

**REMEMBERING THE FUTURE
TOWARD AN ESCHATOLOGICAL ONTOLOGY**

Metropolitan of Pergamon
JOHN D. ZIZIOULAS

Remembering the Future

Toward an
Eschatological Ontology

Foreword by
Pope Francis

Edited by
Bishop Maxim Vasiljević



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FOREWORD

by Pope Francis

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

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

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


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

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

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

Vatican City, 15 October 2023

Francis



PREFACE

by Bishop Maxim Vasiljević

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

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

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

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

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

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

Los Angeles, October 2023

INTRODUCTION

I. Between the “Already” and the “Not Yet”

Eschatology is not simply a doctrine; it is an orientation, a perspective, a mode of existence. Eschatology does not concern only the future; it affects our past as well as our present. This is how the Church viewed and experienced the “last things” from the beginning. In the words of the late father Georges Florovsky:

[For] indeed eschatology is not just one particular section of the Christian theological system, but rather its basis and foundation, its guiding and inspiring principle or, as it were, the climate of the whole of Christian thinking. Christianity is essentially eschatological ... The Christian perspective is intrinsically eschatological.¹

This was precisely how the early Christians understood their very existence:

The goal was indeed “beyond history,” but history was inwardly regulated and organized precisely by this superhistorical and transcendent goal, by a watchful expectation of the Coming Lord. Only an ultimate and final “consummation,” an ultimate and final reintegration or “recapitulation” could have given meaning to the flux of happenings and events, to the duration of time itself.²

This centrality of eschatology in Christian theology—acknowledged also by Karl Barth,³ albeit without effect on his theological

¹ G. Florovsky, “Eschatology in the Patristic Age” in *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky. Essential Theological Writings*, eds. B. Gallaher and P. Ladouceur (London: T&T Clark, 2019), p. 311.

² *Ibid.*, p. 314.

³ K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. E. C. Hoskyn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 314: “If Christianity be not altogether thoroughly eschatology, there remains in it no relationship whatever with Christ.”