fact' without interpretation. That would be impossible. As such, Jenson's early work poses difficult questions. If we take his broad definition of metaphysics, a lot of our heritage comes under fire.

[34] Jenson, *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics,* 6
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 6-7

The danger of this scaling back is the loss of the objective truth the Grace-Roman heritage assured for Christian thinkers. On one level, this was a preamble, a shared platform for dialogue. But the problem is deeper than that. Methodologically implicit in Jenson's approach is the historical relativising of Greek philosophy. Understanding this philosophy as a mere historical starting point, rather than something appealing to what is shared by all humanity, puts it epistemically on the same level as any other religion or ideology. If it were not so, then surely the answer would be to simply turn back and resurrect the old way of thinking. One implication of this is that reason itself appears to be under threat. Seen from this angle alone, Jenson appears to swing perilously close to pure subjectivism. As we said above, Jenson's task will be to tread a path between these two extremes. In historicising Greek philosophy, he must not lapse into relativism, losing correspondence entirely.

Turning back to the old words is not an option for Jenson because the church must proclaim the gospel. Metaphysics must serve proclamation. 'The proclamation of the gospel' can never be wedded indefinitely to words which seek to cancel 'the ultimacy of time.'[38] Of course, this does not mean that the problem is only a particular notion of eternity. In our own time we have distinct, rival solutions to the human condition. Eternity takes on broader meaning. There are new challenges in a new age. The gospel meets these as an incompatible alternative. We cannot turn back the clock because the concepts of a previous age are no longer convincing. This is the problem with the metaphysics which seeks to cancel the ultimacy of time. At this stage in Jenson's career, however, this central concern remains general.

Twenty years later, *The Triune Identity* adds definition. Modernity approaches a situation like that of declining Mediterranean antiquity.[39] There is 'a different divine offering on every street corner.' We must learn to specify which.[40] Metaphysics is that intellectual effort by which we reach to the divine. It is how we chart our course to the gospel's God, or to another. This is why it pertains to our description of faith and cannot be separated from it. It defines where we hang our hearts. As Jenson would argue: 'Human life is possible [that is, meaningful]…only if past and future are somehow bracketed...' Our lives must 'cohere to make a story.'[41] The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are one such story. Metaphysical systems 'that posit life's fulfilment in escape from time' are another.[42] Thus,

[38] Jenson, *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics,* 6
[39] Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, ix
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 1
[42] Ibid.

by 1982 it is not only a change of background but 'two great contradictory interpretations of reality.'[43] One pertains to the gospel's God, the other does not.

There can be no separation between philosophy and theology.[44] In fact, that is the very point. People are religious. 'Thus, in all we do we seek eternity' and, 'if our seeking becomes explicit, we practice "religion."'[45] The great conflict between 'interpretations of reality' is not between metaphysics and the gospel. The incurable breach is between time's escape and the gospel. Israel's God is not just any God. We may bracket time by abstracting from created things, arriving via an intellectual movement at timelessness. Or, we deal with the narrative of scripture and the temporality of the created order, with all the intellectual problems that entails. Any understanding we have of revisionary metaphysics must reflect this underlying dichotomy between the gospel and time's escape.

Read thus far, it seems our God is the eternity we posit. As we go deeper, we will see this is not quite true. We do not posit the true God - he introduces himself to us. However, we must bracket time, one way or the other. Similarly, we may have the God who acts in time, or the one who is defined in contrast to it, not both. Each entails differing metaphysical methodologies. One aspect of this is the hiddenness of God, which rules out other potential avenues to 'bridge the gap' between eternity and creation that, if correct, would allow us both sides of the coin. However, the problem is not only the potential relation between eternity and creation. We need to explore the relationship between Christianity and Greek metaphysics through history in greater detail. Doing so will set the stage for our discussion of how God hides and reveals himself in time.

Differing prolegomena

At this juncture we cannot avoid a little prolegomenal thinking, though in Jenson's case this will be gleaning insight from the church's history rather than attempting to step outside it. Indeed, that reason pretends to an outside position is precisely the point of Jenson's critique. To recap, the gospel comes to us as a fact of history and we, the church, are part of a history that did not begin with our own thinking. Our thinking is a response to the gospel. Theology is a second order reflection that serves

[43] Jenson, *The Triune Identity,* 1
[44] Robert Jenson, *Essays in theology of culture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 224
[45] Jenson, *Triune Identity,* 2

proclamation.[46] Metaphysics is part of the ongoing conversation between what happened and how we understand it. It is part of how we communicate the gospel. Thus, distinct as they may be, we cannot have proclamation without metaphysics. Proclamation needs metaphysics; in one sense, metaphysics should *be* proclamation.

Where proclamation and metaphysics were sharply divided in Jenson's earlier work, his later work is more nuanced. This nuance is consistent with and develops from the historicised perspective we saw above. Within Western civilisation 'it is not possible to be a disciple of the apostles and not a disciple also of Socrates.'[47] The ultimate reason that we cannot divide philosophy and theology concerns our own heritage.[48] Socrates posed religious questions we are still answering, even as we take our lead from the gospel.

An example will serve. However we understand the soul, or even if we have souls, the word is forever conditioned. Our starting point has changed. And 'the adopted Socratic notion of a soul has through theological history been a fruitful source of puzzlement.'[49] The puzzlement is key. The gospel must talk to something. This does not mean that Socrates is the endpoint, only that we cannot un-hear what he has already said, so many years ago. We theologise within a history, in response to what has come before. The gospel comes to us as part of that history. In some ways it may make that history, but it is not to be understood without it.

However, the history produces more than fruitful tension. To appreciate this, we turn directly to Jenson's own prolegomenon to his *Systematic Theology*. This entails a reading of theological history we will need to consider in greater detail. To do so we will take a degree of creative license in providing examples as Jenson is all too brief in this crucial area. We expand in order to elucidate.

For Jenson, the problem of natural knowledge is the problem of Greek reason.[50] This reason is absolute. It is its own, atemporal starting point. Jenson's point in the brief theological history sketched at the beginning of *Systematic Theology* is constitutive of all that follows. It is that, raised on this type of thinking, some kind of natural knowledge apart from the gospel was inevitable.[51] Throughout

[46] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.1,* 5
[47] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 163
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., 110
[50] Ibid., 6-8
[51] Ibid., 7

history it was sought according to this historical particularity and presented as the shared property of humanity.[52] This tension between natural knowledge and faith lay dormant until its rupture in the eighteenth century.[53] We cannot avoid this aspect of theological history if we are to consider the correspondence of truth according to revisionary metaphysics; it has too great an impact on how we understand reason and its relation to faith. It also underscores then problem with metaphysics more generally.

Greek reason moves from the temporal to eternity where it belongs. It is divine; and so, for Plotinus it must return home by leaving the external and temporal behind.[54] Likewise, for Socrates, we have a kind of turning inward. Mind is sufficient unto itself and needs no temporal thing. For this reason, knowledge is recollection of the eternal.[55] For Epictetus, reason could accomplish this because it was divine, a part of God.[56] Whatever eternity was, it was like human reason and human reason was the way to it. Plotinus turns inward away from the external and inferior;[57] the soul ascends in upward movement.[58] Its first step is to reject the material, the external, in favour of the inward.[59] Stoic and Platonic are alike in this regard. Epictetus begins with divine reason, the only thing that may know itself.[60] It can start with itself, be its own beginning. This fits what we saw in Jenson's earlier work - 'contradictory interpretations of reality,'[61] 'explicit' seeking for eternity become religious.[62] The inward turn which takes reason as its starting point is a prolegomenon to a different faith.[63] To pre-empt our discussion below, it looks indistinguishable from the 'formal structure' of sin: the '"incurvature" of the soul' back in 'on itself.'[64] Greek reason pretends to be its own beginning and yet, 'I am not self-existent, the condition of my own hypostasis, but I can pretend to be.'[65]

Thus, the dialogue between Christianity and the Greek religion is live and costly. It takes place between contradictory worldviews, but it can yield fruit. Hence Jenson's reference to Clement's *Exhortation to the Greeks* – 'I long for God, not the works of God. Now – whom among you can I

[52] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.1,* 7
[53] Ibid.
[54] For example: Plotinus, *The Enneads,* trans. Stephen MacKenna, (London: The Penguin Group, 1991), 348-9
[55] Plato, 'Meno,' in *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo,* 2nd ed., ed. John M. Cooper, trans. G. M. A. Grube, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002)
[56] Epictetus, *Discourses, Fragments, Handbook: A new translation by Robin Hard,* trans. Robin Hard, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014), 5-6
[57] Plotinus, *The Enneads,* 348
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Epictetus, *Discourses,* 6
[61] Jenson, *Triune Identity,* 1
[62] Ibid., 2
[63] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.1,* 10
[64] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2*, 139
[65] Ibid., 145

take for a co-worker in the longing? For we do not altogether despair of you. Perhaps Plato…'[66] There is nothing wrong with this in general. But it must be the Christian that takes Plato, not the other way round. We cannot continue to take 'the qualification of truth taught by Plato or Aristotle as more "natural" or "rational" than truth taught by Isaiah or Paul.'[67] The danger is that we do so implicitly. Jenson summarises this as follows:

> We usually refer to the work of Greece's theologians with their own name for it, "philosophy." We have thereupon been led to think this must be a different *kind* of intellectual activity than theology, to which theology perhaps may appeal for foundational purposes or against which theology must defend itself. But this is a historical illusion; Greek philosophy was simply the theology of the historically particular Olympian-Parmenidean religion, later shared with the wider Mediterranean cultic world.[68]

Christianity could converse with Greek philosophy because both were trying to do the same thing, to think and speak in answer to the human condition. Both concerned salvation; that is the dialogue. The problem comes when Greek philosophy and Christian theology are understood on different epistemic levels, one shared by all humanity by virtue of reason, the other the special, subjective possession of the believer. This hierarchy is what results in an appeal to Greek philosophy for foundations that can only come in faith. There can be no appeal to Greek religion to back up Christian revelation; that would be a category mistake. This includes epistemology and so there can be no appeal by faith to Greek reason for buttressing. Greek philosophy was a faith of itself – that is the point. Christianity spoke to the Graeco-Roman world, came from it to a degree, and so presumed upon things it might not have done otherwise. Natural knowledge, or knowledge shared by all humans, grasped in atemporal axiom, is presumed upon because of this dialogue, not because it is necessarily what the gospel presupposes. In fact, in so far as 'natural' knowledge affords reason an outside position on the gospel - making reason divine, in other words – an appeal to it creates tensions and problems for Christian theology.

The sweep of the two or three pages we are considering is enormous and Jenson is quite brief. I remind the reader that we are trying to excavate his thought process. In doing so we find the issue with 'the Greeks'[69] is the rational starting point, reason beyond temporality. I have called this reason's outside position. It is outside time, and it is outside the gospel. It is outside time because it abstracts from the temporal to arrive at the atemporal. Or, it is purely inward, and thus divine, in no need of the

[66] Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks,* in Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.1,* 10
[67] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.1,* 8
[68] Ibid., 9-10
[69] Ibid., 10

external at all. It is outside the gospel because the gospel comes as the word of promise. The gospel is received or rejected, understood from within. There is no impartial rational assessment.

For Jenson, the problem continues into the medieval era. If there is a latent tension it is in the presupposition that reason may operate outside of revelation generally and, specifically, that it may do so regarding the knowledge of God. This is not really about natural theology – that came later, but it is the same kind of thinking. The preface to Anselm's *Monologion,* for instance, laid out an intention subtly different but enabling of that later problem:

> They specified…the following form for this written meditation: nothing whatsoever to be argued on the basis of the authority of Scripture, but the constraints of reason concisely to prove, and the clarity of truth to show…the conclusions of distinct investigations.[70]

The appeal to an outside authority for the knowledge of faith is clear. What proceeds is a quintessential example of the kind of thinking which Jenson is criticising. There can be no preamble, strictly speaking, no starting point save faith. This does not rule out the knowledge of God in created things, just reason as providing its universal starting point. Reason cannot be its own objectivity, its own correspondence. That it may have been considered so historically is because of the church's first conversation partner, not a shared facet of human nature.[71]

On Jenson's reading, the problem really comes to the fore in the eighteenth century with the uncoupling of the natural from the revealed.[72] The argument by this point is well-worn; this type of knowledge does not work. We will have more to say on this heading in the next chapter when we consider how true knowledge works. For now, we note that Jenson's thought dovetails and develops upon Hans Frei here.[73] The Enlightenment saw the natural knowledge judge the revealed knowledge. To cite our earlier example, Anselm's position has been reversed. However, the danger was always implicit. None of this is new.

To fully appreciate Jenson's point, we need to go a step further. Another example will help, charting the parallel between ancient and modern. For Jenson, prolegomena are typically arrogant, aiming at

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[70] Anselm of Canterbury, *The Major Works,* eds. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5
[71] Ibid, 7
[72] Ibid., 7-8
[73] Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: a study in eighteenth and nineteenth century hermeneutics,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974)

the impossible.[74] The implication is that they are the problem we have been tracing. To put it one way, we are not to start with our own epistemic limits. But how does this tie in with 'Greek' reason? For Epictetus reason was divine, beginning in analysis of itself. This continued in western intellectual history. The Cartesian sceptic does the same. Although Jensen does not give an example, we may cite David Hume. When Hume picks up the baton, his project, 'the Science of Man' was again mind knowing itself.[75] The epistemic becomes the basis and possibility of metaphysics. As with the modern prolegomena, we begin with what we may know, with our own limits. The deep grammar of Jenson's critique is that metaphysics was bound to undo itself in this way. Hume is just one example, but we could cite many others. It is no surprise that metaphysical knowledge collapsed on such a footing. The human analysing itself cannot attain to what starts in God's act. Metaphysics was never supposed to be a project apart from faith. 'Secular' faith is faith in something, or someone, else. We cannot place our faith first in ourselves, and then in God.

Jenson's relatively frequent references to Nietzsche and nihilism should be taken as shorthand for the intellectual history of his prolegomenon. Viewed from another angle we might say Jenson is taking seriously Nietzsche's boast to have dealt with Christianity as 'Platonism for the people.'[76] The only way beyond the arguments of *Beyond Good and Evil*, on this model, is to have a reason which does not go up 'beyond good and evil' at all, which brings us to an important conclusion of this brief history. If we are not dealing with an epistemic limit, we are dealing with a moral one, with sin and salvation. The metaphor of dialogue functions in this space. In the following chapters we will trace it as alternative to the knowledge based in reason.

Metaphysics as moral and existential

Having laid this foundation, we now turn to consider another aspect of Jenson's critique of metaphysics. If opposition to atemporal reason is one half, the hiddenness of God is the other. Our knowledge is temporal. How this works will concern us in later chapters. As we elaborate on this, we find that God himself opposes any starting point other than faith. This is what we mean by his hiddenness, though it is also a great deal more than that. God's hiddenness is inseparable from his

[74] Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, *Vol.1,* 6
[75] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature,* (London: Penguin Group, 1969)*,* 43
[76] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: prelude to a philosophy of the future*, 3rd ed., ed. Michael Tanner, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 32

revelation of himself in time. This is why we are dealing with a moral, rather than merely epistemic, limit. God himself determines how he is found.

Some clues as to how we may proceed are given in the second chapter of *The Triune Identity*. If metaphysics is that by which we understand the gospel narrative, and which helps us proclaim it, it must be *soteriologically* conditioned. This is the essence of what it means to proclaim from the *inside,* rather than reason's false, outside position. Jenson elsewhere describes the fundamental claim of the gospel as 'Jesus is risen.'[77] Jesus' story concerns our salvation. All theology must then, *in nuce,* concern salvation. If it does not tie back to saving faith, it has lost its way. In Jenson's words, our 'talk' must be 'saving talk.'[78]

We mention this in order to bring to the foreground what has been implicit throughout. Beginning from reason's outside position, the question of metaphysical knowledge becomes solely about our epistemic capacity. This has nothing at all to do with sin and salvation. The wise are simply the intelligent, or the well informed. In this regard, one of the pillars of Jenson's critique must be that faith has nothing to do with the metaphysical knowledge that begins in reason. They are 'contradictory interpretations of reality.' Therefore, there can be no knowledge of God apart from faith.[79] Put differently, all true knowledge of God is saving knowledge. It is moral, not epistemic - spiritual, not merely intellectual. What objectivity faith's knowledge may have thus takes on vastly different form.

This entails a notion of the hiddenness of wisdom, and a pivoting toward God's revelation of himself. One influence here is the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. We have no space for a lengthy study, neither may we pre-empt our move beyond critique. However, it bears mention that Jenson elsewhere develops his understanding of faith's knowledge in dialogue with the Wisdom literature, particularly the Proverbs and Job.[80] Doing so, he leans heavily on the work of exegete Gerhard von Rad.[81] Von Rad, whose views dovetail nicely with what we have seen so far. For instance, '…in the case of the wise man's search for knowledge…there was never any case of what we would call absolute knowledge functioning independently of their faith in Yahweh.'[82] This is really the issue with reason's outside position. Similarly, this truth 'has to do with character rather than with

[77] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 199
[78] Jenson, *Triune Identity,* 26
[79] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 153-4, 162-3
[80] Ibid., 157-9
[81] Ibid., 157
[82] Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel,* trans. James D. Martin, (London: SCM Press, 1972), 64

intellect.'[83] The wise man is righteous, and the fool's behaviour 'is determined only to a very small extent by an intellectual defect.'[84] When we speak of the knowledge arising from faith, this is the kind of thing Jenson has in mind. Again, this is all to do with sin and salvation. The metaphysics which charts a course to the true God cannot be understood apart from the rubric of salvation. That established, we will be better able to grapple directly with the notion of God's hiddenness and its relation to revisionary metaphysics.

Triune logic and God's hiddenness

God's hiddenness and revelation cannot be separated for Jenson because we know God narratively. The early chapters of *The Triune Identity* bring this dynamic to light. If our talk is to be saving talk, 'there is no way or need of getting to God past what happens with Jesus in time.'[85] So much we have seen already, though now we see Jesus' story from a new angle. It is not only the gospel, the content of our proclamation. God's economy is a de facto limit to our speculation. Anything beyond it will not be the knowledge of God and cannot proceed from faith. In Jenson's words: 'We honour and obey the divine majesty of God "in himself" only by refraining from the religious quest for God "in himself" beyond his temporal revelation…'[86] The logic of God's revelation of himself is trinitarian[87] and concerns the narrative of scripture. Nonetheless, it does express a kind of limitation to our thinking.

If we depart from the 'Trinitarian logic' we will 'trivialise our apprehension of God.' In any case, direct confrontation with God would 'destroy us.'[88] What can this mean? Jenson is hinting here at the relation between Trinitarian thought and God's hiddenness. Thus we find Gregory of Nyssa's comment: 'He whose curiosity rises above the Sun passes also by the thought of the Father.' It would make faith 'vain, and the message empty.'[89] Precisely because it would destroy us, any such attempt would require that 'we erect some protective image of the divine, that is, some idol, between him and us, or end in despair.'[90] Despair, as Jenson makes clear in his later work, is in fact sin.[91] We can put this together with what we have seen already. Faith reaches to an object. Our faith, our God, is where

[83] Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel,* 64
[84] Ibid.
[85] Jenson, *Triune Identity,* 27-28
[86] Ibid., 27
[87] Ibid., 26
[88] Ibid.
[89] Jenson, *Triune Identity,* 26
[90] Ibid., 27
[91] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2*, 145-8

we 'hang our hearts.'[92] If we move beyond God's revelation of himself, we end up reflecting back in on ourselves. We have then a provisional definition of idolatry, which corresponds to our definition of sin, the incurvature of the soul. Moving beyond God's revelation, the proclamation becomes empty, and the 'talk' cannot save; it does not complete the relation between creature and Creator but terminates somehow in the creature once more. Thus, whatever Gregory's actual view, the point here for Jenson is that no abstraction *from* creation will actually reach God. Similarly, we must take care not separate God's hiddenness from his revelation. We cannot abstract from God's revelation of himself so as to 'identify the divine *ousia* as the one God'[93] If we do, we imagine a hiddenness apart from the narrative of God's history with us, abandoning the Trinitarian logic altogether.[94]

This version of narrative understanding ties in with Jenson's reading of Luther, which brings in the question of God's hiddenness. 'Of the teachers of the church, no other has understood this with such clarity as Martin Luther.'[95] 'Luther's drastic insight' is that we are stuck with 'temporal revelation' – we cannot rise above it – 'because the true God's majesty is precisely his hiddenness.'[96] This is no small claim. It is not only majestic that God hides himself, but his very majesty is his hiddenness. Therefore, 'God is not hidden from us by mere metaphysical distance.'[97] No abstraction can ever go far enough and so we have God only as he shows himself. It is this which underwrites 'the necessity and the object' of Jenson's trinitarianism.[98] He summarises this well in a later article, aptly entitled *The Hidden and Triune God:* '…the locus of God's hiddenness is the very substance of all trinitarian teaching;'[99] and again, 'the doctrine of the Trinity is simply the insistence…that God in himself is not other than he is in his history with us.'[100] We cannot separate God's economy from his hiddenness.

The heart of this is that God's hiddenness is a *positive* divine attribute.[101] This is a direct implication of Jenson's reading of hiddenness *as* the majesty of God. It expresses an intentionality on God's part and thus also indicates a manner of discovery. That God hides means that he actively frustrates our attempts to reach him. He will only be discovered on his own terms. We may presume those terms the best ones for us, just not that they are ours. We have said that metaphysics concerns our attempt to 'bridge the gap.' God's hiddenness means that every such attempt will fail. God bridges the gap

[92] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2*, 69
[93] Robert Jenson, *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics*, 72
[94] Ibid.
[95] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 26-27
[96] Ibid., 27
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Jenson, *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics,* 73
[100] Ibid.
[101] Jenson, *Triune Identity,* 27

himself, no one else can. Put bluntly, the problem with metaphysics is that God is hiding. Moreover, he is hiding to make himself known, to save us. It is 'his refusal to be grasped by any but himself'[102] which keeps us from idolatry. We need to consider this closely because it will set up our later discussion, rounding off the present question. It will also help to situate Jenson's metaphysics (and critique thereof) in the complex of ideas around God's hiddenness.

The problem is not merely how we talk of God, but in what manner our talk is 'saving talk.'[103] Metaphysics must serve proclamation. The hiddenness of God is no independent 'piece of theologising' – it cannot be separated from 'the gospel about Christ.'[104] In fact, 'It is precisely the unconditionality of the gospel that makes us see God so…'[105] That God may promise unconditionally, requires that we acknowledge His hiddenness.[106] This is important. For God to be sovereign in Jenson's sense, he must stand behind all that is. Nothing is outside His will. Things are not as we would expect and so God is hidden. That this also concerns God's sovereignty shows this is more than a negative attribute. Hence, 'God's freedom is his capacity to make and keep promises.'[107] Similarly, 'The true – that is, biblical – God, Luther knew, is a storm blowing all creatures before himself, an unquenchable Will closer to each creature than the creature is to itself.'[108] Indeed, 'In his sheer deity, God works in all without discrimination…'[109] However, precisely because we feel that much of what is should not be, '…he is hidden, his purposes untraceable, his reasoning inscrutable, his character opaque.'[110] Because of what occurs, 'he is a moral enigma.'[111] Apparently, even our ideas of good and evil cannot find purchase.

It seems, then, that Jenson's appropriation of Luther (here, *Bondage of the Will*) has brought us to a startling position. There is behind this an extremely strong position on the providence of God which, on the surface of it, looks a problem. Thus far, Jenson has stressed the necessity of knowing God in time, through history. Anything else is an intellectual movement that will not find its terminus in God because it misses his revelation of himself. The focal point of this, we found, was Jesus' story. As we dug deeper, we found in place a 'Trinitarian logic' which shifted focus to the narrative of scripture. Now, we find 'all creatures' in view. God apparently works in all 'without discrimination.' This

[102] Jenson, *Triune Identity,* 27
[103] Ibid., 26
[104] Ibid., 27
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid., 27-28
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid., p.27
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.

version of the hiddenness of God is somewhat problematic as it appears to put theological knowledge itself into jeopardy. Viewed from this angle, the 'moral enigma' suggests a difficulty in separating good from evil. It suggests that we cannot call some of what happens evil because God apparently works in all 'without discrimination.' He is the God of all that is and does not conform to our concepts. Of course, some of this needs to be said, but it is certainly not the case that Jenson thought we could not distinguish between good and evil. God must be other than us. His actions will not be entirely explicable to us because he does not think like us, but Jenson is committed to theological knowledge *of* God, nonetheless. Therefore, this presents a real problem for the Trinitarian knowledge of God in time. How, based on this articulation of God's hiddenness would we recognise his revelation in time? The issue is a serious one for revisionary metaphysics.

Thankfully, there is a way through if we look at the wider corpus of Jenson's work. The challenge of doing so will be to mitigate, but without losing what it is that Jenson was trying to say in the somewhat underdeveloped references of *The Triune Identity.* Turning first to this aspect, we note that we cannot get stuck trying to explain the mystery of providence. To level the full force of these questions at revisionary metaphysics would be unfair. The problem of pain and suffering is a question for other metaphysical positions as much as for Jenson's. Moreover, Jenson is not interested in theodicy. Secondly, we said above that we would attempt to take Jenson on his own terms to best understand what he is trying to say. Those terms prohibit this kind of objection, fairly or unfairly. As above, reason's 'outside position' has been ruled out. If this means anything, it certainly means that there is no human court that could try God's actions. We may not step outside of history and say it would be better if it were otherwise. To say that requires timeless reason beyond historical knowledge, or so we imagine Jenson may argue. The criticism cannot land because it cannot be legitimately made. In speaking of a moral enigma, Jenson most likely has something like this in mind.

Turning to the 'Hidden and Triune God,' written about twenty years later, supports this reading and adds much needed depth. Indeed, if we are to move beyond the difficulties of Jenson's description of God's hiddenness, we will have to admit a development in his thought, much as we have been tracing so far. If we do so, we can better construct Jenson's thought generally, mitigating some of the tension. In his own words, Jenson picked up this strand 'therapeutically, to ward off bowdlerised apophatism.'[112] The point, again, is that it is no mere metaphysical distance between us and God.[113] There is 'no standpoint from which we can relativize' and 'project more soothing visions.'[114] So much

[112] Jenson, *Triune Identity,* 27
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.

we have seen. Again, 'The scriptural hiddenness of God is not primarily a matter of our epistemic weakness or God's ontological uniqueness.'[115] We may therefore surmise that the hiddenness of God, as it is articulated in *The Triune Identity* in 1982, though Jenson was by this time a mature thinker, was employed to a particular end. That God's hiddenness was not systematically integrated, as he recognises in the same 'Hidden and Triune God,' is perhaps the weakness.[116] Neither is Jenson entirely unaware of the issue; the attempt to integrate the hiddenness of God opens 'a can of worms.'[117]

The full resolution of this problem would take us beyond the realm of critique into the constructive element of revisionary metaphysics. The 'positive' element of God's hiddenness will concern us later when we ask after the knowledge of God in created things. However, the issue is still live and putting a spotlight on it now will frame that later discussion. Another element to consider is that it is, after all, Luther's thought which Jenson is employing. For Jenson, 'Luther's drastic insight' concerns temporal revelation. As we have seen, it concerns much more than that. That is the reason it is difficult to integrate systematically. The problem then becomes one about the interpretation of Luther and one must ask whether Jenson's problem, at this stage, was realising this. Perhaps he only later realised the 'can of worms' appropriating *The Bondage of The Will* entailed. However, the fact remains that the corpus of Luther's writings is enormous, and any use of his thought requires considerable interpretation and systematic reconstruction given the occasional nature of his writings, the vast majority of which are exegetical. If Luther is to be appropriated in this way, we will have to refrain from being too systematic in our constructive efforts as it will take us far beyond the bounds of our current project.

Neither is Luther wholly consistent. Alistair McGrath's analysis of the early Luther throws the problem into sharp relief. This explores the developing of Luther's thought in terms of shifting conceptions of divine justice,[118] very much in a way that is relevant for the question of the 'moral enigma' Jenson has traced. The question of saving faith, in McGrath's analysis, reaches a tipping point where God's righteousness is revealed to be *saving righteousness.*[119] This then presents a substantial and useful foundation for the understanding of God's hiddenness in that God's justice is other than we expect. It does not fit our concept of justice and so grace, to the sinner, looks unjust. All this is very useful for understanding what the moral enigma might mean (though McGrath's work was

[115] Jenson, *Triune Identity,* 73
[116] Jenson, *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics,* 71
[117] Ibid.
[118] Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough,* 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011)
[119] Ibid.,134-5, Ch.4

published after Jenson's so there is no direct link). However, though pioneering in his construction of the early Luther's 'Theology of the Cross,' McGrath stops short of Luther's later work, suggesting that behind *Bondage of the Will* is another, entirely unpalatable notion of the hiddenness of God.[120] McGrath's is, of course, only one potential view. Nonetheless, it is a useful example of the ways in which one may navigate Luther's thought so as to mitigate the tension of the 'moral enigma' by dividing it into earlier and later. Thus, we may suggest that, as for the early Luther, the language around God's hiddenness is primarily about salvation. It is more to 'ward off' certain types of thinking and retain a focus on what Jenson calls 'saving talk.'

The 1994 essay 'An Ontology of Freedom in the *De servo arbitrio* of Luther' takes the problem from the other side. As the title suggests, Jenson is pursuing a different question here. However, what it does show is something of Jenson's thought process as he read Luther and one of the reasons he returned to this text. Again, one may argue that we see a development in Jenson's thought given the later publication, but that does not inhibit our purpose of asking how it is we may retain the point of what Jenson argued in *The Triune Identity,* while mitigating some of its problems. Interestingly, though the question here is about God's freedom, our salvation is again in view. I mention this not because it may redeem Luther's text. That is not important to us. However, it does help us to reconstruct the lines of Jenson's thought. For instance, regarding providence and salvation, '…for someone always to *keep* promises, he must be sovereign over all contingencies.'[121] Because of this God may keep the promise of salvation. On the question of providence Jenson also has more to say: '…experience both worldly and theological confronts us with God hidden precisely by his utter free sovereignty.'[122] This would seem an expansion on the short statements in *The Triune Identity.* In terms of history, God's hiddenness in this harsh form seems partly to be about ensuring salvation and understanding God as not subject to history, or our expectations of it. These are no doubt salutary takeaways, but they do not remove the issue. Left here, there is another aspect of the 'moral enigma' in view, but not an answer to our problem.

Where we see development is when Jenson ties his reading of *De servo arbitrio* into Luther's earlier thought. Indeed, the purpose of the 'utterly free sovereignty' culminates in 'the free action of God at the cross.' This 'confronts us with God in the hiddenness of love.'[123] This surely cannot be read except as an allusion to the *Theologia Crucis*, not least as it is a commentary on one of Luther's texts. It thus represents a deepening of the perspective we encountered in *The Triune Identity.*

[120] McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross,* 221
[121] Jenson, *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics,* 163
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid., 163

Though we must build from occasional references, we can perhaps chart further progression on this front in *Systematic Theology.* The explicit difference here is not a full analysis but it nevertheless finds a development in Luther's thought. Indeed, 'Luther's first solution was the "Theology of the Cross," which held that the real God manifests himself so exclusively in suffering that no one could possibly seek him in a self-serving fashion…But Luther's mature solution was that idolatry is broken rather by the true God's objective intrusion into the church's audible and visible world.'[124] This does not solve the issue of the moral enigma entirely. However, it lays the groundwork for a positive conception of hiddenness which goes beyond *De servo arbitrio,* much as Luther's later thought does. To explore this fully – and to assess Jenson's success in this regard – we would need to examine faith's knowledge of God in created things, as we will do in a later chapter. For the problem at hand, however, it at least partially mitigates the tension by showing that Jenson's mature thought went beyond the less developed concept of God's hiddenness seen in *The Triune Identity*. This permits Jenson's metaphysical pivot to 'saving talk,' but does not preclude 'the hiddenness of love,' even outside of the cross. This is no small point given our earlier questions about the correspondence of faith's knowledge.

Returning to Jenson's reading of *De servo arbitrio*, we may leave the question of the moral enigma for now by remembering that our experience of God's freedom is not 'causative but participatory.'[125] The purpose of understanding God's freedom in this way was to ensure the possibility of his keeping his promises. In Jenson's hands it is about saving talk. Here, we find that that means participating in God's freedom, revealed in all things. We would be remiss if we did not recognise that there are two sides to the problem. Tying these strands together we might say that the moral enigma and the hiddenness of God are 'positive' attributes as they do God's loving revelation of himself. This is not all that could be said about God's hiddenness, but a fuller exposition of God's revelation within time will have to wait for a later chapter.[126]

That established, we need to return to the heart of our critique. That God reveals himself through history does not inhibit an idolatrous movement on our part. In closing the critical element of our study, we need to consider this directly as it is key to the hiddenness of God. The problem with the

[124] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2,* 138
[125] Jenson, Jenson, *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics,* 167
[126] The other aspect of Jenson's thought is how this hiddenness ties into the unity between God's immanent and economic life. The best example of this is the Son as external utterance, which means John 17, for example, is a part of God's immanent life (see Robert W Jenson, "On Truth and God: 2. The Triunity of Truth," *Pro Ecclesia* 21, no.1 (February 2012): 51-55). This means that God's immanent life cannot be separated from his hidden revelation in the Son.

abstraction from created things to timelessness comes into new light from this position. Indeed, it is not only that it moves to what is 'no God.' There is some warrant, given Jenson's broad notion of God's revelation in hiddenness, for the knowledge of God in created things, though we must remember that there is no possibility of this notion via reason's outside position - absent faith, in other words. There are two sides to this. One is the true knowledge to be had from created things, the other is reason's false position. Regarding the false position we found that it terminates in what is not God, a creature. We need to look at this element in greater detail, considering Jenson's reading of Ludwig Feuerbach in *Systematic Theology* will allow us to do so, adding depth to the negative element of God's hiddenness.

Idolatry, in so far as it misses faith's true object, also loses objectivity. Thus, one of the chief problems with the metaphysics Jenson criticises is that faith's knowledge cannot meaningfully correspond to God. Indeed, it is all too easy for the gods of any given nation, class, or people to become 'products of our own religious subjectivity.'[127] Idols are 'powers we envision by projection of our own values and needs.'[128] This adds another layer to our critique. Reality provokes a kind of wishful response. This is an emotional corollary to reason's outside position, but results in much the same thing. Jenson's mature thought brings this into view. However, the insights with which we began our study apply equally: metaphysics, as an intellectual movement, is a reaching beyond to comprehend reality and bracket time. It cannot be separated from salvation. In this regard, 'Feuerbach doubtless correctly described the way in which humans envision deity.'[129] We feel the lack of the good we have in part and then, 'in our consequent longing and resentment, we project fullness of these goods onto the screen of eternity.'[130] 'It is just so that Scripture sees the gods of the peoples as idols…'[131] The resonance with the critique we have seen already should be clear, now with another dimension. The positing of eternity is a kind of projection. As the relation between creature and Creator is not completed, we lapse into a view of ourselves, the creature.

It is especially important for our purposes that 'the true God knows we project our values onto him and so conceive him idolatrously…He is intent on giving us new values and contravening our idolatry.'[132] This really is the essential point. Where Jenson employs Luther's 'drastic insight,' it is to this effect. God will frustrate our attempts to reach him idolatrously. We now know that those attempts are a selfish projection of our values onto God. The true God is 'unfazed by the childishness'

[127] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.1,* 52
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.

as He does actually pre-exist our projections, and as His values are not ours.[133] This sense in which He is a 'moral enigma,' is more palatable.

Of course, that God actually *is,* and that He is not as we imagine, is the grounds of Jenson's reversal of Feuerbach's causal chain. That we may say 'good' at all, that we may even seek idolatrously, presupposes *true* revelation. Feuerbachian projection is a kind of '*relapse*' from God's enabling self-introduction. For Jenson, there is something like general revelation that stands behind the possibility of us positing eternity at all. We call things 'good' because God has 'antecedently done so in our hearing.'[134] That we have in some way heard, does not stop us seeking idolatrously.[135] That much is clear and dovetails with what we have seen already. Again, the 'moral enigma' is more than an epistemic limit.[136] In this regard, the response to Feuerbach will only take us so far. Speaking of an epistemic limit would not help us find purchase in saving talk. There is an epistemic limit, but there is revelation, too. We are not dealing only with our projections or what we may know unaided. That is not the issue, saving talk is. The epistemic and moral limits are related through the question of our values and their inadequacy, our 'good' and God's. But the Feuerbachian question only points to the threshold where God's hiddenness, his actual revelation, takes over. Having completed our critique, we turn to consider this directly.

[133] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.1*, 55
[134] Ibid., 57
[135] Ibid.
[136] Jenson, *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics,* 73

2. Faith in Redemption

In this chapter we will turn to consider the positive aspect of revisionary metaphysics. We have seen that our religious seeking, our metaphysics, can so easily lapse into idolatry. Part of this is the attempt to 'escape.' The metaphysics of timelessness will not do for Jenson. The other aspect is God's hiddenness. God actively eschews the religious quest, leaving us dependent on his often-unlikely revelation of himself, *in time.* The positive aspect of Jenson's metaphysics must begin with this revelation. We also saw the problem with reason's 'outside' position and its close connection to the issue of 'natural' knowledge. Faith cannot find a foundation in reason. This provides a second methodological step. If truth as such is divided into coherence and correspondence, correspondence has often been sought in reason apart from faith. Jenson must find it within faith. This is a significant feature of Jenson's thought which we will unpack in detail below. The first element of this will be that we will start not with a supposedly neutral ground, but with the perspective of the believing community; that is, within faith. The objective, mind-independence of truth is still a central issue in view. But if we are to find this correspondence, we must start first with coherence. It will be no good trying to find objectivity by attempting to strip away our subjectivity; that would be the outside position. If what we have found thus far is accurate, the objectivity of faith's knowledge can only be accessed through the perspective of faith. This immediately raises questions about the possibility of objectivity. However, before considering this, a few comments are needed on the nature of truth in Jenson's metaphysics. This will set the scene for what follows.

'Dumb' Truth: the story and the promise

We can get a flavour of what Jenson hoped to accomplish by considering one of the essays found in *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics* - 'What if it were true?' This essay hits home on two fronts. The first relates to the nihilism which revisionary metaphysics must avoid, giving us a clue as to how Jenson understands the problem. In his own words, 'The unity of truth was once conceived as a corollary of the simplicity and uniqueness of God, but in modernity it came to be conceived as a corollary of the unifying action of the human intellect.'[137] There is a subtle point here, easily missed. The simplicity of God, on most readings, must be part of the abstract metaphysics being revised. Therefore, the essential point is not that way of doing metaphysics, but rather what it accomplished, which has been lost in modernity. The modern problem is truth as a 'corollary…of the human

[137] Jenson, *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics,* 24

intellect.' Modern theology is 'uneasy' about 'ordinary truth claims' because 'the unity of the human intellect is pretty obviously too fragile to bear much weight.'[138] If truth is made to depend on human reason, then correspondence is lost. Jenson is not, at heart, aiming his criticism at modern theology. As in our previous chapter, the problem is correspondence being found in human reason. Our intellect is too 'fragile' for that, hence relativism. And so for Jenson, 'postmodern thinkers' explicit pointing to this fact is doubtless a salutary purgation,'[139] (even if they do not solve the problem). In sum, we can avoid modernity's epistemic weakness by ensuring truth does not depend on the human intellect. This leads to our second point.

The gospel requires correspondence. In Jenson's words, 'The Christian gospel makes a good many statements that present themselves as would-be statements of fact.'[140] 'Some of these are epistemically or ontologically surprising, but that does not change how they present themselves.'[141] And here the key point: 'Much of modern theology has laboured to interpret some or all of the faith's apparent truth-claims as indeed apparent truth-claims…What they "really" are…is value-judgments or expressions of religious experience or grammatical rules…'[142] These terms are useful; some of them have left a profound impact on Jenson's theology. However, the 'would-be facts' of the gospel must also be true in the ordinary use of the word – true in the 'dumb sense,' as Jenson puts it.[143] They may have mythic implications, or even employ mythic language.[144] But unless there is a real event, an actual resurrection - which is really being described by Matthew, or Mark, or John etc – then faith's knowledge is not objective. At best it would be internally coherent, at worst no more than wordplay. The weight of Jenson's essay is to say that this is not enough when discussing the gospel's God. Faith makes actual truth claims. That they must arise from faith within time will define the correspondence on offer. Nevertheless, whatever correspondence we find in Jenson's metaphysics must be able to support these ordinary, matter-of-fact truth claims. It must allow genuine historical knowledge.

In 'How the world lost its story,' another essay in *Revisionary Metaphysics,* Jenson provides a complementary angle. The church's message *consists* in story and promise.[145] The church tells the biblical narrative to the world, this is 'proclamation' and 'worship to God.'[146] The problem is that

[138] Jenson, *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics,* 24
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid., 23
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid., 50
[146] Ibid.

'Most of those who talk of postmodernism are belated disciples of Nietzsche.'[147] This, we found above. However, we can add now that the great difficulty with this is that it leaves us *without a story*. That is what nihilism really means. Without a story, we cannot understand the promise.[148] Therefore, modernity's 'self-destruction' is best understood in relation to 'story and promise.'[149]

This adds important nuance to what we saw in our last chapter. Viewed through the classical metaphysical paradigm, the problem with postmodernity is that reason is not as weak as described. Jenson's problem is different. We have already found that we may not turn back; to do so would be to give reason a false position. Viewed through the lens of revisionary metaphysics, the problem leading to nihilism is that reason was already too weak and that it was given an inappropriate role. Truth cannot be a correlative of our intellect. Viewed, further, under the headings of story and promise, we may say that human reason is not the storyteller, and it does not discover the promise of itself. It is neither the beginning nor the end of the narrative of history.

The problem of correspondence can be understood in these terms, too. The ordinary ('dumb') meaning accepts the objectivity of truth. In this sense it accepts truth as universal. However, only God's intellect can bear this weight. His self-revelation is temporal, and the gospel is the telos of history. Tying these strands together yields a unique definition of the problem of correspondence and its answer:

'The story the Bible tells is asserted to be the story of God with his creatures; that is, it is assumed and explicitly asserted that there is a true story about the universe because there is a universal novelist/historian. Modernity was defined by the attempt to live in a universal story without a universal storyteller.'[150]

This is the starting point of revisionary metaphysics. The conceptuality of 'saving talk' is that pertaining to the universal story, and the promise which it alone may receive. Truth's correspondence must begin with the universal storyteller, not the human intellect. However, that is just the beginning of an answer. We need to examine how story and promise work in greater detail. To do so, we will move beyond the short articles of *Revisionary Metaphysics.* True to form, we will build by considering the historical reality of the church in its apprehension of story and promise. Although the

[147] Jenson, *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics,* 50
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid., 52
[150] Ibid., 54

terminology is distinct, the best place to start for this is one of Jenson's latest works, *Canon and Creed.*

Canon and the creed

For the believing community, the key question is how it identifies its God. At base, this is what metaphysics is about. Jenson's early work responded to this problem, highlighting the knowledge of God in time and the 'trinitarian logic' it entails. In *Triune Identity* this is narrative: the church worships Abraham's God, the one in Scripture, who brought the people of Israel out of Egypt.[151] There is a common-sense ingenuity to this answer. In one sense, it is enough to say, 'Israel's God, revealed in Jesus.' However, this does not capture the hermeneutical complexity involved. There are other communities laying claim to Israel's scriptures. A full answer to the question of objectivity and correspondence must then grapple with textual interpretation and somehow provide grounds to interpret one way rather than another.

Creed is the interpretation, canon what the community interprets. However, the dynamic goes both ways. The interpreting community is defined by the canon. The creed, as historical reality, met the needs of the church, but is neither perfect nor complete.[152] There is a live dialectic. Put simply, 'Canon confirms creed, and creed confirms canon.'[153] Neither can be taken without the other.

Because of this dialectic, the hermeneutical problem may be reversed. The church could not choose Israel's scriptures, though that is a 'supposition hidden in the way the matter is often stated.'[154] 'On the contrary, Israel's Scripture accepted – or did not accept – the church.'[155] For the early church, Israel's scriptures were authoritative because they were a 'sheer given.'[156] Thus Jenson reverses the hermeneutical problem: '"Why does Israel's scripture need Jesus and his disciples?"'[157] In our last chapter we found the gospel came as a fact of history, precisely because we could not leave history. This is the same, but that does not solve the problem of canon's authority.

[151] Jenson, *The Triune Identity,* 7
[152] Robert Jenson, *Canon and creed: interpretation: resources for the use of scripture in the church,* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010)*,* 50
[153] Ibid., 34
[154] Ibid., 15
[155] Ibid.*,* 20
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.

The reason Israel's scripture needs Jesus is narrative. When Jenson says that 'Israel's prophets were the very teachers from whom the primal church learned why Jesus is needed,'[158] this is what he means. Thus we find, '…as the church reads its Scripture, the whole narrative from Genesis 1:3 through the Old Testaments historical books and the Gospels tells one long Christological story of God's works done, as the New Testament tells us, "in Christ."'[159] Christ then becomes a kind of originating principle, the word of promise in Scripture and in person, according to whom it is interpreted.[160] In him, the creed begins – He is the promise, but He is also what the story is all about. This points to the hermeneutical problem from the other side, from the perspective of creed and promise. In this sense, creed is the authority of canon.

The New Testament occupies a unique interpretive place, which sheds light on the dialectic. It is both canon and creed. It becomes part of the Church's Scripture and, as it does so, it becomes the metric of its interpretation. However, this raises a problem. So described, the New Testament is scripture on its own authority. Indeed, the New Testament 'is a product of the church, and at a particular juncture of its history.'[161] There must, then, have been something before it, from which it arose. Similarly, the initial recognition of The New Testament texts as authoritative required that we trust 'the presence of truth in the community,'[162] without which the authority of the texts could not have been recognised. The truth itself is confirmed by these texts, but the reverse is also true. This would be a vicious circle were it not for the historical reality of apostolic authority. The confidence in the New Testament texts arises from the 'church's immediate awareness of her truth.'[163] However, we are not merely, at this point, asserting the priority of living memory, of apostolic succession, important as that may be in the history of the church. Rather, at each stage of the church's history there is the envelopment in the truth itself, the life of the community.[164] If Canon stands as sheer given, its authority is in its temporal priority. When appealing to apostolic succession we have a similar argument for creed. Its authority is its agreement with what came before.

However, this still does not resolve the dialectic between canon and creed, text and interpretation. For that, we must bore a little deeper. The answer, it seems, must lie in this notion of 'immediate awareness' in the community. The immediate awareness must form the creed, just as it recognises the

[158] Jenson, *Canon and Creed,* 22
[159] Ibid., 50
[160] Ibid., 22
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid., 34
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.

authority of the church's scriptures which it predates. Similarly, by it the community understands itself as the continuity of Israel's story.

The believing community and its awareness of truth

The immediate awareness of truth relates to how the community identifies its God in time. God is triune and, precisely so, 'The triadic "Father…Son…Spirit" is not a *collection* of names.'[165] They are 'the internal structure of one name.'[166] This 'names the church's God from the plot of his history with us, a plot represented by biblical names for the *dramatis personae* of the story.'[167] This 'displays the great biblical claim that God's history with his people is not only their history but also his own, that he truly is in his one self the Father, Son, and Spirit of saving history.'[168] The early baptismal creeds, and the apostolic creed too, contain this triadic structure and are thus early historical evidence, either side of The New Testament, of the triune grammar. The 'immediate awareness', the truth in the community, contains this structure, just as the community believes that is part of God's history with humanity. It not only arises from Scripture's past but, in so far as it continues the story, is the evidence of is ongoing vitality, and the possibility of its future.

The immediate awareness is triadic in structure. To seek other than idolatrously means to identify Jesus in light of Israel and Israel's God. This means and refers to the formulae above, 'the one who…' The positive to our negative of the previous chapter is found here first and foremost. Another name for this is the '*regula fidei'.*[169] Thus Jenson, 'In this study "creed" will cover not only the relatively fixed catechetical-baptismal confessions usually now so labelled, but also and foundationally the "rule of faith" to which the church appealed before it had fixed creeds and for some time after the latter began to take shape.'[170] 'Foundationally' is the optimum word. The foundation of the creeds, which are a kind of developed formulation, and of the fixed baptismal confessions on which they are in some measure based, is the rule of faith which preceded them. Rather than conceptualising in the abstract, examining temporal origin we will come closer to the 'immediate awareness' we have been tracing. The grammar of revisionary metaphysics is to be that of the earliest church community, which is, on

[165] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 45
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid., 15
[170] Ibid.

this model, both narrative and trinitarian. The 'immediate awareness' and the confidence of the presence of truth in the community are just that.

Similarly, the thought structure of the community is closely linked to its identity. The New Testament codified elements according to which the church interpreted the scriptures it inherited. This fixity is precisely what 'is necessary for the perdurance of the community.'[171] Yet, 'the church perdured without a New Testament for more than a century.'[172] In that sense, it is necessary for the perdurance of the church's identity 'only at one remove.'[173] The *regula fidei* may be attested within the pages of the New Testament – something which scholars will no doubt debate for the foreseeable future[174] – but they are not one and the same. Before the various works of the New Testament were known as the New Testament, the church had already an identity. This brings us a step closer to the identification of the 'immediate awareness.'

We take another step when we understand the community which lived by the creed. Indeed, 'the church is the community of a *message*, that the God of Israel has raised his servant Jesus from the dead.'[175] This is the origin of the 'immediate awareness' and its triadic thought structure. The heart of the issue is the nature of proclamation, now communally defined. The immediate awareness comes from receiving the promise. But if promise needs story as context, we are still grappling with the hermeneutical problem of the dialectical relationship between canon and creed.

Moreover, our temporal perspective brings its own difficulties. Time threatens the existence of the community: 'Any community that intends to live for more than a moment, that hopes to remain itself through some term of yesterday-today-and-tomorrow, will have to deal with the fragility of an identity thus stretched across time.'[176] If we cannot escape time metaphysically, if our salvation is in some measure temporal, we must deal with time directly, in all of its perilous consequences. As such, it threatens the life of the community. One such pressure comes in the ongoing proclamation, at which point one may find that 'the process of tradition has disintegrated the message' like in the telephone game[177] – another reason tradition cannot provide correspondence or be the source of the community's immediate awareness of truth. This arises directly from the passage of time and the need

[171] Jenson, *Canon and Creed,* 15
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid., 16
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid., 3
[177] Ibid., 4

to 'proclaim' again to sustain the life of the community. This is 'especially severe' in the case of the church which needs 'repeatedly to shape the message as to make it comprehensible to new sorts of hearers…'[178] Its messengers do not merely 'recite the gospel' but must 'interpret it as its messengers enter new cultural or historical situations.'[179] The pressure is to find accommodation in a new context, at which point the self-identity of the community is threatened just as the consistency of its message is compromised. If creed is to be interpretation - in a manner of speaking, the thought process of the community as it approaches the scriptures which give it its fixity - there will be a perilously thin line between translation, which is necessary, and compromise, which will dilute its message. If the objectivity of the message is compromised, then so is the community's immediate awareness of truth. This dynamic is key for Jenson's metaphysics which, at base, must concern the telling of Jesus' story to new hearers, if nothing else. The second order reflection of theology must so build as to retain the sanctity of the message. The grammar of the Christian community must remain the grammar of the promise it received.

However, the message – that Israel's God has raised Jesus from the dead – can never be identical with the manner of its explication. As in our previous chapter, this is a development on 'Proclamation without metaphysics,' though now we consider the positive angle. Initially, 'Apostles or apostle's disciples…were experienced as a presence in the integral community of the church, which had thus a living memory of Jesus' words and works and the witness of his resurrection.'[180] The creed, the manner of interpretation of Israel's scriptures is in that sense instituted by Jesus, who interpreted the scriptures, in a manner of speaking, 'as if he were the author.'[181] In terms of the 'dumb truth,' this is very important. We saw that proclamation could use mythic language but could not, in so doing, obscure the ordinary truth. Jesus, the living word, is the interpreter. The core of creed in this sense is the message and its proclamation. It *was* the living memory of Jesus' own words and deeds, and of the resurrection. From there the community could so define itself as the continuity of Israel's story, and as the people of Israel's messiah. But the message is not simply the rule of faith. Or again, the rule of faith is not the gospel itself, but arises from it, and especially from its communal apprehension. It is that which guards the message from time's distortion. It facilitates the proclamation it mandates by regulating its linguistic fluidity.

In the passage of time, living memory no longer sufficed. Whereas at one point, 'the church simply knew at communal first-hand what the message was', there came a point when 'a living memory of

[178] Jenson, *Canon and Creed,* 4
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid., 22

the Lord could no longer be so immediately dispositive.'[182] This, along with the need to proclaim again in a new context, is the other aspect of time's pressure. Time's effect in this way is the crux of the church's precarious identity and of the threat to truth's correspondence within time. Where once it was sure, where an apostle wielded a degree of personal authority, there is now room for doubt. And so, the question arises: 'How do we know what does or does not belong to the message?'[183] And again: 'How do we know if we heard rightly from our predecessors.'[184] The creed must have another authority than inheritance, for Jenson, as on its own it cannot withstand the effects of time. Canon underwrites creed, but creed must also be able to underwrite canon. If not, the faith could not be 'canon and creed' in the way Jenson describes. The identity of the believing community, and the truth of its proclamation, is threatened by the pressure of time if it is not able to answer these doubts.

The message comes from outside the community. Its communal apprehension is the credal thought structure. We can see, then, that if the internal coherence is to be found in the dialectic of canon and creed, the message can in the final analysis be neither canon nor creed. If there is to be any objective correspondence for truth it will have to be found in the message that founded the community. Because it engenders a thought-structure and resultant interpretation of Israel's canon, it cannot be canon itself, even if, seen from one angle, this is where the community's identity comes from. Promise and creed align more closely, though not exactly. The grammar is not the message which engendered it; it is not the word of promise. More exactly, 'The rule of faith…was a sort of linguistic communal awareness delivered to the apostles, which sufficed the church for generations.'[185] Delivered by whom? In one sense, it was delivered by Jesus, as we saw above. The fundamental message is, after all, 'that the God of Israel has raised his servant from the dead.'[186] Jesus interpreted the scriptures for the church and passed it on to the apostles. Thus, the resolution of the dialectic between canon and creed, and the guarantor of the church's acceptance by the Old Testament is the Word of God himself. However, in terms of message and proclamation, Jenson is saying considerably more than that. The message, as promise, must underwrite both canon and creed. Then again, the promise cannot be understood without the story, and so the message needs the canon.

This is separate from Jesus as interpreter of Israel's canon. There will, in fact, be a sense in which Jesus, the Word, is both canon and creed. Apparently following the reformation reading, Jenson finds the authority for this in in that 'in the final ontological analysis' Jesus is 'the very Word that "came

[182] Jenson, *Canon and Creed,* 4
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid., 15
[186] Ibid., 3

to" the prophets' and 'is offered back to God in the psalms, and moves Israel's history.'[187] Let us leave aside here the question of the *logos asarkos*. The point in view is the divine origin of the message and thus of the way it entails an interpretation of Israel's scriptures. One way of interpreting this is to suggest that the authority of the community's interpretation is the same authority as its scriptures because both proceed from the Word. If so, we may deduce that creed is the telos of canon, much as promise is the telos of story. The Triune grammar is a communal expression of both, apprehended in the authority of the Word. As the very word of God, Jesus is thus a kind of present also. Again, along these lines we may suggest Jesus is the life, even the agency, of scripture and of the gospel, rather than identical with either. This seems broadly in keeping with what Jenson is trying to say, even if a little interpretive construction is involved. If accepted, it also helps to explain why it was the canon which could accept or reject the church, and why being 'in Christ' was to be the present continuity of canon's story and the community of its creedal interpretation.

However, while this helps us to understand the rule of faith it still does not fully answer the hermeneutical problem of canon and creed. The awareness of truth is not the message itself. It is the structure that helps us to speak of the promise. It arises, like a grammar, from this promise but is not altogether determined by it. One could receive the promise but, because of the passage of time, it will be possible to reinterpret the canon in another way. Arguably this would be to go against the agency of canon and creed, but then, many have done so. This problem is not removed when we highlight the authority of Jesus as historical originator of the church. He is the proper reference point of the creed, its origin. Jesus is the authority of the creed and so he is its correspondence. It corresponds to his words and actions within history. However, we are still left with the authority of what has come before in the narrative of scripture. Despite the divine origin, and the present authority, there is also a process by which the communal awareness of truth is codified through time. When we speak of creed, we speak of the end product, which produces a fuller understanding of canon. In short, the above requires us to trust the process of history. Thus far we have pinpointed the authority of the Word, now, in keeping with the trinitarian logic, we turn to the role of the Spirit.

History and telos: The Spirit and the story

Even if Jesus is the authority of the proclamation, what we have seen thus far shows the problem of the message through time. The authority of Jesus is not such that the community's thought structure is

[187] Jenson, *Canon and Creed,* 22

the only one available. Above, we saw that the passing on of Jesus' words is not enough to ensure their correct interpretation. Nonetheless, the immediate awareness of truth survived, which brings the role of the Spirit into focus.

To ensure the immediate awareness of truth as Jenson has described it, two things must be true of the Spirit. Firstly, the Spirit must be active in the community through history. The Spirit must be revealing the message and guiding the thought process of the believing community subsequently. Secondly, this requires an authority over the events of history, to ensure the correct thought process is developed. The creed may be incomplete but the process of history, even creedal controversies, brought about the development of the church's creed. In the critique of classical metaphysics, Jenson articulated a strong view of providence. This is the same in that God must have allowed these controversies in order to bring about and develop the creedal thought structure through time; that is, through the process of history. The Spirit's movement in this regard is therefore providential. The Spirit governs history to ensure the immediate awareness of truth in the community and its development as creed. The work of the Spirit is then twofold. The Spirit ensures the promise is received, granting the 'immediate awareness of truth,' and then governs history so as to develop the immediate awareness into the creed.

This means that faith corresponds to the action of the Holy Spirit. Its objectivity is thus twofold, relating to the twofold action of the Spirit just described. Firstly, if the Spirit reveals the message to those in the believing community and causes the creedal thought structure, the Spirit is the correspondence of the believer's faith. Its objectivity relates directly to God's own action, even if it is apprehended subjectively. In the second place, the objectivity of faith is also in the process of history, governed by the Spirit. Faith corresponds to this process of development which is objective in that it does not depend on the subjectivity of the believer. Again, the history which develops the thought structure is what the Spirit does or allows (depending on how one reads this). The process of history relates to the Spirit's governance. Therefore, while faith itself is not mind-independent, its object – it's objectivity and authority – is the Spirit, who very much is. Faith corresponds to the Spirit, which is to say that it is a bestowed on the believer by the Holy Spirit as a gift. This correspondence also relates to the way the Spirit uses the process of history. At times the believing community is not dealing directly with the Spirit who gives faith to the community, but with the opposition to the creed that develops the thought process of the believing community that began in faith, always under the Spirit's providential rule. It is, in this way, an aspect of God's hiddenness, once more as a positive attribute, that ensures this movement through time. This is important to how we understand God's objective revelation of himself in creation as a whole and so we will have to postpone discussion until

our next chapter. Presently, we will focus on what the Spirit's governance of history means for the dialectic between canon and creed, as well as the immediate awareness of truth.

If faith's knowledge is to have this correspondence in an objective history ruled by the Spirit, the problem of historical relativism becomes even more acute for Jenson. The objectivity of faith depends on history, though not in appeal to 'outside' reason. Faith does not make rational appeal to the kind of historical work that can be done apart from the Spirit causing the immediate awareness of truth. The triadic thought structure and the universality of the story depend on the knowledge communicated by the Spirit, mediated through history. If this history is not properly understood and interpreted, the whole thing falls apart. Indeed, the believing community cannot identify its God unless it can know the canon correctly and trust the historical development of the New Testament era, the creed, which codified its immediate awareness. Jenson understands how deep this goes: 'Only if there is someone who has a purpose for time, so that historical events cohere in a reality other than themselves, is there a coherent and narrative past…'[188] Furthermore, 'a historiography that eschews teleological narrative must eventually undo itself altogether…'[189] This is because eschewing telos is rejecting the Spirit's work. Without the *telos* of the Spirit there can be no correspondence because the Spirit is the correspondence of the message. The outcome would be the subjectivism (and nihilism) Jenson wants to avoid. This is modernity's loss of story seen from another angle. However, starting from faith's perspective means starting with a reading of history that allows telos. This is the two aspects of the Spirit's work in the community operating in tandem. Because the Spirit gives telos, in reading canon 'there is no reason to be long deterred by secular modernity's inhibitions.' On that footing, we will consider two brief examples of the knowledge communicated by the Spirit, mediated through history.

The first is perhaps the most pertinent example of abstract reason's failure, though not in terms of metaphysical timelessness. In place of creed and canon, and parallel to the loss of Scripture as the West's encapsulating narrative,[190] was the quest for the historical Jesus. This, too, is a kind of abstraction, in that it purports to step outside of history – and of scripture's story - and judge it. This knowledge, established by human reason alone, is then used to judge the knowledge of faith in the church. We do not, of course, have anything like sufficient space for such an enormous weight of scholarship. Suffice it to note that reason could not guarantee faith's knowledge of God. Jenson acknowledges the contribution of historical scholarship. However, in contrasting the gospel's portrayal of Jesus and the Jesus of historical scholarship – research and speculation alike[191] - we see

[188] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 58
[189] Ibid.
[190] Frei, *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative*
[191] Jenson, *Canon and Creed,* 58

the import of so conceiving the Spirit as sovereign over the process of history. The chief insight is the difference between a scholarly construct and a person.[192] However plausible, historians appealing to rational criteria alone can never produce the latter. If faith may have knowledge, this is not it, though the scholarly work is undoubtedly useful.[193] The reason we are safe with the canon is that the Spirit has so guided history as to furnish us with this picture. This is part and parcel of a teleological reading of history; that is, of reading history through the thought process of canon and creed. The church must understand this for its identity to persist through time. The scholar's construct is secondary to faith's knowledge of canon because the scholar may interpret in a way that is not in keeping with the creedal thought structure, which corresponds 'objectively' in the Spirit, not human reason. If 'we have grounds to claim *any* knowledge' of Jesus, it is only because 'the Spirit indeed guided and guides the church's effort to know him.'[194] The communal awareness which recognised the truth of The New Testament, and which formed the church's canon, then comes from the presence of the Spirit in the community. Part of the Spirit's guidance of history is in the thought process the Spirit brings to the community, and in the way it maintains that thought process.

The second example is the way the church navigated two significant early heresies, Gnosticism and Marcionism. These are interesting examples in that one reinterpreted Israel's canon, though differently than the church, and one dismissed it entirely. The rule of faith allowed neither. Let us consider Gnosticism first, which, absent the rule of faith, could have presented a real problem for the church 'in a religious culture that loved elaborate myths and supposedly elite secrets.'[195] The danger to the church was the Gnosticism did not necessarily view itself as contrary, only possessed of 'a higher revelatory niveau.'[196] Indeed, if it could be overcome, perhaps even 'rather easily dispatched' among the judicious, it was only because the rule of faith was robust enough to resist this incorporation.[197]

Canon could not have accomplished this alone, not least as the Gnostics 'usually did not regard the Old Testament as simply false but merely as inferior and in need of illumination by a higher wisdom.'[198] Had the church not been sure of its own wisdom, guided by the Spirit, the nascent faith could easily have been absorbed into Gnosticism.[199] It was because the church read Israel's canon in a

[192] Jenson, *Canon and Creed,* 58
[193] This should go without saying but if needed see Jenson, *Canon and Creed,* 58-9
[194] Ibid., 51
[195] Ibid., 27
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid.

defined, specific way, even before it fully organised its own texts, that this was avoided. Had the church not grasped its own message according to the Spirit's twofold work, the new 'higher wisdom' may have provided an alternative interpretive framework. For Jenson, this is even more important in light of the linguistic similarity between the two camps. 'What is this 'wisdom' – *Sophia,* the very name of the key divine emanation in some gnostic systems! – that Paul shares only with 'the mature?''[200] The question was live to the early church, as it is today. If time's work is to push towards accommodation and dissolution, the continuity of the church's message shows the correspondence the Spirit brings. The early church was not just quibbling over terms, or exploring semantic fields, but expressing, as far as possible, a deep-seated awareness of the truth it witnessed to. As we have seen, the clear articulation of that in creed and text was secondary to the 'immediate awareness' of truth.

In the case of Marcionism we find the same. This is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it shows the strength of the rule of faith. Put simply, 'It was the rule of faith that saved the church from abandoning its founding canon.'[201] Even though it was the canon, not the community, which took priority (Israel's scriptures accepted or rejected the church, not the other way round), the canon could not have ensured its own interpretation. The creed had to be maintained in the providence of the Spirit.

Secondly, the church's response took unique shape, reflecting its historical situation. This is reflected in the apostle's creed, which put the community's awareness of truth into solid form. The best example of this is the inclusion of the doctrine of creation, which 'it [the community] could not let go' because 'it was intrinsic to the communal consciousness.'[202] This is the rule of faith at work. In response to this historical problem, the creed took a unique shape. However, regarding the canon (the Hebrew Scriptures) the church possessed at the time, 'with respect to the role of the law, it is not creation as such but the exodus and the revelation at Sinai' which form the 'theological centre of gravity.'[203] Thus is this important because the creed did not reflect the canon as a whole. That is part of it not being complete. Instead, it drew upon the essential aspect of the communal consciousness for the response to a particular problem, Marcionism. The rule of faith 'skipped straight from the creation to the incarnation.'[204] In doing so it hit both Marcion and the Gnostics at the key point of difference, as Jenson's example of Irenaeus's determination to prove the Creator and the Father of Jesus are one and the same shows.[205] Again, that the church's identity was sufficiently grounded to resist alternate

[200] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 36
[201] Ibid., 28
[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid., 28-29
[204] Ibid., 29
[205] Ibid., 30

readings of its canon is further evidence of the Spirit at work through history, and points once more to the manner in which the community's perspective of faith must provide the foundation for how we understand the correspondence of truth in Jenson's metaphysics. Without this, we would be stepping outside the narrative of history and subjecting it to our own analysis, appealing to reason's outside position.

Before pressing on, it is useful to recap briefly. Thus far we have been tracing the dialectic between canon and creed from the perspective of the believing community. We have done this to understand how it is that faith's knowledge could be objective for Jenson. We started with the perspective of the community (that is, from faith) because Jenson's critique of abstract reason meant we could not appeal to an 'outside' rational foundation for faith's knowledge. This looked like beginning with coherence to understand correspondence. We first considered two of Jenson's articles, which left us with the sense that the 'dumb truth' could not in any way sacrifice the objectivity of historical truth. The church's beliefs must correspond in real history and that had, in some way, to relate to the underlying reality of story and promise. In terms of the dialectic between canon and creed, this boiled down to the work of the spirit in governing history and through the history, the creed. The life of the believing community began in apprehending the word of promise, aided by the Spirit, and its thought structure was maintained as the Sprit continued to develop it at one layer removed, through the governance of history. All this means that the objectivity of faith's message is that it corresponds directly in God (the Spirit) on one hand, and in the history the Spirit governs, on the other.

However, what we have seen thus far presents a further problem. From the perspective of the believing community, faith's authority is found in that it corresponds to the act of God. But what could this mean for those outside the community? Does the Spirit not speak through created reality in *all history*? This must be so, or else the Spirit could not be the telos of the *universal* story. The word of promise is live in the community of faith. But if the story is universal, the promise cannot know this as boundary. And so, the objectivity of faith must relate to this proclamation of the gospel. There are two parts of this; first, the proclamation of the community. Since its faith is received, the proclamation is a correlative of God's intellect, making proclamation metaphysically foundational. Metaphysics does not begin with epistemology, but with the message received in faith. Secondly, there is the word of promise in creation at large. This second aspect will concern us in our third chapter. However, the proclamation of the community is also God's speech through created reality. God's communication through created reality is twofold. According to this reading of Jenson, the truth corresponds for the rest of creation precisely in that it is proclaimed by the believing community, not only in that creation is a communication from God. In this sense, the objectivity of truth is its

proclamation, though that is a startling point to come to, which needs further examination. We will have to move beyond *Canon and Creed* to consider what Jenson's views on proclamation in light of his understanding of the community in the second volume of *Systematic Theology*.

The community of the proclamation

The proclamation must be universal if Jenson's metaphysics allows for objective truth. Similarly, if the promise corresponds to God's actions in history objectively, then the story of these actions must also be objective and universal. The question of universality and the question of objectivity are therefore one and the same. The community's faith must pertain to a universal reality, not its own imagining. Internally, we found this correspondence to be a correlative of God, Word and Spirt. As there is but one Creator God, Lord of history, his story with humanity must be humanity's story. There cannot be another story, or else it will not be universal. Once more, Jenson's focus on history makes this problem acute. There can be no version of universality which abstracts from the real events of history, no 'essential' thing yet to be instantiated or instantiated only in part. Jenson must find a way to understand the specific and apparently subjective perspective of the church as universal and objective. His answer relates to his understanding of the community. It comes in the priority of the general over the individual on one hand, and the unity of creation and redemption on the other.

In that Christ was the initiator of the message of promise, *Canon and Creed* revealed that the fundamental feature of proclamation is that we may 'encounter Christ in this act.'[206] The gospel, when proclaimed, becomes the very presence of Christ, revealed by the Spirit. It is and never was under our control, just as wisdom was not 'at our disposal.'[207] It is not our word, we only pass it on. *Systematic Theology* complements this by describing the community more fully as the *totus Christus*. This is the key to Jenson's understanding of the universality of the community and its message. However, to understand this we must throw the problem back into the terms of creation and redemption, asserting again their unity.

The reason we may encounter Christ in the act of proclamation is because of the nature of God's address to us. We said that the believing community is founded in the act of God, Word and Spirit,

[206] Jenson, *Canon and Creed,* 60
[207] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 158

but – in terms of origin, most especially by word. In interpretation and in the very message Christ is the initiator. Now we add two things. Firstly, if redemption is such speech, so too was creation: 'God initiates humanity by speaking *to* a group of creatures.'[208] Faith is objective because creation and redemption cannot be separated. Both are God's speech.[209] This is foundational to our second point.

One implication of uniting creation and redemption in this way is a renewed anthropology. This will be our access point to the question of how the story and the promise may be universal and objective when proclaimed in faith by the community. Considering the disjunction between the two humans, the one inside and the one outside the community, is one way of getting at the heart of the issue we are facing. Firstly, there is the 'how' of justification, of becoming part of the believing community. Secondly, there is the reason the perspective of this community may be objectively true also for those outside the community, despite beginning in faith. This does not mean that both share the reality of salvation. Those outside the proclaiming community do not share in faith. However, as we said above, the problem is the universality of a historical reality. Jenson has cut off the route to abstract universals, insulated from time. There is then a tension between the 'general' of the community not, on the face of it, being up to the epistemic burden an abstract universal could bear, but still Jenson needs some way of ensuring what the abstract universal, timelessly and rationally accessible, could ensure. Were humanity understood in terms of such a universal, the believing community could be participating in it. It could even be the revelation of the true universal of humanity, previously lost in sin – but Jenson cannot take this route. It is for this reason that Jenson understands the 'special task' in terms of understanding humanity as created by 'the divine Word' as explaining those outside, rather than inside, the believing community.[210] What this means will become clearer below. For now, we turn to consider this new anthropology as a clue to how the promise may be objective.

Firstly, '…a Christian individual is someone whose nation and polity and communion are the church.'[211] This is a stronger statement than first appears. We have said that a Christian is one within the community, who understands themselves as part of *this story*. 'The *anima christiana,* the Christian soul,'[212] is not a compilation of substance and accident, nor the instantiation of a universal. The human soul, addressed by the word of redemption, is quite literally a new creation. Humanity began with God's address; it has no reality derivable from another quarter. Jenson presses this to its logical conclusion. 'For if the human creature has no other fulfilment than the vision of God, then the

[208] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2*, 61
[209] Ibid., 68
[210] Ibid., 289
[211] Ibid.,
[212] Ibid.

baptised person must be the only available paradigm of human personhood.'[213] This means that '*faith* is the true life of humanity, at least short of the kingdom.'[214] This is best understood in relation to what we have seen thus far regarding the triune persons as *dramatis personae* and the oneness of creation and redemption. There can be no gap between nature and grace because 'the openness of nature to grace is *dramatic* openness, the openness of one utterance to another in the dialogue of a story.'[215] There is then no special and general revelation, no natural and supernatural, nor other dichotomy on similar lines.[216] And this because 'the image of God consists in the action of prayer' and it is faith that performs this action.'[217] Reality is conversation. In the case of humanity, that is a conversation between us and God. Thus 'we are prepared in our very nature for the deifying address of God, because we have a nature only in that we have already been caught up in the dialogue in which this concluding address occurs.'[218] Our true nature is to hear God.

We need to mention an implication of this solution to the problem of nature and grace because it will be important to how we conclude our discussion on the universality of the community and its message. Specifically, this does away with paradox in the discourse of faith. In fact, this is a primary point of contention between Jenson and Henri de Lubac.[219] For de Lubac, the relation between nature and grace is a 'paradox overcome in faith.'[220] Not so for Jenson, for whom reality is conversation, a seamless whole, encompassing nature and grace.[221] Naturally, there is a mystery inherent to the idea of our relation to God, which Jenson acknowledges.[222] However, this is not at all the same thing. Faith is no paradox. Indeed, we may be closer to the mark if we say it is the only thing that makes sense, or even that it is the only possible foundation for anything making sense at all. This is important for the objectivity of faith. The hiddenness of God and the moral enigma of reality frustrate our religiosity. However, the dramatic openness (as opposed to independent rationality) of faith's story guarantees the objectivity of faith provided we do not imagine that we could 'step outside' of this story, rationally or otherwise.

[213] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 289
[214] Ibid., 68, italics Jenson's
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid., 154
[217] Ibid., 68
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid., 67, 'Moreover, to deal with the fundamental relation of nature and supernature, de Lubac finally takes refuge in "paradox", always a dangerous sign.' 66-72 summarises Jenson's response to de Lubac
[220] Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural,* Ed. David L. Schindler, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad, 1998), Chapter 9
[221] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 68
[222] Ibid., 305

Returning to anthropology, the notion of the *anima ecclesiastica,* is central to Jenson's thought. Jenson's priority of general over individual is again key. In developing this Jenson appropriates elements from Joseph Ratzinger: 'The *anima christiana,* the Christian soul, is "the *anima ecclesiastica*, that is, a personal self through whom the integral community of the church expresses itself."'[223] Whatever the direction of Ratzinger's original comment, Jenson is here making a significantly innovative point. The very notion of the *anima ecclesiastica* elevates the communal element of a Christian's identity. The individual – the *anima Christiana,* now redefined as *anima ecclesiastica* – is in a logical relation to the *'*integral community of the church.' The point is one of ontological priority. The individual could simply be alongside other individuals forming, as it were, a metaphysical 'body.' If so, the body would be secondary, reducible to its individual parts; it would be an abstraction from them (or possibly an emergent property). However, that would prioritise the individual over the general; once more, Jenson does the reverse. The upshot is the agency of the collective operating through the individual. This is not like the instantiation of an abstract, because the body, in its physicality, exists only within time. Instead, the community, in its concrete identity is in temporal priority to the action of an individual. This is not a relationship of mere representation, but of expression. The will of the body, its intention, is shown in the action of the individual.

The relation between the individual and the general, the Christian and the body of Christ, hinges on the distinction between communion among believers and communion with Christ. Indeed, 'It will not do merely to say that the communion of believers with one another is constituted by the fact of shared communion with Christ.'[224] This would still prioritise the act of God in that community but communion among believers would be derivative of communion with Christ. They would still be first and foremost individuals, participating relationally in the life of Christ and then having this in common among themselves. This is not possible given the epistemic weight Jenson places on the general, which must take ontic priority here also. Jenson must go further to make *this* communion of the *universal* story and promise according to his way of thinking. He requires that the temporal communion bears the philosophical weigh of the timeless universal. To accomplish this, we get into sacramental theology: 'For the body of Christ received in the Eucharist is…itself identical with the community it creates.'[225] Jenson means this literally. The body of Christ, human community, is the bread of the sacrament. If the gospel's plain truth (the dumb truth, that is) requires metaphysical revision, it will be in propositions such as this. Hence, '*We* do not create our community, moved by our…affinity.'[226] Rather, '…we at once receive Christ and the church in which we receive him.'[227]

[223] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 289
[224] Ibid., 221
[225] Ibid., 221-2
[226] Ibid., 222, italics Jenson's
[227] Ibid.

This is the ontic priority of the general over the individual in soteriological terms. The church is antecedent to its members because it is understood sacramentally as the very body of Christ. It is, in sum, not merely '…a plurality of persons held together by a common commitment, not even when the commitment is to Christ.'[228] Instead, 'at Eucharist, we are precisely "coembodiments" of Christ.'[229] This is part of how the historical communion may become that of the universal story, bearing the epistemic strain that entails. That the community may do so is because it is no mere human community, but the *very* body of Christ. We turn to consider this notion of embodiment in more detail because it is integral to Jenson's thought as a whole.

The embodiment of Christ

At this juncture we cannot avoid delving directly into Jenson's understanding of the Eucharist. Indeed, there are two key parts to this which we will consider in turn. There is the manner in which the sacrament becomes the objectivity of Christ to the believing community, and there is the manner in which the believing community, as the very body of Christ, becomes the objectivity of Christ to the world.[230] We will consider Christ as the objectivity to the church first but before that we need to make a few remarks about why this is important to Jenson's theology.

Firstly, what we have seen thus far may present a false picture, even if it is one pressured by Jenson's choice of language and emphasis on embodied, historical reality. The notion of 'co-embodiment', coupled with the priority of the community - *as* general - over the individual, gives the impression that the risen Christ is not other than the believing community. However, for Jenson this is relational. Once we understand that, we will understand how the above may be held in tension with other language in the New Testament that prohibits such direct identification. The distinction is not obvious. For instance, Jenson directly claims that 'the church is ontologically the risen Christ's human body.'[231] Aside from being somewhat obscure, this appears to reduce Christ to merely the church. As we saw above, this concern Jenson answers in part with the priority of the general. The community is not secondary, ontologically speaking, to its members. It is not clear, however, that Jenson completely solves this problem.

[228] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 222
[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid., 213-215
[231] Ibid., 213

Another aspect of this is Jenson's understanding of body as '*availability* to other persons.'[232] Jenson couples this with 'German idealism's subject-object distinction,' with Hegel, in other words.[233] However, we need to make sure reference to Hegel does not confuse maters. There is on one hand, Jenson's allusion to Hegel, and, on the other, Hegel's actual views. As David Bruner has convincingly argued, Jenson may have misunderstood elements of Hegel's thought.[234] However, while Bruner may find valuable avenues for a general enquiry, if he is correct (concerning Jenson's views on Hegel) it should not change our interpretation here. At present, we remain focused on understanding what Jenson meant by 'Hegelian,' so to speak, however accurate that may be.. This relates to both sides of what we are exploring sacramentally, the bread as Christ's objectivity to the church, and the church as the same to the world. We will return to Hegel in a moment. Concerning the objectivity *to* the church, we have already a considerable nuance on the apparent direct identification of Christ and church. Is there a tension here? If so, Jenson himself recognises it:

> Yet we cannot rest with this first answer. In the New Testament the church and the risen Christ are one but can also be distinguished from each other; thus, for example, the church is the risen Christ's "bride" so that that the Christ and the church are joined as a *couple.* We may not so identify the risen Christ with the church as to be unable to refer distinctly to the one and then to the other.[235]

The subject-object distinction in Hegel is at least partly employed to solve this problem. If the church is what it is as 'object' to the world but also exists as 'subject' to Christ's objectivity in the Eucharist, then there is a sense in which the church is just both. The problem with this is that everything we have seen thus far, and the strength of Jenson's metaphysics, consist in the fact that the church is what it is in relation to God *alone.* That is, the solution works better from one angle than the other. The church is the body of Christ in that it participates in the life of Christ in the eucharist. Now, however, the priority of the general becomes a problem because it would seem to cast the church as Christ to the world. If the church were *ambassador* of Christ in its act of proclamation, which itself correlated through faith to God and his actions in history, this would make more sense. But that would lose the priority of the general as the agency would be in the hand of the individuals acting collectively. Instead, Jenson has cast the church as existing as Christ precisely in that it is apprehended to be so by the world. It proclaims and is the body because it is Christ's availability. Interpreting this lightly would leave us with something like *ambassadors,* or even representatives pointing beyond

[232] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2*, 212-213
[233] Ibid., 213
[234] David Bruner, "Jenson, Hegel and the Spirit of Recognition," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 21, no.3 (July 2019)
[235] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2*, 213

themselves. However, if Christ is available only in embodied form (which we will come to in a moment) we are not permitted this reading. Rather, there is again a kind of relational ontology at work, though now running perilously contrary to what we have seen thus far. The church is body because of its relation to the world.

With the strong doctrine of unity between individual and church, the Hegelian subject-object divide does not seem enough. In our quotation above Jenson highlighted the need 'to refer distinctly to the one and then to the other.' The subject-object distinction accomplishes this. It allows linguistic distinction, but then ontology is not a mere question of semantics. It is not the reference, but the referent – the mind-independent reality - which is of prime importance. Jenson's focus on the historical reality presses this issue all the more. The question is, why does Jenson need to take this step? Why could the church not simply point beyond itself to the reality of the risen Christ?

The answer lies in Jenson's understanding of the Eucharist, which ties these strands together and points back to the critique of our last chapter. The key is Jenson's understanding of body as the objective availability of Christ to the church. This is made necessary by the critical position he has taken in relation to other metaphysical ideas, now seen more fully as opposed to the priority of the individual over the general as well. In Jenson's own words:

> 'But now a question can no longer be repressed: Why must Christ be embodied for us at all? Why is not a "spiritual" – in the vulgar sense – communion enough? That is, why is it not enough privately to think and feel Christ's presence and to know that others in their privacies do the same? Why do I need to live in the assembled church? Or indeed why is it not enough that the bread and cup move me to inward awareness of the risen Christ and to a deeper feeling of communion with him…why must we say the bread and cup *are* his objective intrusion, his body?'[236]

We could answer a question with a question here: why is it one or the other? Thinking and feeling personally are not necessarily opposed to 'objective intrusion.' Apparently, they are for Jenson because it must be specifically in the bread and wine that Christ is known to the church. Anything else would be merely subjective. Even if other metaphysical positions would allow a role for thought as an objective intrusion, this would not be 'embodied' for Jenson. As a result, it would not provide the kind of historically available objectivity we have been tracing. This understanding does not follow necessarily from our reading of the Spirit's governance in history in *Canon and Creed*. As a development, it renders the position much less flexible, however. After all, the message received must

[236] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 213-4

be apprehended subjectively according to the work of the Holy Spirit. It is difficult to see how this would not allow some room for thought and feeling as not merely subjective, at least in so far as they tend toward an appreciation of the 'bread and cup' as what they are for Jenson, Christ's availability to the church.

This comes back to the hiddenness of God. Thus far we have understood God's hiddenness as his opposition to the 'religious quest,' our seeking of him apart from his revelation of himself. Considering Jenson's understanding of the eucharist it becomes clear that sacramental theology forms the centre-point of this revelation. This is also why the church must, for Jenson, be the embodiment of Christ to the world and cannot be merely representative or point beyond itself. In Jenson's words, 'Few have probed this question with such passion as Martin Luther. Were Christ's presence in the assembly disembodied, it would be his presence as God but *not* his presence as human.'[237] Similar to what we saw above, Christ being present as *divine* would not be a problem for another metaphysic. Neither, it would seem, must this mean he is not also present as human given that he is, for Jenson also, the *risen* Christ, who is not of course human in quite the same way as those of us who will one day die, whatever exactly this means. However, for Jenson 'as a human he [Christ] is a risen body.'[238] There is then a loose linguistic association based upon the understanding of body as availability. Without body, resurrected or otherwise, there can be no availability. This, of course, raises problems for how it is that the Father and Spirit may be available, but we will be able to consider that more fully when we consider how God makes himself known through creation as a whole for Jenson in our next chapter.

This move allows Jenson to associate any manner of Christ's presence to either thought or feeling except through the sacrament with the full force of Luther's scathing attack on anything but God's hiddenness. Christ apart from the bread would be 'sheer God, abstracted from his embodied actuality as Jesus' to which 'Luther can only react with horror: "Don't give me any of *that* God!"'[239] The concern is soteriological, as we have seen: 'God's hiding in human embodiment…is our salvation…Christ's naked deity – were there such a thing – would be "nothing to do with us,"' quoting Luther again. The hiddenness as positive attribute is, in turn, seen in that God has made himself available in the sacrament. If he were available in similar measure, as risen Christ, to thought and feeling one gets the impression that, for Jenson, this would be lapsing back into the kind of paganism which could find a beginning in itself, with reason or feeling, aside from history. The

[237] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 214
[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid.

strength of Jenson's opposition to this arises from his apparent belief that allowing anything other than the sacramental availability of Christ's presence would be to resort to the metaphysics of timelessness. Hence, Christ without the sacrament would be 'abstracted from his embodied actuality.'[240]

Tracing Jenson's thought as we have done, one can see how he has arrived at this position. The high cost he pays for employing God's hiddenness in this way is that already mentioned, and which he himself pinpoints in the passage we have been considering, the need to distinguish between the risen Christ and the church. There is an inherent difficulty in integrating an essentially 'anti-systematic' notion like the hiddenness of God, though Jenson arguably does better elsewhere. One can also understand the need to emphasise the significance of the eucharist, beyond subjectivism, given the shape of Jenson's theology.

However, the chief difficulty of the present example is the apparent need to reach for something like a Hegelian solution for the problem of the identity of Christ and church to the world. Continuing with the passage in question, Jenson reaches again for the subject-object distinction in Hegel to the effect that Christ as anything other than sacrament would not be an 'object' for us as 'subjects,' resulting in our slavery. For Jenson, following Hegel, the 'relation must be reciprocal.'[241] In considerable innovation on Luther, this apparently holds true even for the relation between the church and God. Contrastingly, Luther's rhetoric around 'sheer deity' seems to press in the opposite direction in that 'sheer deity' as described can never truly be the object of our theologising. This also seems to be the place Jenson came to when we considered *de Servo Arbitrio* towards the end of the past chapter. God could never truly be the object of our seeking unless we attended to his revelation. The point of the 'ontology of freedom' was that the freedom was God's. In this regard Jenson's analysis came close to Oswald Bayer's pioneering study in understanding Luther's conception of the life of faith as the *vita passiva,* which is surely a more accurate reading.[242] Although we do not have space to develop this theme in detail, and though Jenson need not follow Luther in every regard, his interpretation in this regard seems to compound the difficulty, not least as it conflicts with his views elsewhere. His reading is not necessarily a problem, except that his understanding of the sacrament owes so much to Luther and within Luther there was perhaps resource to avoid the difficulty.

[240] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 214
[241] Ibid.
[242] Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: a contemporary interpretation,* trans. Thomas H. Trapp, (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 42

Again, Jenson does not solve the problems we have found already with the subject-object distinction. The ambiguity returns immediately following this passage in that the 'risen Christ' turns to 'find himself' in 'the sacramental gathering of believers.'[243] This means that 'The church with her sacraments is the object as which we may intend Christ because she is the object as which he intends himself.'[244] The church then becomes 'the risen Christ's ego.' All this is somewhat vague. To do Jenson full justice we would have to delve into the meaning of personhood, for which we lack space. Either way, the direct identification of Christ with church in this way causes problems Hegel cannot resolve. Neither does the hiddenness of God for Luther require such formulations. Within this passage Jenson presents this as antidote to the errors of pagan antiquity according to which things are determined 'by abstractly universal principles' and so his intention in moving beyond classical metaphysics is clear.[245] He has done so, though in this area Jenson's metaphysics approaches its most controversial.

Leaving that aside for the moment, we need to return to our discussion of how it is the story may be universal. Regarding sacramental theology we highlighted two aspects: the availability of Christ in the eucharist to the church, and the availability of Christ in the body to those outside. Both aspects are sacramental as they deal with the manner of Christ's embodiment and availability. We have been critical of both aspects in their relation to Hegel. However, we have still to consider the manner of the church's availability to the world in proclamation. This is also part of the embodiment. There is more to say here than can be criticised as Hegelian. Jenson's solutions outside of that weakness are innovative and effective.

The church as paradigm of humanity

We began our discussion from the perspective of the believing community. This looks like focusing first on the internal coherence of faith's knowledge, apprehended subjectively, as foundational to the universal objectivity of the message. In the same way, 'description and analysis of the *anima ecclesiastica,* though not under that label, was the necessary beginning at every step of this work's anthropology.'[246] Our beginning with *Canon and Creed* with the believing community, runs parallel to this. This is more than methodology, however. Or rather, if methodological, it is that kind which

[243] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 214
[244] Ibid., 215
[245] Ibid.
[246] Ibid., 289

necessarily proscribes a certain content. As we said above, if it is faith's knowledge with which we are dealing, then this shapes the correspondence on offer. Likewise, if the universal story is that of the believing community, its objectivity will reflect that. If Jenson's metaphysic is to articulate mind-independent truth, it will be found in this way. It is useful to think in terms of internal and external, within and without the community of faith, but, in the usual way we think of this reality, there is a priority of the latter. We typically conceive of the church as a subdivision of human society as such, and the Christian of humanity as a whole. However, this is precisely what Jenson does not allow. Put clearly, 'Humanity within God's people is not a variety of humanity outside God's people; rather the latter is an abstraction of the former.'[247] The priority of the general – the body as believing community – over the individual means more than first appears. It also comes to mean that the general is something like a paradigm of humanity, a sort of historical universal, at least in so far – according to this interpretation of Jenson – as it performs the epistemic function of an abstract universal ontologically by defining humanity as such.

This follows the critique of our previous chapter, building positively. We must not begin with a position 'outside' the knowledge of God. Tempting and 'natural' as that may be, it is incoherent. It leads only to the reality of the fragility of the human intellect. If truth is a corollary of God's intellect, we must not begin thinking as if we could sustain truth without him. We begin, rather, with God and the story he tells, which is reality. To start elsewhere would be to neglect what is, hoping to prove it by appeal to hypotheticals. Obviously, this problem takes particular form when we consider the usual rational appeals which are made in the aid of faith. Truth as a correlative of God's intellect, not ours, means we must begin with God, not with something supposedly outside his creating and redeeming speech, which are one dialogue with humanity as such. Hence, in Jenson's reading of Romans, it is not that reason may independently verify the knowledge of faith, as if it were available without faith, or faith were in our power. Rather, 'We must likewise be clear from the start that there is no question in Paul of a knowledge of God that human agents by intellectual operations on observed phenomena.'[248] That is really the point of there being no outside position. It is also the reason we began with coherence, the community's faith understood from within the community. The community and its message attain to universality in so far as there is actually no outside perspective on them. Reason may not adjudicate on what faith says. Proclamation, therefore, is not subject to independent scrutiny, as if the story were not universal. Its authority is in that it is not simply *our* message, or merely *our* body to which we belong. Both pertain to Christ and their definitions obtain only in light of him and only once he is given the ontic and temporal priorities we saw above.

[247] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 289
[248] Ibid., 154

This is important for our question regarding the nature of truth. There can be only one universal story. The relative numbers of those in the community cannot be afforded explanatory power. One does not translate the universal story into another, wider discourse. Therefore, proclamation, in Jenson's terms, deals directly with the question of the reformation, of justification, that is.[249] This, as he understands it, is a variation on what we saw in *Canon and Creed:* 'How is the church's discourse…to be logically and rhetorically shaped so as to not betray its content?'[250] For Jenson, the primary concern of reformation thinkers was in that sense regulative. This is not, of course, to imply that reformation discourse is vacuous, all method no content, only that its concern was proclamation and instruction.[251] To fully unpack this would pull us off course, we need only note that it is 'hermeneutic' (rather than transformative)[252] because it is 'metalinguistic.'[253] Whether or not this holds ecumenically, it is revealing for the project at hand in that we find the proclamation must, by its very nature as the word of promise, be such that its message is an all-encompassing story. That is the regulative import of the reformation question, for Jenson. If it were not so, it could not be 'meta-' linguistic. The grammar of salvation is just this linguistic regulation. But that does not mean that it is without content. It still corresponds. It is just that we govern our speech in light of the type of correspondence the gospel offers. That is, our speech reflects the universal story and not another.

Interpreted negatively, this focus on linguistic regulation confronts us with the difficulty we found in Jenson's understanding of the Eucharist. The issue is not merely the capacity to reference linguistically, but to land upon a particular referent. However, we need not read this 'linguistic regulation' as resulting in the same error. Indeed, Jenson's great concern throughout has been the danger that metaphysical thinking to what is not God, to something of our own imagining. To speak of salvation linguistically does not, as with Hegel, obscure the referent. The grammar here is better understood in terms of what we saw in *Canon and Creed,* as the triadic thought structure foundational to creed, given and developed by the Spirit. In that sense, the grammar of salvation is the requirement to speak of God as universal, not otherwise. That is what the reformation focus on proclamation means for Jenson. The proclamation may only be made as universal, anything else would be a different promise, a different story, and a different God. The Creator God can only be understood as at once the God of Israel, the Church and of humanity. Importantly for our purposes, this conception of things presents an absolute barrier to the notion of equal rival traditions.

[249] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 291
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid.

Tying this to our anthropological concerns, the universality of the story and its promise pertain to the universality of the *anima ecclesiastica.* Again, this is all about telos. The telos of the church's promise is the telos of humanity and therefore what humanity really is. We exist because he spoke and are redeemed in the same way. Justification is the initiation into the community on this basis, recovering telos as anticipated righteousness.[254] This also entails the priority of the general over the individual. In keeping with the ontic priority of the body over its members, the faith of the individual is to be part of the *totus Christus.* The human being enters into his or her true identity by doing so. We are what we are by relation, not in essence, or by participation in a timeless universal for Jenson. In that sense, salvation is sacramental. It consists in the relation of the individual to the body of Christ and literally becoming – or, at least, 'co-embodying' - what Christ is. Though intimately tied, none of this, in strict logical terms, requires Jenson's understanding of the eucharist described above. The 'co-embodying' is distinct to Jenson's austerity with respect to Christ's embodiment in the eucharist.

To summarise, 'The human creature is an entity whose good is to belong to the *totus Christus* and,' this being the strong part, 'who exists only in that he or she is directed to that good.'[255] We note that the fullness of humanity is *telos*[256] and without the telos of *this story,* which is the only one available, there can be only unfulfillment. On this basis, '…the baptised person must be the only available paradigm of human personhood.'[257] We note again how the community and its message may become universal. The form of humanity as such is the baptised person, the paradigm of human personhood. The time-bound general takes its form from what it will be because the future the Spirit opens is in the word of promise. Because there is only one universal story, and only one storyteller, there is only one humanity, that of the new creation which anticipates the Creator's purpose. Once more, creation and redemption are one in God's speech to (and now through) humanity.

This becomes stronger when we consider it as an alternative to the abstract metaphysics Jenson is replacing. We have seen two highly significant metaphysical moves. The church, as body, takes priority over its members ontologically speaking. This is best understood as Jenson's own philosophical preference of the general over the individual, which runs through his whole ecclesiology and soteriology. This is important when we consider the second move Jenson makes. Beyond the priority of the general, we have the church, as body, co-embodiment of Christ et cetera, as paradigm of humanity. What the Christian is in essence is via participation in the communal whole,

[254] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 291
[255] Ibid., 289
[256] Ibid., 291
[257] Ibid., 289

the general. And, in so far as creation and redemption are but two stages in God's dialogue with humanity, the church is in fact the paradigm of humanity. Here then we have the general standing in for the abstract universal, ontologically speaking. The material, historical general of the church as paradigm and future of humanity as a whole recasts any notion of 'essence.' Things are not what they are aside from time, but what they will be in time. The general stands in for the universal because it bears the same epistemic weight, defining as it does what humanity is as such.

Whether this makes sense is another question. From one angle it appears as though Jenson's beginning point with the faith of the community has allowed him to conflate the general and the universal. Or perhaps, read more charitably, Jenson has eschewed the idea of an essence aside from historical particulars. The language of general and individual, though not Jenson's own, best captures this shift and, if taken on its own terms is consistent. If pressed for the epistemic certainty that a timeless universal provides, one feels Jenson would respond that such a thing does not exist, entailing as it does an appeal to reason apart from history. In terms of the objectivity of faith's knowledge, this allows mind-independence. However, it cannot buttress itself apart from an appeal to an eschatological reality - apart from faith, that is. This is not an answer that will satisfy all, but, according to this interpretation, it is at least consistent with the critical elements of Jenson's metaphysics and his methodology throughout.

We may close by noting that the ecclesial embodiment of the bread, the *totus Christus,* and the spiritual provenance of the promise itself, entail a specific role for the community of faith to the rest of creation. Above we found that the Eucharist is Christ's objectivity to the church.[258] The other aspect of that is that the church is Christ's objectivity to the world.[259] We noted the difficulties with Jenson's understanding of the eucharist. This is the other aspect of that stance, though we may soften Jenson's position by emphasising that the church's proclamation refers beyond itself, to the God of the gospel. It is not that the church is Christ's only availability to those outside the community of faith. They may also join the community. This is adjusting Jenson's position, or at least his emphasis. However, it is not out of keeping with his thought as a whole. It also helps to avoid some of the difficulties associated with the appropriation of Hegel, such as the equivocation between church and Christ.

[258] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 213-215
[259] Ibid., 213

Jenson's unique anthropology and the universality of story and promise are possible only in so far as they are correlatives of God, the *dramatis personae.* However, the presence of Word and Spirit in and as the community entail more that the buttressing of its thought structure, the grammar of salvation. By the same token, its promise proclaimed becomes the very voice of God in and to creation. Proclamation will not resolve into other categories because the message, the promise, is not human. It is, rather, the speech of God to humanity. We said humanity existed in so far as it was addressed by God and could draw reality or explanation, ultimately, from no other quarter. The same applies to the redemptive word which constitutes the new creation. In proclaiming, and as the 'co-embodiment' of Christ, the community's proclamation becomes the redemptive address. In so far as humanity is also creaturely, though destined to be taken up into God's redemptive address, the objectivity of faith's promise is just that it may be proclaimed on its own authority. The key witness to God in creation is not impersonal, but embodied, not *in*human but, like Christ, as human as its hearers. And this, in its entirety, must explain the relation between coherence and correspondence in the story and the promise. It inheres in us; it is spoken of him. It relates entirely to him who spoke the redemption in the first place. In that, the community is a single prophet.[260] It need not justify its address to creation because its address is the word of him who chooses to create and to redeem by his own authority. 'As to what the church is to prophesy, the Word of the Lord has come to her once for all…'[261] The prophecy is the promise, the telos, of the universal story and the destiny of humanity: 'Jesus is risen.'[262]

Contrastingly, when reason operates from the outside position, it looks for a creaturely foundation for metaphysics, a place outside God's received address. If the gospel is authoritative as God's word, reason operating from the outside position acts as if it can be its own foundation, its own authority. Beginning with the believing community's dialectic between canon and creed, we see this reversed in Jenson's thought. The proclamation of the body is thus a creaturely witness standing as alternative to a supposed rational absolute. It does so according to the certainty of faith. But that is only part of the picture. According to the metaphysics Jenson rejects, creation as a whole provided an independent witness, grasped by reason, a kind of 'natural knowledge.' For Jenson, the knowledge of faith will also correlate objectively to creation, though not according to reason's outside position. We turn to consider this in detail presently.

[260] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 199
[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid.

3. Faith in Creation

This chapter considers the knowledge of God, faith's knowledge, in creation. This will take us to the heart of Jenson's metaphysics and the nub of the issue we have been tracing: how it is that the knowledge of faith corresponds to an objective mind-independent reality? Nowhere is this more crucial than when we consider the knowledge of God that creation may bring. However, nowhere is the attempt more perilous. Based on Jenson's critique of metaphysics, the knowledge of God in created things could easily lapse into idolatry, seeking God from a starting point other than faith and God's revelation of himself in time. We must bear this difficulty in mind. If faith is not supported by an appeal to reason's grasp of creation *apart from faith*, then what is the knowledge of God found *by faith* in created things?

We hold this question alongside the promise of objectivity that knowledge of God in created things could bring. Created things are mind-independent objects of knowledge. If they were the vehicles of a knowledge received in faith, then that knowledge – on one reading – would be objective. It would be mind-independent because it came by what was independent of the human mind. That said, it is unclear what this knowledge would look like for Jenson. It could not be natural theology, or *a priori* proofs such as Anselm offered.[263] Compounding the issue is the unity of creation and redemption. This prohibits a layered nature-grace scheme such as would allow the separation of our understanding into 'natural' and 'revealed.'[264] All must be natural, or all revealed – Jenson will have to work this out. Likewise, what faith apprehends in creation must be from faith, redemptive as God's address to the believer which creates the new creation, the subject of our last chapter. It remains to be seen how Jenson will solve this puzzle. However, one thing is clear. The unity of creation and redemption, as well as his commitment to the authority of scripture means there must be a knowledge of God in creation.[265] We might add also that a knowledge of God in created things seems necessary if Jenson is to articulate a full-blooded account of truth. It cannot be that his concept is weaker than what he revises. If that were so it could not be the 'dumb truth' we are after and which the gospel demands. What we gain by faith we must *really know,* or else Jenson has failed.

[263] Anslem, *The Major Works,* 5
[264] Jenson, Systematic Theology, *Vol.2,* 154
[265] Romans 1:20, for example

Throughout we have traced the problem of the correspondence of truth as one fundamental challenge for Jenson's metaphysics. It is fundamental because of Jenson's critique of metaphysics. Greek metaphysics, so the argument goes, casts us in a false position, searching and reaching for a false eternity abstracted from time. The problem of finding correspondence without reason so defined, and beginning with the perspective of faith, is what led Jenson to emphasise the importance of the general over the individual and, ultimately, to speak in such a way that it bears the epistemic weight of an abstract universal. This mitigates the problem of subjectivism; that is, it contributes to avoiding the lapse into Nietzschean nihilism, to put it in Jenson's terms. By refusing to begin with reason's 'outside' position, and by beginning with faith, Jenson shifts the epistemic ground.

However, this is only part of the answer to the problem of truth's objectivity. A full answer must incorporate knowledge of created things. Even more than that, for Jenson created things must somehow communicate faith, as we will see. Truth and faith cannot be separated because creation and redemption cannot be separated: this requires that creation be apprehended in faith, which means that it mediates the knowledge of God, faith's knowledge. To any that imagine belief somewhere on the spectrum to the certainty of knowledge, this is going to be a substantial redefinition. At the outset, it may even look like equating terms. However, in Jenson's terms, and in all that follows, faith cannot be less certain than what reason may know. Indeed, as we proceed it will become clear that reason can only really know by faith anyway. Faith – of one sort or another – must be its foundation, in creation just as it is in redemption. Although, perhaps that is not as controversial as might be thought. After all, 'By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.'[266] If we begin in faith, the matter of this chapter will be understanding the other two key terms: the universe and God's command. If we can get these two in place, then we can understand what Jenson means by locating faith's knowledge in creation. Or again, we will know how it is that creation may speak redemptively. On that heading, we need to define a few key terms.

Firstly, we have to address the linguistic ambiguity of the word 'creation.' I propose to use it in two primary senses. On one hand there is creation as a whole, created things. This includes everything apart from God, but in my usage it will refer to physical reality – trees and water and bodies et cetera. I do not, by referring to 'created reality' in connection with the knowledge of God, mean to refer to any spiritual reality, however it is defined, good or evil. Neither do I refer to anything purely intellectual. For all intents and purposes, creation in this sense means 'nature.' If this is limited, it is because this focus will be most useful in understanding both the problem at hand (how creation contributes to the objectivity of faith's knowledge) and Jenson's answer to that problem. In the second

[266] Hebrews 11:3, NIV

sense, I mean not created things but God's 'act of creation.' As we will need to refer to creation in both senses, I will use creation or created things in my first sense and whenever God's creative act is in view I will say 'the act of creation,' or something similar. It may not be so easy to disentangle the two in practice because of Jenson's understanding of both, but that, of course, is the metaphysic we are trying to understand. That established, we may proceed to examine Jenson's understanding of created things. That will lead to consideration of the relation *between* created things, which is 'harmony.' Jenson's understanding of harmony is closely related to his redefinition of transcendentals, which are no longer abstract, but temporal and trinitarian – especially beauty – so we will need to mention this briefly, too. As both created things and harmony relate to God's speech, God's creative act will be in view throughout.

What creation is

If creation and redemption are alike, then reality must be a dialogue for Jenson. But how can created things be speech? Surely it must be the case that we are talking about some*thing*? Correspondence requires a referent, not just a referring. Knowledge needs an object. Likewise, if things are God's speech, how are they related? If we imagine a world of objects, we likewise suppose a set of laws governing their relation. Jenson's revision of metaphysics thus works from the ground up. It concerns what created things are, where Jenson will take seriously the biblical assertion that they proceed from God's speech, labelling them 'things referred to.'[267] Their relations are likewise redefined: not law but 'harmony' is the relation of God's command. This is also part of the definition of created things. We have a two-part definition therefore: the what – speech – and the relation – harmony.

The *what* of created things comes first. What is the referent of our speech? If we prioritise thought over matter, then speech can refer to an intellectual reality underwriting the created order. In terms of our programmatic verse, the visible comes from the invisible. But what, for Jenson, is the invisible? The *what* of the visible will be determined by the answer to this question. Jenson's understanding of created things proceeds from his doctrine of God[268] and so his metaphysical understanding of created things has to be understood in light of that doctrine. Thus, while we will begin with created things, we must always bear this methodological point in mind and be ready to situate what we find in light of Jenson's understanding of God's own being. As we will see, that means allowing Jenson's

[267] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 160
[268] Ibid., 29

understanding of the Trinity, and his critique of timeless eternity, to shape our understanding of his metaphysic of creaturely things.

There are two parts to Jenson's understanding of physical things. The first is body. Body, in Jenson's terms, is the availability of one thing to another in the created order.[269] 'In the created order' means within time. For example, 'availability' cannot be solely intellectual, as a standing relation between universal and particular may be. If it were, the perception would tend again towards an abstract beyond time. It must be the case then that bodies are 'available' precisely as bodies. That is, they are not just signposts to transcendental ideas, but the very manner of availability. They are physical. Jenson is not entirely clear on this point. However, as we said at the outset, the work of an interpreter is partly constructive. We are, after all, pursing a narrow point regarding the mind-independence of truth. In order to do that we need to understand how it is that creaturely objects may communicate the knowledge of God. And, in order to understand that, we need to consider Jenson's metaphysical understanding of created things. If body means *material*, that has strong ramifications for the possibility of objective truth. Can changeable, material objects bear that epistemic weight? Jenson did not always have the question of mind-independent truth in mind as he wrote (though what we have seen thus far demonstrates its importance to him). At this juncture we have, therefore, to make an argument from deduction in order to 'flesh out' Jenson's thought on this point. I suggest the best way to do that in light of the critical element of Jenson's programme is to understand body's 'availability' in the most basic sense as *material*. Matter, *qua* body, is, it would seem for Jenson, precisely *physical* availability. This also has the benefit of being the most obvious interpretation of the word 'body,' which perhaps explains why Jenson did not feel the need to elaborate further.

This goes some way to tying together the strands we have been tracing. However, before we move on, we need to touch upon two potential issues with this interpretation, each sitting at contrasting extremes. One concerns Jenson's understanding of transcendentals, by which I mean transcendentals in the classical sense, an area so key to other metaphysical systems. How does Jenson understand being and beauty – do we not in some way 'participate' in these as part of our knowledge of God? These transcendentals are chosen because of their centrality to Jenson's thought. If we can grasp these, we will begin to grasp what role transcendentals play in Jenson's metaphysical system. The second is a potential difficulty with the understanding of body according to the argument above, namely that the emphasis on specifically *physical* availability could imply materialism (which would not fit with Jenson's thought as a whole). Jenson does not fit into idealist or materialist boxes as easily

[269] See for example Jenson, *Systematic Theology Vol.2,* 49, but also throughout

as others might. As such, we will need to chart a course between the two – first, to transcendental ideas.

Jenson's references to transcendentals, though infrequent, are important for understanding his work as a whole. Neither did his commitment to maintaining and revising traditional thought around transcendentals diminish over the course of his academic career, as two later articles published in *Pro Ecclesia* show.[270] However, space prohibits an in-depth examination. We will touch upon first being, and then beauty, the latter to be more fully expounded over the course of the present chapter as we discuss harmony. The central text here will be chapter 14 in the first volume of *Systematic Theology,* which is aptly titled 'Our place in God.' This is not the only relevant text, but it has the benefit of closer integration with other areas of Jenson's thought (being part of a systematic theology), as well as being a mature work.[271]

The first thing to note is that the title is not window-dressing. Here, as elsewhere, we will substantially miss what Jenson is getting at unless we begin with his doctrine of God. On that heading, Jenson sharpens the question to a fine point, 'But how can it be that God is known by creatures?'[272] From one angle, we have answered this question in our previous chapter. It concerns the redemptive knowledge of God. However, we need to touch on it here as it ties together critique and construction, quickly leading onto the knowledge of God mediated by created things. Indeed, both creation and redemption are tied together in the understanding of *being* adopted by Jenson: 'to have being is to be knowable.'[273]

On Jenson's reading, God's being must be open to participation of some kind.[274] This, it must be said, is best understood in light of our early critique. In mentioning transcendentals, Jenson is in no way retreating into timeless abstracts. The problem likewise concerns the church's historic tendency to fall into thinking 'of God as simply one thing and creatures as another.'[275] This concern, we will find throughout this chapter, is programmatic to Jenson's understanding of created things and their mediation of the knowledge of God. We must not, in our understanding of causality specifically, or in

[270] See Jenson, Robert W. "On Truth and God: 1. Ipsa Veritas and Late Modernity." *Pro Ecclesia* 20, no. 4 (November 2011): 387 on 'maintaining' and Jenson, Robert W. "On Truth and God: 2. The Triunity of Truth." *Pro Ecclesia* 21, no.1 (February 2012): 52-53 on 'revising.'
[271] Jenson's essay "The Triunity of Truth," originally published in 1979 and reproduced in Jenson, *Essays in theology of culture,* is a good example of an earlier work which introduces these themes that are later developed in *Systematic Theology.* The same could be said for "Beauty," which is also republished in the same volume.
[272] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1,* 224
[273] Ibid.
[274] Ibid., 226
[275] Ibid., 224

our understanding of created things more generally, blur the line between creature and Creator. Indeed, immediately once the possibility of being as a transcendental is introduced, Jenson signals this danger: '…we may resort to language designed to blur the boundary between God and creature.'[276] For which effort, the 'inheritance of Mediterranean antiquity will be immediately at hand…'[277] This must, in part, explain why Jenson feels the need to describe his thought in this area as 'badly wrenching the received concept.'[278]

That said, Jenson also finds that 'Being is truth' – and so we cannot avoid the question of what role transcendentals may play.[279] The key, however, will be in the manner of participation open to us. That participation may be described as *trinitarian,* but it seems a stretch to label it *transcendental.* We need, in light of this, to understand how the 'received concept' has been wrenched and reinterpreted, but it will not be helpful at this stage to pre-empt our later argument. Or, as Jenson puts it, 'We must venture thus far into the doctrine of creation, with propositions that can be justified only later.'[280] We will feel this most in that, for Jenson, participation concerns not an abstract concept, still less a timeless relation. Rather, participation for Jenson means that the being and life of God can 'accommodate other persons' without distortion.[281] God is, in Jenson's memorable phrase, 'roomy.'[282] This means that we can 'participate' because God is open to us – but this openness must be understood 'in trinitarian fashion.'[283] To understand this more fully, we must consider Jenson's understanding of time (which we will later do). For now, we note that Jenson's understanding of God substantially redefines his understanding of transcendental participation, the main difference being that it is temporal, occurring within and though history. For Jenson, participation does not concern an abstract principle, but the subsisting trinitarian relations that make up God's own life. In his words, 'There is a speaking and hearing in God, and the knowledge of God is participation in this discourse.' This is not about transcendentals beyond time. According to a classical conception, we may have being by participating in God's being, but 'being' need not be trinitarian. A singular abstract principle will do. This is not the case for Jenson and, what is more, his doctrine of God means he redefines transcendentals as 'concrete.'[284] This, for Jenson, is what trinitarian means. If it were not so, we would fall prey to the whole weight of the critique traced in our first chapter. This is, indeed, a 'wrenching' of the received concept.

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[276] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1*, 225
[277] Ibid.
[278] Ibid., 224
[279] Ibid., 226
[280] Ibid.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Colin E. Gunton 1993. *The One, the Three, and the Many: God, creation, and the culture of modernity,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 139

The metaphor of discourse also shapes the meaning of beauty, which is explained temporally in light of Jenson's trinitarian doctrine of God. In Jenson's words, 'God's beauty is an actual living exchange between Father, Son, and Spirit…'[285] This again will become clearer later. The key for the moment is that 'God is *beauty*.'[286] It follows that the divine 'living exchange' must be beauty itself, just as God just *is* the subsisting relations between the trinitarian persons.[287] For Jenson, beauty arises as the 'perfect harmony' of this divine discourse, which is 'its music.'[288] Fascinating as this may be, we must confine ourselves to the question at hand, namely how this may impact upon what we have found above; that is, body as *material* availability. If what we have found regarding *being* holds true here also, as indeed I believe it does, we find that this means beauty takes on temporal character. The harmony of the triune life happens within the history that God shares with us. On this reading, created things in their materiality may facilitate the knowledge of God, that is, they may accomplish what a transcendental concept may have permitted in a different metaphysic, though in quite a different way. Indeed, for Jenson, beauty's role is unique in this regard because it dovetails with what we have seen already, namely that created things are 'things referred to' in the divine discourse of God's life.[289]

Thus Jenson prioritises beauty as 'ground and union' of truth and goodness, affording it a unique, foundational role.[290] The heart of this is that 'in apprehending beauty we abstract from the content of the discourse [created things] without becoming abstract in our understanding.'[291] Clearly this is a significant conceptual move, allowing as it does that beauty (or harmony) describe the relation between things without becoming the kind of abstract we have seen Jenson criticise to this point. In other words, harmony not only replaces substance for Jenson, but also does the work a transcendental may do. Beauty is then to be found between the things in time, as a defining characteristic of God's own life. Beauty is part of created things being 'referred to' in the divine discourse, and thus the order which governs that referral. Beauty is therefore harmony; it is what describes the relation between created things. It is also, to be clear, musical[292] and thus a special kind of order. Crucially for the point at hand, this redefinition – or 'wrenching' – facilitates Jenson's understanding of body as physical availability without resorting to the abstraction of the metaphysic he is revising. Indeed, though not without difficulties, as we will see, this is a novel idea which seems to go some way to providing the consistency that objected truth requires of the created order. We will return to the theme of harmony

[285] Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, *Vol.1,* 235
[286] Ibid., 234 (emphasis Jenson's)
[287] Ibid., 226
[288] Ibid., 234
[289] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2,* 160
[290] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1,* 235
[291] Ibid., 236
[292] Ibid., 235

presently, but first we turn to the other issue with body as material availability: that, in light of Jenson's critique, it would appear to imply materialism.

We suggested above that created things are *body,* and that body is *material availability.* Availability is physical perception. The second part of Jenson's answer will speak to the danger of materialism. It will say, beyond perception, what is actually made available. We are still looking for the underlying *what.* The next part of our discussion will consider Jenson's appropriation of Jonathan Edwards in that regard.

According to classical metaphysics (for lack of a better term), physical perception relates to an underlying substance. This understanding was pivotal for many different thinkers, with many variations. We do not need to go into them all here. The point of mentioning substance is just to highlight that, for most, creation has a material *what.* Created things are not usually supposed to consist purely in their perception. However, for Edwards, 'body' is identical with solidity or 'resistance.'[293] The point here is that there is no underlying substance. This, appropriated from Edwards, is the second part of Jenson's definition. For a programme of 'revisionary' metaphysics, one can understand the appeal. Concerning the specific issue we raised with body as availability – that it seems to run close to materialism – it has another benefit. If there is no underlying 'substance' then materialism is effectively impossible. Indeed, Edwards was an idealist. This puts Jenson onto very different territory. Whatever causes our sensory impressions, it is not in the final analysis a material cause at all. In fact, put in terms of Aristotelian causality, material causes do not exist. We are left with form, of course, though its 'solidity' must be entirely other.

At this juncture we have to make an interpretive point. The role substance plays in a classical understanding of created things is considerable. Something like substance exists as what we might call a 'middle term' between God's act of creation and what we perceive. God creates, things are materially, and then we perceive that materiality. If created things are just as perceived, then there is no 'they are' in between God's creative act and our perception. Instead, we would be perceiving God's effects directly, without a middle term. Logically, the *what* that is made available is God's creative act.

[293] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 49, quoting *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol.6*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 215

However, without a middle term, created things appear ontologically thin. Or perhaps, their contingency is emphasised beyond the norm. Jenson may not consider this an issue, bearing in mind that he does not consider contingency a 'defect,'[294] but it does have consequences. Of course, this middle term need not be material. Following God's creative act, things could 'be' intellectually, and this intellectual reality could be the mediating source of perception, again presenting God as indirect cause of physical perception, at one level removed. However, this will not be Jenson's view because it implies a timeless relation.[295] We will come to this below, but it is worth mentioning here to show what is at stake. This concerns not only the manner of our perception, but of God's creative act also. It means there is no way to understand created things apart from God. From the perspective of the objectivity of faith's knowledge, this means that faith once more corresponds in God and also that it is objective as it knows created things as they truly are. Created things are truly mind-independent according to this account, but the immediacy of God's creative act has other consequences too.

Without a middle term – physical or otherwise – God's creative act is always immediate. There is, according to most, a distinction between creating and sustaining. In what follows we will examine the implications of Jenson's understanding in light of that. If God's causality is always immediate, always present, then there is no real difference between creating the world and sustaining it, which amounts to continuous creation. This is again a far-reaching revision of classical understanding. In Jenson's words, 'A distinction between creation and "preservation" or between initial and "continuing" creation has been rightly used to warrant that there was a first existence of creatures at a zero point of time. But such distinctions can have no metaphysical or religious significance.'[296] Jenson sees the distinction as one recognising creaturely contingency and nothing more. Bearing that in mind will help us understand the positions Jenson takes. Jenson presents God's creative act as immediate to underscore that it is God's act, and his alone. All else are contingent creatures. This is a worthy assertion, often blurred in practice, and certainly absent to most world views, most notable among them for our purposes being 'the Greeks.'

Likewise, Jenson opens his account of the act of creation by highlighting the danger of understanding creation as emanation.[297] Removing the middle term presumably removes the danger of emanation while maintaining the contingency of the created order. For Jenson, the 'emanationist temptation' has been present throughout the church's history, wherever Platonist influence has caused the blurring of

[294] See introduction
[295] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 5-7
[296] Ibid., 9
[297] Ibid., 5

creature and creature.[298] Here again, we can see that removing substance, or another intellectual middle term, would look like a good move. Doing so undercuts the possibility of ascribing creative agency to something other than God. One may make only a small interpretive leap in supposing an eternal abstract such as a universal would fit this bill. In all these implications we would do well to take the 'creation or emanation' fault line as programmatic for what follows. We will see the best of Jenson if we understand why he takes the steps he does and what problems he avoids by doing so. Removing substance, to his credit, removes the dangers inherent to an emanationist understanding, that there is 'no reality other than the divine' or else that it is a 'delusion or degradation' thereof.[299] Jenson quite rightly sees that neither is compatible with a biblical account of creation.

Creaturely order as harmony

Having considered the *what*, we now need to consider how created things relate to one another. This will be central to the question of the objectivity of truth because logic depends on our being able to apprehend order in creation. Indeed, without us being able to do so, it is difficult to see a way that science or mathematics could be possible. In faith we may apprehend created things as God's effects, but we still have to consider the relation between these effects. The big challenge here will be the lack of creaturely causality. As above, all stems from God's command in a direct sense. For example:

> Any creation of the triune God, no matter how different from the actual creation, would be in some way material. That is, in it creatures would be made available to one another as other than one another, in a structure of such presentations set by God's command.[300]

The first part of this is familiar. Body is material availability, but this is not materialism because there is no substance.[301] We now turn to the second aspect, 'the structure' of body's availability. What laws if any, does it follow? Jenson's lack of a middle term has consequences here also. For 'presentations' read 'sensory impressions,' per the above. As such, we are dealing with the laws of nature. These laws are 'set by God's command.' This, in itself, is uncontroversial. By any account, God's creative act determines the structure of physical reality. The structure God commands determines not only what we perceive but also the relation between perceptions. If Jenson's thought in this area follows what

[298] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 6
[299] Ibid., 5
[300] Ibid., 49
[301] Ibid., 48

we have seen thus far, then the command will be immediate. There will be no law arising from the thing itself, only God's present intention expressed in the relation between created things.

It is helpful to remember the critique of our first chapter. Jenson, in the beginning of his systematic theology, wrote a prolegomenon in which he criticised 'natural' knowledge. This, present in the ancient world, continued through Christian history and came to fruition in Enlightenment deism.[302] We glossed this problem as beginning from an 'outside position', a rational and supposedly neutral angle on faith. For Jenson, the rational outside position was not actually neutral ground, but rather the product of the church's engagement with the philosophical-religious culture of Mediterranean pagan antiquity. In essence, it was Greek culture.[303] In fact, there is no knowledge of God that does not begin with his revelation of himself. God as direct cause of sensory impressions fits this bill and should facilitate knowledge of him through created things, provided it begins in faith. The issue of the order of creation is closely related.

We need to apply the same insight to the order between created things. We cannot imagine another basis of empirical reality than God. This is compounded, rightly or wrongly, by the conflating of creating and sustaining. Nothing 'is' apart from God's immediate effects. Because this amounts to continuous creation, there is no 'outside' position from which reason may begin absent faith. There is no outside perspective on creation as there was no outside perspective on redemption. Turning to the question of the order set by God's command, we see something similar. The relation between things is not caused by the things in themselves. We need to understand this relation if we are to understand what knowledge of God it may bring. On this, we need to consider Jenson's critique of the Enlightenment understanding of the laws of nature. As with other key areas of Jenson's thought, this concerns a shift in governing metaphor. In this case, it is from machine to musical harmony.

For Jenson, enlightenment mechanism is closely related to the positing of substance as material cause.[304] If substance does not cause sensory impression, then it may not have causal efficacy with respect to the order of creation. We may observe laws, but they do not arise from the things governed by them. In Jenson's words, 'A universe that was significantly like a great machine would not have the *sort* of dynamic order that answers to the harmonious life of the triune God…'[305] The 'dynamic order' Jenson supposes is that like a musical harmony. True to form, this proceeds from his doctrine

[302] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.1,* 5-10
[303] Ibid.
[304] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 39
[305] Ibid.

of God and we may follow the causal connection backward. The '*sort* of order' depends on the sort of God. A timeless God would have a timeless order, such as pure logical relation. A God that acts in time would create a temporal order, hence the 'drumbeat rhythm' of God's creative speech.[306] The act of creation is musical and so the order which governs created things is musical also. The 'insistent rhythm'[307] of Genesis is the order of reality in its layered musicality. This is a beautiful idea which we must hold alongside the concept of story we saw in our last chapter. The coherence of created things will be that they have a beginning and an end, a set part to play. God is storyteller, but also composer.

Moreover, as we cannot separate creating and sustaining, we will not in the final analysis be able to separate what things are and the order of their relation. Continuous creation prohibits the kind of creaturely independence which would allow the idea of nature's self-governance. Indeed, that is the point. If the act of creation has a rhythm, then created things will move in time with it. This is the kind of thinking Jenson is getting at, which is why 'harmony' may be 'conscripted' as 'contrary example' to 'substance.'[308] Harmony is 'metaphysically descriptive language' which is 'more malleable to the gospel's grasp of reality.'[309] Order and substance are not quite the same thing, but if creating and sustaining cannot be separated – and if substance is excised causally – then harmony can do the work of substance, for Jenson. It will describe what things are. However, we are still without a middle term. That is, the harmony is directly God's speech. Like sensory impression, it does not exist in itself. We are not talking about an abstracted creaturely order sustained by God. Jenson wants us to move straight from the rhythm of created things to understand that God is also harmonious.

In contrast, the positing of 'substance' behind or underneath sensory impressions yields an alternative metaphysic and a different God. Quite literally, it produces enlightenment mechanism and deism.[310] We may note that both are rationalist – natural, in Jenson's terms – and have no need for faith or revelation as they consider created things apart from God. Whether they are explicitly emanationist is not the issue. Emanation supposed the divinity of the world. In Jenson's terms, Enlightenment mechanism does the same by giving causal agency to created things.[311] Instead, Jenson draws on Jonathan Edwards, for whom bodies did not act upon one another because they were not agents.[312] If we cannot separate creating and sustaining, this step is clear. If God sustains as a separate ongoing act

[306] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 5
[307] Ibid.
[308] Ibid., 39
[309] Ibid.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Ibid., 39; also quoting Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol.6*, 216
[312] Ibid., 49; also quoting *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol.6*, 216

to creating, then creaturely agency is indeed possible. Either way, for Jenson in his appropriation of Edwards, this is not a serious option because it would imply enlightenment mechanism.

Harmony is an alternative 'dynamic' order. It is dynamic because it is living, reflecting the immediacy of God's impact in continuous creation. The distant, abstract God of natural theology is a kind of polar opposite to this way of thinking.[313] One gets the sense that for Jenson, temporal means not contingent in a negative sense, but alive – active, not static. That, we may suppose, is what he is driving at. If creation is a dynamic harmony of interrelated created things, then the God that made it must be suitably musical and relational. We may also add in anticipation of our argument below that this active harmonious God would not be a singular, undifferentiated principle, but a Trinity of overflowing life. As we proceed, we should also note that this has far reaching implications for how we understand the objectivity of truth. It will not, on Jenson's terms, be found sterile and inactive. That cannot be the knowledge faith brings if the world is as described and if created things are as God speaks them. Jenson's account may not be without problems in terms of the objectivity of knowledge, but we would do well to note this fact before encountering them. In looking for objectivity, we are looking for a way to understand our creaturely knowledge as more than subjective. It must correspond to God and if it can do so while incorporating creaturely things then all the better – this, after all, is what classical metaphysics achieved. However, objective in Jenson's sense will presumably not mean impersonal. If created things may be an object of knowledge, we must also remember for Jenson that 'What is around us is not an iron impersonal fate but an omnipotent conversation that is open to us.'[314] Reality is this conversation.

God, too, is conversation.[315] This is a key notion for Jenson, one which will come to govern his understanding of harmony. In his own words, 'God does not first become active and relational when he creates; just so creating is *both* appropriate and unnecessary for him.'[316] Because God is relational created things may be genuinely other. In his act of creation, he 'opens room' in himself, which he can do because he has such relations.[317] More than that, '…the God in question is Father, Son, and Spirit. To make our first and fundamental step, we need merely to remember that these three subsist only in their relations to each other.'[318] The central implication of this 'fundamental step' is that 'any work of God is rightly interpreted only if it is construed by the mutual roles of the triune persons.'[319]

[313] Jenson, *Systematic Theology Vol.2,* 49
[314] Ibid., 44
[315] Ibid., 26
[316] Ibid., 28
[317] Ibid., 25
[318] Ibid.
[319] Ibid.

God can be conversation because of Jenson's understanding of subsisting relations and, consistent with Jenson's focus on the acts of God, if he creates by speaking then this must be the manner of his relation. We mentioned already that God may allow us to be really 'other' because of these relations. Putting conversation into these terms yields:

> The word, "Let there *be…"* can truly be spoken only in *dramatic* discourse. The trinity is such a conversation, the only one that can never collapse into dialogue or monologue, because the three who make its poles are the conversation.[320]

Dramatic discourse – or the triune persons as *dramatis personae* – is what we found in our last chapter. God is known by the part he plays in the story, the story he tells. We see something similar as regards God's act of creation. The otherness of creatures is to be 'commandingly mentioned or addressed' in this divine discourse.[321] We are what he tells, referred to in the internal discourse of the Trinity.

This leaves the question of what harmony is. It cannot be like natural law, operating impersonally and mathematically, because it is developed in contrast to Enlightenment thought in that regard. We know it is the command of God, the structure of the presentations of body's availability. We know, too, that there is nothing in created things (them not having substance) which could generate this order apart from God's continuous act of creation, which, in turn, reflects his own triune life. This is trinitarian dialogue, which refers to created things. Without substance, we suggested that creaturely causality was not possible. As regards harmony, we have likewise found no middle term in Jenson's thought so the same weakness reoccurs, though an appeal to faith will not suffice here. Harmony has replaced substance for Jenson but, in so far as it does not accomplish the same purpose of permitting creaturely causality, it has not answered the problem. For Jenson, harmony must be understood differently than mechanical order because it must reflect the 'mutual roles of the Triune persons,' as above. It must also be temporal. However, the order perceived between created things suggests creaturely causality. We need to explore this in greater detail. Following critical examination, we will return to consider how Jenson may address the problem according to his understanding of the Trinity. We still pursue the question of what truth may be communicated by created things to faith and, in particular, what role harmony may play in this since it has replaced substance metaphysically.

[320] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2*, 25-26
[321] Ibid., 26

Harmony and causality

For Jenson, even without substance, dynamic harmony allows for ordinary empirical knowledge, though we will have cause to question this presently. According to Jenson's understanding, Edwards' removal of substance did not entail a rejection of Newtonian science.[322] There was 'in Newtonian and Lockean science a grand vision of universal dynamic harmony.'[323] The point of removing substance is that it denies causal influence to created things. Thus Edwards, whom Jenson appropriates here, 'had to undo the metaphysics' the Enlightenment usually associated with the order of creation. For Jenson, we may still observe God's effects, so long as we understand them as God's. With respect to scientific knowledge on a superficial level, this is probably true. In so far as science is empirical, there is no conflict between it and the 'phenomenalist and operationalist'[324] philosophy Jenson adopts from Edwards.

However, as we probe deeper, the picture becomes more complicated. The crux of this is not the integrity of sensory impressions (that is maintained in their being caused by God) but in what this implies for the reliability of our grasp of the order of creation. Because created things lack independent reality as Jenson describes them, there is a knock-on effect for creaturely knowledge, which threatens the objectivity of truth. In fact, redefining causality as Jenson has done runs the risk of rendering our knowledge, as creatures, unreliable. This understanding of causality presents a potentially serious issue for Jenson because it is inextricably tied to harmony, which is a central cog in Jenson's metaphysical reasoning. Moreover, if understanding God's causality in this way does not allow sufficient ontic weight to creaturely things to support creaturely knowledge, then the manner in which created things may mediate the knowledge of God appears in jeopardy also. Even if the truth is a correlative of God's intellect, grasped in faith, our intellectual capacities must be sufficient to apprehend it. They are thus two separate issues, the consistency of the created order and our ability to apprehend it rationally. One issue, the consistency, may be solved through an appeal to faith. In faith we may grasp that God is and so understand creaturely effects as his and therefore reliable. The second issue, however, is the greater one. It concerns not God as cause, but the lack of causal weight given to created things, which affects the reliability of reason, without which, even following faith, the objectivity of truth is under threat. The nexus of this problem is Jenson's understanding of causality. We need to consider the second issue, the reliability of our rational grasp of created order in detail because of its implications for the objectivity of the knowledge of God in creation.

[322] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 26
[323] Ibid., 40
[324] Ibid.

Indeed, despite taking aim at enlightenment mechanism, Jenson opens himself up to the weaknesses of enlightenment epistemology. Jenson mentions specifically that Edwards follows Hume on causality, before accepting this as the way forward himself.[325] The removal of agency of created things, we found above, related closely to the question of causality. One of its primary aims was to remove the notion of a 'natural' causality which would operate apart from God. Jenson's understanding of harmony flowed from this point and so cannot be separated from the question of creaturely causality, even if this is where problems develop. However, Hume's causal scepticism creates problems for the objectivity of truth because it presents human faculties as unreliable. There can be little room for such scepticism in a metaphysics built on faith, in which creation and redemption cannot be separated. From the standpoint of objective truth, this causal scepticism has undesirable implications. We can see this if we consider it in Hume's own thought, always bearing in mind that Jenson is not commentating on Hume directly. The point of examining Hume directly is not to exegete Jenson's thought but to highlight implications for creaturely knowledge Jenson may have missed by adopting Hume's causality. This, of course, would influence how we understand Edwards, but that is not our present concern.

For Hume there was no independent guarantee that the sun would rise tomorrow. The only 'evidence' we have of that is that it has happened before.[326] Our understanding of the relation between things is therefore reduced to 'custom.'[327] According to Hume's notion of custom, the human mind observes and establishes connections between things without any independent basis for doing so, threatening the integrity of our knowledge. Moreover, it does so in a way that presents human reason as radically unreliable. We cannot, for instance, in watching the world around us, accept that the rhythm of cause and effect we see is only apparent without adopting a posture of distrust toward our own faculties. The order of creation is not merely apparent. Cause and effect are physically perceptible and rationally examinable.

It is understandable that Jenson wishes to paint a picture in which physical things are not causes in themselves. However, there must, for the possibility of genuine knowledge of created things, be space for us to speak in terms of creaturely effects apart from God's immediate creative act. We cannot but conclude that the shattering of glass makes a noise, or that fire really does burn. Thus, while Hume's critique of metaphysics presents problems for abstract knowledge, it is no less difficult for any notion

[325] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 40
[326] Hume, *Treatise,* 126-30
[327] Ibid., 234

of order arising from perception of physical things. Harmony is such an order. Our perception of created things can begin in faith but then we must know according to our perception, and rational examination thereof, that we are perceiving order.

We could defend Jenson by saying that these are Hume's consequences, not his. However, we need to take care here, dealing as we are with three distinct thinkers – Jenson, as well as Hume and Edwards. Arguably Hume does not deny causality, he just renders it unanalysable. This, in its scepticism is highly problematical for Jenson because of its implications for our understanding of the created order. Edwards, in contrast, is committed to a doctrine of occasionalism. Occasionalism certainly implies there is no genuine creaturely causality because creaturely actions are only the occasions of God's actions. Perhaps unhelpfully, Jenson does not draw a distinction between these two. Nonetheless, we may say accurately that, in his interaction with idealism, via Edwards or Hume, he arrives at an unhelpful tension which threatens creaturely knowledge. Arguably, this is an implication of Edwards occasionalism. Similarly, Humean scepticism would seem, on one reading, a potential consequence of Jenson's excising substance from the created order. Because we cannot help but perceive the world as if there is such creaturely causality, to maintain the conclusion that creaturely causality does not exist, we must distrust our own faculties, the same ones which Jenson wishes to employ in perceiving harmony between created things. In sum, harmony requires that the order we perceive in created things be reliable. God may be the only cause at base, but he must be causing the interaction between things at one level removed or scepticism results. This is not a gap that faith can plug because it is not what faith reveals, namely, that things were created by God. Given that things are, we must be able to reason about them and – since Edwards and Jenson believe ordinary scientific enquiry is possible – we must presume Jenson thinks his account allows for this.

We may summarise the difficulty with causation according to our interpretation of Jenson's critique of classical metaphysics: truth as a correlative of the human intellect results in nihilism because our intellect is too fragile to sustain it; this happens when appeal is made to our intellect to support the claims of faith or the acts of God such as creation; this is reason's 'outside position;' Hume starts in this position to define causality as he does, absent God; therefore, the predicted dissolution occurs – ordinary 'dumb truth' cannot be maintained on this model. Adopting Edwards and Hume on causality breaks with an understanding that begins in faith. Surely, if creation and redemption are apprehended in faith it must be that our perception is reliable. If that is not the case, then either God communicates reality to us unreliably (he is the direct cause of our sensory impressions), which is deceitful; or, God communicates truly (as faith demands), but we cannot reliably perceive this communication. It is Edwards' continuous creation that Jenson adopts, not Humean empiricism. As such, we may presume

that for Jenson we know creaturely effects reliably because by faith we know them to be God's. However, our rational grasp of what we perceive, even where we may perceive according to faith, must be reliable if the truth is objective. If not, dynamic order will, to us, be only subjective and will not correspond in God. Whether it proceeds from God or not, we must be able to recognise the order in creation. This requires that reason and physical perception be reliable in a way the sceptic cannot assure.

This becomes clearer when we consider Hume's philosophy of mind, which shows why he believed our perception of causality (and thus of created order) was unreliable. This relates to understanding reason as secondary to or derivative of sensory impression. Jenson's priority of matter over thought – even without substance – leaves him open to this difficulty. In Hume's terms, sensory impressions are primary, ideas secondary – a structure which shapes his whole philosophy of mind.[328] Reason comes merely to link between these secondary, derivative ideas as a result. But that, of course, must relate to order – dynamic or not; order is, after all, the relation between created things. The functioning of reason is related therefore to the perception of order. Conveniently for Jenson, the presentation of reason as linking between ideas which themselves are merely derivative of physical sensation does avoid the problem of timelessness. There is no hint in Hume's account of grasping at timeless metaphysical truth. The question for the argument at hand, however, is whether the understanding of causality that partners this can facilitate objective truth. The danger of Humean causality is that reason does not link between primary impressions but their derivative ideas. Once more, this is the sceptic's problem and results in the dissolution Jenson predicts because it portrays truth as a correlative of human intellect. The challenge for Jenson is that adopting something like Humean causality must imply something similar about the functioning of the human mind and thus the objectivity of truth.

Whereas for 'classical metaphysics' the connections reason drew could correspond to timeless abstracts,[329] Jenson has no such option. This leaves him in a bind. The truths of reason, in observing the order of things, cannot, if we understand causality with Hume, be said to correspond to God. If that were the case then there would be no difference between body and harmony, no consistent relation between created things at all. Indeed, while body may be understood as God's direct effect, harmony is by definition distinct. It does not concern an underlying some*thing,* which we may attribute directly to God in faith (substance being anyway imperceptible). Harmony is the relation *between* these things. If, pressing continuous creation to the point of denying that harmony is separate

[328] Hume, *Treatise,* 49-55
[329] Saint Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings,* Ed. Peter King, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 46-63

to body, Jenson attributes also the order between created things to God's immediate causality, then, theoretically, Jenson could remain consistent. However, in taking that step it would be beyond doubt that the sceptic's problem would loom even larger. Were that the situation, then our perception of created things as existing at all would be so woefully inaccurate that the problem would not stop with harmony. In fact, in that case, there would be no such thing as creaturely harmony, only physical body, continuously created. Therefore, empiricism – or 'phenomenalist and operationalist' philosophy, in Jenson's terms – cannot ensure accurate perception of the relation between created things.

This is not a small point. If Jenson opposes emanation, it is on the grounds that it conflates creature and Creator. In other words, it ascribes divinity to nature. His removal of substance and redefinition of causality serve to avoid emanation in this regard, but at the expense of reason being reliable. We need to consider potential solutions on Jenson's own terms.

If we take a 'phenomenalist' root, then sensory impression must be prioritised. Doing so makes the perception of order secondary, as it does for Hume. This leaves two options regarding the order between created things. The first option is that the association between created things – ideas, in Hume's terms – is a function of our reason, as it is for Hume. This would make order a correlative of our intellect and thus, as Jenson rightly highlights, unreliable. Creaturely order cannot be permanent or established on empiricist terms. Such creaturely independence requires a solid some*thing*, be that intellectual or material or both. In terms of creation, it needs a middle term between God's causal action and our perception to allow created things a solidity apart from God's continuing creative act. We have seen already that Jenson rules this out by conflating creating and sustaining deliberately.

The second option is to understand the relation between created things as somehow divine. In this case, reason would not be a correlative of the human intellect, avoiding the danger of dissolution and subjectivism. However, working from an empiricist basis, this would come close to the dangers Jenson associates with emanation. Causality would be reliably perceived by the human mind. Created things – the world at large - would be genuinely functioning in a way amenable to reason. Its governance would be rational and conceived rationally because the divine mind would be the order of our sensory impressions. Hume would be neutralised, but this would be a step beyond removing substance. Jenson wants God as sole cause, not the divinity of the created order. Removing substance brings God close to created things (unlike for the deist) but it still retains a separation. Created things

are the 'masks' of God. They are not God, but point to him in their contingency, for Jenson.[330] We look at them and ask how they come to be, understanding (for Jenson) that they have no substance apart from God. But if God's immediate causal impact is felt as harmony, without a separation, then in perceiving harmony we literally perceive God's speech. This must be the case because the relation between things cannot be the things themselves. But on Jenson's terms, it cannot be a standing abstract like a universal either. And if that harmony were the stuff of reason, then reason – on one reading – would also be divine. Either way, the suggestion that we understand harmony as God's very thought (for such it would be without a middle term) would seem to equate the Creator with his creation. This option allows the truth's objectivity, answering the second horn of the dilemma (the reliability of our perception) but at too high a cost. Neither is it Jenson's view.

Let us recap. What we have so far established requires that Jenson find permanence to the order perceived in creation in its materiality. The dynamic harmony of creation is in the availability of one created body to another and that availability is physical rather than intellectual. However, beginning with material perceptibility, through to the denial of ordinary causality, it is difficult to see how another course could be charted consistently than Hume's. We may say that that sensory perception is reliable and consistent as a correlative of God's intellect. In faith we may grasp that these are God's effects, beginning not with an outside perspective on creation and redemption but with God himself, as faith demands. However, there is a related problem for the correspondence of truth. We may not understand creation to mediate the knowledge of God, even with faith at its base, if we cannot reliably apprehend the order God commands. God communicates to us but also presumably endows us with faculties capable of receiving that communication and thus of accurately apprehending objective truth that begins and ends in him, just as he is Creator and sustainer of reality. Regarding harmony and its relation to objective truth, we seem to have two unacceptable options. One cannot be because it presents our rational connections as just that, merely ours. Harmony cannot be a correlative of human intellect, or it is merely subjective. The other suggests that harmony is God's immediate causality in a way that comes close to divinising the created order. Of the two, only the second promises a potential escape from the dilemma of reason's reliability.

[330] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 156

Divine harmony?

Jenson appropriates Edwards, not Hume. As such, we need to consider a possible solution on these terms. Indeed, while it is ultimately the lack of substance which creates the danger for the reliability of knowledge, and this comes from Edwards, Edwards' account does not threaten the integrity of our knowledge in quite the same way. For Edwards, the structure binding created things was God's own thought.[331] This, though it cannot be exactly the same for Jenson as for Edwards, is an important insight, which would substantially define harmony. If the harmony of created things were God's own thought, then the challenge around the reliability of reason would disappear. What reason perceives as harmony would ultimately be reliable. Creaturely causality would be missing, and as such the 'middle term' we have been chasing would be, too. Nonetheless, God's immediate causal impact would ensure that, as with body's presentations to the senses, the apparent laws we perceive would be reliably discerned, corresponding once more in God. We need to tread carefully, however, as Jenson's thought is less straightforward. Harmony as God's thought allows objective truth. The question remains, however, whether this would fit with Jenson's thought as a whole, not least his critique of metaphysics and opposition to emanation.

There is some reason to suggest that Jenson, like Edwards, finds harmony to be God's own thought. Thus, Interpreting Edwards Jenson finds that, 'The play of phenomena is the play of the mandating thoughts of God; their law like coherence is the coherence of that thinking.'[332] Jenson goes on, 'At his most youthfully speculative, Edwards could identify space, the field of physical phenomena, within the field of God's consciousness…'[333] Logically speaking, this would seem an unavoidable consequence of equating harmony with God's thought directly. Moreover, despite Jenson's tone, which suggests he views this as indeed 'speculative,' he later in the same chapter speaks positively in this regard. Concerning miracles and their relation to the harmony of created things Jenson again asserts that '…Jonathan Edwards has the decisive insight,'[334] because events are ordered within 'logical and musical appropriateness within God's thinking of them…'[335] The suggestion is that things are as God thinks them. Some have even interpreted this as panentheism in Edwards' case.[336] This, however, is not an option that Jenson can take, nor does he seem to wish to on the basis of other passages.

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[331] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 40
[332] Ibid., 40
[333] Ibid.
[334] Ibid., 44
[335] Ibid.
[336] Oliver Crisp and Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards: an introduction to his thought,* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 94-5

For Jenson, the operative principle of the harmony of created things, which makes the 'order' into 'dynamic order,' is God's speech. This completely replaces any solidity created things could have in themselves and, per the discussion of mechanism and causality, removes any causal weight we may give to the relation between created things apart from God's speech. However, it does not authorise us to replace sensory perception with thought. Neither does it permit that in rationally ordering our perceptions, we find that the laws of our own minds are the laws of God's thought. If Jenson is, in interpreting Edwards, adopting some of the central tropes of eighteenth-century idealism, he is not quite becoming an idealist. Were that the case, his emphasis on history would be merely inconsistent and his opposition to timeless abstracts would make no sense. It is of course possible to take the nominalist route as an idealist or a panentheist. The difference with Jenson is his emphasis on history and God's temporal revelation. In comparison, the 'law-like consistency' of God's thoughts suggests an altogether different foundation for knowledge. As stated above, for Jenson, the operative force in creation is not God's thought, but his speech.

Concerning Jenson's understanding of God's act of creation, the following must be considered programmatic: 'Theology…has often failed to understand *Logos* as God's utterance and has substituted the notion that he is God's concept.'[337] This breaks with the idea of creation via 'the Father's act of knowing himself' and the actualisation of these ideas. In Jenson's understanding, *Logos* as concept 'subverts the Genesis account.'[338] The point of the word as 'utterance' is that it determines the character of creation, which is necessarily material, as we saw above. Jenson is not suggesting panentheism, or anything like it. His is a theology of history, and God in it (while telling it). God's command as utterance is such that things are genuinely other.[339] That is the point of their being utterance, not thought. Indeed, there are times when Jenson presses this logic very clearly. Of Luther he says, 'Of classic theologians, it is perhaps Martin Luther who most straightforwardly corrected the usual interpretation.'[340] Luther's commentary on Genesis makes reference to not merely word, but 'spoken word.'[341] This, for Jenson, yields 'a decisively biblical understanding of the *Logos* himself…'[342] There is then no room for an understanding of God's mandating speech as thought rather than utterance because 'Already the Word that is a triune person is God's *utterance* in his triune life…'[343] If created things exist between the poles of God's speech, they are 'truly other than God'

[337] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 6
[338] Ibid., 6-7
[339] Ibid., 6
[340] Ibid., *7*
[341] Ibid.
[342] Ibid.
[343] Ibid.

because of it.[344] For Jenson, the point of Luther's correction is that understanding *Logos* as concept displaces the role of the Son in creation. It is not that things exist as ideas in the mind of God, for Jenson, and so harmony cannot literally be God's thought. This allows Jenson to maintain a distinction between creature and Creator, built does not solve the epistemological problem we have been tracing.

Once again, therefore, we seem to be looking for ontic stability without a middle term. Despite the thinness (for lack of a better term) of Jenson's account of creation, the order of creation cannot be as an abstraction from created things. It must be present *in* created things. This leaves us again searching for something in the manner of God's speech which would fill this gap, another way in which the order of physical things may somehow correspond *directly*, without a middle term, to the thought of God while allowing that creation is utterance, not thought. We mentioned above that God's creative act must be understood in trinitarian terms. The above issue with understanding creation in terms of thought has likewise been shown to relate to Jenson's understanding of *Logos* as utterance, which holds even within the triune life, guaranteeing the possibility of 'otherness' within God.

Turning to the Son's role in creation directly, we can see how this works. We do not have space to fully analyse Jenson's views on the triune relations within God. We must remain focused on what his understanding of creation means for harmony, and the problems we have been tracing. This is further justified by Jenson's own making 'concrete' of transcendental ideas. The same could be said for an analogical focus, such as might employ a psychological lense to resolve the subject-object divined in Jenson's thought. We have seen Jenson prioritise 'utterance' over 'thought' and, in our wrestling with his account of creation we must remain true to that focus, however useful other avenues of enquiry may ultimately be. This is most relevant for the question of the objectivity of faith's knowledge of creation, not least following the emphasis we found Jenson to place on the the physicality of body. The relevant point for us should be clear. The Son is not thought, but utterance, and that determines the harmony of creation. The Son's role in creating is to 'mediate between the Father's originating and the Spirit's liberating.'[345] He 'determines the content of their mutuality' and so in the divine conversation he 'speaks the actuality…'[346] His is the moral content, but this moral content is not abstract. It is Jesus' own life, his story in time.[347] The key point for understanding what the pivot to utterance rather than thought means is that this otherness in the Son allows him to '*hold open'* reality

[344] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 26
[345] Ibid., 26-27
[346] Ibid., 27
[347] Ibid.

so as to allow creaturely being.[348] He may do this because the divine conversation can so stretch as to include creaturely reality while still being divine, for Jenson:

> The Father commands, "Let there be…" The Son, who is himself this commanding word insofar as the Father hears therein his own intention, is given to the meaning of the creature; within creation he is the creature as intended by and for God.[349]

Once more, our point is a narrow one regarding the meaning of *Logos* as utterance. The Son in his otherness does not establish a merely logical relation, but a temporal one - and that *in God himself*. Because of that, the Son becomes the possibility 'of all otherness from God.'[350] Arguably this posits the relation between creature and Creator in God himself. Either way, we are not asking about the feasibility of this account of God's immanent life (if indeed Jenson would accept the existence of such a thing). Our problem is how reason may be reliable without creaturely causality. That has taken us to consider harmony directly as God's speech and that has led us – through Jenson's appropriation of Edwards – to consider the possibility that harmony between created things could be God's own thought for Jenson. This account of the Son as literal material other seems to make that impossible. He is utterance, not thought, and that defines the otherness of created things, too.

We need to remember why Jenson has so described the Son in order to appreciate the positive contribution he makes here. It will also help us understand why this requires a distinction between God's thoughts and the harmony between created things. The doctrine of creation as Jenson articulates it is his alternative to timeless Greek reason and its metaphysic. Because of the definition of *Logos,* creation is not a mere logical relation for Jenson, but a temporal one.[351] Putting this into the language of our first chapter, this trinitarian account of creation is a way to 'bracket time.' The above can thus be understood as proceeding from one primary concern, avoiding 'emanation' and the related notion of Greek eternity. Indeed, the outworking of Jenson's critique against an abstract timelessness is felt especially in the doctrine of creation. For Jenson this is a central issue. In his words, 'In the world's religions the dominant understanding of our being is that it derives from deity by *emanation* of one sort or another.'[352] Neither is this problem merely an ancient one, but instead has continued into the modern era, and not just among theologians.[353] As mentioned, for Jenson, emanation means

[348] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 27
[349] Ibid., 27-28
[350] Ibid., 27
[351] Ibid., 6-7
[352] Ibid., 5
[353] Ibid.

either that there is no reality other than the divine, or else reality other than the divine is an 'illusion or degradation.'[354] Hence the creaturely 'otherness' of the Son is Jenson's answer to this problem.

Despite that, of the two consequences of emanation mentioned, Jenson is certainly closer to the former. We have still to find a way, given God's direct causality (without a middle term) to understand the harmony between created things as reliable without saying directly that it is God's own thought. If we cannot, then there is arguably no reality other than the divine, as is the case according to Jenson's understanding of emanation. If the harmony of creation is directly to be understood as God's own thought, then we are all in the mind of God somehow. However, we can see, in the context of 'utterance' as the solution to ascribing divinity to the world, that Jenson's solution will be other than Edwards.' Created reality as conversation, as utterance, means outside of God's mind, even if it exists between the poles of the divine conversation. Were it internal to the divine intellect there would not, in Jenson's terms, be the otherness required for created things to exist, or else they would be some kind of Platonic degradation. The *Logos* is not a concept. However, we have still to answer what exactly harmony can be other than God's thoughts if it is to furnish reliable creaturely knowledge, such as objective truth requires. For creation to mediate the knowledge of God, creaturely things must be the object of our knowledge. Our knowledge may correspond to God if it is faith, but the knowledge of God in creation is knowledge of God in what is 'not God.' Because of that it must be other than God himself, opening us up to the challenges we have found above regarding causality and harmony. On that heading, we turn to consider God's creative speech directly a final time.

Another avenue of approach is hinted at in Jenson's appropriating utterance from Luther. We have seen how this determines his understanding of the Son, but not how it may relate to created things apart from the Son. In this there is room to consider another metaphor for harmony which Jenson does not use, divine grammar. On this basis, there may be a way to understand what Jenson has said while retaining the creaturely otherness which the lack of a middle term does not allow. Concerning, God's speech in creation, Jenson has the following to say *vis-à-vis* Luther:

> According to Martin Luther, "Sun, moon, heaven earth, Peter, Paul, I you, etc. are all words of God, or perhaps rather syllables or letters in context of the whole creation…In this way the words of God are embodied realities (*res*) and not mere language." What God has to say become actual and not merely possible utterance, in that there are creatures. And Luther's

[354] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 5

> choice of language to evoke this event is intentionally suggestive; for the chief context in which *res* was a technical term for him was the doctrine of sacraments.[355]

Jenson goes on to elaborate on the sacramental element of this. Created things are signposts to God and God is therefore *hidden* in them.[356] There is in Luther a kind of grand vision of reality as sacramental. The utterance as 'other' than God means that all reality points towards him. This dovetails closely with what we found above regarding the removal of substance. All things are body, which is material availability. What is actually made available is in some way God in that he is sole and direct cause of all body. Faith may then know God in that it knows things accordingly as his effects. So much we found above. But is there a solution here for the question of harmony also? It must be noted that, although Jenson appropriated the notion of utterance from Luther, Luther did not find 'room' in God for created things in this otherness and creatureliness to be attributed to the Son. As such, *utterance,* could well be separated into immanent and economic without logical contradiction. Of course, we are here proposing solutions to problems we find in what Jenson has articulated. It is doubtful that Jenson's account of the Trinity could stretch to a distinction between immanent and economic. Nonetheless, absent the notion of the Son Jenson has described, we may draw upon the understanding of utterance to articulate a distinct concept of harmony. In doing so, we go beyond Jenson but are still reasoning on his own terms.

The quotation of Luther Jenson gives mentions speculatively that created things could be 'syllables or letters in context of the whole creation.' This points beyond Jenson's emphasis upon sacrament to a further shift in governing metaphor. It may be that what Luther suggests has significant implication for the relations between *res.* On that basis, we may cite the insights of Christoph Schwöbel. We may return from the analogy of nature as machine, to an earlier metaphor – that of the book.[357] This would be amenable to Jenson's revisionary project. God could be storyteller still. Enlightenment mechanism would be avoided. Significantly for the questions we have been pursuing, there could be between *res* another kind of order, equally harmonious. Governing God's speech on the page of reality there is an implied *grammar.* Grammar is itself not coterminous with thought but reflects it. And, moreover, it does so entirely in keeping with Jenson's emphasis on utterance, speech not thought. Reality is embodied and, consequently, bears the mark of the mind that spoke it. Crucially, this would give us

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[355] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 159, the quotation is from Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5,* ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick, Vol. II, (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 17

[356] Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Vol.2,* 158

[357] Christoph Schwöbel, "We Are All God's Vocabulary: The Idea of Creation as a Speech-Act of the Trinitarian God and Its Significance for the Dialogue between Theology and the Sciences," in *Knowing Creation: Perspectives from Theology, Philosophy and Science*, ed. Andrew B Torrance and Thomas H. McCall, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 47-68

our middle term. Just as speech is not thought, that which governs the relation between words is not thought in any direct sense but – for lack of a better term – the 'embodied' structure of it. In terms of creaturely knowledge, we could then have something in place of the abstract to which our knowledge of creaturely things could have corresponded, something less prone to the weaknesses of emanationism, per Jenson. There would be a consistency to embodied reality as God gives it and between God's effects would indeed be a kind of law which reflects his express intention, and which allows us to know reliably. Asking how it is that anything could be at all and how it could make so much sense, as it does, we could simply answer according to the faith we have received – these are God's words.

Conclusion

It remains, in closing, for us to return to the question with which we began our inquiry. Does Jenson's revisionary metaphysics present a truth that corresponds? It is clear from the foregoing that this was an important object for Jenson. The 'dumb truth' is a particularly memorable phrase. Likewise, the commitment to the view that our metaphysic must reflect the gospel would seem to require a full-blooded account of truth, not a mere language game. If Jenson's critique of metaphysics and commitment to history mean anything it is that coherence alone is not enough. When we refer to God, our language must find purchase. It must correspond. If not, how could it be saving talk?

However, having a goal and completing it are not the same thing. In Jenson's eyes, nothing was lost of the objectivity of truth in the act of 'revising' metaphysics as he has done. Indeed, in so far as his conception of the God of scripture requires that we use temporal language and avoid any suggestion of timelessness, he may well say he has made considerable steps forward. The problem with metaphysics in our first chapter was, in truth, more than timelessness. The persistent undercurrent of all Jenson's critique, as well as his emphasis on God's self-revelation, was not a concern for logical efficacy or metaphysical purity. We return, in fact, to the truth as a *way*. For Jenson, unless it pertained to our own salvation somehow, charting a course to the gospel's God that reaches for us, our metaphysical language was not just inaccurate but dangerous and idolatrous. All too easily, our thinking may lapse into subjective projection, mere wish and exaggeration based on creaturely things and our desires. No, saving talk is about soteriology and, therefore, metaphysics must be soteriological. The hiddenness of God was Jenson's solution to this difficulty. God hides in order to save. He thwarts the religious quest in order to be known only to faith.

This conception naturally presents challenges for the way in which we understand the correspondence of truth. What would it mean for the truth to correspond in God other than for us to be describing what God has done in time? This does not allow for an independent rationality which may chart a course to divinity. It does not satisfy our craving for intellectual independence of God, or allow us to begin, in understanding all that is, with our own thinking. That is perhaps one of Jenson's central insights and the strength of his presentation of correspondence. It leaves objectivity radically redefined in the expressed personhood of God. It means that we may not have the knowledge of God apart from faith or know created things for what they are, his effects, apart from us beginning with God's revelation in faith.

That the truth should be a correlative of Gods intellect, not ours, means this at base. For Jenson, given the preceding, I would say that our thought must be understood as a reaction to what God has already done. There is no eternal part of us, waiting to come out from this body of flesh. Neither may we abstract from the creation that God has already spoken into being. We cannot do so because we are likewise what he has spoken. It is clear on this basis that correspondence, real truth, was very much on Jenson's agenda. It is clear also that he managed to articulate an understanding of redemption that facilitated that.

In that sense, in understanding Jenson it makes sense to talk not only of knowledge in general, and that apart from faith, but precisely of the knowledge of faith. Faith is not a subjective matter. The story God tells and the promise he makes, neither are anything less than universal. In our second chapter we charted this story and asked how it is that it could be universal and found that it was so because the community of the promise was to be the future of humanity at large. There is much to recommend in Jenson's perspective here. His insights in terms of the relation between faith and history are creative solutions to the problems he sketches. The Spirit as guarantor and referent of faith is chief among these. Faith is not its own object, but it does speak on its own authority because the message is not ours but God's. Redemption 'corresponds' in God, faith's knowledge, too.

Our third and final chapter moved to consider the knowledge of God that creation itself may communicate. The metaphysics of timelessness which Jenson understood himself as revising most certainly allowed for this knowledge. It is, therefore, an important question for revisionary metaphysics, one that could have been pursued beyond the scope of the present work. The danger of natural knowledge was that it may become something apart from the knowledge of God. Despite that, Jenson was at pains to articulate an account of creation which allowed real knowledge of created things. Without substance, this meant that knowledge of created things, in the final analysis, could only be said to relate to God himself. They are his immediate effects. There is, for Jenson, no middle term between God's causality and what we perceive, strange as that may seem. This, in itself, is not necessarily problematic for the correspondence of truth. However, given what it implies for the possibility of creaturely harmony, an essential concept for Jenson's understanding of both God's creative act and created things, it is not without difficulties. Without a so-called middle term, or even un underlying material substance, the question of creaturely harmony is challenging. This, we found, was further complicated by the attached notion of causality, taken from eighteenth-century idealism, and which fit poorly with the concept of truth Jenson articulates generally. While understanding our perceptions in the most basic sense as 'given,' and thus amenable to being apprehended in faith as

God's effects, is possible for body, it is not as simple for harmony. What governs the relation between created things, if it is to be other than God, would seem to require a more robust conception of physical things. They must have a greater degree of independence than Jenson's metaphysic affords them if our perception of order, so central to the question of reason's reliability, is to be appropriate to the 'dumb truth.' That is to say, it is not enough that things be reliable, we must also reliably perceive them – and that requires a middle term. Or so my interpretation has suggested.

Much of this, unhappily, comes down to the question of time. The central concern upon which Jenson's understanding of causality pivoted was that the relation between God and creation be temporal, not timeless. Any purely logical relation would not be causal in Jenson's sense. We may suppose that it would reflect our thinking, our own minds, but not the mind of the Creator, who created the world in time. We have not, perhaps, have done enough to discover whether Jenson's understanding of the Trinity could do more in this regard. It may be that there is enough good ground here to build an imaginative solution to the problem of timelessness that Jenson himself may prefer. For my own part, I have suggested that for revisionary metaphysics to retain a robust and 'corresponding' truth with respect to created knowledge would not require us to abandon Jenson's central insights. Instead, there is suitable impetus in Luther and in other areas of Jenson's thought to produce something like the middle term I feel is necessary for a full articulation of the correspondence of truth. If creation is God's vocabulary, harmony may be his grammar. It should be noted that this does not require us to return to the metaphysic of timelessness, only to adjust some of what Jenson has said. Most of the 'talk' was indeed 'saving talk,' after all.

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