

**REMEMBERING THE FUTURE
TOWARD AN ESCHATOLOGICAL ONTOLOGY**

Metropolitan of Pergamon
JOHN D. ZIZIOULAS

Remembering the Future

Toward an
Eschatological Ontology

Foreword by
Pope Francis

Edited by
Bishop Maxim Vasiljević



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FOREWORD

by Pope Francis

To hold this book by John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon, in my hands is for me still to clasp his hands in the friendship that bound us together. A posthumous book, as the title tells us, it comes to me as a sign springing from a past that has been liberated in the Future of God.

I first met John Zizioulas in 2013 when I welcomed the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople that came to Rome for the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. It was a meeting that confirmed for me the conviction of how much we still have to learn from our Orthodox brothers and sisters with regard to episcopal collegiality and the tradition of synodicality.

In our conversations during successive meetings, he often brought up the topic of an eschatological theology that for years he had been hoping to turn into a book. When we prayed and reflected on the unity of Christians, he communicated his realism to me: this would only be achieved at the end of the ages. But in the meantime, we had the duty to do everything possible, *spes contra spem*, to continue to search for it together. The fact that it would be achieved only at the end should not feed complacency or find us idle: we had to believe that the Future was already in operation, “the cause of all being.” A Future that comes *toward* history, that does not emerge *from* history. Not simply the end of the journey, but a companion in our life that is capable of “coloring” it with the colors of the Resurrection and with the voice of the Spirit that would have “remembered new things.” He avoided the danger of our having our gaze fixed on a past able to make us prisoners, prisoners above all of old errors, of failed attempts, through accumulating negative junk, through encouraging the implanting of mistrust. We all suffer the negativity of looking backwards, and the sincere search for the unity

of all Christians suffers from this in a particular way. The value of our traditions is to open up the path, and if instead they close it, if they hold us back, that means that we are mistaken in the way we interpret them, prisoners of our fear, attached to our sense of security, with the risk of transforming faith into ideology and mummifying the *truth* that in Christ is always *life* and *way* (John 14:6), path of peace, bread of communion, source of unity.

The *eschaton* knocks at the door of our daily life, seeks our collaboration, loosens the chains, liberates the transition to a good life. And it is at the heart of the eucharistic canon that for Zizioulas the Church “remembers the future,” completing as he does in the chapters of this book a doxology to “Him who comes,” a theology that he has written on his knees, in expectation.

I want to awake the dawn (Psalm 108:2). The psalm’s verse calls on all the instruments and voices of humanity to cry out our need for God’s Future. Let us awake the dawn within ourselves, let us awake hope. Indeed, “the substance of things hoped for” (Heb 11:1), the gesture that constitutes Christianity, is to give a sign, a tangible and daily sign, a humble and disarmed sign, of “Him who is and who was and who is to come” (Rev 1:8).

Vatican City, 15 October 2023

Francis

PREFACE

by Bishop Maxim Vasiljević

Typically, eminent authors, in the twilight of their careers, tend to produce final works that are not commensurate with the elevated standards their readership has come to expect. Contrary to this norm, John Zizioulas, at the culmination of his theological journey, has bestowed upon the academic world in this magnum opus, a work that surpasses all his previous endeavors in depth, insight, and scholarly rigor. The insights presented in his celebrated *Being as Communion* and *Communion and Otherness* provided the groundwork for the extensive exploration undertaken in this seminal piece that will likely be dissected and referenced even more extensively than the author's prior contributions.

Metropolitan John harbored a deep-seated aspiration to pen this masterpiece on eschatology, a desire that can be traced back to his lectures in the 1980s, where he reflects on the notion of the world as "creation." However, the journey to authorship of such a volume on the future was protracted. Frequently questioned about the anticipated publication date, the metropolitan would often respond with a touch of humor, remarking, "before the Second Coming, I hope." The publication, released posthumously a mere six months after his repose in Athens on February 2nd of this year, stands as both a fortuitous gift and a fulfilled commitment. It is thanks to his disciple, Andreas Goulas, to whom I express my warmest thanks, that five invaluable manuscripts have been bequeathed, culminating in this impressive volume.

The late Elder Metropolitan of Pergamon acknowledged the profound challenge of articulating the influence of the future on the present. In 1999, he remarked, "I realize that this concept is most difficult to grasp and to experience," attributing this difficulty to the fact that "we still live in a fallen world in which protological ontology is the dominant form of rationality." The future of things in this perspective is defined by its origins and the "given" or the "factum."

For the past decade, during my visits with colleagues to Metropolitan John in Athens, he would often divulge snippets from his forthcoming monograph with the intriguing title, “Remembering the Future.” He would emphasize that his book is written for those who *have accepted* the fact of the Resurrection of Christ and are interested in *the “logical” consequences* that follow the acceptance of this fact: *credo ut intelligam*. Throughout many discussions, he urged us to examine critically both the foundations and ramifications of his groundbreaking assertion that “the future precedes the past” from both logical and ontological perspectives. He maintained that Christian theology represents a hermeneutics of Resurrection, a pivotal theme at the heart of this book’s inquiry.

This work of Zizioulas presents a holistic Christian “Grand Unified Theory,” as he underscores how eschatological ontology deeply influences the entirety of Christian doctrine. While the lengthy introduction and the first three parts of this book are being presented to the public for the first time in this compilation, some segments have been previously published in other contexts. Yet, each piece has been carefully revised and refined by the author specifically for this edition. Editing the manuscripts of the late Metropolitan John has been a journey marked by fervent passion and reverential trepidation. I was convinced unequivocally that I had been handed writings parallel in profundity to those of ancient philosophers and Church fathers. The confidence bestowed upon me by the John Zizioulas Foundation and Sebastian Press, served as an invaluable source of encouragement. Engaging in numerous discussions with patristic scholar Norman Russell about the entire manuscript, as we revised it together, and his assistance provided by the meticulous cross-referencing, expert advice on the relevant literature, and translation of patristic passages, together with his translation of Pope Francis’s *Foreword*, has been both immense and gratifying.

The John Zizioulas Foundation expresses profound gratitude to Pope Francis for graciously providing the foreword to this book, imbuing it with his invaluable insights, heartfelt warmth, and straightforwardness. His enthusiasm and unwavering dedication to the theology of John Zizioulas shine through all that he says. I owe a special debt of gratitude also to Stavros Yangazoglou, George Papageorgiou, don Giuseppe Bonfrate, p. Pino di Luccio SJ, fr. Basil Gavrilović, Nikos Tzoutis, Dionysios Skliris, and Sally Anna Boyle.

Los Angeles, October 2023

Chapter One

ESCHATOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY

Introduction

1. Ontology and Theology

What does accepting the apostolic *kerygma* of Christ's Resurrection and the entrance of the "last days" into history mean for our *being*, our existence, and the existence of the world? The concept of being is not merely an academic subject; it does not refer to "metaphysics," a speculative description of the ultimate structure of reality, but to the most fundamental and *experienced* "fact" of existence in its universal and unshakeable inevitableness. The place that the verb "to be" occupies, since ancient times, in the structure of all our Western languages witnesses to the foundational character of being in the basic and commonest expressions of our culture. As Heidegger, in referring to the structure of our Western languages, has observed, "the little word 'is' which speaks everywhere in our language and tells of being, even when it does not appear expressly, contains the whole destiny of being—from the *ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι* of Parmenides" to our own time.¹ Our way of thinking in Western cul-

¹ M. Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. J. Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 73. The fact that there have been different ways of understanding being from the classical times to the present, including recent attempts to reject ontology altogether in contemporary thinking (see the Introduction to this book), does not undermine or expunge the notion of being from our thought and language.

The "traditionalist" view which advocates a theology free from or uninterested in the concept of being overlooks the obvious omnipresence of the verb "to be," and thus of ontology, in every thought we make or sentence we compose. The idea of a "canon of faith" free from an explicit or implicit presence of ontology is a myth inspired and invented by anti-philosophical, confessionalist purism, totally unfounded in history. Already within the time range of the formation of the Bible and during the entire course of the patristic period, the "canon of faith" was constantly reinterpreted and cast in the philosophical idiom of each particular time, the concept of being always playing a key

ture is structured and revolves around the verb *to be*, and if Christian theology wishes to interpret the Gospel in this culture, it cannot but express itself in ontological terms.

The employment of ontological categories had become a hermeneutical necessity for theology already at the time of the encounter of Judaism with Hellenistic culture. Ontological terminology with reference to God appears clearly in the translation of the Bible in the Septuagint where the intentionally obscure self-designation of God in the book of Exodus (3:14) is translated into Greek as ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ὁ ὢν or ὁ ὢν (“I am the one who is” or “the Being One”). This way of referring to God established itself among the Greek-speaking Jews of the Hellenistic period when thinkers like Philo employed it with noticeable frequency.² Although this way of referring to God remained for the Jews a fixed formula which was repeated without a philosophical explanation, the exchange at times (e.g., by Philo) of ὁ ὢν with τὸ ὄν reveals a tendency, at least among the Jewish intelligentsia, to interpret the formula in a philosophical (Platonic) sense.³

The New Testament retains the Exodus formula undeclinable and without explanation in the book of Revelation (1:8, 4:8, 11:17)—ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος—sometimes combined with the word παντοκράτωρ as an expression of the supra-temporality and deity of God.⁴ The ontological content of the formula becomes more evident when it is applied to Christ in the Gospel of St John in the form of ἐγὼ εἰμὶ as Jesus’ self-designation (Jn 8:24, 28, 8:58, 13:19). In chapter 8 verse 58 in particular, the ontological sense of the formula is implied in the contrast between Christ and Abraham with the verb “to be” (εἰμὶ) applied to the former and “to become” (γενέσθαι) to the latter: πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμὶ. Similarly, in another passage

role in the process. This did not result in a “Hellenization of Christianity” but rather in the “Christianization of Hellenism” (Florovsky), thanks to the hermeneutical ingenuity of patristic thought. To restrict the hermeneutics of the apostolic *kerygma* to the past would be tantamount to turning it into a venerable but dead relic. Hermeneutics is the task of Christian theology also in our own time, in the context of a culture which continues to structure its way of thinking and its language around the verb “to be.”

² F. Büschel, “εἰμὶ, ὁ ὢν,” in G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, II, (Michigan, MN: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 398.

³ M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, II (London: SCM Press, 1974), p. 105, n. 372.

⁴ Büschel, “εἰμὶ, ὁ ὢν,” p. 398.

(8:24) the ἐγὼ εἰμὶ is contrasted with ἀποθανεῖσθε: “if you do not believe that ἐγὼ εἰμὶ, you will die (ἀποθανεῖσθε) in your sins.”

The designation of God in ontological terms with the ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ὁ ὢν formula is particularly used by the Greek fathers and in the Byzantine liturgy and art. Already in St Justin and the Apologists, the formula ὁ ὢν is not only present but often explicitly understood in a Platonic sense. In Justin, for example, God is described as “he who is always the same in himself and in relation to all things,”⁵ which is a direct reference to Plato.⁶ Origen continues in the same line,⁷ while the Cappadocians unhesitatingly apply to the ὁ ὢν formula the idea of being in its philosophical content. Thus, Gregory of Nazianzus can write that the designation of God as ὁ ὢν (or τὸ ὄν) is “the more strictly appropriate name for him ... making everything contemplated therein always the same, neither growing nor being consumed.”⁸ “The ἀεὶ ὢν, as he [God] calls himself, ... [is appropriate] because he possesses in himself the whole being (ὅλον τὸ εἶναι).”⁹ Similarly Gregory of Nyssa, in the same spirit, regards the notion of being as appropriate for God, because he contains the true being, and “it is not possible for anything to be unless it has its being (τὸ εἶναι) in the one that is (ἐν τῷ ὄντι).”¹⁰ In the same line, Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century will make use of the ὁ ὢν formula in order to clarify the notion of being by distinguishing it from that of essence: in the Exodus self-designation, God does not say “I am the essence” but “I am the who is,” “the one who encompasses all being.”¹¹ Theology has nothing to say about the *essence* of God, but this does not mean that it cannot refer to the being of God. The ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ὁ ὢν does not exclude ontology but its identification with ousiology.

All this is reflected in the liturgical life of the Church where the Exodus designation of God occupies a central place, at least in the East. This is evident in the eucharistic liturgies which bear the names of Basil the Great and John Chrysostom, both of them going back

⁵ Justin, *Dial.* 3,5 (PG 6:481B). Cf. Athenagoras, *Leg.* 4,2 (PG 6:900A).

⁶ Plato, *Republic* 6.4846.

⁷ Origen, *de princ.* I 3,5 (PG 11:150B).

⁸ Gregory Naz., *Or.* 30.18 (PG 36:128A).

⁹ Gregory Naz., *Or.* 45,3 (PG 36:635C).

¹⁰ Gregory Nys., *Or. cat.* 25 (PG 45:65D).

¹¹ Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, III, 2.12.

Chapter Three

ESCHATOLOGY AND THE FALL

I. Fall from What?

The traditional presentation of the doctrine of the fall is markedly protological. It presupposes an original state of perfection from which the human being deviated, “falling” to a lower kind of existence dominated by moral and natural evil, such as sin, suffering, decay, and death. The Bible appears, at first sight, to offer support to this view, since according to the story of creation, after creating the world, God looked at it and found it to be “very good” (Gen 1:31). Everything was perfect at the beginning. The human being existed in a state of moral and natural perfection in “paradise,” which it lost owing to its disobedience to God’s commandment.

The view of an ideal and perfect original state of the world and the human being was not unknown to the ancient world outside the Bible; in fact, it was predominant in it. Hesiod in his *Works and Days*¹ provided the myth of a Golden Age to which later Greek and Latin poets would return again and again, and which Plato would use extensively in his *Politics*.² According to Plato, in the original state of the world, the gods reigned over the entire cosmos, the climate of the earth was always temperate, men lived on fruit, and there were no men or women or children because they were all reborn from the earth. Orphism speaks of a primordial Eros or *Protogonos* or *Phanes* (light) whom the Neoplatonist Proclus calls the god of the beginning of things and, at the same time, of the race of gold (cf. Hesiod), creation and the golden age of happiness coinciding. In Orphism, evil is the legacy of the event of Dionysus’ murder by the Titans when the human soul experienced the brutal descent into a

¹ *Works and Days*, trans. A.E. Stallings (London: Penguin Books, 2018), line 109ff.

² Plato, *Politics* 271C–272.

body and its imprisonment in it. This is the original sin of the fall of humankind.³ It is this idea of the fall of the soul that lies behind the anthropology of Plato, the Neoplatonists, and Origen. Gnosticism also extensively used the idea of the fall, although, unlike Genesis, it placed it at the same time, or even before, the creation of the world.⁴

The idea that human beings experienced at the beginning of their existence a “golden age” or a “paradise,” in which there was no suffering or evil of any kind, appears to be incompatible with the scientific findings of our time.⁵ The appearance of *homo sapiens* took place in the midst and as a consequence of a fierce struggle of survival among the various species, involving them in suffering and death. Death, both as a result of killing and a matter of senescence, was already there when the human being appeared; it was not introduced at the fall.

Commentators of the Old Testament in the past used to take an apologetic attitude by dismissing as insignificant and “without scientific ground” the view of natural historians that the original state of creation was not free from suffering and evil. Commenting on the creation narrative of Genesis, they would insist that “the fact which now prevails universally in nature and the order of the world, the violent and often painful destruction of life, is not a primary law of nature ... but entered the world along with death at the fall of man, and became a necessity of nature through the curse of sin.”⁶ More recent biblical scholarship, however, has presented the biblical narrative of creation and the fall in a way that does not necessitate a conflict with scientific findings. The following observations by recent scholarship are of particular importance:

³ See Paul Ricoeur, *La symbolique du mal* (Paris: Aubier, 1960), pp. 264–279.

⁴ H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

⁵ “In modern times the whole concept of the Fall has often been rejected as inconsistent with the facts of man’s development known to science, especially with evolution.” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 597. Likewise, John Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality* (London: S.P.C.K., 1991), p. 72 and A. Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 222–223.

⁶ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. I (T&T Clark, 1866–1891; repr. 2001), p. 40f. More recently, F.A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), pp. 62, 64, and 95.

1. The narrative of Genesis 2–3 comprises a unity. One cannot reduce it to a “before” and an “after” the fall. Both parts of the narrative form together the “primordial event” which lies on the other side of history.⁷ To split it into two parts and conclude that it speaks of an “original” and a post-fallen state is to distort its meaning and intention.

2. The idea of a “fall” as something passive, fateful, and transmissible to all of humanity appears only in the apocryphal book of 2 Esdras in the first century AD and, taken in this sense, it is absent from the story of Genesis. “The narrative of Genesis 2–3 does not speak of a fall.”⁸

3. The original narrative of the fall reflects the conditions of the Jewish people when the Yahwist document was edited under the impact of the Babylonian exile. It “elevates to the level of exemplary and universal history the penitential experience of one particular people,” and, therefore, “all later speculations about the supernatural perfection of Adam before the [f]all are advertitious interpretations that profoundly alter the original meaning; they tend to make Adam a superior being and so foreign to our own condition. Hence the confusion over the idea of the [f]all.”⁹

4. It is noteworthy that the story of the fall never appears elsewhere in the Old Testament. It is also surprising to see how little Adam figures in the other books of the Old Testament. The Apocrypha, on the whole, do not seem to have a very exalted idea of the original state of Adam and Eve. It was the rabbinic tradition that developed a lofty view of original humanity. And when we come to the Gospels we are struck by the absence of any reference to the pre-fallen state of the human race. Only Paul seems to refer to Adam’s disobedience (Rom 5:12–21), but his interest is not so much in the first as in the last Adam, Christ. Paul in this text exalts the state of grace offered in Christ far more and higher than the original state of Adam (Rom 5:15–17, 20–21). The intention and purpose behind this

⁷ See Claus Westermann, *Genesis*, trans. J.-J. Scullion (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984), pp. 20f.; 276f.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁹ Paul Ricoeur, “Evil,” *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol V, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: MacMillan 1987), p. 202.

Chapter Four

ESCHATOLOGY, HELL, AND FINAL JUDGEMENT

Introduction

The problem of the eschaton is usually approached from a *juridical* viewpoint, as the time of *judgement*. In the scene of Christ's Second Coming presented by St Matthew's gospel (Mt 25:31–46), Christ judges the world ("the nations") and divides it into two groups, "at his right hand" those who inherit "the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world" and pass over "into eternal life," and "at the left" those are condemned "to the eternal fire" or "to eternal punishment." When this scene is combined with other similar references in the gospels (e.g., Mt 8:12, 13:42, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30; Lk 13:28), the juridical approach to the eschaton is completed. At the end of time, when Christ comes to establish his Kingdom, of which "there will be no end," humanity will experience for all eternity either an unceasing joy and blessedness or an endless agony.

This juridical understanding of the eschaton undeniably has depth and also, perhaps, an exclusively *psychological* character. What is presupposed is a God who punishes and, at the same time, a human experience analogous, if not quite identical, to that to which human beings are exposed in this life: retribution, pain, groaning, a "grinding of teeth." All these, if taken literally, presuppose a human body in its present form, which is compatible neither with the concept of the soul separated from the body after death, the so-called "intermediate state," nor with the state of bodies after the resurrection, when death will be no more and bodies will not be subject to decay. The psychology of pain is inevitably bound up with mortality, with our mortal bodies. It is a projection of historical experience to the eschaton, an understanding in terms of mortality of a mode of existence that is, however, happening *after* the abolition of death.

This juridical and psychological approach has overlain another more basic and fundamental view of the Last Judgement which refers to the *being* itself of humanity and of the world.¹ When we refer to the eschaton, to heaven and hell, we have in our minds as a rule certain “feelings”—either pleasant or unpleasant—as if the purpose for which God included the eschaton in his “economy” was confined to, or centered upon, our having pleasant or unpleasant feelings about what we call “beatitude,” rather than upon whether *we should exist or not exist in a true manner*. The expression “eternal life” thus loses its ontological content and acquires what is, in essence, a meaning that is purely psychological. We forget that the synonym of “eternal life” is “true life,” that is to say, life which does not self-destruct (and so, is a lie) on account of death, as is the case today with our biological life. Heaven and hell must be connected with ontological categories. Only then do they acquire their full meaning.

We encounter an ontological approach of this kind in St Maximus the Confessor. As with previous subjects, we shall take him as our point of departure and comment on him in the course of setting out our argument and theological reflection. If we wish to learn from the Fathers, we cannot just repeat their words; we must reflect on them.²

I. Judgement and Existence

Therefore the *logoi* of all things that exist in essence and will exist in essence, or that have come into being, or will come into being, or are apparent, or will be apparent, preexist in a stable manner in God. It is by virtue of these that all things are and have

¹ Eschatology, as Sergius Bulgakov notes in *L'Épouse de l'Agneau*, trans. C. Andronikof (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1984), p. 292ff., and *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 349ff), even the eschatology of Orthodox dogmatics has been shaped under Roman Catholic influence and is marked by two dangerous tendencies: (a) a *rationalism* that tends to transpose rational schemata taken from historical experience; and (b) an *anthropomorphism* that unhesitatingly transfers to God juridical categories belonging to the penal code. Thus, in my opinion, it is absolutely necessary for theology “to carry out an *ontological* exegesis of the relevant texts [relating to eschatology].”

² A theologian who does not reflect on the words of the Fathers but simply repeats them is rather like students who repeat what they have learnt parrot-fashion. No teacher would want such students; why should the Fathers want them?

come into being and persist forever, by their own *logoi* in accordance with God's purpose, approaching by a natural movement and assuredly being held in existence, in accordance with the quality and quantity of the movement and balance of deliberate choice, receiving either well-being through virtue and the direct movement that follows the *logos* by which it exists, or ill-being through wickedness and the movement that is contrary to the *logos* by which it exists, and, to put it briefly, according to the possession or loss of their power by nature to participate in him who is by nature utterly imparticipable, and simply grants himself to all, the worthy and the unworthy, wholly by grace through infinite goodness, and will create the permanence of ever-being just as each has disposed himself to be and is. In their case, the proportionate participation or nonparticipation in him who is being in the proper sense is an intensification and increase of the retribution suffered by those who are not able to participate, and the pleasure enjoyed by those who are able to participate.³

It becomes apparent from the study of this passage of St Maximus that the final judgement of the eschaton has a deeper ontological content and is not a juridical or psychological matter. What is judged at the eschaton is "participation" or "nonparticipation" in *being* in its *threefold form*, which occupies a central position in Maximus' thinking, that is to say, *being in the proper sense*, *well-being* and *ever-being*.⁴ Eternal punishment (τιμωρία in Maximus, translated above as "retribution") is constituted by "non-participation" in *being*, in *well-being* and in *ever-being*, just as conversely eternal life is constituted by "participation" in being in its three forms. In the final analysis the judgement at the eschaton is a matter of participation or not by grace in the same God who "is by nature utterly imparticipable," and who alone is that which is truly *being* and *well-being* and *ever-being*.⁵ "Nonparticipation" in this threefold being is equivalent to the separation of humankind from God.⁶ This is hell represented in ontological categories.

³ Maximus, *Amb.* 42 (PG 91:1329AB).

⁴ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91:1116B).

⁵ Maximus, *Amb.* 65 (PG 91:1392D): "as of [God] alone, who is properly and truly being and ever-being and well-being." Cf. Maximus, *Carit.* 3.25 (PG 90:1024C).

⁶ Maximus, *Ep.* 1 (PG 91:389A). Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 16.9 (PG 35:945C).

Chapter Five

ESCHATOLOGY AND LITURGICAL TIME

Introduction

Theology and the Church often give the impression that, during the course of the centuries, they have lost sight of the significance of the new dimensions brought into human and, indeed, cosmic existence through the experience of the Liturgy. As a result, they have deprived the Gospel of its existential relevance. Liturgical experience has become a separate compartment in the lives of Christians, something taking place on Sunday or at some other special time without bringing any new and decisive insights into ordinary everyday experience. Similarly, in theological work, all matters pertaining to liturgical experience are usually left outside the domain of dogmatic theology, as if systematic theology could be done without any consideration of the liturgical experience of the Church.

That all this deviates from the original Gospel is clearly seen in the fact that, in the early Church, liturgy and theology were so closely connected that scholars still find it difficult to disentangle one from the other, both in the New Testament¹ and in early patristic writings. Without the Church's liturgical experience, we would not have the New Testament (certainly not in its actual content and form), and patristic theology would be, as I am afraid it is in fact for many students of the Fathers, an exercise in philosophical or intellectual and philological debate, with no clear implications for our existence in the world. It is, therefore, imperative, if we want to understand what the Bible and the Fathers really intended to say in their theology and to make all this relevant for us, to recover this primitive link between theology and liturgy by establishing the existential significance which joins them together.

¹ See C.F.D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament* (London: A. & C. Black, 1981). Also, E. La Verdere, *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996).

With this concern in mind, I intend to raise two basic questions. In the first place, I should like to ask if liturgical time differs fundamentally from what we may call non-liturgical, ordinary time. Secondly, if there is a difference between these two kinds or ways of understanding time, how do they relate to each other and in what way does liturgical time affect ordinary existence in time?

I. Time as an Existential Problem

What do we mean when we use the word “time”? We certainly do not mean in theology the conventional time with the help of which we arrange our appointments and organize our work. Neither do I wish to use here the word “time” in a purely conceptual sense, as if one could speak of time as *such*, a sort of entity to which one could attach being and existence (“time is this or that”), regardless of the concrete beings to which it is related. Our concern here is with time as it *affects existence*. It is the existential significance of time that we are interested in.

The word “existential,” however, calls for immediate qualification. Under the influence of modern existentialist philosophies, which in this respect go back to St Augustine, the concept of time has been associated mainly with what man experiences psychologically as time. Augustine seems to have been the first to deduce time from the self-interpretation of presence, as a study of Book XI, chapters 13–29 of the *Confessions* shows. Friedrich Schelling, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, in addition to most of Romanticism seem to have followed this line to its conclusion by sharply distinguishing between humanity’s “internal” time and the time in which the world around it moves, the “external” time.²

This understanding of time, valid as it may be to some extent, introduces a dichotomy between the human being and nature that makes it difficult for biblical and patristic notions of being to be accommodated. We shall, of course, discuss the personal dimensions of time, but we should not make it look as if personal time is *another* time and not the time in which natural events take place. Instead

² See A. Darlap, “Time,” in *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. VI, p. 259.

of trying to distinguish two kinds of time, the personal and the natural, we shall try to see how these two relate to each other as two dimensions of one and the same time. In this approach, “existential” means in fact “ontological,” in the broad and general sense which comprises everything that can be said to *be*, to have a particular identity, a place in existence. In our concern, therefore, with the existential significance of time, we must try to work out an approach that will make room for creation as a whole and not only for humanity’s experience of time, as if only the human being existed in the world or as if time would not really have existed if there was no human being to experience it.³ Our sense of existential time here includes, all under the same rubric of “time,” the cosmic and natural repercussions of time such as the life and death, growth and decay, and being and nonbeing of everything that *is*. Only such an understanding of time as a notion applicable to both person and nature can do justice to the Christian liturgy which claimed from the beginning to affect being as a whole—not just the psychological experience of the human soul, as we have often been led to believe through the various forms of pietism both in the East and in the West.

How then does time affect being as a whole, and in what way does it constitute a problem that liturgical time addresses?

If we try to approach patristic theology with these concerns in mind, we shall realize that throughout the patristic era, in the East as well as in the West, the notion of time was linked inseparably with creation. Augustine stated clearly for the first time that time as a concept is introduced automatically with creation and cannot be applied outside it.⁴ Such a view seems to lie behind the mainstream thought of the Greek fathers, too.⁵ The main important conclusion following from this is that time must not be associated either with God’s being *in itself* or with the fall of man. Time is neither God’s context of existence in an ultimate sense nor the outcome of the fall and sin. In what way, then, can it be said that time constitutes a prob-

³ The human being, according to the Christian faith, was brought into existence after the rest of the material world. Therefore, time does not appear with the creation of the human being; it appeared with the creation of the world (Augustine).

⁴ Augustine, *Conf.* XI, 9–13; cf. H. Chadwick, *St. Augustine: Confessions*, p. 227f.

⁵ E.g., Basil, *C. Eunom.* 1.21 (PG 29:560B).

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Biographical Note

John D. Zizioulas (1931–2023) was a modern theologian and former Metropolitan of Pergamon, in the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

He was born in Greece, January 10, 1931. He began his studies at the University of Thessaloniki, but received his undergraduate degree in theology from the University of Athens in 1955, where he also later received a degree of Doctor of Theology.

Metropolitan John's education included a period of study under the Eastern Orthodox theologian Father Georges Florovsky at Harvard Divinity School. He received his M.T.S. at Harvard in 1956 and was a Fellow at Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies. He received a doctorate in theology from the University of Athens in 1965. His doctoral thesis on the bishop in the early Church was published in English as *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001).

Somewhat later, he taught theology at the University of Edinburgh for a period, before becoming Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Glasgow, where he held a personal chair in systematic theology for some fourteen years. In addition, he went on to be Visiting Professor at the University of Geneva, King's College London, and the Gregorian University, Rome. He was also a part-time professor at the University of Thessaloniki. Metropolitan John became a regular member of the Academy of Athens in 1993 and its president in 2002–2003.

He was consecrated as a bishop on June 22, 1986, and named Metropolitan of Pergamon. He has represented the Ecumenical Patriarchate on international Church bodies for many years. Metropolitan John was a member of the committees for dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church, and with the Anglican Church, and was Secretary of Faith and Order at the World Council of Churches in Geneva, where he gradually came to be recognized as one of the most influential Orthodox theologians of our times.

His ecumenical involvement has led him to publish a number of articles and studies in various periodicals. Some of his books are *L'Être ecclésial* (Paris: Labor et Fides, 1981), *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), *Communion and Otherness* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), *The One and the Many* (Los Angeles: Sebastian Press 2011), *The Eucharistic Communion and the World* (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

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