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Original Paper

Eschatological Hermeneutics in the Thought of John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon

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Abstract
In the posthumous work of the Metropolitan John of Pergamon (Zizioulas) *Remembering the Future: Toward an Eschatological Ontology* the Christian dogmatic is reconsidered in the light of eschatology. Creation is thus considered good only in the perspective of the final victory of life over death. The Fall is interpreted as a fall from the future, not from an ideal prelapsarian condition. Time is regarded as acquiring meaning through the visitation of the eschaton in history. Ethics is viewed as fidelity to the eschatological state of being as communion, inaugurated in the Resurrection and prefigured in the Eucharist. Zizioulas rejects any kind of teleology that implies the eschatological state is inherent in the properties of nature. This prioritization of the eschaton over history, as well as the future over the past, brings Zizioulas into dialogue with the hermeneutical tradition, including Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. For Zizioulas, however, it is love—not death—that offers the hermeneutical key, as a coexistence of otherness and communion.

Keywords: eschatology, ontology, creation, resurrection, personhood, hermeneutics, time, teleology

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In his posthumous work *Remembering the Future: Toward an Eschatological Ontology*, the Metropolitan John of Pergamon endeavours to reconsider the entire Christian dogmatic in the light of the eschatological victory of love over death. This victory creates a priority of the eschatological future over the historical present and past. Eschatology is thus not only the last episode in a linear exposition of dogmatic theology, but a perpetual presence which pervades all different domains of systematic theology and dogmatics. At the same time, if for secular hermeneutics truth is reached when one assumes one's mortality and envisages the end that is death, for a Christian thinker truth is achieved only if one judges history through the transcendence of death by love. The latter is, however, a foretaste of the Second Judgment by Christ, which distinguishes between what leads to love within history and what contributes to the circularity of death. This paper will explore the ways in which the Metropolitan John of Pergamon reformulates the fundamental subjects of Christian dogmatic theology through a priority of the eschaton over history, as well as the future over the past.

Eschatology and Creation

For Metropolitan John of Pergamon, eschatology is not simply a doctrine regarding the end times; it is rather an orientation which concerns the totality of theology, as well as a perspective and a mode of existence.[1] In this, Zizioulas is following the remark by Fr Georges Florovsky that eschatology is not one particular section of the Christian theological system, but rather its foundation, its guiding and inspiring principle.[2] Furthermore, for Zizioulas eschatology should not merely be the last chapter of dogmatics referring to death, the state after death, the resurrection and the Last Judgment, but a principle of interpretation for all Christian dogmas.[3] A central object of

[1] John Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*: *Toward an Eschatological Ontology* (Alhambra, California: Sebastian Press, 2023), 1.

[2] Georges Florovsky, "Eschatology in the Patristic Age," in *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Theological Writings*, ed. Brandon Gallaher and Paul Ladouceur (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 311.

[3] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 2.

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his thought in this area is to respond to the provocative statement by Ernst Troeltsch at the end of the 19th century that "the bureau of eschatology is usually closed."[4] Zizioulas is also influenced by the project of Wolfhart Pannenberg to articulate an "eschatological ontology,"[5] but he places less emphasis than Pannenberg on the aspect of revelation and more on the Eucharistic remembrance of the future in an ontological and not merely psychological sense (i.e.,on the fact that remembrance is capable of creating events).[6] For Zizioulas, the Eucharistic remembrance of the future is an hermeneutical tool for understanding and appropriating the past.[7] This also entails a reversal of the direction of time, since the future causes and thus explains the past: what Zizioulas calls an "eschatological hermeneutic."[8]Along the same lines, Zizioulas rejects the linear time of the "History of Salvation" (*Heilsgeschichte*) as expounded by Oscar Cullmann,[9] stressing the fact that since the Holy Spirit brings the eschaton into history (Acts 2:18)time also moves backward.[10]This is a continuation of an early period of Zizioulas' thought where eschatology was linked with the work of the Holy Spirit in the divine economy and the Church, since it is the Holy Spirit that constitutes Jesus as the eschatological Christ (i.e., it is the Holy Spirit who "chrismates" the Messiah) and thus opens up the History of Salvation to the role of the historical Jesus as the eschatological Judge and King. This also reflects the sense of the patristic formulation that the Holy Spirit is the divine hypostasis who accomplishes (τελειεῖ) the plan of the divine economy.[11] It this way one can speak of a pneumatologically constituted Christology.[12]

[4] Ernst Troeltsch, *Glaubenslehre*, ed. Marta Troeltsch (Munich and Leipzig: 1925), 36.

[5] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 1991).

[6] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 6–10.

[7] Ibid., 11.

[8] Ibid., 28–35.

[9] Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1950).

[10] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 74.

[11] Ibid., 136.

[12] John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion:Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 123–142.

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For the Metropolitan John of Pergamon, eschatology includes the entirety of creation, not only humanity. His is a cosmic eschatology,[13] which involves the resurrection and the transformation of creation as a whole.[14] This equally means that eschatology is an hermeneutical principle for the dogma of creation as well. The goodness of creation lies in its future when the created nature will be resurrected after the abolition of death. For Zizioulas, the resurrection of Christ constitutes an interpretation of creation, and it is in this sense that one should understand Saint Maximus the Confessor's principle that the *logoi* that lead us to the future explain nature,[15] and that the future is more important than the past,[16] since the resurrection realizes the goal for which all beings are brought into being.[17] This eschatological interpretation of creation means that creation is destined for immortality as loving communion, thus both nature and history are interpreted in the context of contributing to this identification of being with communion (or as failing to do so in the case of the fall and sin, which entail a temporary preponderance of death over love). For Zizioulas, the eschatological state, i.e. the ever-lasting being which is identical with communion, is a hermeneutical principle in order to partly understand what is happening in nature even during its historical state. This entails that there is a theological meaning in evolution, in the sense of a biological progress which leads to the human species as a mediator with God. Even if evolution in its modern Darwinian sense is linked to death, Zizioulas thinks that evolution *per se* could be considered as belonging to the divine plan, although the particular Darwinian sense of the evolution is regarded as something that should be surpassed by man. Following a patristic

[13] Richard Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 182.

[14] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 80.

[15] Carl Laga and Carlos Steel, eds., *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium II, Quaestiones LVI–LXV una cum latina interpretation Ioannis Scotti Eriugenae iuxta posita*, *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca* 22 (Turnhout and Leuven: Brepols and Leuven University Press, 1990), 59, 61, 255–63, 283 (PG 90:613D-616A).

[16] Carl Laga and Carlos Steel, eds., *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium* I, *Quaestiones* I–LV *una cum latina interpretatione Ioannis Scotti Eriugenae iuxta posita*, *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca* 7 (Turnhout and Leuven: Brepols and Leuven University Press, 1980), 7, 459, 272–290 (PG 90:520C-D).

[17] Maximus the Confessor, *Capita Theologica* I,66 (PG 90:1108AB).

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interpretation of *Genesis* found in a developed form in Saint Maximus the Confessor, the human being is considered as the last (ἔσχατος) being that enters creation,[18] because it is the being that will recapitulate it. In the Maximian context, this means that human beingsare naturally a microcosm of creation, since they have elements that are common with all other creatures; for example, matter is common with inanimate things, and corporeality is shared with plants and animals. What is more, there are, according to Saint Maximus, certain types, parts or faculties of the soul which link human beings with plants and animals, because they do exist in latter. For example, the capacity of nutrition and growth is regarded as being psychological and not merely corporeal, according to Aristotelian psychology. The human being thus shares common psychological features with plants. In the same sense, the capacity of sensation and self-movement, as well as desire and anger, are psychological features that the human being shares with animals. Last but not least, human beings share an intellectual and logical nature with angels, the latter also being considered as creatures that are saved through humans.

This communal orientation is of course Christological: it is through the union of human nature with divinity in the hypostasis of Christ that creation is established as being "good" and is saved. Christ is the microcosm of creation and its mediator with God. However, there is in Saint Maximus a sense of the preparation of nature through evolution in order to reach a level when a being—namely the human being—is introduced that can be a synopsis of all that preceded him. In this sense, human nature "explains" nature, i.e., it expounds the meaning of properties that we find in animals, plants, and inanimate nature. In turn, Christ explains human being, i.e., he realizes human nature in a novel way that explains the meaning of the properties that we find in humanity.

A chief contribution of Zizioulas here is that he underlines the difference between teleology and eschatology.[19] In Zizioulas' frame-

[18] Nicholas Constas, ed. *Maximos the Confessor. On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, Volume II (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 104(PG 91:1304D-1308C).

[19] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 22–26.

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work, the salvation of nature through the humanity of Christ does not come as an actualization of the potentialities of nature, as would be the case in a teleological framework, but as the fulfilment of a personal call that visits history "from the outside." The human being's vocation to save nature lies in personhood and not in the fact that the inclusive character of human nature plays a significant role as a mediator with the nature of animals, plants and inanimate objects due to natural recapitulation. Of course, following the Fathers, Zizioulas might insist on the significance of the human being's corporeality for the mediation with corporeal and material creatures and their salvation through the incarnation of Christ. But he highlights the simple fact of the human being's corporeality and materiality,[20] not a full psycho-corporeal teleology that would include for example the desiring and irascible part of the soul, etc. For Zizioulas, humanity has the task to assume nature through its corporeal character and bring it to God through a personal call that elevates human being above nature, yet at the same time provides it with the possibility of bringing nature with it to a higher level of freedom. There is no mention of a specific task of human nature as such to recapitulate other created natures through its different psychological and corporeal properties. This is a personal call for Adam; but, when he fails, the Christ succeeds by his incarnation, through the assumption of corporeality in a divine person. In Zizioulas, there is no insistence on the salvific role of the human nature of Christ, i.e., on the fact that the human nature of Christ had specific psychological and corporeal properties which were realized by Christ in a specific way (for example, the realization of human desire, anger, thinking and praying by Christ). Zizioulas' insistence lies on the fact that Christ realized in a personal divine and supernatural way the properties of human natures; not on the fact that there was an "awaiting" of nature to be realized in this way.

This dialectic between natural necessity and human freedom permeates the work of Zizioulas from the time of his earlier work on

[20] Ibid., 148.

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human capacity and incapacity.[21] It has a Trinitarian foundation[22] in the sense that the person of the Father is presented as constituting God as freedom by begetting the Son and breathing the Spirit, without any necessity of substance.[23] This conveys an ontological priority of the person of the Father, hence of person over nature, which is also conceived as a victory of freedom over necessity.[24] The human being has freedom as an image of God (that is, as an image of the Trinity), but it has limits due to its createdness. For created persons, liberation from necessity comes through ecclesial existence, which allows nature to be in freedom.[25]Christ transfers the personal mode of the Trinitarian existence in humanity through the Church. This personal mode also entails catholicity and universality[26] given the fact that Christ bears the catholicity of human nature and not a fragment of it, as is the case in the fallen mode of existence. The ecclesial community offers human beings the opportunity to exist in this personal universal mode, even though this will be fully realized only in the eschaton. Inside history, human beings can only have a foretaste of catholicity in the Eucharist.

Objections have been raised against Zizioulas' theology of personal freedom and catholicity as opposed to natural necessity, both from the point of view of Patristics[27] and from a systematic point of view. For example, if all humans share ecclesiastically in the Sonship

[21] John Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1975): 401–447.

[22] For the philosophical and theological presuppositions of the Trinitarian debate on freedom and necessity, see Brandon Gallaher, *Freedom and Necessity in Modern Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[23] Douglas Farrow, "Person and Nature: The Necessity-Freedom Dialectic in John Zizioulas," in *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church*, ed. Douglas Knight (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 110.

[24] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 40.

[25] Ibid., 101.

[26] Farrow, "Person and Nature," 112.

[27] See for example, among many others, André De Halleux, "Personnalisme ou essentialisme trinitaire chez les Pères Cappadociens? Une mauvaise controverse," *Révue Théologique de Louvain* 17 (1986): 129-155; Lucian Turcescu, "'Person' versus 'Individual' and Other Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa," *Modern Theology* 18/4 (2002): 97-109; Melchisedek Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 55–56.

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of the Son and in His relation to the Father, then there seems to be no way to distinguish between them.[28] Likewise, if freedom is offered to human beings only by divine personhood and not through divine grace that is participated in by human nature, then the result would be a dictated otherness that would prevent genuine human cooperation which includes human nature.[29] Zizioulas has responded to these lines of critics[30] by stressing, for example, the fact that the incorporation in the corporate personality of Christ enhances personal otherness rather than reducing it or leading to confusion of persons.[31]For Zizioulas, the notion of corporate personality refers to the possibility of one person to stand for many, such as for example Adam or a patriarch of the Old Testament could represent the entire humanity or his entire people before God or a bishop can represent his diocese in a council. Of course, the divine person of Christ is the only one that can literally incorporate all the human persons in his identity. Other corporate personalities are either prefigurations of Christ in the Old Testament or icons of Christ in the New Testament. This notion of incorporation is not linked to the corporeality of the human nature of Christ but to his divine personhood. Furthermore, Zizioulas asserts that the clash between freedom and necessity refers only to the fallen mode of existence and not to God or the non-lapsarian and eschatological state of humanity. Finally, he points to the principle that every personal *ek-stasis* from nature is also a personal *hypo-stasis* of nature. The latter means that Zizioulas is against any escapism from human nature and, on the contrary,

[28] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 87.

[29] Nicholas Loudovikos, "Person Instead of Grace and Dictated Otherness: John Zizioulas' Final Theological Position," *Heythrop Journal* 52, no. 4 (2011): 684–699.

[30] John Zizioulas, "Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor," in *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through the Resurrection: Proceedings of the Symposium on St Maximus the Confessor, Belgrade, October 18–21, 2012*, ed. Maxim Vasiljević (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2013), 85–113.

[31] For the biblical notion of the corporate personality see Henry Wheeler Robinson, "The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality," *Werden und Wesen des Alten Testaments* 66 (1936) 49–62; Jean de Fraine, *Adam et son lignage: Études sur la 'personnalité corporative' dans la Bible* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959).

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views personhood as a realization of the catholicity of nature, which also means a realization of divine perichoresis and consubstantiality.

Zizioulas emphasizes the fact that it is the divine person of the Son that makes human nature universal.[32] This universality of the human nature of Christ is linked to the lack of gnomic will in Christ, since the gnomic will indicates the partiality of human cognition and volition. It is true that the human gnomic will is inherent in created personhood and is not introduced by the fall. It initially means the capacity of a human person to be disposed toward a given reality. God does not have a gnomic will because there are no realities that pre-exist him. But human persons do have a gnomic will because they are created and thus face from the very beginning exterior realities to which they should respond. For example, both God and the exterior world pre-exist the human being. From the very beginning, even in a "pre-lapsarian" state, the human being faces a dilemma of orientation: It can either turn to God as the creator of the world or be enclosed in the world as a supposedly self-existent being, the latter constituting both a lie and a sin. Such dilemmas are linked to the notion of the gnomic will, which is not due to the Fall.[33] In contrast, the natural will means the tendency of nature to strive in order to acquire all the virtues that will make it ontologically fuller and more coherent, according to Saint Maximus' dynamic and eschatological ontology of nature. This entails that nature is not perfect in the beginning but is awaiting its accomplishment in the future.[34]That being said, the lapsarian mode of being has changed the character of the gnomic will. After the fall, the gnomic will is related to the fragmentation of nature and the fact that it is initially impossible for lapsarian humans to have a universal view of the world, This lapsarian lack of universality is linked to the fact that after the Fall both good and evil pre-exist the concrete human beings that come into existence and the human will thus faces a dilemma between good

[32] Zizioulas, "Person and Nature," 85–113.

[33] Maximus the Confessor, *Opusculum Theologicum et Polemicum,* 1 (PG 91:17C).

[34] For the fuller and more concise definition of the natural will see Maximus the Confessor, *Opusculum Theologicum et Polemicum,* 1 (PG 91:12C-13A).

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and evil, as actually existent.[35] The fact that Christ is the divine person of the Word and not a created one, as in Nestorianism, entails for Zizioulas a new way for His human nature to subsist as universal, since divine personhood is linked to universality and non-fragmentation. This also entails that the human will of Christ does not express its freedom through a choice between already existent options of good and evil and is not influenced by sinful partiality.

The other aspect of this universality is the non-participation of Christ in biological reproduction, i.e., the dogma of the immaculate conception of Christ. For Zizioulas, sexual reproduction is intrinsically linked to death, since it means a survival of the species to the detriment of particular persons and their concrete bodies that perish.[36] Consequently, Zizioulas interprets in a way that is relevant to modern evolutionary theory and psychoanalysis the view of Saint Maximus the Confessor that there is an ontological vicious circle between birth (γέννησις) and death, which is also expressed as the vicious circle of pleasure (ἡδονὴ) and pain (ὀδύνη) at the psychological level.[37] The universality of the human nature of Christ which is due to divine personhood is thus prefigured at His immaculate conception and birth by the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit. It also entails that the Crucifixion is a free and voluntary passion in contrast to other men who suffer death as a necessity. And, most of all, it means that the resurrection of Christ constitutes the resurrection of the entire universal human nature and of creation as such. The resurrection of Christ is the premise for the resurrection of all the dead. The proclamation that "Christ is Risen" is tantamount to saying that each one of us is already risen in Christ, since Christ is a corporate personality that includes all persons and has a universal human nature which engulfs the entire humanity. The eschaton is the total revelation and manifestation of this truth, but its ontological foundation is already present in the Resurrection of Christ.

[35] Maximus the Confessor, *Ep.* 2 (PG 91:396D).

[36] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 50–53.

[37] Christoph von Schönborn, "Plaisir et Douleur dans l'Analyse de Saint Maxime, d'après les *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*," in *Maximus Confessor: Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur, Fribourg, 2–5 septembre 1980*, ed. Felix Heinzer and Christoph von Schönborn (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1982), 273–284.

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Thus creation is good (καλὰ λίαν, after *Genesis* 1,31)in an eschatological, Christological and Pneumatological context. In other words, creation is good thanks to its hypostatic union with the Son, which entails its resurrection and the full revelation of its immortalization in the eschaton. Inside the historical lapsarian mode of being, however, death still exists. This means that recognizing the creation as good is a matter of hermeneutics.[38] For Saint Maximus the Confessor, creation is led to the eschaton by the *logoi* of beings which constitute divine wills for the future of nature.[39] Nature itself is like a text which invites an interpretation. Through ascetic purification, man is called to see the divine intentions behind nature, the latter being tantamount to illumination regarding divinization as the end of beings. In all of this Zizioulas is trying to actualize Maximian hermeneutics through a dialogue with Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

The Metropolitan of Pergamon incorporated many elements from the thought of Martin Heidegger, such as the notion of *ekstasis*, the emphasis on being and truth, and most of all the fact that Heidegger put eschatology at the centre of ontology through his notion of "Being-toward-death." It could be argued that Zizioulas' originality lies in his synthesis between the neo-patristic program of Georges Florovsky and Heidegger's insistence in eschatology, in the sense of the horizon of the end.[40] Heidegger himself drew this element from various sources: from Wilhelm Dilthey's insistence that historical life can only be understood in its totality (i.e., from the perspective of the end), from Saint Paul's eschatology, as well as from the philosophy of time conveyed by such Christian thinkers as Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther and Søren Kierkegaard. Heidegger used these sources to articulate an eschatological phenomenology

[38] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 113–132.

[39] Grigory Benevich, "God's Logoi and Human Personhood in St Maximus the Confessor," *Studi sull'Oriente Cristiano* 13/1 (2009), 137–152.

[40] Matthew Baker, "Zizioulas and Heidegger. 'Eschatological Ontology' and Hermeneutics" in *Between Being and Time: From Ontology to Eschatology*, ed. Andrew Kaethler and Sotiris Mitralexis (Lanham, Maryland, New York and London: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019), 116.

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without salvation, which is centred on death.[41] But since death is an impossible vantage point, human beings can only anticipate it, which requires a future-oriented projection. Heidegger's notion of authenticity thus entails an anticipation of the understanding of existence as a whole thanks to the assumption of the possibility of death. Hermeneutics is thus related to finitude and to its assumption, which constitutes the authentic mode of being.[42] Heidegger thus put into doubt the priority of the past in the interpretation of history. Zizioulas transformed this element into a hermeneutical freedom from the facticity of the past thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in ecclesial structures.[43]

The human being is invited to an existential interpretation of the world, according to which it will observe the divine will (λόγος τῶν ὄντων) for eternal loving communion. However, Zizioulas tries to downplay the teleological element in nature. By doing this, he is engaging in a modern actualization of Maximian thought after the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin and his successors, which did a fatal blow to teleology. For Zizioulas, the interpretation does not entail a detection of potentialities that are inherent in nature and bring it toward immortality and perfection, as is the case with any teleology which insists in the potentialities that are inherent in nature. It is rather an historical interpretation that is detecting historical events as God's deeds which reveal a will for personal communion—the event par excellence being the incarnation of the Son through the Spirit, in which the divine person realizes for the first time the human nature as universal in the image of the Trinity. After the resurrection, interpretation is a collective Pentecostal event which reads the historical evolution of nature as a history of divine love. For Zizioulas, the eschaton is not reached through properties that are inherent in nature and evolve, but comes as a "visitor" from the outside. There is an historical preparation of nature which is free from naturalistic determinations.

[41] Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger's Eschatology: Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger's Early Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 75.

[42] Thomas Sheehan, "A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research," *Continental Philosophy Review* 32, no. 2 (2001): 1–20.

[43] Baker, "Zizioulas and Heidegger," 117.

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The Eschatological Interpretation of the Fall

A concomitant result of the eschatological interpretation of creation is the eschatological interpretation of the fall as a fall not from an ideal past, but from the future.[44] If the good creation is the state of nature in the eschatological kingdom then there seems to be no need to postulate an ideal pre-lapsarian state in which death did not exist. The introduction of death by humans due to the fall is not corroborated by modern post-Darwinian evolutionary theory.[45] What is more, death is considered by evolutionary theory as a means of evolution or even progress since it is instrumental in the survival of the fittest through mutations that might lead to survival or prevent it. However, the fact that the introduction of death to nature might not have been an historical fact does not mean that the fall lacks any historicity or that it is simply an allegory or symbolism. On the contrary, Zizioulas struggles thoroughly in order to attribute an historical character to the fall, thus following the patristic tradition. Following Saint Maximus the Confessor, Zizioulas considers the fall as a "lack of the activity, which leads to the end (« τὸ κακὸν τῆς πρὸς τὸ τέλος τῶν ἐγκειμένων τῇ φύσει δυνάμεων ἐνεργείας ἐστὶν ἔλλειψις, καὶ ἄλλο καθάπαξ οὐδέν »)[46] or, in his own terms, as a fall from the eschaton. This means that even though death already existed, there could have been a human movement toward the transcendence of death, which would have characterized the animal kingdom if the human being had responded affirmatively to the divine call. The failure of this response to a call for immortality has an historical character. Zizioulas thus follows a middle way. On the one hand, he does not admit that there was an historical period without death, a fact that is not confirmed by modern science. On the other hand, he considers the fall as an historical event and not as a symbol for the existential

[44] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 171–182.

[45] See for example, Ulrich Kutschera and Karl J. Niklas, "The Modern Theory of Biological Evolution: An Expanded Synthesis," *Naturwissenschaften* 91/6 (2004): 255–276.

[46] Carl Laga and Carlos Steel, eds, *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium* I, *Quaestiones* I–LV *una cum latina interpretatione Ioannis Scotti Eriugenae iuxta posita*, *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca* 7 (Turnhout and Leuven: Brepols and Leuven University Press, 1980), 29, 217–219 (PG 90:253A-B).

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struggle of each person, as is the case with many existential theologians. In doing this, he valorises the stance of certain Fathers, such as Irenaeus of Lugdunum, who considered the initial state as one of immaturity.

Furthermore, Zizioulas resists the metaphysical vocabulary of a distinction between potentiality (δύναμις) and actualization (ἐνέργεια), since the latter echoes Aristotelian teleology. He does not view the progress of the human being toward divinization as an actualization of natural potentialities, as is the case in teleology, but as a personal call for the overcoming of death through communion. The difference is that teleology describes a gradual progress through ethical achievements that realize human nature in conformity with its potency. Zizioulas focuses on the deep existential intermingling of nature with death in a way that requires ontological salvation and not only moral progress. In a similar way, Zizioulas defines the fall as a fall from truth into reality and as a fall from the future to the present. For Zizioulas, reality has the character of necessity in contrast to truth.[47] As Aristotle Papanikolaou has shown,[48] this does not mean that Zizioulas is an existentialist in disguise, since the opposition between freedom and necessity is not part of nature but only of its fallen mode of existence, whereas the salvation of nature means its being in harmony with personal freedom and not in a conflict with it as is the case in the existentialist view that human freedom clashes with natural necessity.

Eschatological Anthropology

The eschatological understanding of creation and the fall lead to an eschatological understanding of anthropology. The human being is conceived by Zizioulas as the animal which resists death and the "power of death" (Heb 2:14); i.e., the "system" of death, which pervades biology, the political and economical history of mankind, etc. Humanity is defined by love, which is a desire for the immortaliza-

[47] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 171–182.

[48] Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Is John Zizioulas an Existentialist in Disguise? A Response to Lucian Turcescu," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 4 (2004): 601–607.

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tion of loved ones according to the definition by the French existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel: "To love is to tell another person that he or she is not going to die."[49] This is a way of reformulating the definition of Saint Gregory the Theologian that the human being is the animal that strives for deification. Zizioulas situates humanity particularity in art, religion and the care for the dead, which distinguish the human being from other animals. In this Zizioulas has a totally different stance from Christos Yannaras who considers religion as an instinctual drive for the psychological survival of the individual.[50] In today's era of artificial intelligence, Zizioulas insists that it is not the intelligence or the linguistic abilities of the human being that distinguish humans from animals and machines, but on the contrary their reference to otherness, including resistance to mortality and a wish to transcend death. For Zizioulas, reference to otherness provokes *ek-stasis*, which is also a distance (*apo-stasis*) from animal nature and thus freedom from it.[51]

Eschatological Ontology

For the Metropolitan of Pergamon, Christian ontology starts from the fact that from an early period the Christian Fathers undertook the task to express the biblical preoccupation with history in terms of being.[52] However, true ontological being lies only in the resurrection of all in the eschaton. Zizioulas views history as an icon of the

[49] Gabriel Marcel, *'Tu ne mourras pas.' Textes choisis et présentés par Anne Marcel*, (Paris: Arfuyen 2012), 104. This is quoted by Zizioulas in *Remembering the Future*, 60.

[50] Among the fundamental differences between the two important Greek theologians who are considered as exponents of a personalist theology, one can cite the fact that Yannaras regards religion as the urge of a primitive individualism that responds to egoistic needs, whereas the Metropolitan of Pergamon considers it as a part of the divine image in human beings, i.e., of their referentiality to divine otherness. It is to be noted that for Yannaras what distinguishes human beings from animals is the symbolic capacity of language, whereas Zizioulas thought that language and intelligence only constitute a difference of degree and not of quality between humans and non-human animals. See Christos Yannaras, *Against Religion: The Alienation of the Ecclesial Event* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2013).

[51] John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 229.

[52] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 86.

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eschaton, following the triple schema of Saint Maximus the Confessor which describes the Old Testament as a shadow, the New Testament as an icon, and truth as lying in the eschatological condition.[53] An objection that might be brought forward is whether this entails an "inverted Platonism" in the words of Ilias Papagiannopoulos,[54] according to which history reflects not archetypes of truth but "eschato-types" which come from the future. Even though such a danger of regarding history as a totally passive reception of divine will might exist if one overemphasizes eschatology, it is to be noted that Zizioulas views history as a realm of human creativity.[55] The future enters history as divine grace, but human persons cooperate with the divine will in an active way, not merely in passive anticipation.[56] An "eschato-type" coming from the future is not the same thing as an archetype. The notion of archetype entails a depreciation of history as a realm of corruption and decay which only alienates us from truth. On the contrary, the notion of an "eschato-type," if one is allowed to coin such a neologism, means that the human person is responsible for the realization of nature inside history in dialogue with the divine will. It is true, however, that Zizioulas sometimes seems to underestimate the value that is inherent in historical events. In this respect, the remark by Nikolaos Asproulis[57] that there could be a synthesis between the eschatology of Zizioulas and the value attributed by Fr. Georges Florovsky to the events of the history of salvation is a valuable starting point for a more balanced theology of history.

[53] Cf. the *Ambiguum* 21, Nicholas Constas, ed. *Maximos the Confessor. On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, Volume I, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 442–444 (PG 91:1253C-D).

[54] Ilias Papagiannopoulos, "Πρόσωπο και Υποκείμενο. Σημειώσεις για μια εσχατολογική ανθρωπολογία," in *Αναταράξεις στη Μεταπολεμική Θεολογία: Η Θεολογία του 'όο* (Athens: Indiktos, 2009), 159.

[55] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 28.

[56] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 33.

[57] Nikolaos Asproulis, *Το Μυστήριο του Χριστού και το Μυστήριο της Εκκλησίας. Γεώργιος Φλωρόφσκυ και Ιωάννης Ζηζιούλας σε διάλογο γύρω από τη θεολογική μεθοδολογία* (Volos: Ekdotiki Dimitriados, 2023).

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Eschatology and Hermeneutics

For John Zizioulas, eschatology means that the past is always open to new interpretations that come from the future. If for Heidegger the *Dasein* acquires an awareness of its finitude through a projection to the future,[58] for Zizioulas it is the future of the resurrection which visits the past and explains it. Zizioulas follows the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, according to whom there is a fusion of the horizon of the past with the horizon of the future, in order for the past to acquire a new meaning. For a true theologian, this means that the transcendence of death through the resurrection of Christ gives a new meaning to the events of the past. Zizioulas considers the judgment of Christ in the Second Coming as an act of interpretation: the past is reopened and at the same time it is judged in an ontological way. Whatever led to death remains enclosed in a past that is abolished. Whatever led to love acquires new potentialities of meaning. There is also a place for repentance, i.e., for persons who were tied to sin and death through their deeds but asked for divine love to respond to their failures. The Second Coming is an act of interpretation because it entails the ultimate ontological distinction between love and death. This means that the past is reopened, is purified from what led to death, whereas the events of love are led to new ontological conclusions that did not exist inside history. This consideration also means that even within history every ecclesial and theological consideration can act as a novel interpretation that is a foretaste of the Second Coming.

On this theme, Zizioulas enters into dialogue with the thought of Wilhelm Dilthey,[59] insisting on observing the meaning of beings and events starting from their end. If for Martin Heidegger this end is death,[60] for Zizioulas it is the resurrection which reopens the past to interpretation. Zizioulas follows Friedrich Nietzsche in denying a

[58] Martin Heidegger, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999).

[59] Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 177.

[60] Martin Heidegger, *Der Begriff der Zeit* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2004), 123.

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reified subsistence to historical facts, asserting the priority of interpretation.[61] Another aspect of this reopening of the past is the possibility of forgetting the past. For Zizioulas forgiveness entails an ontological (non-psychological) forgetfulness of the past, if the latter contains sin and hate that have been erased through repentance and reconciliation. The Resurrection connotes liberation from the past.

Saint Maximus the Confessor would speak of a participation in the *logoi* of providence and judgment, which complete the *logoi* of nature. According to this theology of history, once a human person is purified from self-centredness, he or she can see the mysterious and hidden ways in which God acts inside history and creates meanings which are not evident by those who are immersed in egoism. The *logoi* of providence are divine wills that lead to the creation of concrete natures inside time as well as the emergence of particular historical events in cooperation with the human will. The *logoi* of judgment are divine wills that lead history toward the Final Judgment of the Second Coming of Christ, distinguishing what is ontologically genuine from what is false. In Zizioulas' own terms, one could say that every true theology makes a distinction between love and death even within history. When a theologian interprets the past, she or he distinguishes between on the one hand the potential that leads to love and, and on the other, the forces that remain entangled in the power of death. History is a realm of confusion between the two in every sphere of life, such as biology, political history, economics, etc., whereas the eschaton brings an absolute distinction. The theologian thus acts as someone who brings the eschaton into history. This might be considered as something violent, since the visit of the eschaton brings an ultimate violence of separation of the things that are intermingled inside history. But it is a violence that is identical to love and to ontological authenticity. The latter is also a power of fertility, since reinterpreting the historical past can lead to novelties in human civilization. To provide an example, the primitive Christian Church reinterpreted the law of Judaism, the Greek philosophy and the Roman state in a way that led

[61] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 31.

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to a new civilizational paradigm. But in every age, a theologian can reinterpret the demands of her or his era, leading to novel civilizations that are open to the light of the resurrection. This also means that a theologian leads others to the sacraments of the Church. The Eucharist is the foretaste of full eschatological communion. The sacrament of repentance is an existential annihilation of the past, or rather of what in the past contributed to death, and thus a reinterpretation of the personal past of the faithful which saves whatever led to communion.

While Zizioulas' thought presents some affinities with the eschatological ontology of Wolfhart Pannenberg,[62] his emphasis lies more on the ontological character of the overcoming of death than on the element of divine revelation. This prevalence of ontology over gnosiology is evident in the way he interprets the Eucharistic remembrance not as a psychological recollection, but as an ontological realization; i.e., as an event of the future that visits the present. Zizioulas' thought about the performativity of liturgical language could be compared with the relevant views of John Langshaw Austin[63] and John Searle[64] about speech-acts, which realize meaning instead of merely representing it. For Zizioulas, the Eucharist is a paradoxical remembrance of the future overcoming of death through love. As such, it interprets the present and the past: the transcendence of death through communion is regarded as the meaning of all historical events. Whatever contributes to it survives; whatever remains entangled in the web of the circularity of death and temporary reproduction is doomed to perish. This does not entail a lack of historicity. Events of love give meaning to history, whereas repentance, which is linked to the Eucharist, can mean a perpetual reinterpretation, in which we erase our ties with the forces of death and commit ourselves again to love reopening our past personal history to a visit

[62] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 1991).

[63] John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

[64] John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay on the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

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of the eschaton. The eschatological horizon is the subjection of the entire universe to Christ, because Christ has defeated the power of death, according to Oscar Cullmann.[65] The scriptural evidence for the future eschatological state lies in the apparitions of Christ after the Resurrection (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor 9:11, 1 Jn 1, etc.), which show both the corporeality of the body of Christ and the fact that this body was liberated from the separation that is presupposed in the fallen mode of space and time.

The function of interpretation is linked to the Person of the Holy Spirit. According to the Cappadocian Fathers, the role of the Holy Spirit inside history is the fulfilment (τελείωσις) of the divine plan. For Zizioulas, this means the eschatological constitution of the identity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of the Second Coming. Christology is thus Pneumatologically constituted. In other words, the Spirit is present in each birth of Christ and in each constitution of his identity: in the chrismation of the Messiah, in the Annunciation, in the Birth, in the Baptism, but also in the Transfiguration, in the Crucifixion, in the Resurrection and in the Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is also the divine Person who opens the eyes of the disciples so that they understand that the stranger is in fact the Christ who breaks the Eucharistic bread. The latter also signifies a novel interpretation of history based on the revelation that Christ is its Lord. Instead of interpreting history through a remembrance of the end of death, as in Heidegger, Zizioulas proposes an interpretation of history through the end of the resurrection. It is in this sense that the Holy Spirit inspires the saints and the prophets to discern the hidden meaning of history, but also leads to remembrance of Christ's words and deeds (Jn 14:26). The remembrance is at the same time an annunciation of the coming of the future (Jn 16:13). In Zizioulas' terms the Holy Spirit fulfils the void that is the present according to Aristotle (οὐθέν), as a vanishing mediator between the past and the future.[66] This hermeneutic of the Holy Spirit leads to a philosophy not *sub specie aeternitatis* as in Spinoza, but *sub specie resurrectionis* or

[65] Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 4–20.
[66] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 16.

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sub specie eschatorum. Here also, Zizioulas follows a golden middle. On the one hand, he rejects the eschatology of a perpetual suspension of meaning, like those found in post-modern versions of Judaist eschatology (e.g. in Jacques Derrrida). In contrast to a Judaistic form of eschatology, faith in the Incarnation and in the Resurrection of Christ that has already taken place means that the Christian ethos involves a fidelity to the event that has already happened. On the other hand, Zizioulas rejects the realized eschatology that we find in forms of political theology that equate the eschaton to the realization of political ideals. For Zizioulas, the eschaton can inspire politics but cannot be identified with it;[67] at least, not as long as the power of death continues to be active within history.

Eschatology and the Theory of Time: Eschatology as the Opposite of Teleology

The Metropolitan John of Pergamon stresses the absolute difference between eschatology and teleology. Teleology entails the achievement of goals that are inherent in the natural properties of a being. On the contrary, eschatology means a sudden and abrupt "visit" of the eschaton within history, which comes as a surprise to the natural sequence of events and can even be opposite to nature, even liberating it from determinism. The eschatological Omega enters history as a "thief at night" (1 Thess 5:2). It is to be noted, however, that Zizioulas does not envisage a rejection of the natural. He emphasizes that in Christian mysticism, and especially in the Orthodox ethos, there is no ascetic ecstasy (ἔκ-στασις) from nature that is not at the same time a novel mode of being (ὑπό-στασις) of nature which saves it. The eschaton is rather an answer to questions that nature has not itself put.

The opposition drawn by Zizioulas between teleology and eschatology also has consequences for the theory of time. For classical Greek teleology time is the measure of the unfolding of natural potentialities (δύναμις) which are actualized (ἐνέργεια). For Zizioulas

[67] Ibid., 57.

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there is a reversal of the arrow of time from the future to the past. The eschatological Omega does not stem from the Alpha, but is its cause. In this sense, Zizioulas engages in an eschatological ontology, following a Christianized version of Heideggerian thought,[68] but not in metaphysics like other theologians. In fact, he rejects any metaphysics, as well as any form of evolutionary teleology, such as the one that we find in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.[69] He is also critical of the endeavour of theologians to incorporate Marxist philosophy of dialectical progress into a progressive Christian world-view. On the other hand, Zizioulas' thought affirms facets of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory, since the latter brought a sort of abolition of teleology in Western thought. For example, the progress of animal species is seen by evolutionists not as following a pre-ordered intelligent design, but as the result of contingent mutations and of the instinctual struggle for survival. While Zizioulas seems to agree with aspects of the post-Darwinian rejection of teleological thought, he does not however wish to incorporate Darwinian evolutionary theory into a Christian theological view, since this kind of evolutionary progress is based on death and egoism, i.e., on the opposite of the Resurrection and the Crucifixion. Zizioulas prefers to reverse Heidegger and conceive of a horizon of meaning which is not that of death, but that of its transcendence through love. The Omega is thus not an offspring of history, but rather a visitor and a guest.

Eschatology and Ethics

The fact that Omega is ontologically prior to Alpha also means that the Resurrection is ontologically prior to the Crucifixion. In other words, the Resurrection is not a stage or an episode that comes after the Crucifixion. And the Crucifixion is not some necessary moment of dialectic, Hegelian or other. This also means that the Crucifixion cannot be a moral command, in the strict sense, since it is tantamount to the annihilation of one's nature or in a Christian perspective to its offering to God. It can however inspire ethics. In the same

[68] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 382–384.
[69] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 23.

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sense, the Crucifixion cannot become a political program, since it could mean the collective annihilation of a state, nation, or other collective. That being said, it can infuse political society with values, even though the eschatological ideal cannot be fully realized within history. For just like evolutionary biology, politics instrumentalize death and violence and cannot be conceived apart from them. The modern state is based on the monopoly of violence and coercion in contrast to the Church which is a collective of free persons. An eschatological ethics would entail a resignation of survival as a goal. This cannot be turned into a moral precept or a political project, but it can inspire an ethos of self-sacrifice and of faith in the final victory of love and its coincidence with life.[70] Eschatological ethics is the opposite of moralism, i.e., of judging people according to objective moral criteria and characterizing them as good or sinful/evil. Since any person who survives in a world based on death is in some way sinful, an eschatological ethics within history can only be one of repentance. The latter is the Christian equivalent of a political permanent revolution, since the faithful can always start anew. It is an ethics of fidelity to the event of the Resurrection that has already happened in Christ, and, thus, to the truth that love is more powerful than death. At the same time, it is also a fidelity to the future, which entails being prepared for martyrdom, if it is needed according to the will of God.

Conclusion

The Christian eschatology expounded in Zizioulas' posthumous work *Remembering the Future* entails a universal resurrection of humanity in an eschatological era where being coincides with communion. The end of history entails an ontological judgment that is identical with the distinction between what has led to love and what has led to death. Eschatology equally functions as an interpretation of the past. In this way, Zizioulas is inspired by some of Martin Heidegger's intuitions, but in his own thought it is eschatological love

[70] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 43–59.

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that functions as a hermeneutical key and horizon for the understanding of historical events. Eschatological love is defined as a coexistence of absolute otherness and full sharing of the substance, whereas the Resurrection entails a universalization of nature and time, and an abolition of every division and distance that is based on death. This view can lead to a novel appreciation of key Christian dogmas and themes: creation is considered as good only in the perspective of its future immortalization; the fall is a fall from the future and an enclosure to reality as necessity. Furthermore, time itself is not concomitant to a teleological movement; it acquires meaning if the eschatological Omega fills the historical Alpha. But the Omega comes from the outside as a visitor or even as a thief. Ethics is a fidelity to a future that has already happened in the resurrection of Christ, in the victory of love over death.

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