OmegAlpha I:2 Autumn 2025, 159–161
ISSN 3067-1329 (Print), ISSN 3067-1337 (Online)
https://doi.org/10.63394/7f3chh91
Book Review
Received: 11 April 2025 | Accepted: 15 April 2025

Remembering the Future: Toward an Eschatological Ontology by John D. Zizioulas. Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2023. xii + 335 pp. ISBN 978-1-936773-95-4.

In the mid-1990s, when Metropolitan John Zizioulas and I first started planning what eventually became his book, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), one of the intended chapters was a paper first given by then-Professor Zizioulas at the University of Durham in 1982, but never published. Its original title was "The Existential Significance of Liturgical Time." As the volume developed, Metropolitan John changed the chapter title to "Redeeming the Time." However, late in the day, in 2005, he decided to withdraw the chapter from *Communion and Otherness* because, he said, he wanted to keep it for another book.

Now at last we have that book, published posthumously, just months after Zizioulas's death, and the revised Durham paper is its final and culminating chapter, with the title, "Eschatology and Liturgical Time." The editor, Bishop Maxim Vasiljević, describes in his Preface how Zizioulas steadily crafted *Redeeming the Time: Toward an Eschatological Ontology* over the course of many years, and aptly explains why: because the book offers a "Grand Unified Theory," analyzing how "eschatological ontology deeply influences the entirety of Christian doctrine."

In his moving Foreword, Pope Francis recalls that in their various meetings over the years Zizioulas "often brought up the topic of an eschatological theology that for years he had been hoping to turn into a book," and he precisely expresses the ontological thrust

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of the book: for Zizioulas, he says, the Future is "already in operation" as "the cause of all being." The Future here "comes *toward* history, [it] does not emerge *from* history." In a fascinating footnote in his book, *Being as Communion* (1985), Zizioulas already contrasted eschatology as *orientation* and eschatology as *presence*, and firmly espoused the latter.

Readily acknowledging that such a view is deeply paradoxical, and frequently highlighting its contrast with common-sense "protological thinking," Zizioulas proposes in his lengthy Introduction that Christianity "depends entirely on the experience of the intrusion of the *eschata* into history," because "all of Christian life and thought" is derived from the post-Resurrection encounters of Christ with his disciples, when he *ate* with them in a foretaste of the Kingdom, a foundational experience now prolonged throughout history by the Holy Spirit in the celebration of the Eucharist. In Christian understanding, therefore, time is reversed and the Alpha derives from the Omega, as St. Maximus the Confessor in particular explained.

In a wide-ranging, closely argued, and hugely stimulating narrative, frequently engaging with thinkers both ancient and modern, and regularly returning to Maximus who said, famously, that "truth is the state of the future," Zizioulas considers his topic from many angles in successive chapters: "Eschatology and Ontology," "Eschatology and Creation," "Eschatology and the Fall," "Eschatology, Hell, and Final Judgement," and the aforementioned "Eschatology and Liturgical Time." One of the striking features of the book is the ample scriptural commentary that it offers, reflected in the very helpful index of scriptural references at the end. It is quite clear that Zizioulas is striving to interpret *biblical* faith, and especially "the apostolic *kerygma* of Christ's Resurrection."

Chapter one starts by noting the ontological import of "I am" in the book of Exodus and the Gospel of John, and steadily unfolds the eschatological and relational nature of God's self-revelation, and the ecclesial and cosmic implications of Christ's resurrection. Chapter two further investigates the survival of creation, asking whether "the being of creation [has] been fixed at the beginning, or will it be fixed in the end?" Chapter three intriguingly

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asks whether the biblical Fall is a fall from past perfection or rather from the future that God intends for humanity and creation? Chapter four pursues a truly ontological rather than juridical understanding of judgment, evil, and hell, and proposes that the Eucharist is the antidote to hell "because it transforms us from individuals into *persons*." As already mentioned, chapter five considers the redemption of time itself, and the experience of time redeemed that the disciples had in their post-resurrection meals with Christ and that the Church now has in the Eucharist by the intervention of the future. The challenge of living in accordance with this mystery is considered in an extended section of the book's Introduction, entitled "Toward an Eschatological Ethics," which focuses on love because "love is the only 'virtue' that will survive in the end."

If we wonder what all of this means for ecumenism itself, Pope Francis recalls, and evidently shares, the view of Metropolitan John that we must fix our gaze on the future rather than the past and ask the Holy Spirit to help us "[remember] new things."

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