

# Toward an understanding of the eschatological presence of the risen Jesus with Robert Jenson

Sang Hoon Lee

Raynes Park Korean Church, Durham Road, Raynes Park SW20 0DE

[since.sh.lee@gmail.com](mailto:since.sh.lee@gmail.com)

## Abstract

This article will attempt to demonstrate the plausibility of Robert Jenson's account of the Son's existence before his earthly lifetime by arguing that the retroactive presence of the risen Jesus is what Jenson means, and by reflecting on the relationship between the way that grace and power of Christ reaches to the people of Israel and the concept of retrocausality in physics. This article restricts its discussion to the presence of the risen Jesus in the economy, leaving aside the question of the eternity–time relation, on the grounds that one may constructively engage with Jenson's account, regardless of his or her view of eternity.

**Keywords:** Robert Jenson, pre-existence, resurrection, retroactivity, retrocausality

Since Robert Jenson's *Systematic Theology* came out, it has occasioned criticism and given rise to misunderstanding, particularly regarding his account of the transcendental presence of the Son, which is connected with his revisionary metaphysics of time. Even though critics may raise legitimate concerns about Jenson's disavowal of extra-temporal eternity, it seems that most of them have overlooked Jenson's invaluable insight on the transcendental presence of the risen Jesus over and in the time of this age, i.e. the relation between the time of this age and the eschatological time, encapsulated in the risen Son. For instance, Oliver Crisp is baffled at Jenson's affirmation of the risen Jesus' presence in the history of the Old Testament Israel. Crisp says, 'Indeed, it is hard to see what a human pre-existence could mean. This difficulty is compounded by Jenson's insistence that ... Christ pre-exists as Jesus of Nazareth.'<sup>1</sup> Even though he notes that the eschatological character of the Son's transcendence comes into play in Jenson's thinking, Crisp concludes that his account is simply incoherent.<sup>2</sup> In a similar vein, George Hunsinger claims that Jenson confuses protology with eschatology, saying, 'The

<sup>1</sup> Oliver Crisp, 'Incarnation', in John Webster, Kathryn Tanner and Iain R. Torrance (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Crisp, *God Incarnate: Explorations in Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), pp. 69–71, 75.

“pre-existence” of Christ is a theme that Jenson redefines so that it really means “post-existence” instead.<sup>3</sup>

Having those criticisms in view, this article will move in a counter-direction and attempt to give more weight to Jenson’s account, by demonstrating how Jenson’s account of the presence of the Son in the Old Testament period can make sense.<sup>4</sup> To achieve that aim, this article will show, first, that Jenson has argued for the retroactive presence of the risen Jesus in the Old Testament period. Next, I will argue that this concept of the retroactive presence of the risen Jesus is plausible, given the encompassing scope of the grace and power of Jesus, and also given modern physics’ understanding of retrocausality. Lastly, I will consider whether the scientific concept of retrocausality, employed in this article, is compatible with the A-theory of time, which Jenson favours. On the whole, I will suggest that the theory of the ‘growing block universe’ is consistent with Jenson’s metaphysics, while his theological account still goes beyond it, as he legitimately posits the transcendental time of the risen Jesus as outside or over the growing block universe.

Before we proceed, we need to take note of the limited scope of the following discussion. This article will not attempt to interpret and justify the whole of Jenson’s revisionary project. I will not venture into debates on the relation between eternity and time, or between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity in Jenson’s theology, about which critics like Hunsinger raise serious concerns.<sup>5</sup> Our primary focus will not be on the relation between sheer timeless eternity and creaturely time, but rather between the eschatological time of the risen Jesus and the creaturely time of this age.

### The retroactive presence of the risen Jesus

Since what Jenson means often lies under the surface of his texts, it is important to find out and clarify first the underlying reasoning and meaning of his account. As Crisp points out, in Jenson’s account it is not the Son without the flesh who is present in the Old Testament; it is Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it must also to be noted (as this section will show) that it is the risen Jesus Christ – critics like Crisp seem to miss this point – who is retroactively present in the history of the Old Testament Israel.

<sup>3</sup> George Hunsinger, ‘Robert Jenson’s *Systematic Theology*: A Review Essay’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55 (2002), p. 172.

<sup>4</sup> For Jenson, the pre-existence of the Son means his presence in the Old Testament period, or, more precisely put, his presence before his earthly life. It does not denote his pretemporal existence, for Jenson has jettisoned this concept along with that of atemporal eternity.

<sup>5</sup> Hunsinger, ‘Review Essay’, p. 178; Paul D. Molnar, *Faith, Freedom, and the Spirit: The Economic Trinity in Barth, Torrance and Contemporary Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), p. 225.

To grasp what Jenson means, it is helpful to start with Jenson's account of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, in which Jenson indicates the eschatological and transcendental character and claims that Jesus is now the personal eschatological reality by virtue of the resurrection. Jenson notes that the risen Jesus' presence is quite elusive. When the disciples secretly gathered in a house and the doors were shut, Jesus 'came and stood among them'.<sup>6</sup> In another episode, the risen Jesus came to the two disciples and walked with them on their way to Emmaus. They recognised him only when their encounter turned into a specifically eucharistic context, but then Jesus 'vanished from their sight'.<sup>7</sup> In the post-resurrection narratives, it becomes obvious that Jesus' bodily presence is not impeded by spatial restrictions, leading Jenson to conclude that the risen Jesus' presence is not 'subject to the regularities of this age'.<sup>8</sup> He is now 'an inhabitant of the age to come'.<sup>9</sup> The risen Jesus' presence 'is elusive because he is ... future'.<sup>10</sup> He is 'in the appearance of the future'.<sup>11</sup>

Jenson takes one step further when he implies that the risen Jesus, as the eschatological personal reality, overcomes not only spatial but also temporal restrictions. For Jenson, the risen Jesus can be retroactively present to the times before his earthly lifetime by virtue of the resurrection. That is why Jenson speaks of the presence of the Son who 'precedes his human birth without being simply unincarnate'.<sup>12</sup> When Jenson mentions 'the narrative pattern of being going to be born to Mary' in his account of the pre-existence of the Son, it seems that as many readers understand Jenson refers to the whole community of Israel as 'the Son'.<sup>13</sup> Importantly, however, Jenson does not overlook the divine and individual Son's presence in Israel.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Jenson, *The Triune God*, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology* [hereafter ST 1] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 197; emphasis added.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 24:51; ST 1:197.

<sup>8</sup> ST 1:197.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Robert Jenson, *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), p. 158.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>12</sup> ST 1:141.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* Jenson himself indeed says, 'Jesus Christ, the God-man "pre"-exists himself ... to the pre-existence of Jesus Christ there belongs among other factors his pre-existence in and as the nation of Israel. For Israel also is the human Son.' Robert W. Jenson, 'Christ as Culture 1: Christ as Polity', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (2003), p. 326. Many readers and critics believe at this point that Jenson has diffused the presence of the eternally begotten and pre-existent Son and replaced it with the people of Israel. See e.g. Simon Gathercole, 'Pre-existence and the Freedom of the Son in Creation and Redemption: An Exposition in Dialogue with Robert Jenson', *International Journal of*

In this regard, Jenson betrays a particular interest in the *Shekinah* phenomenon, which refers to ‘God as “settled” to and within Israel while not ceasing to stand over against Israel’.<sup>14</sup> Combining *Shekinah* theology with his christology, Jenson avers that the *Shekinah* figures display the *homoousios* relation with God the Father.<sup>15</sup> For instance, the angel of the Lord who appeared to Abraham is ‘a messenger “of” God who nevertheless refers to God in the first person’.<sup>16</sup> The Word of the Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.’ Abram replied, ‘O Lord God ...’<sup>17</sup> When Solomon dedicated the ‘place for thee to settle into ...’, it was the Glory of the Lord that came to inhabit Solomon’s temple as the answer to his prayer.<sup>18</sup> In Jenson’s theology these *Shekinah* appearances are *Christophanies*, i.e. the pre-existence of the individual Son.

Now, at this point, it must be remembered that for Jenson this Son is never *asarkos* but ‘aggressively incarnate’.<sup>19</sup> In his account of the *Shekinah*, Jenson indicates ‘the fleshly, incarnational character of God’s relation to Israel which makes the Christian claims about Jesus intelligible in the first place’.<sup>20</sup> The angel of the Lord who appeared to Jacob wrestled with him; the Word of the Lord had conversations, took a walk and ate with Abraham; the Glory of the Lord in Ezekiel’s vision ‘looked like a man’, Jenson claims, ‘because he was one’.<sup>21</sup> These episodes all reflect ‘the Lord’s fleshly involvement with Israel’.<sup>22</sup> Who is this enigmatic and fleshly divine figure in the *Shekinah* phenomena? Jesus of Nazareth. Jenson states that in Ezekiel’s vision ‘the man on the throne who shines with God’s own glory, who indeed is God’s Glory, must either be Jesus the Christ or something highly problematic’.<sup>23</sup> ‘Who could the man on the throne be but He?’<sup>24</sup>

But how could it be that ‘someone born in 4 B.C. could ... have spoken to and through Jeremiah or that someone who died in A.D. 30 could ... have

Systematic Theology 7 (2005), pp. 44–5; Crisp, *God Incarnate*, p. 72; Andrew Nicol, *Exodus and Resurrection: The God of Israel in the Theology of Robert W. Jenson* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2016), p. 100.

<sup>14</sup> ST 1:76; emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Jenson, ‘The Bible and the Trinity’, *Pro Ecclesia* 11 (2002), p. 331.

<sup>16</sup> ST 1:76.

<sup>17</sup> Gen 15:1–6; cf. ST 1:79.

<sup>18</sup> Jenson, ‘The Bible and the Trinity’, p. 332; emphasis added.

<sup>19</sup> ST 1:139.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Jenson, ‘Toward a Doctrine of Israel’, *CTI Reflection* 3 (2000), pp. 5–6.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Jenson, ‘The Trinity in Ezekiel’, *Lutheran Forum* 44 (2010), p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Jenson, ‘Toward a Doctrine of Israel’, p. 6; emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Jenson, *Canon and Creed* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> Jenson, ‘The Trinity in Ezekiel’, p. 9.

spoken through, say, the seer John’?<sup>25</sup> Jenson gives a hint when he says, ‘Time, as we see it framing biblical narrative, is neither linear nor cyclical but perhaps more like a helix, and what it spirals around is the risen Christ’.<sup>26</sup> This entails that ‘Ezekiel sees no abstracted or unidentified figure; he sees Jesus as the risen Christ’.<sup>27</sup> To put the question differently, how could it be that ‘the incarnate Christ speaks in all Scripture’?<sup>28</sup> For Jesus is risen. The risen Christ, the eschatological personal reality, can be present at all times – forward and backward – by virtue of the resurrection. Thus, this section has traced the theological reasoning implicitly operative in Jenson’s doctrine of the pre-existence of the Son.

### The grace of Christ on the Old Testament Israel

Understanding Jenson’s meaning is one thing; substantiating his claim is another. How then can the idea of the retroactive presence of Jesus Christ be substantiated? How can we give more weight to his claim than critics do?

Here we briefly turn to Douglas Farrow’s mariology, in which he explicitly argues for the retroactive grace of Christ upon Mary. Farrow appeals to an apostolic constitution issued by Pope Pius IX, saying, ‘The retroactive power of what God accomplishes in Christ is implied in the definition of *Ineffabilis deus* (1854) that “from the first moment of her conception the Blessed Virgin Mary was, by the singular grace and privilege of almighty God, and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of mankind, kept free from all stain of original sin.”’<sup>29</sup> Mary’s immaculate conception, Farrow says, wholly depends on divine grace. Importantly, it is ‘not another grace than the grace that is vouchsafed in Christ’, but that same grace, which is ‘retroactively operative... based ... on the merits of Jesus Christ’.<sup>30</sup> The logic of Farrow’s mariology can be applied to anyone who lived before Jesus’ birth and received divine grace, although in no other case did it result in immaculate conception. If so, it may be argued the divine grace which they received can be no other grace but the grace of Christ, definitely rooted in his work – the cross and the resurrection. So construed, the grace of Christ that was bestowed on those who lived before Jesus’ birth must be retroactively operative on them. Thus, once it is admitted that divine

<sup>25</sup> Robert Jenson, ‘Scripture’s Authority in the Church’, in Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (eds), *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 35.

<sup>26</sup> Jenson, ‘Scripture’s Authority in the Church’, p. 35; emphasis added.

<sup>27</sup> Jenson, ‘The Trinity in Ezekiel’, p. 9; emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup> Jenson, ‘Scripture’s Authority in the Church’, p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Douglas Farrow, *Ascension Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 83, n. 50.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

grace in the time before Christ was still the grace of Christ, its retroactivity can be affirmed.

In this context, we may draw upon Karl Barth who suggests the concept of the ‘outward vector’ of the resurrection. For Barth, in some important sense Jesus ‘was made eternal in the resurrection and therefore always present in His resurrection’.<sup>31</sup> As Jesus is made eternal, he is present to all human beings in all ages, that is, ‘for every age from the days of His resurrection’.<sup>32</sup> Barth says, ‘The event of Easter Day is the removing of the barrier between His life in His time and their life in their times’.<sup>33</sup> It is ‘the outward vector’ of the resurrection by which the first-century man is present to all other times.<sup>34</sup> Along this line, we may construe another of Barth’s concepts, Jesus as the contemporary of all human beings: ‘The man Jesus has his own time, but He also has more than that: Risen and exalted He is the Contemporary of all.’<sup>35</sup> Here again the resurrection is closely related to Jesus’ transcendent presence. As Hunsinger puts it, ‘This transcendent aspect of bodily resurrection meant that the person of Jesus Christ – (and not without) his life-history and his saving work – had been elevated into eternity. It meant that he had been made the “Contemporary of all human beings.”’<sup>36</sup>

In light of this understanding of the ‘outward vector’ of the resurrection, we may take a further step and understand Barth’s remark that Jesus is the contemporary of Israel. Barth states that Jesus ‘was in the midst of the fathers’, and that he was ‘a contemporary of Israel’.<sup>37</sup> Barth indicates that ‘the promise and expectation of His coming make Him the Contemporary of Israel’.<sup>38</sup> Jesus can be regarded as present among them, inasmuch as his coming is looked forward to in their prophecies. And yet he claims that the presence of Jesus in the Old Testament period is not to be reduced to ‘the

<sup>31</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* [hereafter CD]. 13 vols., ed. and trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–74), IV/1, p. 322. For Barth, the resurrection is ‘the initiation of His lordship as the Lord of all time’ (Barth, CD IV/1, p. 316). Here our consideration of the transcendent presence of Jesus, centring upon the significance of the resurrection, should be counterbalanced with the other major motif in Barth’s dialectic thought, that is, Jesus’ pre-temporal election. See George Hunsinger, *Evangelical, Catholic, and Reformed: Doctrinal Essays on Barth and Related Themes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), pp. 279–80.

<sup>32</sup> Barth, CD IV/1, p. 322; cf. CD IV/4, p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> Barth, CD IV/1, p. 316.

<sup>34</sup> R. Dale Dawson, *The Resurrection in Karl Barth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 67.

<sup>35</sup> Barth, CD III/2, p. 440.

<sup>36</sup> Hunsinger, *Evangelical, Catholic, and Reformed*, p. 186.

<sup>37</sup> Barth, CD IV/3.2, p. 482.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

clue to ... or the preparation for the coming of the crucified and risen Jesus ... – as though this were not an objective fact'.<sup>39</sup> What kind of presence would it be? I take it that at this point there is room for the concept of the retroactive presence of the risen Jesus. If we understand the presence of Jesus as the contemporary of Israel in light of what Barth suggests with regard to the resurrection, a conclusion can be drawn out that the risen Jesus is present retroactively by the power of the resurrection, even though Barth does not unpack this idea in detail.<sup>40</sup>

We may also approach the question from a different angle, noting Barth's claim that 'the new creation has taken place in the resurrection of Jesus Christ'.<sup>41</sup> It can be maintained here that the new creation that occurred in his resurrection includes the whole resurrection. T. F. Torrance enunciates this point: 'In Christ the whole resurrection is already included in a decisive way. The New Humanity is already raised up in Christ. He is the corn of wheat which falling into the ground does not come up alone, but with a whole harvest of grain.'<sup>42</sup> Torrance is clear: 'Our resurrection has already taken place and is fully tied up with the resurrection of Christ, and therefore proceeds from it more by way of manifestation of what has already taken place.'<sup>43</sup> At this point, it can be inferred that his resurrection embraces the people of the Old Testament Israel within it. Abraham and his Old Testament descendants have been raised up in and with him. This entails that the salvific power of the resurrection is retroactively applied to them, stepping over the temporal boundaries. It coheres with Barth's notion of the 'outward vector' of the resurrection.

Simply put, if the Old Testament people are to be saved only by God's grace and if the grace is no other than that of Christ, definitely rooted in his works – particularly his death and resurrection, then it would be plausible to say that the grace of this first-century man is retroactively applicable to those who lived before the time of Jesus. And if the power of the resurrection can retroactively reach back to the people of Israel, then why not the risen Jesus himself, i.e. his *fleshly* presence? This is the point where Jenson's theology of the resurrection is distinct from that of others.

The reason why Jenson goes beyond other theologians' account of the resurrection seems to lie in the fact that Jenson endorses the Lutheran

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Barth himself briefly says, '[God's] declaration [of reconciliation] has a retroactive force' which took place in the resurrection. Barth, CD IV/3.1, p. 298.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 300.

<sup>42</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), p. 34; emphasis added.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

christological axiom that *finitum capax infiniti*. But for Jenson the doctrine does not mean the ubiquity of the body of Christ by way of diffusion.<sup>44</sup> While Jenson has added a temporal aspect to it, that does not entail a temporal diffusion of his body either, as we have seen.<sup>45</sup> Rather, Jenson's suggestion can be put like this: the risen Jesus (i.e. Jesus in his new fleshly existence) can be anywhere he wills to be, overcoming spatial and temporal restrictions. Put differently, if the grace and power of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ can reach forward and backward in time, as Jenson claims, his bodily presence can be retroactively available to those who lived in the times before his earthly life. But would it be correct, one may ask, to attribute such a transcendental character to a human bodily presence, even if it is the risen Son's? Arguably, it would be better to do this than to attribute a kind of impotence to his risen body – an inability to transcend spatial-temporal bounds – as that would impugne his power in some degree.

### Retrocausality in physics

To strengthen the concept of the retroactive presence of the risen Christ, we will look to modern physics, which suggests retroactivity in the physical world. I will claim that if retroactivity of certain physical entities in time is possible, as some leading scientists and philosophers argue, then there is no reason to think it would not be possible for the risen Jesus.

Robert Russell, a physicist and admirer of Jenson's long-time theological friend Wolfhart Pannenberg, indicates that there is a time-symmetric account in which 'the present emerges out of an underlying combination of forward and backward causality'.<sup>46</sup> Referring to James Maxwell's four equations, 'which mathematically unified all that was known about electricity and magnetism',<sup>47</sup> Russell holds that there is a mathematical possibility that electromagnetic waves move backward in time.<sup>48</sup> According to Russell, 'Maxwell's equations can lead to the classical wave equation for E in the vacuum:  $\delta^2 E / \delta t^2 = c^2 \nabla^2 E$ ' (where E is the electric field; t is time; c is the speed of light).<sup>49</sup> This equation is invariant under time inversion, that is,

<sup>44</sup> Jenson states, 'Thus Brenz replies to the obvious objection to his claim that Christ's body is ubiquitous: "We do not attribute to his body extension or diffusion in space, but elevate it beyond . . . all location"' (ST 1:204).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Farrow, *Ascension Theology*, p. 292.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Russell, *Time in Eternity: Pannenberg, Physics, and Eschatology in Creative Mutual Interaction* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), p. 341.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342. The four equations are: (1)  $\nabla \cdot E = 4\pi\rho$  (2)  $\nabla \times E + (1/c)\delta B/\delta t = 0$  (3)  $\nabla \cdot B = 0$  (4)  $\nabla \times B - (1/c)\delta E/\delta t = (4\pi/c)J$

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.



'by the substitute of "-t" for "t"'.<sup>50</sup> Russell applies the wave equation to the simple case of the sun: 'The light from the Sun travels outwards in space and forward in time until it reaches the Earth some eight minutes later'.<sup>51</sup> But Maxwell's equations suggest that it is also possible to think of 'light waves that arrive at Earth eight minutes *before* they are emitted from the sun',<sup>52</sup> that is, 'so-called advanced waves, which move outward from the source but backward in time, waves that move from the present into the past'.<sup>53</sup>

Having shown the mathematical possibility of retroactivity of the electromagnetic waves based on Maxwell's equations, Russell asks, 'Is the time symmetry of electromagnetism merely a formality, an artifact of the equations, or could there really be "backward moving waves" in nature?'<sup>54</sup> Can such phenomena be observed? At this point, Russell turns to John A. Wheeler and Richard Feynman's 'fully time symmetric formulation of electromagnetism that explicitly included backward moving as well as forward moving electromagnetic waves'.<sup>55</sup> Russell explains why such retroactivities are not observed in nature:

If we nudge the electron at time  $t = 0$ , a forward moving wave 'F' and a backward moving wave 'B' will radiate outward at the speed of light. Eventually another electron at a distance  $r$  will absorb the backward moving wave at a time  $t = -r/c$ . This electron then creates a reaction wave 'f' that propagates forward in time and arrives at the origin at a time  $t = r/c - r/c = 0$ , that is, at exactly the moment when the charge at the origin is first nudged.<sup>56</sup>

This means that 'the backward moving wave ... from the source and the forward moving wave ... from the absorber *cancel each other out*, leaving no empirical evidence of light traveling backward in time'.<sup>57</sup> (See [Figure 1](#).) Finally, noting that the time-symmetric theories are widely applied to electromagnetism, quantum mechanics, gravity and cosmology, Russell

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 343.

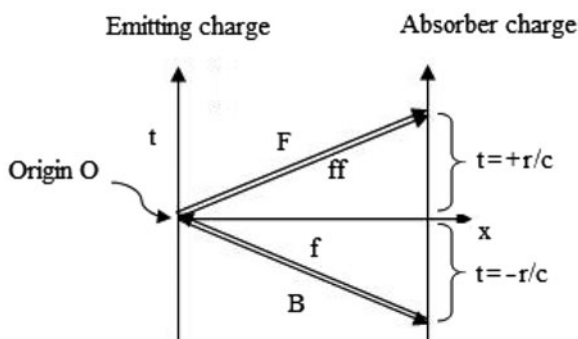
<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> J. A. Wheeler and R. P. Feynman, 'Interaction with the Absorber as the Mechanism of Radiation', *Review of Modern Physics* 17 (1945), p. 156; J. A. Wheeler and R. P. Feynman, 'Classical Electrodynamics in Terms of Direct Interparticle Action', *Review of Modern Physics* 21 (1949), p. 424; cited in Robert Russell, *Time in Eternity: Pannenberg, Physics, and Eschatology in Creative Mutual Interaction*, p. 343, n. 68.

<sup>56</sup> Russell, *Time in Eternity*, p. 344.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 1.** Forward moving and backward moving waves emitted by the charge at the origin and reflected by the absorber cancel to give only forward moving waves expanding outward from the charge (Russell, *Time in Eternity*, p. 344, figure 6.1)

states that the implications for retrocausality ‘might be consonant with the kind of eschatology that a theist such as Pannenberg supports’.<sup>58</sup> We can add here that it would also be congruous with Jenson’s idea of the retroactive presence of the risen Jesus.

Furthermore, a leading scientific philosopher, Huw Price, also argues for retroactivity in the physical world. He derives the idea of retrocausality from the intriguing physical phenomenon known as quantum entanglement. It can be described briefly as follows: let us assume that two particles interact and so are ‘entangled’ in a place, and then each particle is sent to two different laboratories (say, Alice’s and Bob’s). When Alice measures the behaviour of the particle sent from the source, the other in Bob’s laboratory always behaves in *correlation* to Alice’s.

[T]here’s a perfect correlation between the two results [i.e. measurements] – more exactly, an anti-correlation, in the sense that if one photon goes through the polarizer, the other one is always blocked, and vice versa. (We can turn it into a perfect correlation by rotating one polarizer through 90°).<sup>59</sup>

Even though they are long distant apart (even light years apart), the results of the measurement of the two particles will be correlated. ‘The actual act of observation of one of the two particles influences the other one instantly,

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 347.

<sup>59</sup> Huw Price, ‘Einstein and the Quantum Spooks’, in C. Stewart and R. Hewitt (eds), *Waves of the Future* (Sydney: Science Foundation for Physics, 2005), p. 229.

not matter how far away the other one is.’<sup>60</sup> It seems that the two particles can ‘communicate’ each other *instantaneously* (and thus faster than the speed of light).

Albert Einstein was averse to the idea (he called it ‘spooky action at a distance’), because it seems to entail faster-than-light speeds and so it would imperil his theory of relativity. In order to avoid ‘spooky’ quantum entanglement, Einstein, Podolsky and Rosen provided an alternative explanation (known as EPR for short), which postulates that there are ‘hidden variables’; that is, when the two particles interact with each other for entanglement at the source, they have already ‘shared some information’ on how they will behave in the future when they are respectively measured by Alice and Bob. Thus, Einstein’s argument precludes the possibility of instantaneous ‘telecommunication’ between the two particles.

However, another physicist John Bell provided strong arguments against the EPR explanation. At this point, Price says, it is important to understand what Bell’s argument (Bell’s inequality) *actually* rejects. Even though it is commonly supposed that Bell’s argument rejects Einstein’s idea of ‘hidden variables’, Price argues that it is not the case: in fact, there would be hidden variables at the source, affected by something that has not been taken into consideration so far.

At this point Price brings the concept of time-symmetry into the discussion: ‘At the fundamental level, physics is almost entirely *time-symmetric* in the sense that if it allows a process to happen then it also allows the reverse process to happen (roughly, what we would see if we reversed a video of the first process).’<sup>61</sup> Price presents the idea of retrocausality in this context. We can explain what he means by returning to the story of the Alice and Bob’s particles. When Alice measures her particle in her lab, Price explains, she

affect[s] its properties, all the way back to the source. However, at the source, Particle 1 [which will be sent to Alice’s lab] interacts with Particle 2 [which will be sent to Bob’s lab]. So by affecting the properties of Particle 1, it is possible, at least in theory, that we could affect Particle 2, as well; and Particle 2 could then carry those effects into the future, to the time at which its properties are measured on the other side of the experiment.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Anton Zeilinger, *Dance of the Photons: From Einstein to Quantum Teleportation* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2010), p. 11.

<sup>61</sup> Price, ‘Einstein and the Quantum Spooks’, p. 232. ‘Time symmetry’ is the concept Russell and Feynman also used.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

Thus, once retrocausation comes into play, the ‘spooky action at a distance’ can be explained without violation of Einstein’s relativity – without positing faster-than-light speed.<sup>63</sup> In effect, the tension between Einstein and quantum mechanics can be resolved, Price argues, by proposing the idea of retrocausation in time-symmetry.<sup>64</sup>

Back to our theological discussion: if, as Russell suggests with Feynman, electromagnetic waves can go back in time (or, as Price suggests, if some ‘information’ can be carried backward in time), it would be reasonable to think that physical retroactivity would be possible with respect to the physical and eschatological presence of the risen Jesus. I am not saying that the time-symmetric retroactivity is the *same* kind of movement as that of the risen Jesus. The subatomic physical realities still belong to this present age; the risen one to the age to come. Jesus’ retroactivity is correspondingly more radical, as it were, ‘more like a “wormhole” that starts in the eschatological future and ends in the present of the current creation’.<sup>65</sup> His eschatological presence *transcends* the time of this age. This means, I take it, that he could be present to us in a faster-than-light fashion from his eschatological time. His eschatological divine light can exceed the speed of natural light. (Remember, on Price’s account of retrocausation, retroactive subatomic particles do not exceed the speed of light. They propagate backward through time within the limitation of the speed of light.)

This construal of the transcendent presence of the risen one accords with the thought of Jonathan Edwards, whom Jenson quotes approvingly: the resurrected saints “will be able to see from one side of the universe to the other,” since they will not see “by such slow rays of light that are several years traveling ...” but by the light “emitted from the glorified body of

<sup>63</sup> It does not lose Einstein’s other assumptions either: the locality and realism. *Ibid.*, pp. 225–6.

<sup>64</sup> For his proposal, Price draws upon a Parisian physicist, O. Costa de Beauregard, who proposed ‘Alice’s choice could affect Bob’s particle indirectly ... if the effect followed zigzag path, via the past. Alice’s choice could affect her particle “retrocausally”, so to speak, right back the common source, in turn correlation Bob’s particle with Alice’s choice (and *vice versa*)’. (Huw Price and Ken Wharton, ‘Disentangling the Quantum World’, *Entropy*, 17 (2015), p. 7754). He could not publish his paper until his thesis supervisor allowed, because he thought his student’s idea ‘strange’. Later, the supervisor relented ‘only when Feynmann published a famous paper describing positrons as electrons zigzagging backwards in time’ (Price and Wharton, ‘Disentangling the Quantum World’, p. 7754).

<sup>65</sup> Robert Russell said this in an email to me. I must thank him for his kind reply and this insight.

Christ.”<sup>66</sup> In short, if retroactivity is possible with entities of this age, it maybe viewed as still more so with respect to the age to come, whose rays exceed the speed of natural light.

### The growing block universe and the risen Jesus

But, one may object, doesn't time-symmetry theory entail the B-theory of time, in which all times are on an equal footing and temporally real?<sup>67</sup> And doesn't it for that reason also demand the theory of the 'block universe'?<sup>68</sup> If that is the case, then one might say it would be incongruous with Jenson's theology, which favours the A-theory of time.<sup>69</sup> Jenson is clear: '[T]heology must take the side of the A-theorists.'<sup>70</sup> Indeed, it may appear that the kind of time-symmetry theology I have employed to support Jenson's theology is on a collision course with Jenson's conception of time. The question is: can a time-symmetry theory, which seems to entail the B-theory of time, be employed to support Jenson's conception of time, which akin to the A-theory of time? My contention is that it can.

We may think of two options, which can accommodate both Jenson's metaphysics of time and the time-symmetry theory: the 'moving spotlight' theory and the 'growing block universe' theory. The 'moving spotlight' theory operates on the B-theory of time and yet allows for the privileged status of 'now', as the A-theory does. According to the theory, 'past, present and future events exist, but there is an objective property of presentness that moves through the block [of the universe] progressively "lighting up" different times'.<sup>71</sup> It is like a spotlight of 'a policeman's bull's-eye traversing' from the one end of a house to the other.<sup>72</sup> What is illuminated by this

<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Miscellanies*, 926 quoted in Robert Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 182.

<sup>67</sup> The B-theory of time holds that such temporal indexicals like 'now' and 'today', as well as the passage of time, are not grounded in reality but merely a subjective illusion.

<sup>68</sup> The 'block universe' is often described as B-theorists' vision of the reality, in which 'the dimensions of space and the dimension of time combine to form an unchanging four-dimensional whole': Robin Le Poidevin, 'Time and Freedom', in Heather Dyke and Adrian Bardon (eds), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Time* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p. 539. In that theory, the whole history of the universe is determined and complete.

<sup>69</sup> In the A-theory of time, the passage of time is not merely a subjective perception but an objective reality.

<sup>70</sup> Jenson, *ST* 2:33, n. 17.

<sup>71</sup> Kristie Miller, 'Presentism, Eternalism, and the Growing Block', in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Time*, p. 347. The moving spotlight is formulated in Bradford Skow, 'Relativity and the Moving Spotlight', *Journal of Philosophy*, 106 (2009), pp. 666–78.

<sup>72</sup> Charlie Broad, *Scientific Thought* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1923), p. 59.

movement is the present. This theory makes room for Jenson's idea that the risen Jesus breaks into the time of the Old Testament, for it maintains that the past is temporally real. Also, it can embrace the theory of time symmetry, for the moving spotlight theory assumes the reality of the future, that is, the space-time from which some subatomic entities or information can propagate to the present. However, while it takes the passage of the present moment into consideration to some degree, the theory would probably not be satisfactory for Jenson, as it appears too deterministic for him, whose preference for the A-theory of time is rooted in his emphasis on the freedom of God in history, which liberates creatures from past conditions.<sup>73</sup>

We may then turn to the 'growing block' theory, according to which past and present are real, but the future is not. As time goes, the theory envisages, the slices of space-time are added to the total history of the universe.<sup>74</sup> So the universe block grows. This theory accentuates the objective and dynamic reality of the present, which constitutes the forefront slice of the universe, and therefore tips the balance to the A-theory of time, which Jenson opts for. Like the moving spotlight theory, this theory can be employed for Jenson's idea of the retroactive presence of Jesus, as it posits the reality of the past.

But would this theory be compatible with the time-symmetry theory, given that it does not admit the reality of the future (of this age)? I think so. A time-symmetry theory can work within the framework of a growing block universe theory. The growing block universe theory is not a presentism that upholds the reality of the present passing moment alone. The theory of the growing block universe posits the reality of the past (and thus room for a particle to move back in time) and the *growing* temporal reality to the future (and thus room for a particle to move forward in time).

It should be noted here that in the growing block universe, it is possible that some subatomic particles exist *ahead* of 'my' or 'someone else's' time. To use the earlier entanglement story again, Alice's measurement is future in relation to someone's time who makes the two particles entangled at the source. (Let's say the 'someone' is Charlie.) And yet, it can be that the measured particle at Alice's lab already exists ahead of Charlie's present time,

<sup>73</sup> For Jenson, the Spirit as the freedom of God 'liberates each successive specious present from mere predictability, from being only the result of what has gone before' (ST 1:66).

<sup>74</sup> Proponents of this theory include C. D. Broad, *Scientific Thought* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1923); Michael Tooley, *Time, Tense, and Causation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); and Peter Forrest, 'General Facts, Physical Necessity, and the Metaphysics of Time', in D. Zimmerman (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 137–54.

ready to affect the characteristic of the other particle at the source, which Charlie is presently dealing with. In this case, Charlie's present time is not at the fresh slice of the growing universe; Alice's particle's time at her lab is at or closer to the new slice. Put differently, 'my' present moment is not always at the front slice in the growing universe. As Russell points out, the present can be 'relative and inhomogeneous', depending on a point of reference, even in the growing block universe.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, even if it is observed that a particle which affects a present particle at the source comes from a far distant future that is already real, it does not preclude a possibility that there is a further future that is non-existent beyond the time which the particle come from. So the time-symmetry theory does not necessarily lead to the complete block universe theory and is compatible with a theory of the growing universe.

Still there is another kind of time, required by Jenson's revisionary metaphysics: the transcendent time (or hyper-time) in which the risen Jesus dwells. As discussed earlier, it is not a time of this age but of the age to come. That is the eschatological time, i.e. the time of the Future. This time cannot be reached by prolongation of the temporal line/block of the past or the present.<sup>76</sup> It can be reached only when the risen *eschatos* fully bursts into this time of the old creation and floods it with his eschatological power and presence.

But is this time of the risen *eschatos*, the A-series or the B-series? For Christianity, it is of paramount importance to confess that Jesus is *now* risen. It is not satisfactory just to affirm that the resurrection occurred later than the incarnation or the crucifixion. I do not think that the past of his birth and his crucifixion are on equal footing and equally temporally real as his resurrection is. If the crucifixion and the resurrection are *equally* real as the B-theorists would say, then it would be difficult to say that he has overcome death. It means then that it is crucial to uphold the objective moving reality of presentness (at least as in the moving spotlight theory), and to maintain that the present time runs in the time of the post-resurrection, not in the time of his birth or his crucifixion (even for Jesus' divine consciousness). That now he is risen requires that his birth and crucifixion are *past*. Further, it cannot be thought that such a temporal perception would be merely an illusion to the divine consciousness – as B-theorists would argue –

<sup>75</sup> For Russell's argument for 'a relational and inhomogeneous temporal ontology', see Robert Russell, *Time in Eternity*, pp. 123-93. This amounts to a new flowing time interpretation of special relativity. Importantly, it is not necessary to postulate that the forefront temporal slice is straight. It could be wiggly.

<sup>76</sup> Jenson, *God After God*, p. 165: 'A true future is thus no mere possible rectification of one or another shortcoming of the present.'

but firmly grounded in the reality, particularly, his bodily reality which experienced the nadir of the earthly life before but now radiates the glorious and eschatological effulgence. Such a construal stands in close affinity with the A-theory of time.

## Conclusion

This article has identified a plausible thread of Jenson's thinking regarding the transcendental presence of the risen Jesus and attempted to give more weight to it than critics do. It is to admit simply that it is possible that the whole person of Jesus Christ, the *incarnate* and risen one, can overcome not only spatial but also temporal restrictions, and thus to affirm the outward vector of the risen Christ's presence. That outward vector entails not only forward but also backward trajectories of his transcendent incarnate presence.

In order to affirm that at least the spiritual power of the risen Jesus breaks into the time of the Old Testament, I have drawn upon Farrow, Barth and Torrance and pressed the idea of the retroactive grace of Christ and the outward vector of the resurrection to entail that the grace and power of the risen one reaches back to the Old Testament time and the people of Israel.

Going one step further, I have inquired whether it would be possible for the risen Jesus' *physical* presence to break into the time of Old Testament and be present among Israel. Inspired by modern discussions of time in physics (yet not seeking their verification), we have seen two scientific arguments for retrocausality (namely, Maxwell's equations and quantum entanglement), both of which employ a time-symmetry theory. In modern physics, it is supposed that some particles or information can go back in time and influence 'its past'.

My question has been, if retroactivity occurs in the natural universe as some leading physicists and science philosophers argue, then why not with the physical presence of the risen Christ? Put differently, if such retroactivity takes place in the physical realm of this age, why not with his new and eschatological physical reality? What is more, if the spiritual power of the resurrection is retroactively operative, why not his physical presence? Jesus' new physical presence would be able to reach wherever his spiritual power arrives at, even striding over temporal boundaries of yesterday. His new physical existence would be able to do so in a more transcendent way than any physical entities of this age.

Of course, I do not consider I have offered a conclusive argument on the transcendental power of the resurrection. But I suggest that a concept of the retroactive physical presence of the risen Jesus, ensconced in Jenson's christology, deserves more thoughtful engagement than it has received up



to now. By so doing we may enrich our understanding of the (outward vectorial) power of the resurrection. Lastly, this article has not dealt with the diverse views of God's eternity, which can be considered as the propelling force of the resurrection. I have not jettisoned – as Jenson does – the concept of pretemporal eternity or the concept of atemporality or translated God's eternity into the eschatological future, but only focused the power of the resurrection (i.e. the power of the risen one) within the economy of salvation. This means that different views of God's eternity should not prevent the reader from engaging with or appreciating Jenson's idea of the retroactive presence of the incarnate and risen Jesus.