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Strengthening the Ecumenical Relevance of Zizioulas's Eschatological Hermeneutics through a Dialogue with Protestant and Roman Catholic Theologians

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Abstract
This article examines the ecumenical potential and challenges of John Zizioulas's eschatological ontology in *Remembering the Future*. It considers his critical engagement with Jürgen Moltmann, arguing that broader dialogue could enrich discussion of creation, ecology, and universal salvation. It then brings Zizioulas into conversation with Louis-Marie Chauvet, Johann Baptist Metz, Reimund Bieringer, and James Alison. Their approaches to sacramental mediation, apocalyptic expectation, biblical interpretation, and the Resurrection reveal convergences and differences with his thought. Finally, it explores eschatological themes in the international Orthodox–Catholic dialogue, whose relevance remains largely implicit in the book. These encounters can extend Zizioulas's future-oriented vision while preserving its Orthodox foundations. A common celebration of Easter is proposed as a concrete expression of this potential, linking theological reflection with the pursuit of Christian unity within the historical life of the churches.

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Though I am focusing more on the ecumenical dialogue between churches[1] than on the work of the late Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas in my academic research, his work has been regularly discussed during scholarly colloquia organized by my university. This was the case, for example, when we invited Pantelis Kalaitzidis in 2016 to contribute to a colloquium on *The Spirit, Hermeneutics, and Dialogues*[2] and of course we also stimulate our doctoral students to explore the work of Zizioulas in greater depth.[3]

This article focuses exclusively on the posthumous magnum opus of the late Metropolitan Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future: Toward an Eschatological Ontology*[4] and is divided into three parts. Although Zizioulas explicitly states that "the present author operates under the influence of his own tradition,"[5] the Protestant theologian who is most frequently cited—albeit often in a critical manner—is Jürgen Moltmann. In the first part of my ar-

[1] See among others, Peter De Mey, "'Quanta est nobis via?' (*Ut Unum Sint*): A Plea to Accelerate Orthodox-Roman Catholic Dialogue," in *Holding fast to the Mystery of the Faith: Festschrift for Patriarch Daniel of the Romanian Orthodox Church*. Eastern Church Identities, 10, ed. Sorin Șelaru & Daniel Munteanu (Brill, 2022), 474–89.

[2] Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *"Esc*hatology and Future-oriented Hermeneutics in Contemporary Orthodox Theology: The Case of Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas," in *The Spirit and Dialogues*, ed. Reimund Bieringer et al. (Peeters, 2019), 155–80.

[3] Cf. Aleksandre Gabunia, "Seeing from the Future: The Reverse Perspective and Eschatological Anthropology in John Zizioulas' Theology," *Dialogue* 9:18 (2025): 54–77; "Reverse Perspective as Hermeneutical Principle: Zizioulas' Ecclesiology and the *Russkiy Mir* Discourse," *Ecclesiology* [forthcoming].

[4] John D. Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future: Toward an Eschatological Ontology*, ed. Bishop Maxim Vasiljević (St. Sebastian Press, 2023). An earlier draft was presented during the panel "Why Theology still matters Today? The Public Witness of Metr. Zizioulas's Theology," organized on July 1, 2025 as part of the annual assembly of the European Academy of Religion by the Volos Academy for Theological Studies to honour two recent publications with posthumously published studies by Zizioulas.

[5] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 62.

ticle I shall demonstrate that Zizioulas has sought to engage with Moltmann's thought only selectively. Orthodox theologians in general have, to date, paid little attention to "receptive ecumenism." For Zizioulas, this is particularly striking with regard to Catholic theology, which apart from the work of Rahner and von Balthasar he does not seem to have intensively studied.[6] Therefore, in the second part of my article I shall briefly outline what the Greek theologian might have learnt from four Catholic theologians who show a certain affinity with his eschatological position: Johann Baptist Metz, Louis-Marie Chauvet, James Alison and Reimund Bieringer. Finally, it strikes me that the key role which the Metropolitan of Pergamon has had in several official dialogues at the international level[7] apparently had no significant influence on his systematic theological research. In *Remembering the Future* there is not a single citation from the ecumenical dialogues. Was ecumenism, then, for this leading Orthodox theologian, merely an "appendix" to his oeuvre, to quote the famous warning by Pope John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint*? At the end of my article, I will briefly point to the contribution of the Orthodox-Catholic international dialogue on the topic of eschatology.

1. Zizioulas's Critical but Limited Interaction with Jürgen Moltmann

In a brief historical overview in the introduction of *Remembering the Future* Zizioulas contrasts the rediscovery of eschatology as "the heart of our Lord's teaching"[8] with Johannes Weiss and Al-

[6] Nikolaos Asproulis, *Theologically Reading Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas: Orthodox, Ecumenical and Modern* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2025), 31, also mentions his interest in the work of Yves Congar and Joseph Ratzinger, the late Pope Benedict.

[7] See Asproulis, *Theologically Reading*, 136–155 (ch. IV: "Zizioulas as an Ecumenist and Churchman") for an overview of Zizioulas's role in multilateral (Faith and Order) and bilateral (with the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church) ecumenical dialogues. A detailed study of the redaction of the documents of the Orthodox-Catholic international dialogue is found in Patrice Mahieu, *Se préparer au don de l'unité: la commission internationale catholique-orthodoxe 1975–2000* (Cerf, 2014).

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

brecht Schweitzer and the impact this has had on both Catholic and Protestant theology in the 1960s with Orthodox dogmatics which in that period still largely focused on the *eschata*. The Protestant theologians he most appreciates are Wolfhart Pannenberg—who is praised for having also developed an "eschatological ontology"[9]—and Jürgen Moltmann. Zizioulas relies especially on Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*, and welcomes as "particularly strong and successful"[10] the attention for "the victims of injustice and oppression in society."[11] In the same introduction, however, he also deplores "Moltmann's staurocentric perspective" in which Christ's sacrifice was exalted "to the point of making it even an attribute of God's very being." The Cross can, for Zizioulas, become "ontologically significant" only if it reveals at the same time Christ's resurrection, as the anastasis icon representing the descent into hell makes clear.[12]

In chapter one of *Remembering the Future*, references to Moltmann appear again in the section "From Teleology to Eschatology." According to Zizioulas, Moltmann had well understood that the teleological approach of Bloch, which understood the future as "a future of a past," had to be overcome. Moltmann's alternative solution, however, on the one hand puts too much emphasis on God's earlier promises and on the revelation of God's love on the Cross, while on the other hand insufficiently appreciates the epiphanic value of the Resurrection appearances and is almost exclusively oriented on the advent of God's kingdom in the future.[13]

Zizioulas turns to the opening volume of Moltmann's second dogmatics, *God in Creation*, when discussing the link between es-

[9] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 3. Sometimes Zizioulas also points to the differences between their views. Pannenberg prefers to take the critical questions of science to the Christian view on eschatology seriously, whereas for Zizioulas they "confirm the patristic view of creation." Ibid., 119–120, 147, 158. Asproulis, *Theologically Reading*, 54–55, offers a helpful summary of the similarities and differences between the two "pioneer theologians" who both agree that "eschatology must be at the core of theological discourse."

[10] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 24.

[11] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 24.

[12] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 26.

[13] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 106–109.

chatology and ecology in chapter two. In response to the famous thesis of Lynn White that the Judeo-Christian worldview has led to the ecological crisis, Moltmann pleads for a greater awareness that humans are "the product of nature" as well.[14] His humble awareness that "even without human beings the heavens declare the glory of God" is, however, declared invalid by his Orthodox interlocutor because of the Church Fathers' teaching that the limits of nature can only be overcome through personhood. In response to the critique of Lynn White, Zizioulas therefore proposes to substitute "an *anthropocentric*" for "an *anthropomonistic* conception of creation."[15] At this point Zizioulas's reflections on ecology reflect the same staurocentrism which he often reproaches in Moltmann. By offering the Eucharist, the Church repeats the work accomplished by Christ, "the priest of creation," on the Cross and assumes his role of "mediator" himself, "so that the whole creation may be deified in the eschata."[16] Here and throughout his magnum opus, the profound impact of the theology of St Maximus on the Metropolitan of Pergamon becomes clear. When reading his extreme anthropocentrism in the *Ambigua*, stating that "it is through me that the heavens declare the glory of God ... and all creation venerate God and give him glory,"[17] one wonders whether the advice given by Zizioulas at a later stage in his book, that it is not sufficient for theologians to repeat the words of the Church Fathers, but to "reflect on them,"[18] would in the light of the profound ecological crisis we continue to experience today not better have led to a more critical reflection.

[14] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 142.

[15] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 142. This distinction is welcomed by Asproulis, who also believes, however, that, "to address the current climate crisis, a new model of anthropology is required beyond any dated human exceptionalism or problematic *anthropomonism*, where attention is given to those parts of the *imago* that stress the *continuity* between humans and non-humans (e.g. animality) and not to those parts, which deepen or stress their *discontinuity* (e.g. mind/intellect, freedom)." See Asproulis, *Theologically Reading*, 198, including n. 158.

[16] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 142.

[17] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 142.

[18] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 218.

Since for Moltmann all aspects of his theology are interconnected and mutually reinforce one another, I found it difficult to understand why Zizioulas has not made the effort to also include references to the fifth and last volume of Moltmann's systematic theology—his book *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*.[19] My guess is that, already in 1995, the Greek theologian had largely lost his earlier interest in Moltmann and probably was never aware of this book.[20] Moltmann's interesting reflections in *God in Creation* on the kenotic "self-restriction" of God that was needed to create the world[21] have their counterpart in the eschatological "derestriction" that will allow the world to truly become God's dwelling place, since for him "the end of time is the converse of time's beginning."[22] In view of Moltmann's attention in *The Coming of God* to both "personal eschatology" and "historical eschatology" it is insufficient for Zizioulas to praise Moltmann's conviction that, "without a proper doctrine of creation, the ecological crisis cannot be tackled."[23] For Moltmann too, "outside an eschatological perspective, ecology is meaningless"[24] and hence he ends *The Coming of God* with a beautiful summary of the hoped for glorification of the cosmos: "The laughter of the universe is God's delight. It is the universal Easter laughter."[25]

I greatly appreciated the nuanced analysis by Zizioulas of the theologoumenon of the final restoration of all, or universal salvation, in chapter four of *Remembering the Future*.[26] Out of deep re-

[19] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Fortress Press, 1996).

[20] In his review of *Remembering the Future*, published in *Toronto Journal of Theology* 41 (2025), 187, Davor Džalto also deplores that Zizioulas "mostly relies on the same or similar sources he previously used. His ideas and references are only sporadically expanded by more recent research."

[21] Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Fortress Press, 1993).

[22] Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 294.

[23] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 157.

[24] Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 144.

[25] Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 339.

[26] An important study on this topic from an Orthodox perspective is David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* (Yale University Press, 2019).

spect for "the inviolable principle of *freedom*"[27] Zizioulas defends the condemnation of the Origenian teachings by the Fifth Ecumenical Council. It becomes quickly clear that his greatest source of inspiration is again St Maximus, who understands eternal life as the participation in the three forms of "being." Whereas "being" and "ever-being" are the divine gifts received at the creation and the eschaton, respectively, assisted by God's grace humans can grow in "truly being" or "well-being."[28] If the existence of hell was for St Maximus the consequence of "the free choice of nonbeing already in this life,"[29] Zizioulas, for his part, ends his first reflection on "Hell and Freedom" with an open question: "will there be anybody who will not want ever-being and will have freely chosen nonbeing?"[30]

This brings him to a quite sympathetic review of both the Syriac Fathers with their insistence on God's therapeutic punishment and the "modern theologians of chiefly the Russian tradition."[31] In reaction to advocates of universal salvation he is convinced that "none of us can erase hell completely in the name of divine love, but equally none of us can predict God's judgement."[32] If Zizioulas's main concern is "to annul any historical determinism which would make the eschaton the slave of our historical time,"[33] maybe he could subscribe to the careful conclusion by the late Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, one of the universalists mentioned by Zizioulas: "Our belief in human freedom means that we are not entitled to categorically affirm that everyone must be saved. But our faith in God's love implies that we dare to hope that everyone will be saved."[34] If Zizioulas had known Moltmann's reflections on this

[27] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 239.
[28] Zizioulas, Remembering the Future, 219–221.
[29] Zizioulas, Remembering the Future, 223.
[30] Zizioulas, Remembering the Future, 226.
[31] Zizioulas, Remembering the Future, 236–37.
[32] Zizioulas, Remembering the Future, 246.
[33] Zizioulas, Remembering the Future, 244.
[34] Kallistos Ware, "Dare We Hope for the Salvation of All? Origen, St Gregory of Nyssa and St Isaac the Syrian," in *The Inner Kingdom*. The Collected Works, 1 (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 193–215, at 215.

topic in *The Coming of God* he would definitely again have blamed him of staurocentrism: "The Christian foundation for the hope of universal salvation is the theology of the cross, and the realistic consequence of the theology of the cross can only be the restoration of all things."[35] Zizioulas's response probably would have looked very similar to the concluding line of the chapter which returns to the normative teaching of the Orthodox Church: "Since the will cannot be forced, the 'restoration of all' in any of its forms cannot necessarily prevail. Hell must remain forever— alas! —a real choice for free existence."[36] His strong insistence on human freedom makes him in the end defend a position which remains close to that of the well-known opponent of universal salvation, John Meyendorff: "Freedom should be an inalienable element of every human being, and no one should be led into the kingdom of God against his free choice. Therefore apokatastasis must be rejected precisely because it presupposes an ultimate limitation of human freedom, the freedom to remain outside God."[37]

2. A Posthumous Dialogue with Selected Roman Catholic Theologians

There are at least four places in *Remembering the Future* that, in my opinion, deserve to be put in dialogue with the work of Roman Catholic theologians. Since the late Metropolitan either was not aware of these works or preferred for other reasons to explain only the Orthodox point of view, this is only a brief posthumous scholarly exercise.

Right from the introduction of this work Zizioulas identifies the key biblical texts that support his eschatological ontology. He is convinced that there is no aspect of the life of Jesus as described in the four gospels that does not find its origin in "the encounter of the risen Christ with his disciples in his appearances after the

[35] Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 251.

[36] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 251.

[37] John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (Fordham University Press, 1974), 163.

Resurrection."[38] Zizioulas focuses especially on the story of the encounter of two disciples with the Risen Lord on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. The encounter helped them "to 'interpret' the Christ of the past and to foretaste the gifts of the future Kingdom."[39] The encounter is also characterized as a vision and as "an epiphany of the future"[40] or as "a 'visit' or 'intrusion' of the eschata."[41] In view of his critique of postmodern thinkers like Jean-Luc Marion[42] one understands that Zizioulas perhaps did not feel the need to consult the famous book *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, which Louis-Marie Chauvet, a former professor of Catholic sacramentology at the Institut Catholique de Paris, published in French in 1987.[43] If we take Heidegger's critique of classical metaphysics seriously, Chauvet argues, an immediate presence of ourselves, of things or persons outside us, or of the divine has become an impossibility. Therefore, in chapter five, relying on the same biblical story commented on by Zizioulas, he reflects on the threefold symbolic mediation of Christ in the sacramental life of the Church, "rereading the Scriptures with him in mind, repeating his gestures in memory of him, living the sharing between brothers and sisters in his name."[44] The real body of Christ is gone, but His symbolised body is present in the Church's "interpretation of Scripture, its liturgical celebrations, and its ethical engagement."[45] Chauvet is also convinced that the sacramentality of the Church receives its primordial manifestation in the liturgical assembly (*ecclesia*) as the sym-

[38] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 11.

[39] Zizioulas, Remembering the Future, 13.

[40] Zizioulas, Remembering the Future, 27; see also 107.

[41] Zizioulas, Remembering the Future, 110; see also 60.

[42] Zizioulas, Remembering the Future, 35.

[43] Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament. A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (Liturgical Press, 1995). Originally published as *Symbole et sacrement. Une relecture sacramentelle de l'existence chrétienne* (Cerf, 1987). See also De Mey, "Church as Sacrament. A Conciliar Concept and Its Reception in Contemporary Theology," in *The Presence of Transcendence. Thinking 'Sacrament' in a Postmodern Age.* Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia, 42, ed. Lieven Boeve & John Ries (Peeters, 2001), 181–196.

[44] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 163.

[45] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 171.

bolic body of Christ.[46] It is here that the individual believer recognises Jesus as Christ and Lord. Despite their different philosophical presuppositions there are many similarities between Chauvet's analysis and chapter five on 'Eschatology and Liturgical Time' in Zizioulas's book.[47] In an excursus to chapter two Zizioulas also explains his iconic ontology.[48] The theology of icons has made him aware that the believer can experience the presence of the saints even if they are separated from us by the laws of nature. "If the icon involves a presence of hypostasis without the presence of nature, then we are talking, it seems to me, of a 'presence-in-absence' ontology."[49] His iconic ontology is at the same time future-oriented. "Iconic ontology means the filling of the present with reality borrowed or drawn from the future" and this is experienced especially in the sacramental life of the Church.[50]

Johann Baptist Metz was a German Catholic theologian famous for his rehabilitation of the apocalyptic tradition in Judaism and Christianity. His name is only mentioned once by Zizioulas as Johann Metz[51] which maybe was the consequence of his lack of familiarity with his work. The chapter on eschatology in his 1977 masterpiece *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* is entitled: "Hope as Imminent Expectation, or, The Struggle for Lost Time: Untimely Theses on Apocalyptic Symptoms of Timelessness."[52] In his opinion, theology must reappropriate the apocalyptic narratives of the imminent end of the world. Correctly conceived, they are prohibition signs, leading the Christian from the wrong path of self-interest back to the ethics of discipleship. As Metz explains in thesis XXVI, "the Christian idea of imitation and the apocalyptical idea of imminent ex-

[46] Symbol and Sacrament, 180-89.
[47] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 253–318.
[48] Zizioulas, Remembering the Future, 159–169.
[49] Zizioulas, Remembering the Future, 167.
[50] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 168-169.
[51] Zizioulas, Remembering the Future, 3.
[52] Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (Seabury Press, 1980), 169-79. Originally published as: *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft: Studien zu einer praktischen Fundamentaltheologie* (Grünewald, 1977).

pectation belong together. ... Imminent expectation does not allow the imitation of Christ to be postponed. ... It introduces the pressure of time and activity into Christian life. It does not deprive responsibility of its power, but rather provides it with motivation."[53] While appreciating "the importance of the apocalyptic for the understanding of the Gospel and the essence of Christianity,"[54] Zizioulas believes the terminology is "too anthropomorphic to be applied to God."[55]

At my own Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies biblical scholar Reimund Bieringer has since 1997 developed a future-oriented hermeneutics of biblical texts that has much in common with Zizioulas's eschatological ontology, though it is more critical of the limitations of some biblical texts.[56] The point of departure for his approach is Ricoeur's notion of "the world of the text."[57] A future-oriented hermeneutics looks for the world projected by the biblical text. For Christian readers, God reveals himself in Scripture. But in which sense are biblical texts that, for example, have misogynist, anti-Jewish or violent undertones, part of the same divine revelation? With Ricoeur, he is convinced that the world that is projected by the Biblical text contains an eschatological and prophetic vision of solidarity, relationality and inclusion.[58] This resonates with the conviction of Zizioulas that especially in the texts of the Prophets a "future-oriented attitude is manifested. It is in the *last* acts of God that the past

[53] Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 176.

[54] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 197.

[55] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 197.

[56] Cf. Reimund Bieringer, "The Normativity of the Future. The Authority of the Bible for Theology," *ET Bulletin. Zeitschrift für Theologie in Europa* 8 (1997): 52–67. For collected essays on the normativity of the future approach, see *Normativity of the Future: Reading Biblical and Other Authoritative Texts in an Eschatological Perspective.* Annua Nuntia Lovanienses, 61, ed. Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd (Peeters, 2010).

[57] Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action. Essais d'herméneutique II* (Seuil, 1986), 114.

[58] When looking for implicit points of contact to Bieringer's future-oriented hermeneutics in Zizioulas's oeuvre, Pantelis Kalaitzidis points to his moderate position on the ordination of women, "even leaving the whole question open while moving to the field of eschatology." Kalaitzidis, *"Esc*hatology and Future-oriented Hermeneutics," 171.

events receive their meaning. … History receives its meaning only with its consummation."[59]

How this hermeneutical method concretely works can be illustrated with a reference to the work of Laura Tack, a former doctoral student of Reimund Bieringer who has applied this method to John 14:6, a potentially anti-Jewish text describing Jesus as being the way, the truth and the life.[60] At first sight the verse seems rather exclusivist: the *ego eimi* verses seem to imitate the divine speech in the Old Testament; the definite article indicates that Jesus does not represent one amongst other valuable ways and the line is followed by a second part stating that "No one comes to the Father except through me." When interpreting this verse within the context of the Farewell Discourses, the passage can however also be read as an "ethical exhortation to form a universally oriented and loving communion." If one also pays attention to John 10:10—"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly"—then it becomes clear that God's ultimate concern is life and salvation for the world in an all-inclusive sense.

The fourth and final Catholic scholar I want to introduce as a valuable interlocutor for people studying Zizioulas's work is the British systematic theologian James Alison, already through his 1996 monograph *Raising Abel: The Recovery of the Eschatological Imagination,*[61] but especially through his 1998 study *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes*.[62] Alison was heavily influenced by the scapegoat theory of the French anthropologist René Girard. Through his study of many great classics in the world literature, Girard had discovered that violence—based on mimetic desire—seems to be omnipresent and is in different cultures only temporarily solved by bringing sacrifices. By accepting his

[59] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 90.

[60] Cf. Laura Tack, *John 14:6 in Light of Jewish-Christian Dialogue. Sharing Truth on the Way to Life*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II, 557 (Mohr Siebeck, 2021), partim.

[61] James Alison, *Raising Abel: The Recovery of the Eschatological Imagination* (Crossroad, 1996).

[62] Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes* (Crossroad, 1998).

sacrifice freely Jesus unmasked the world of violence and sacrifice from within. The apostles understood this only gradually after Easter. In Alison's words which resemble those of Zizioulas: "The epistemological starting point for any understanding of Christianity is the presence to the disciples of the crucified and risen Lord."[63] At the start of his chapter "Original Sin Known in Its Ecclesial Overcoming" Alison is inspired by the important distinction between the "biological" and the "ecclesial hypostasis" in *Being as Communion*.[64] Alison accepts Zizioulas's discovery "that it is from the eschatological notion of the ecclesial hypostasis—what we are becoming through ecclesial life—that what we were is to be understood."[65] It is for him one step further to understand "that original sin is precisely being locked into the an-ecclesial hypostasis."[66] Discovering this is a liberating and joyful insight. In chapter three of *Remembering the Future*, dealing with "Eschatology and the Fall," Zizioulas develops a similar position in dialogue with St Maximus: "How can we 'know' (that is, have gnoseological access to) our origin, the state in which we issued from the hands of God? ... For St Maximus, there is only one way by which we can know our original state, and that is *by looking at our end*."[67]

3. Eschatology in the Ecumenical Dialogues

As already indicated in the introduction, there is no single reference to the fruits of ecumenical dialogues in *Remembering the Future*. Even if none of the agreed statements in the international dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox has an explicit focus on eschatology, it is often present as a subtheme, especially in the first three dialogue statements of 1982, 1987 and 1988.

Since "remembrance of the future Parousia"[68] is a key theme in *Remembering the Future*, it could have been useful to include a

[63] Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong,* 115.
[64] Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 162.
[65] Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong,* 162.
[66] Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 163.
[67] Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong,* 180.
[68] Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 7.

reference to the phrase found both in the Munich Document and the Valamo Document that Christ is present in a sacramental mode in history, "from Pentecost to the Parousia."[69] The title of the first dialogue statement, *The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity*, has been beautifully explained in a key phrase in the second part of the document: "This mystery of the unity in love of many persons constitutes the real newness of the Trinitarian *koinonia* communicated to men in the church through the eucharist."[70] The document realizes, however, that the Church is only able to realize this communion in an imperfect way in the course of history and hence it insists that "The *koinonia* is eschatological. It is the newness which comes in the last times."[71]

In the excursus of chapter II entitled "Historization of the Eschaton: The Significance of Iconic Ontology," the Metropolitan of Pergamon refers to "the extraordinary statement" in Hebrews 11:1 that "faith is the subsistence (hypostasis = reality) of things hoped for."[72] In his opinion only one of two interpretations of this

[69] Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, *The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity*, I.1: "This is the mode (*tropos*) in which the unique person and the unique event of Christ exists and operates in history starting from Pentecost and reaching to the Parousia."

Cf. https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese4.html. *The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church with Particular Reference to the Importance of Apostolic Succession for the Sanctification and Unity of the People of God*, §9: "It is according to this sacramental way that one must understand the work of Christ in history from Pentecost to the Parousia."

Cf. https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese2.html.

[70] Munich Document, II.1. Cf. Myroslaw Tataryn, "The Munich Document and the Language of Unity," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26 (1989): 648–663, at 657: "The nature of the Church as a eucharistic and trinitarian koinonia is obviously of great concern in the Munich document, which again mirrors much of the work of the two theologians under study [Jean-Marie Roger Tillard and John Zizioulas]."

[71] Munich Document, II.2.

[72] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 167.

line allows for an "iconic ontology." If faith would only be the psychological assurance "that God's promises will be fulfilled in the future" then "there would be no room for a presence of the future" and thus for an "iconic ontology." The present should rather be filled "with reality borrowed or drawn from the future."[73] In my opinion Zizioulas has here improved or deepened the explanation of the same verse in the Bari statement *Faith, Sacraments, and the Unity of the Church*, which holds that in Hebrews 1:11 faith is "understood in terms of an existential confidence in the power and love of God, in acceptance of the eschatological promises as fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ."[74] A reference to this dialogue statement thus would have been very relevant here.

When dealing with the relationship between Zizioulas and Moltmann I explained Zizioulas's nuanced view on *apokatastasis* already. Maybe during the preparation he remembered a line from the famous—or infamous, in some Orthodox local churches—Balamand statement dealing with "Uniatism, Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion."[75] The reality of the "persecutions and sufferings" in the often painful history between our churches is not forgotten, but is followed by the recommendation no longer "to accuse or disparage the other Church."[76] Then follows a beautiful statement which is echoed in *Remembering the Future* by Zizioulas's conviction that "none of us can predict God's judgement"[77]: "God alone knows his own witnesses. Whatever may have been the past, it must be left to the mercy of God, and all the energies of the Churches should be di-

[73] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 168.

[74] *Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church,* §10.

Cf. https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese3.html.

[75] *Uniatism, Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion*.

Cf. https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-lingua-inglese.html.

[76] *Uniatism, Method of Union* §23.

[77] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 247.

rected towards obtaining that the present and the future conform better to the will of Christ for his own."[78]

At one point in Zizioulas's *magnum opus* I would have appreciated a more explicit treatment of the implications for the ecumenical relations between the Churches. In the section on "Eschatology and Ecclesia" in chapter four it is mentioned that the axiom *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* "was translated into practice by participation in the Divine Eucharist. Those who cut themselves off (or are cut off by the Church itself) from eucharistic communion are deprived of the 'communion of the saints,' within which alone they can hope to be saved."[79]

[78] *Uniatism, Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion*, §23. Jaroslav Z. Skira, "The Balamand Document on Uniatism in the Context of the International Orthodox-Catholic Ecumenical Dialogue," in *The Catholic Church and Its Orthodox Sister Churches Twenty-five Years after Balamand.* Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 326, ed. Jaroslav Z. Skira, Peter De Mey and Herman G. Teule (Peeters, 2022), 27–48, at 47 is aware that the Balamand document insists on "a correct and comprehensive knowledge of history aiming at a historiography of the two churches which is in agreement and even may be common" (§30) but is afraid that in §23 "Balamand seems to want to gloss over history and to leave it to the 'mercy of God.'" He repeats the strong statement by Robert F. Taft, "The Problem of 'Uniatism' and the 'Healing of Memories': Anamnesis, not Amnesia," *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 41-42 (2000–2001), 155–196, at 191: "Until the phenomenon of 'Uniatism,' in its origins and the factors behind those origins, in its history, and in its present reality, comes to be viewed with more respect for historical trust, I see little hope for any lasting substantial progress in Catholic-Orthodox ecumenism." A more positive assessment is found in Waclaw Hryniewicz, "Labour and Hope. Fifteen Years of Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 39 (1995), 339–360, at 350–356 (III. 'The Past must be left to God').

[79] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 245. Though written much earlier, fine comments on Zizioulas's position are found in Scott MacDougall, *More than Communion: Imagining an Eschatological Ecclesiology* (Bloomsbury, 2015), 71: "In Zizioulas' theology, church could hardly be given a higher position. It is the exclusive site of salvation for people individually and collectively and, indeed, for creation as a whole." In the opinion of MacDougall the ecumenical consequences for Zizioulas are crystal clear: "He consistently argues that eucharistic sharing reflects ecclesial consensus on matters of theological, and so, ontological, import. Doctrinal orthodoxy, remember, is required for the unity in which the eucharistic table is to be approached. Until ecumenical efforts to heal the rifts within the Christian family succeed, Zizioulas supports the practice of barring non-Orthodox from communing among the Orthodox, non-Roman Catholics among Roman Catholics, and so on." Ibid., 99 n. 202.

Finally, given that the resurrection of Jesus occupies such a central place in this book, I found it a pity that not even once a case was made for the introduction of a common Easter date. As we know, the late Pope Francis, who wrote a beautiful foreword to *Remembering the Future,* during the Vesper service concluding the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January 2025, repeated that the Catholic Church was open to accepting a common date for Easter "that everyone wants."[80] The Commission on Faith and Order organized a webinar on the same topic one month later and asked for renewed attention to the so-called Aleppo Statement of 1997, *Towards a Common Date of Easter*, which it included once again in the conclusions.[81] May the dream of both Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew not be forgotten!

Conclusions

The late Metropolitan of Pergamon's posthumous *magnum opus* is a stimulating and much-awaited theological contribution that complements his oeuvre and offers the ultimate key to understanding his theological thinking, namely eschatology. Without a doubt, Zizioulas presents scholars and theologians, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox, with fresh food for thought. Notwithstanding Zizioulas's merits and influence, this article aimed to follow a more critical path and did not shy away from highlighting the book's limitations and the areas that require additional attention from theologians interested in Zizioulas's thought.

The shortcomings of Zizioulas's monograph, its selective interaction with the Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann, its limited interaction with Roman Catholic theologians who also developed eschatological hermeneutics to various extents, as well

[80] https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/papa-francesco/2025/Omelie/vesperi-San-Paolo-Fuori-le-Mura-conclusione-Settimana-Preghiera.html.

[81] Towards a Common Date for Easter. Faith and Order Paper, 241, ed. Sandra Beardsall and Martin Illert (WCC, 2025). Cf. https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/towards-a-common-date-for-easter See however also the section on "A Common Celebration of Pascha" in Metropolitan Job (Getcha), "The Actuality of the Council of Nicaea," *The Ecumenical Review* 75 (2023), 185–202, at 194–197.

as its disregard for an explicit engagement with the achievements of the ecumenical dialogue, are important gaps that the current and the next generations of Orthodox scholars and theologians need to address. As I have demonstrated in my brief comparative analysis, Zizioulas's theology can offer many more points of convergence and dialogue with key theologians from non-Orthodox traditions who also rely on and construct an eschatological theological vision. The absence of an explicit discussion of the results of the ecumenical dialogues in *Remembering the Future* must be treated as an invitation to expand Zizioulas's eschatological ontology to such an ecumenical endeavour by finding common ways to concretely *remember* the upcoming eschatological *future* within the boundaries of history. A common celebration of Easter can be a promising beginning in this sense.

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