

Remembering the Future

Toward an Eschatological Ontology

Metropolitan of Pergamon
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Foreword by
Pope Francis

Edited by
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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

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 commit-

ment. 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 pas-

sages, together with his translation of Pope Francis's *Foreword*, has been both immense and gratifying.

The John Zizioulas Foundation expresses profound gratitude to Pope Francis for graciously providing the foreword to this book, imbuing it with his invaluable insights, heartfelt warmth, and straightforwardness. His enthusiasm and unwavering dedication to the theology of John Zizioulas shine through all that he says. I owe a special debt of gratitude also to Stavros Yangazoglou, George Papageorgiou, don Giuseppe Bonfrate, p. Pino di Luccio SJ, fr. Basil Gavrilović, Nikos Tzoitis, 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 method—suffered a long eclipse in the Church’s history. With the prolonged delay of the Parousia the Church began to settle herself in the world, building cathedrals that would last for centuries and making long-term plans for the future while often reconciling herself to social and secular influence and power. Eschatology was, thus, pushed to the end of history or, more commonly, to the end of the individual’s life and the state of its future existence. As a result, Christian theology devoted to eschatology the last chapter of dogmatics (*de novissimis*) referring specifically to death, the state after death, the resurrection of the dead, the Last Judgment, the consummation of the world and life everlasting. The only relevance left to eschatology for history and the present life was the fear of God’s final judgment and its ethical implications, or the desire for reward and “happiness” in the future state through the fulfilment of certain conditions in the present life (moral, ascetical, sacramental, etc.).

All this gradually led to the marginalization of eschatology in relation to the essence of the Gospel and of Christianity itself. Protestant liberal theology in the nineteenth century placed the “essence of Christianity” in the proclamation of ethical principles,⁴ while theologians such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, following traditional lines, relativized the doctrine of the last things in comparison with other doctrines.⁵ All this led Ernst Troeltsch to declare at the end of the nineteenth century that “today the bureau of eschatology is usually closed.”⁶

Things, however, underwent a radical shift in the following century. As Hans Urs von Balthasar, writing in 1957, observed, “if Troeltsch’s comment that ‘the bureau of eschatology is generally closed these days’ was true for the liberalism of the nineteenth century, it is on the other hand true that the same office has been working overtime since the turn of the century.”⁷ This historic shift had already begun around the end of the nineteenth century when the biblical scholar Johannes Weiss brought to attention the central and crucial place of eschatology in the teaching of Christ in his work *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*, published first in 1892.⁸ This was followed by Albert Schweitzer’s *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* in 1906 and his studies on the mysticism of St Paul.⁹ Both Weiss and Schweitzer criticized the Protestant liberal theologians of the nineteenth century, endeavoring to show that Jesus was not interested in preaching a God who only reigns in the souls of human beings or in proposing ways by which society could improve morally, but rather in proclaiming the immediate intervention of God in history in accordance with the prophetic and apocalyptic tradition of Israel that expected the sudden coming of God’s Kingdom in the days of the Son of Man or Messiah. The “essence of Christianity” was not, therefore, to be found in certain ethical principles, as Adolf von Harnack and other liberal theologians claimed, but in the coming of God’s Kingdom. Whether this coming was imminent or delayed, future or “realized,” was of secondary importance. The crucial thing was that eschatology constituted the heart of our Lord’s teaching, and this in itself was a thesis of tremendous significance for all of

theology.

The consequences of this thesis for systematic theology deserve special emphasis. Such consequences were brought out and underlined in the nineteen-sixties particularly by Karl Rahner, Johannes Metz, and Balthasar on the Roman Catholic side, and Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg on the Protestant side. Among these, it was mainly Pannenberg who worked out a complete *Systematic Theology* (in three volumes) on the basis of what might be called an “eschatological ontology.”¹⁰ Moltmann found a wide audience particularly among politically-concerned theologians, since his *Theology of Hope* appeared to be full of implications for social life, particularly in support of the victims of injustice and oppression in society.¹¹ Today, after a certain decline of interest in sociology and politics, modern philosophers in Europe and in America keep alive in various ways the interest in eschatology, thus maintaining its centrality in contemporary thought.¹²

Orthodox academic theology, however, does not seem to have been affected by these developments. Its dogmatic manuals continue to treat eschatology as their last chapter covering subjects such as life after death, the final judgment, etc. The relation of eschatology to the other doctrines of the Church—or to the present life of the believer—is totally missing.

A different approach to dogmatics is to be found, as we have seen, in Florovsky and, in regard to the Liturgy, in the work of the late Alexander Schmemmann. Both of them draw mainly from the liturgical experience of the Church, in which eschatology occupies

a central place. For both of them, the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi* must coincide and serve as the source and the foundation of dogmatic theology. Yet, in neither of them do we find a discussion of the implications that the integration of these two sources might have for systematic theology and Christian existence in its fundamental aspects. In the last century, an attempt to liberate Orthodox dogmatic theology from Western rationalism and lead it back to the patristic sources was made by the late Vladimir Lossky, who has exercised a strong influence on contemporary Orthodox thought, particularly with his book *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Lossky did indeed lead Orthodox dogmatics away from western Scholasticism, yet in the direction suggested mainly by the thought of the Areopagetic writings in which eschatology is notoriously absent. Lossky did refer at several points in his work to the future eschatological state but he hastened to explain that this state is already present in the saints who, being already deified, enjoy the light of the Resurrection and have nothing *essential* to expect from Christ's second coming. Quoting St Symeon the New Theologian, he wrote that the Parousia will not occur for the saints: "for those who always walk in the light, the Day of the Lord will never come, for they are already with God and in God."¹³

This kind of eschatology leans too heavily on the side of the "already"—at least for a certain class of believers—taking away or marginalizing two basic aspects of Christian eschatological faith: the *eagerness* of the expectation of the Parousia, which marked so vividly the experience of the first ecclesial communities (Rev 6:1; 22:17, 20), and the longing for the resurrection of the *body*

which will be granted *only in the future*. Laying too much stress on and contentment with the present state of the saints' union with God and their experience and manifestation of the divine light can lead to the position that the future Parousia will not affect the saints ontologically (that it will not add anything essential to them, but only to the rest of the world), and that their bodies *even in their present state of corruption and death* exist in perfection, not being in need of liberation from the bondage of death. In such a view of eschatology, corruption and death lose their tragic character and the future bodily resurrection is deprived of *ontological* significance for *all* human beings and creation.

This weakening of the longing for the Parousia has not been limited to theology; it has permeated also the religious life of the Christian communities, including the Orthodox Church. The widespread identification of the human being with its soul, which in the Platonic view prevailing among Christians is immortal, contributes to the diminution of the longing for the resurrection of our bodies and, thus, for the eschatological Parousia. The prayer *maranatha* (the Lord is coming, or Lord come) which dominated the worship of the early Christians has hardly any place in the petitions of Christian worshipers in our time. The salvation of the soul seems to have absorbed almost entirely the concern of the Christians, and this makes the coming of the Parousia and the resurrection of *the body* lose their existential urgency.

II. The Eucharistic Remembrance of the Future

The area of ecclesial life in which the eager expectation of the Parousia has survived, albeit without full consciousness of its significance, is that of worship and, in particular, the *Eucharist*. The *anamnesis*¹⁴ of the events of the history of salvation for which the gifts of the Eucharist are offered to God in thanksgiving (εὐχαριστία) includes not only “the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand (of the Father)” but also “the Second and glorious Coming again (Παρουσίας).”¹⁵ In the celebration of the Eucharist the ecclesial community remembers *not only the past but also the future*.

This remembrance of the future Coming of Christ is to be found in all the eucharistic canons of the East, but strikingly in *none* of the West.¹⁶ It is notable that, as far as I know, this is true for all the extant eucharistic documents from the earliest times to the present. Such a consistent divergence cannot be without theological significance. It reveals the place eschatology occupies in the two great Christian traditions, confirming Yves Congar’s pertinent observation that the East “suit beaucoup plus l’idée, très présent chez les Pères et dans la liturgie, d’une ‘phanie,’ d’une manifestation des réalités célestes, invisibles, sur la terre. Il s’ensuit une conception principalement sacramentelle et iconologique de l’Église” (the East “follows much more the idea, very present in the Fathers and in the Liturgy, of a ‘phanie,’ of a

manifestation of celestial, invisible realities on earth. This leads to a principally sacramental and iconological conception of the Church”).¹⁷

The remembrance of the future Parousia in the eucharistic liturgy goes back to the earliest biblical sources. Paul already (1 Cor 11:26) sees the ἀνάμνησις (*anamnesis*) commandment for the celebration of the Eucharist as connected with the expectation of the Parousia: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” Joachim Jeremias after a detailed exegetical discussion concludes: “‘Until he comes’ apparently alludes to the *maranatha* of the liturgy with which the community prays for the eschatological coming of the Lord. This means that the death of the Lord is not proclaimed at every celebration of the meal as a past event but as an eschatological event, as the beginning of the New Covenant.... Paul has therefore understood the *Anamnesis* as eschatological remembrance of God that is to be realized in the *Parousia*.”¹⁸

As the same biblical scholar observes,¹⁹ Paul does not stand alone in this eschatological understanding of the *Anamnesis* commandment. In another primitive eucharistic text, the *Didache*, where eschatology dominates the entire eucharistic service, the remembrance of the Parousia also occupies a central place: “Remember, Lord, thy Church to deliver her from all evil and to perfect her in thy love, and gather her together from the four winds ... into thy Kingdom which thou hast prepared for her.”²⁰ In each eucharistic celebration, the community not only asks for the coming of the future Kingdom but, at the same time, *antici-*

pates and *celebrates* its coming. God remembers the Church in his Kingdom and, at the same time, the community “remembers” the coming of the Lord in his Kingdom. The “not yet” is experienced and celebrated as an “already.”

The Eucharist, therefore, was from the beginning a representation and celebration of the coming of the future Kingdom here and now (Jn 4:23; 12:31; 13:9). As Fr Florovsky remarks, “The Eucharist ... is a hymn rather than a prayer. It is the service of triumphant joy, the continuous Easter ... a sacramental anticipation, a foretaste of the Resurrection, an image of his Resurrection.”²¹ This is why it was from the beginning (Acts 2:46) celebrated “with gladness of heart.” Vestiges of this understanding of the Eucharist are left in eucharistic services in the East as well as in the West, yet without a consciousness of the eschatological character of the sacrament any longer, as it is evident in the way the Eucharist is normally celebrated in the Church and treated in sacramental theology today.

Thus, in the way the Eucharist is celebrated today, the prevailing atmosphere lacks the joy and jubilation that characterized the primitive eucharistic liturgies. Exclamations such as “Hosanna” and “Blessed be the Coming One,” which were originally in the liturgy used to greet the coming of the eschatological Lord, have survived in the liturgical texts as doxological remnants without raising in the hearts of the faithful the eager expectation and anticipation of the Parousia. In many cases, particularly among the Orthodox today, the Eucharist is celebrated in dark churches so as to create the atmosphere of “mysticism” or even contrition,

while the splendor of iconography or of the clerical vestments inherited from Byzantium tends to be regarded as an offence to the humility displayed by Christ in his earthly life. What the Church “remembers” in the Eucharist today is no longer the glorious eschatological King but the humble and crucified Jesus. It is a remembrance of the past, not of the future.

This corresponds to the way the Eucharist is understood and presented in sacramental theology, particularly since the Middle Ages, in the West but also in the East. Maurice de la Taille expresses faithfully this theology when he writes that the *res tantum* (i.e., the ultimate meaning) of the Eucharist and all the sacraments is our union with *the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross*.²² In the discussions about the Eucharist at the time of the Reformation, the prevailing question was in what way the Eucharist ought to be related to the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. This has also been the dominant theme in all dogmatic manuals dealing with the Eucharist—Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant—ever since. The relation of the Eucharist with the eschatological Kingdom that we find in biblical and early liturgical eucharistic texts seems to have disappeared in the course of history. The Eucharist is, in the consciousness of contemporary believers, a remembrance of the past, not of the future.

III. God's Remembrance

What does “remembering” or *anamnesis* mean in a eucharistic context? In our common usage, remembering carries basically a

psychological meaning: it signifies an act of our imagination, a mental recollection of a person, a thing, or an event. As such it bears no *ontological* meaning; it does not refer to a reality but to a personal thought or feeling. Remembering someone or something does not bring about their *presence*; it does not render them actual and truly existing.

Biblical research in our time has pointed out that the verb “to remember,” which is used in the Bible frequently, indicated something more than a mental recollection of a person or an event; it was intended to *effect* something, to *create an event*.²³ This is particularly the case when the verb is used about God, but it applies also conversely to humans in their relation to God. The Old Testament, particularly the book of Deuteronomy (5:14; 7:18; 8:2; etc.), develops what may be called a theology of remembering,²⁴ and the same is true of the New Testament. God remembers his covenant (Lk 1:72) precisely in bringing about its fulfilment in Christ, and when he remembers the iniquities of Babylon (Rev 18:5) he applies his eschatological judgment. Christ’s remembering of the thief on the Cross means no less than his entrance into the Kingdom (Lk 23:42). Equally, when God does not remember someone or something (for example, one’s sins in Heb 8:12) he declares them nonexistent. God’s remembrance always has an *ontological* meaning, not a psychological one (which, if applied in this case, would imply anthropomorphism).

The same ontological content must be given to remembering when the subject is human beings in their relation to God. The remembrance of the Passover ordered by God for his people (Ex

13:8) means that in remembering it each generation of Israel must consider itself as having been delivered from servitude.²⁵ In the same way, and even more dramatically, the celebration of the Christian Passover by the eucharistic community is not simply a psychological and mental act of its members but “an efficacious and creative event” in which a redemptive act of God is experienced by those who participate in it.²⁶ Whether we accept Joachim Jeremias’s thesis that in the eucharistic *anamnesis* the subject doing the remembering is *God* (God remembers the Messiah Christ in his Kingdom),²⁷ or we understand the community as the subject who remembers (a remembrance of Christ’s death, Resurrection, and Second Coming *by the Church*), we are talking of something that happens *here and now* and affects our existence ontologically. Remembering, in this case, can and does *create a reality that matters existentially*.

IV. The Light of the Post-Easter Experience

In the eucharistic *anamnesis*, remembering is not directed only to the past but also *to the future*. It is in fact a remembrance of the past *via* the remembrance of the future. This is crucial, and it seems to have been overlooked in theology. It constitutes a central point in the present study.

The Eucharist is undoubtedly an *anamnesis* of Christ’s death, i.e., *of the past*. It is noteworthy, however, that it is *not celebrated on the day of the crucifixion but of the Resurrection*. And it was not an occasion of grief, as it befits a remembrance of someone’s death,

but one of “gladness of heart” (Acts 2:46). The fact that the death of Christ is regarded as a redemptive event is not enough to justify the absence of grief: on Good Friday, which is devoted exclusively to the commemoration of Christ’s death, the prevailing feeling in the Church is that of mourning (and it is precisely for that reason that the Eucharist is *not* celebrated in the Orthodox Church on that day). The fact that the Eucharist was from the beginning celebrated on Sunday and with “gladness of heart” was due to its being a commemoration of the *Resurrection* and of the *Parousia*. The tone, therefore, in the event is set by *eschatology*: *it was the remembrance of the future that dominated the remembrance of the past. The past was remembered via the future.*

This raises a fundamental philosophical issue. If in the Eucharist we remember past events by placing them in the setting of the future, thus allowing the latter to provide the tone and ambience in which they are recalled and experienced, this means that historical events acquire their significance for the present (they become “efficacious and creative events”) only if they are understood and experienced as part of a future event that possesses finality and ultimacy. *The remembrance of the future serves, in this case, as a hermeneutical tool for understanding and appropriating the past.* Such a remembrance of the future does not undermine history but rather confirms and vivifies it. Eschatology and history are not two alternative or opposite ideas but united in the one and the same event.

This encounter of history and eschatology, in which the latter interprets and gives ontological significance to the former, con-

stitutes the heart of Christian experience and, consequently, of theology. This is because in fact all of Christian life and thought is derived from one fundamental event: *the encounter of the risen Christ with his disciples in his appearances after the Resurrection.* Had it not been for these encounters we would have neither the historical Christ of the New Testament nor Christian worship as we know it.

It has been noted by modern biblical scholarship and must be constantly born in mind that in *all* four Gospels the historical life of Jesus, which is their subject, is presented, shaped and formulated *in the light of the post-Easter experience of the communities.* This does not necessarily mean that the historical facts of the life of Jesus are altered or distorted by the Gospels, but it does mean that they are *interpreted* and presented in the light of the encounter with the *risen* Christ. This applies also to St Paul: his Christology is based on his encounter with the risen Christ, an encounter which was a *sine qua non conditio* for genuine apostolicity and the apostolic *kerygma* (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor 9:11; 1 Jn 1:1; etc.).

Oscar Cullmann has pointed out and emphasized the importance of the post-Easter appearances of Christ for the emergence and formation of Christian worship.²⁸ We need not repeat here his arguments. Suffice to mention only the trivial use of the appellation “Lord” in our prayers to Christ or even in just our common references to him. It is normally forgotten that this term was originally used to indicate and proclaim the eschatological subjection of all things, including above all the power of death, to the risen Christ (Phil 2:14; 3:21; 1 Cor 15:2, 7). In other words

we worship the historical Christ only because he is the risen one, the eschatological Lord, and we do so on the basis of the apostolic testimony that the risen Christ was encountered by the disciples who had seen, touched (1 Jn 1), and, above all, eaten with him (Acts 10:41; Lk 24:42; Jn 21:16) *within historical time*. It is this intrusion of the eschatological Christ into history that constitutes the source of worshiping him as the Lord to whom every knee shall bow (Phil 2:10), the Lord over evil and death itself. Take away these post-Easter encounters and the entire biblical Christology of Christ's divinity—indeed the whole content of the Gospels—collapses together with Christian worship as a whole.

Christianity, therefore, in all its basic claims and existential implications, depends entirely on the experience of the intrusion of the eschata into history and the interpretation and reception of the tradition *via* its encounter with the future. To employ Hans-Georg Gadamer's terminology, it is in the fusion of the "horizon" of the past with the "horizon" of the future that the past acquires its true meaning, its *hermeneutics*. For Christian theology, the past is not understood and interpreted by being placed in the horizon of the present, as it is for Gadamer, but in that *of the future*. The present emerges from this encounter of the past with the future either as a *dialectic*, a "κρίσις" (judgment/crisis) in Johannine terms (Jn 2:19, 12:31), an either/or in the language of Søren Kierkegaard, or as a *conversion* of the past into an eschatological reality—a pure "Yes" without a "No," a eucharistic "Amen" (1 Cor 1:10) that equals a "sacrament." Time is "redeemed" neither through an escape into eternity in a Platonic manner, nor by a vertical "mys-

tical" entrance of the eternal into the present, but by becoming "now" the bearer and the receptor *of its future*, its τέλος, the ultimate purpose for which it exists, as St Maximus would put it with reference to Christology and the eschatological Kingdom. The encounter of the risen (the eschatological) Christ with his disciples brought the end, in the sense of the purpose, of creation, into the present. It became in this way the "birthplace" of what we call "sacramental" reality in which events of the past and created realities become images of the Kingdom and carriers of the grace of immortality promised for the future, "antidotes to death" in the language of St Ignatius of Antioch, albeit, as yet only "in the Spirit," that is, as an "earnest" provoking thanksgiving and at the same time the eager longing for its future fullness and reality, the cry of "maranatha" of the first Christian communities.²⁹ The remembrance of the past *via* the remembrance of the future, which the disciples experienced in their encounters with the risen Lord (Lk 24:30–32), carried with it the giving of the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22) that enabled them to "interpret" the Christ of the past (Lk 24:27; Jn 14:26) and to foretaste the gifts of the future Kingdom. When the Church celebrates the sacraments and particularly the Eucharist,³⁰ she prolongs the apostolic experience of the encounter with the risen Christ which included also "eating and drinking with him" (Acts 10:41) as an essential aspect of apostolicity. Through this experience, the future is fused with the past granting it its true meaning, its *hermeneutic*, in all its existential significance. This makes the Church "apostolic" in the deepest sense of this credal formulation, that is, a community which not only ac-

cepts and preaches the apostolic teaching but also *experiences* the grace and the gifts of the apostles' encounter and eating with the risen Lord, the entrance of the future Kingdom into time and history.

V. The “Earnest” of the Future Kingdom

All this calls for a deeper consideration of the role of *pneumatology* in theology. With the gradual weakening of the centrality of eschatology in theological discourse, it has been almost forgotten that the specific character of the activity of the Holy Spirit lies precisely in its connection with eschatology. This is apparent in the Bible and, quite interestingly, also in the Greek fathers. When the prophet Joel refers to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit “on all flesh” and the book of Acts applies this to Pentecost, the reference is clearly to “the last days” (Acts 2:18). The Spirit brings the eschata into history—this is his specific function and activity. For this reason, St Paul calls the Spirit the “earnest” (ἄρραβὼν) of the future Kingdom (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:14), the foretaste and experience in the present time of what is promised by God in the last days. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are all “fruits” and manifestations of the “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), and the body of the future resurrection is filled with the Spirit (σῶμα πνευματικόν), as opposed to the “carnal” and “psychic” bodies which are subject to corruption and death (1 Cor 15:44). Christ’s Resurrection itself involves the activity of the Spirit (Rom 8:11) and so does his birth as a human being (Mt 1:18; Lk 1:35) and, indeed, all of his earthly

ministry with its teaching (Lk 4:18) and miracles (Mt 12:28). The Spirit makes Christ “the last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45), an eschatological being “dwelling” in history. Christology is either pneumatological, or it is no Christology at all. Pneumatology is not to be added to Christology; it is constitutive of it.

The connection of pneumatology with eschatology survives in the Greek fathers with St Irenaeus, the Cappadocian fathers, and finally St Maximus the Confessor, as notable examples. Irenaeus places in his anthropology the Spirit at the highest and final state of the human being in its growth from childhood to maturity, that is, its deification.³¹ St Basil in distinguishing the specific activity of each person of the Holy Trinity in the economy, assigns to the Spirit the role of “perfecting” the work of the Father and the Son,³² which is clearly a reference to eschatology. And finally, St Maximus in interpreting the “Our Father” quite bluntly identifies the Spirit with the Kingdom itself: “let thy Kingdom come, that is the Holy Spirit.”³³

Now, the role of the Holy Spirit in Christology is not only constitutive, it is also *interpretative*. The Spirit is the unique authority that tells us who Christ is and what he did and taught in his earthly life. The Gospels, which present to us the life and teaching of Christ, were written with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21). The disciples did not really know who Christ was; as it is stated in the Gospels, they often misunderstood him (Mk 6:52, 8:18, 9:32, 10:38, 14:40, 16:14). It was only the Holy Spirit that could teach them the truth (indeed, “the whole truth,” in Jn 16:13) about Christ’s identity and his teaching: “He [the Spirit] will teach

you all and remind you [ὑπομνήσει: note the idea of remembering, again] of all the things I have told you” (Jn 14:26).

The Spirit, however, would not interpret Christ to the disciples by reminding them only of things of the past; he would also “announce [to them] *the things to come* (τὰ ἐρχόμενα)” (Jn 16:13). As we have already said, the Spirit’s specific activity is to bring the eschata into history. In interpreting Christ, the Spirit places him in the “horizon” of the future—he presents the Jesus of history as the Christ risen from the dead and as the Lord to whom everything will be subjected. Only if the disciples understand the Jesus they had known in the past as the Christ of the future would they know the “whole truth” about him. This is what interpreting Christ in the Spirit means.

We are led, therefore, essentially back to the crucial significance for all of theology of the risen Christ’s encounter with the disciples. The work of the Holy Spirit in history is to prolong into the ages of ages this encounter and, even more than that, to allow and enable the Christian community, those who would accept the apostolic testimony of his encounter, *to share themselves in it*, to have the same experience of seeing the risen one and dining with him in the banquet of his Kingdom, in other words, to bring about and sustain the Church.

VI. The Reversal of the Direction of Time

If the subject of the risen Christ’s discourses with his disciples during his post-Easter appearances was the Kingdom of God and

if the Holy Spirit in interpreting Jesus brings into history the eschatological Christ and his Kingdom, the task of theology cannot but be an interpretation of the received faith, the apostolic *kerygma* and experience, in the light of eschatology. As the post-Easter encounters of the risen Christ with his disciples did not simply involve verbal conversation but also seeing, touching, and, above all, “breaking the bread” and eating with the risen Lord, theology cannot but draw in its interpretative task from the Church’s liturgical experience in which the Holy Spirit prolongs in time and space those encounters. Theology must be an interpretation of the ecclesial (eucharistic in particular) experience in which the remembrance (in the sense explained above) of the future (Kingdom) acts as the hermeneutical “horizon” for the appropriation and proclamation of the apostolic *kerygma* at a particular time and situation.

The entrance of the eschata into history through the post-Resurrection appearances of the risen Lord and its prolongation into time and space by the Holy Spirit as a remembrance which brings about an “efficacious and creative event” implies a radical revision of our common conception of time. In Aristotle’s definition of time as a movement from the earlier to the later, which is also basically our common conception of time, the “now” that stands between the past and the future is empty of ontological content, since, as Aristotle points out, there is “nothing”³⁴ (οὐθὲν) in it that can be measured and identified. This schema cannot accommodate the experience of time in the post-Easter encounters of Christ with his disciples. We need a new conception of time



which would allow for the future to fill the “gap” of the “now,” i.e., to give to time a content which would replace the Aristotelian οὐθέν. There is of course a “mystical” approach to this experience of time, according to which the “now” is filled with “eternity” in a kind of “eternal now,” which is very often used to describe the experience that takes place in worship, quite frequently also by the Orthodox. In the case of the post-Easter experiences, however, the “now” is filled quite specifically not through simply a “mystical” experience but with the presence and experience of a *future* event, the second coming of Christ and the bringing of the Kingdom into history. This is a *reversal* of time, a movement not from the earlier to the later, as Aristotle sees it, but *from the end to the present* or even to *the beginning*, as St Maximus would describe it.³⁵

It is obvious that our intellectual formation which is determined by protological thinking does not possess a concept to indicate this movement from the later to the earlier or to the “now.” The concept of *prolepsis*, which is regularly used (particularly by Pannenberg) does not seem to be fully satisfactory, since it does not indicate that the initiation of the movement lies not with us but with the future kingdom which “visits” us. The same observation would apply also to the term *anticipation* which is preferred by others (e.g., Florovsky). We would need to employ a concept that would indicate the reversal of the direction of time from the end backwards, but this would require the development of an *eschatological ontology*—an ontology, that is, in which the truth of being lies at the end and not at the beginning.

The reversal of time from the future to the present does not

apply only to the post-Easter encounters of Christ or to the liturgical experience of time. It permeates the entire biblical Christology—for example, the way Christ is presented in the Gospels and in the Pauline corpus. We normally describe the birth of Christ as “the miracle of Christmas,” presenting it as a manifestation of God’s *power*. This, however, is not how the authors of the Gospels speak of Christ. For them, Christ is the “Son of Man,” or the “Messiah of *the last days*,” the “last Adam” in Paul’s Christological anthropology. The emphasis in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew in particular) is placed on the fulfilment of the prophecies about the Messiah in the person of Jesus, that is, *on the coming of the last days which the prophets had foreseen*. The Kingdom of God was expected in the future, but it was also present in Jesus’ person (Lk 17:21).³⁶ In a typically Hebrew way of thinking, the “divinity” of Christ was implied in the authority to judge the world, to forgive sins, etc. (Mt 9:5)—all of these were eschatological and at the same time divine powers displayed *now* in Jesus of Nazareth. In Luke’s Gospel, Symeon in holding Jesus in his hands asks God to dismiss him as he has seen and carried in his hands the Savior whom God had prepared for his people and all nations (Lk 2:29). And in the Fourth Gospel, with the exception perhaps of the Prologue, which is probably an independent piece of work, the eschatological Christ is present in the community, through the Spirit granting it the grace of communion with the eschatological Son of Man already now. Paul, on the other hand, speaks of the “Day of the Lord” as dawning already (Rom 13:13; 1 Thess 5:3, 5:8) and of union

with the Coming Christ which is both eagerly awaited and experienced in his life (Gal 2:19; Phil 1:23, 3:7).

These are only a few examples of the crucial importance that the entrance of the *eschata* into history had for biblical Christology. This entrance cannot be conceived without the implication of a movement of time from the future to the present. But it is not only Christology and the liturgical experience of the Church, or indeed the Church herself, that must be understood in the light of this reversal of time. All the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith must be viewed in this perspective. This would lead to a revision, sometimes a drastic one, of the way many of these doctrines have been usually presented in theology. The following may serve as representative examples.

The doctrine of *creation* is normally presented as an act of God completed in the past. Eschatology in this case does not affect the ontology, the *being* of creation but its *well-being*, its *θέωσις* as participation in the divine glory—an idea particularly familiar to Orthodox theology. If, however, we ground our doctrine of creation on that of Christology,³⁷ as we find it in Pauline thought (Col 1:15) and in the cosmology of the Greek fathers, such as St Irenaeus, St Athanasius of Alexandria, and, particularly, St Maximus the Confessor, creation is conceivable only as incorporated and recapitulated in Christ, the Logos of God—that is, only when the economy of Christ is consummated. God is still working with Christ (Jn 5:17), and the Sabbath of his rest will come in the future.³⁸ This is how the Fathers, ever since the Epistle of Barnabas understood the Sabbath,³⁹ attaching to it an *eschatological* mean-

ing, as we find it in St Maximus the Confessor's detailed and profound discussion of the term.⁴⁰

God creates only complete and perfect entities. Creation is perfected only in the *eschata*—this is why its eschatological state is, according to the Fathers and against Origen's position, higher and better than the original one. In fact, as Maximus profoundly observes, it is only by looking at the eschatological state of creation that we can arrive at the knowledge of its beginning, its *raison d'être*.⁴¹ Only through a movement from the end to the beginning, from the future to the past, can we “interpret,” (i.e., understand) the mystery of why creation exists at all, of why it came into being in the first place, and why—this is important—it exists *in time* and has a *history*.

All this brings us back to what we already noted concerning the reversal of time from the future to the past brought about by Christ's appearances to his disciples after the Resurrection: only by the entrance of the *eschata* into history can the past be “interpreted” and understood. This hermeneutical principle which pertains to liturgical time and to Christology must be applied also to the doctrine of creation.

The same importance must be given to eschatology in dealing with the doctrine of the fall. We normally understand the fall as the loss of an original perfection owing to the disobedience of the first human beings to God's commandment, the cause of the appearance of all the evils in our existence, including corruption and death. Such an understanding of the fall is at odds with the scientifically established fact that corruption and death existed in

creation long before the appearance of the human being and were not caused by human behavior. The idea of an originally perfect world was common to ancient mythology and religion, but, in spite of any *prima facie* evidence to the contrary, it was essentially foreign to both biblical and patristic thought. For both of these, creation and the human being were brought into existence with a call to *become* perfect, to grow into maturity, as Irenaeus would put it. For both the Bible and the Fathers, creation and the human being were called to a future state of existence much higher than the original one.

The fall, therefore, cannot consist in the loss of an original perfection; it must be seen rather as a refusal or a failure to obtain the perfection to which the human being (and creation) was called to arrive at in the end, a deviation from the movement toward the end and a subjection to what is already given as a *reality*. This is how the ingenuity of a thinker like St Maximus the Confessor perceives the fall: “The first human being,” he writes, “having deprived (ἐλλείψας) the movement of its natural power of *the energy toward the end* (τῆς πρὸς τὸ τέλος ἐνεργείας) was diseased with the ignorance of its own cause.” Evil, therefore, is nothing else but “the deprivation (ἐλλειψις) of the energy toward the end.”⁴² The human being has fallen not from its past but from its future; it refused to move to the end to which it was called, or for which it was created.

The deviation from the direction toward the future has automatically meant the subjection of humanity to what was already there, to *reality*. Since what was already there when the human

being appeared was a state of corruption and death (the condition of animalhood from which humanity evolved), the fall “introduced” corruption and death by making it a *given* reality to which humanity was enslaved. The existential condition that resulted from this amounts, therefore, to *turning reality into a necessity* for the human being. Truth must now coincide with reality: *adequatio rei et intellectus*. Knowledge begins with the data provided by our senses and must not contradict them (Aristotle). Faith becomes a provocation to reason, and reality puts boundaries on human freedom. Humanity revolts and tries (unsuccessfully) either to free itself from its oppression in a Dostoevskyan reaction or to modify or improve reality (by successive reforms and revolutions), never being fully happy with it. The essence of the fall consists in humanity’s enslavement to the past, its *exiling* of the future to the domain of the unreal and denial of it having an ontological effect on existence.

I have dealt elsewhere⁴³ with the importance of eschatology for the doctrine of *anthropology*, particularly if we approach the human being as a *person*. Only if we consider the human being from the point of view of its *telos*—not from what it actually is but from what it aspires to be—can we do justice to what it means to be human. The human being is distinguished from the other animals by its refusal to accept reality, including death itself (which it fights through creativity and art), faith in survival after death, and belief in immortality. In the words of St Gregory Nazianzen, the human being is ζῶον θεούμενον (an animal deified).

Eschatology is, thus, a constitutive element of Christian anthropology. The human being *par excellence* is Christ, the “last Adam” who has conquered death and deified humanity in himself. Take out this unity with God, this eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit, and the human being becomes an animal; it is no longer human, says St Irenaeus.⁴⁴ Humanity is not definable without its relationship with God, which makes Christian anthropology essentially a chapter or an aspect of *Christology*: the human being *par excellence* is *Christ*, a person united with God in the Holy Spirit. The human being as a person—not as an animal—is not truly human “until Christ is formed” (Gal 4:19) in it. Until that happens, humanity exists in a state of conflict between what it actually is and what it aspires to (cf. Rom 7–8), leading a life of tragic impasses, experiencing its freedom as a choice between given or imposed alternatives, between confirmation and negation, hope and despair. All this remains inexplicable without making eschatology a decisive constituent of the human condition. For the Christian, unlike, for example, the hero of the ancient Greek tragedy who is bound by the past, human existence is inwardly regulated by the future, which in the person of the risen Christ enters history offering a revelation and a “taste” of what it means to be truly human.

VII. From the Omega to the Alpha

The claim of Christian doctrine and experience—liturgical, in particular—that the future enters into history (as it did with Christ’s

appearances and encounters with his disciples after the Resurrection) lending it meaning and exercising an existential impact on it, gives rise to questions of a philosophical nature: *credo ut intelligam*. The Church is not only apostolic; it is also *patristic*. The apostolic kerygma must be interpreted, that is, cast in the intellectual framework and culture of a particular time and place, and this is what the fathers of the Church did. Patristic theology is a work of *hermeneutics* in which the apostolic experience and faith is appropriated by being placed in the “horizon” of the way of thinking, of the Hellenic culture in which the Fathers were brought up and to which they were called as Christians to interpret the apostolic kerygma.

The intellectual framework in which the Fathers had to cast the apostolic faith was dominated and shaped by what we normally call *Greek* or *Hellenic* thought, in which we must include also *Latin* thinkers and authors of that time who, in spite of differences in approach and mentality, share essentially the same worldview with the Greeks. It was this worldview and intellectual framework that gave birth to and shaped also our own culture, which justifies the late Fr Florovsky’s controversial statement that, “Hellenism is the common background and the basis of the whole Christian civilization. It is simply incorporated into our Christian existence.”⁴⁵ In fact, it is the entire basis of our way of thinking in modern thought. This makes the fathers of the Church indispensable in any effort to interpret the apostolic kerygma even in our time.

Now, “Hellenism means philosophy,”⁴⁶ and it was in this field that the hermeneutics of the apostolic faith had to be applied.

This was a difficult task, particularly with regard to eschatology. Greek thought was intrinsically resistant to the idea that the future could enter into history and have an ontological impact on the past or the present. This is because Greek thought was *protological* in its ontology. Greek (and, for that matter, also Roman) thinking was past-oriented and placed perfection at the beginning of history, or even before it. Truth as ἀλήθεια was conceived as a recollection of what was already there and emerged from oblivion. Human destiny was already determined by the gods in the past, binding human beings forever. Philosophers and tragedians converged at this point: that there is no “substance” in the future and that hope is a concept irreconcilable with reason. (Friedrich Nietzsche was not exaggerating in his *Birth of Tragedy* in detecting a pervasive pessimism in later Hellenism.⁴⁷)

Now, probably under the influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition, later Western philosophy and theology did discover and emphasize the importance of the future. And yet, even in this case, the protological ontology of classical Greek thought has fully survived and made an indelible mark on our way of thinking. Thus, even in philosophies which have emphasized and made prominent the future, as, for example, in the various forms of social utopianism (Karl Marx, Ernst Bloch, etc.) or scientific evolutionary theories (Charles Darwin, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, etc.), the end always evolves from the beginning in the form of a process or development, a teleology as Aristotle had conceived it, in which the Omega follows upon the Alpha, the future stemming from the past, eschatology emerging from protology. Any suggestion that

the past derives from the future, or that the future makes the past, remains still a scandal and a paradox for our common-sense rationality.

This seems to also be the case with regard to theology. The revival of eschatology in the previous century brought up its significance in many respects (ethical, dogmatic, ecclesiological, socio-political, etc.)—we see this particularly strong and successful in the work of Moltmann—but threw little light on the subject of ontology and the possibility of working out an *eschatological ontology*. Process theology is based on the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead whose concepts are largely derived from and modelled upon those of natural science and not of history.⁴⁸ Pannenberg was perhaps the only one to suggest an eschatological ontology by proposing and developing the principle that, “the future makes the past” and making resurrection the starting point and the focus of all of theology. Pannenberg’s thought has, therefore, many affinities with what is being proposed in the present study. But, as the careful reader of this book will note, there are also certain divergences (probably due to the different Christian traditions from which the two authors draw) that affect eschatological ontology in a decisive way.

As we shall see in more detail, one of the most crucial questions concerns the role of *history* in eschatological ontology. In my view, the future of the eschata is not a prolongation of the historical future into eternity; it is rather a future that *visits* history from outside or beyond history. There cannot be in this case a “fore-conception” of the final future or a “development of the

process of God's revelation and its coming to fruition."⁴⁹ The historical future does provide us with an *epistemological* tool with which to understand the past (the idea of destiny, finality, etc.), but it cannot provide the basis for an *ontology*; it may give *meaning* but not *being* to the past.⁵⁰ The historical future is itself subject to becoming "passed" standing itself in need of redemption by the final future. This cannot happen unless the eschatological future is of a metahistorical order, that is, free from the teleological predicament of the past which is *death*.

Pannenberg lays stress—indeed he builds his entire system—on revelation as history, but revelation is not the same as ontology. Revelation appeals to knowledge, ontology to existence, to being or not being. It is, of course, true that for a great part of the history of Western philosophy going back to Aristotle, ontology is understood as metaphysics, ending up with notions such as substance, essence, etc.—*concepts* graspable by the mind. Ontology, however, as Martin Heidegger insightfully conceived it, cannot operate without reference to *death*. Being is ontologically tied up with death in historical existence, and this means that the historical future may give *meaning* to the past (Heidegger himself would admit that by his concept of anticipation) but not a *being free of death*.⁵¹

The Resurrection, however, is precisely not about knowledge but about the abolishment of death; it is not simply about revelation. As such, the resurrection does not bring a future which is "fore-conceived" or "anticipated" as a prolongation of the future of history, but grants *being*—not just meaning—to history as a

whole, including what was once historical future. The future that the resurrection brings with it is a future that comes from "beyond" history; it grants history itself a true future, an end without end.

Eschatology, therefore, is about a future that *comes to* history and does not *come from* history. The risen Christ is ὁ ἐρχόμενος, "He that Cometh" in order to give *being* to history by liberating it from what negates being, death. History is "real"; it is not a phantom or a "vanity," but its being is not self-explainable. It does not come to it from the past; its beginning, like that of creation, is tied up with mortality. Unless there is resurrection, history is bound to collapse. If history's ontology is protological it cannot provide a future that grants it being. The eschatological future that will give being to history must not be regarded as an outcome of historical development—just as God himself cannot be the future of history—but as *grace*, as God's *visit* (cf. Lk 1:68, 78; Heb 2:6) to history, as a sharing in the life of God whose being is above history. Eschatology is in a sense a transcendence of history; it affirms history by liberating it from the mortal bondage of finitude.

All this finds its highest illustration in the case of Christ's death and its relation to his Resurrection. The death of Christ is not only for the remission of our sins; it is also, and perhaps above all, for "eternal life." With Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, not only sin is washed away but also human mortality. We have in this case an event not of juridical significance (as it is usually presented) but of *ontological* importance, a life-giving death.

This should not lead to an exaltation of Christ's sacrifice to the point of making it even an attribute of God's very being, as we find it, for example, in Moltmann's staurocentric perspective. As we have argued here, being and death cannot be reconciled ontologically. The death of Christ may display a loving God who shares the suffering and evil—even the mortality—that dominate history, but it cannot *qua death* liberate it from mortality granting it being. The Cross by itself cannot provide history with an ontology.

This was realized by the ontologically-minded Greek fathers. They believed in Christ's death as life-giving, and thus ontologically significant, *yet only on the condition that the Resurrection was already acting in it*. As Florovsky remarks in presenting the Church fathers' doctrine of Redemption,⁵² the death of Christ on the Cross was not like our death; it was the death "of the Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:8), i.e., of the one who rose from the dead. The three days in the tomb are the days of the Resurrection: Christ descended into hell raising the dead of the past, the dead of "history." It is not accidental that Byzantine iconography represents Christ's Resurrection as his descent into hades and the liberation of Adam from death. The Resurrection, therefore, was not a successive stage in Christ's life following upon his Cross and his burial; it was already present in Christ's death, as the factor that made this death ontologically significant. Had there not been the Resurrection, the death of Christ would prove that history is condemned to succumb to its finitude, to "being-unto-death."

VIII. An Epiphanic Ontology

History needs the "breaking in" of the future into its course in order to acquire an ontological content, a being without death. This is not a "prolepsis" or even an "anticipation" of the future *by* history; it is an acting of the future *on* history, an impact *on* history coming from outside history. The future does not come into history "by observation" (cf. Lk 17:20) but as "a thief in the night" (1 Thess 5:2). It is, therefore, better to speak of an *epiphany* of the future (cf. Lk 1:79; 2 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 4:1, 8; Tit 2:13), in the sense in which the term was used in the Hellenistic world with reference to the appearance of a god or the solemn visit of a king.

Now, such a terminology to describe the relationship of history to eschatology would allude to *vision* rather than thought or mental impression of reality, and to symbolic representation, as in art. This would not necessarily lead us away from philosophical thought. In fact, vision was the source of classical Greek philosophy, as the origin of the term *idea* (ἰδέα) indicates. It was only later in Western philosophy that "idea" came to mean a product of intellectual action, usually strictly differentiated from artistic representation and vision. This has resulted in the dissociation also of ontology from categories of sight and image in our way of thinking.

The use of the notion of "image" (εἰκὼν) in the framework of a theology (and philosophy) of history appears explicitly in the thought of St Maximus the Confessor. In one of the *Scholia* attrib-

uted to him and confirmed in its content by the rest of his work, Maximus writes the following:

The things of the Old Testament are shadow (σκιά); those of the New Testament are image (εἰκών); truth is the state of the things of the future.⁵³

The philosophy of history that underlies this view of the *Heilsgeschichte* entails an understanding of history as a movement not from the past to the future but from the future to the past. The movement of history is neither circular leading history back to the beginning as in classical Greek thought, nor linear, driven and directed by the necessity of a prescribed “entelecheia,” as in utopian or evolutionary thinking. By being described with the use of a term such as *eikon*, history is presented as a tree which has its roots in the future and its branches in the present. We are confronted with an ontology of history which frees it not only from any natural necessity but also from human manipulation, while allowing it to be the realm of the exercise of human freedom. Like an icon in which the person is present in a way that transcends the material form in which it is presented,⁵⁴ history contains the future without engulfing it and turning it into a part or a phase of history. Such an *iconic ontology* serves a double function: it allows the human being to turn time into the realm of human creativity while subjecting this creativity to the truth of the future.

This “epiphanic” or “iconic” approach to the relation of eschatology to history makes history the ground of revelation without allowing truth to be “grasped” or “conceived” by the human mind,

thus making room for the *apophatic* and the ineffable, and infusing into history the experience of *awaiting*, of eager expectation, of the *maranatha*, of prayer and *worship*. An iconic ontology keeps alive the “not yet” within the experience of the “already” of the Parousia.

IX. Eschatological Hermeneutics

The entrance of the future into the course of time affects our understanding of history in its relation to the notion of *being*, to what we call *ontology*. In what sense can we say that historical events have a true being, given the fact that historical time is in constant flux?

Classical Greek thought had to wrestle with this problem precisely because it attached to being a permanence and unchangeability that excludes uncertainty and doubt. Since history consists of events that undergo change and transience, attaching ontology to history would be absurd. And yet the ancient Greeks did develop historiography and were interested in the explanation of historical events, in the “reason” why events happened the way they did. It is precisely at this point that ontology and history interact on each other in classical Greek thought.

Classical Greek historiography sought the “reason” (λόγος) or “cause” (αἰτία) of historical events, either in eternal laws governing the universe such as retribution (τίσις) and nemeses (as described by Herodotus), or in human reason, enabling us to foresee the outcome of a historical event, albeit often defeated

and crushed by the forces of irrationality (as described by Thucydides); or in fortune (τύχη) (as described by Polybius). Personal history, as depicted vividly in classical tragedy, was also regarded as being ultimately governed by what the gods had decided for an individual in the past. In all these explanations of historical events, their reason (λόγος) *preceded* the events themselves. History had its *raison d'être* in the past; the present had its cause in the past, and it is the past that directs the present toward the future: the ontology of history is *protological*.

Judeo-Christian tradition had a different philosophy of history. The meaning of historical events, their “reason,” ought to be sought not in the past, in preexisting causes, but in the *future*, in the end of history. Historical events have a *purpose* which lies at the end of history: it is the last act of God that reveals the meaning of the preceding events. The ontology of history in this case is *eschatological*.

This biblical view of history found its way into the patristic period not without difficulty. For those who were under the influence of Platonic thought, such as Origen and his followers, history had a movement toward the future, a teleology, but this movement was *cyclical*, with the end turning out to be a return to the beginning (περὶ ἀρχῶν). The underlying ontology of this view was *protological*. The first explicit and fully developed eschatological philosophy of history is to be found only in St Maximus the Confessor in the seventh century, who engaged in a refutation of the Origenist view and elaborated an understanding of history as having its “reason,” its *logos*, in the end and not in the beginning.

The seeds of this interpretation of history had been already sown by St Irenaeus in the second century—a deeply biblically-minded theologian—but it was in Maximus that it received an extensive philosophical elaboration. According to this interpretation, the beginning as well as the course of history could only be explained by looking at their end. We had, for the first time, a full-blown eschatological ontology.

This eschatological philosophy of history was not destined to last long. The interest in history was revived and received prominence in modern times, but, probably under the influence of the Enlightenment, the causes or reasons of the historical events were no longer sought in any metaphysical principle but *in the events themselves*. Historical events were *reified*, possessing a “substance” of their own, an ontology, being turned into “facts” which could not be undone. History became, thus, a sum of facts with their own ontology, which the historian had to discover and respect. Even in cases such as Utopianism, in which the facts and history as a whole possessed a teleology, a future, the ontological source of this teleology lay in the facts themselves, just as the branches of a tree owe their being to the roots or the seed from which they come. Just as in philosophy the truth, according to its medieval definition, consists in the *adequatio* of our mind with the objective reality (the *res*), in the same way the historian must discover and recognize the events of history as true in themselves.

This reification of historical events reached its peak with eighteenth-century historicism and has never abandoned our common-sense approach to historical truth: facts cannot be doubted

nor undone; they possess being, an ontology of their own. An approach to history as consisting of *personal* (i.e., free and creative) human intercourse, developed particularly by Robin George Collingwood and Benedetto Croce in early twentieth century and continued later by G. Florovsky, has contributed to the liberation of history from reification without, however, leading it thereby to the direction of eschatology. It was mainly hermeneutics that opened the way to an eschatological perspective of history.

Hermeneutics emerged from the observation formulated by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) that, in order to understand historical life, we must understand its totality,⁵⁵ and this requires viewing the whole from the perspective of its end. This approach is used by Heidegger in his analysis of “being-unto-death,” according to which there can be no understanding of our existence without the orientation toward the ultimate. There is, therefore, an essential relationship between the understanding of our finitude, our “being-unto-death,” and our interpretation of our involvement in the world. As finite beings we require the mediation of hermeneutics to understand the world and ourselves. Thus, our origin (*Herkunft*) always comes to meet us from the future (*Zukunft*); hermeneutics presupposes a kind of eschatology in order to function. “The past as authentic history is grounded in the possibility ... to be futural. This is the first principle of all hermeneutics.”⁵⁶

From this perspective, historical events or facts do not possess a “being,” an ontology of their own. Nietzsche’s famous dictum, “there are no facts, there is only interpretation,” may be made

to apply to hermeneutics albeit with important qualifications. In eschatological hermeneutics, historical facts are not denied but acquire their truth, their meaning, their “wholeness,” when viewed from the end of history instead of being conceived and “established” at a stage of incompleteness and fragmentation, in their past. (Only at the moment of one’s death can we have the full and true picture of a person’s, or an institution’s, etc., historical identity, according to Dilthey.) Even in Heidegger’s hermeneutics, the end does not negate the past, since our “being-unto-death,” our futurity, throws us back to our heritage (our past, tradition, culture, etc.) so that we may, in an act of freedom, renounce its pastness through a productive response to previously unrealized possibilities. This idea of a “productive history” (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) serves as the basis of Gadamer’s development of hermeneutics, although the eschatological foundation of hermeneutics is not as clear here as in the case of Heidegger. Yet, even for Gadamer, the future affects the past in a decisive way, as in every interpretation the already understood and the alien, the different or other and the new merge in hermeneutics offering endless interpretative, i.e., truth value, possibilities. Hermeneutics opens history to the future, to infinite possibilities.

The affinities of philosophical hermeneutics with Christian theology are only slowly beginning to become apparent and affect theological methodology. Theology, on the whole, still operates with a view of tradition—be it Scripture, the Fathers, or doctrine—formed in the past and possessing an “ontology,” a fixed identity and content. Eschatology as a hermeneutical tool is still awaiting

its full application to systematic theology, and this need comes from the very center of the Christian faith.

It is a fundamental characteristic of the Judeo-Christian tradition to assume and operate with a view of history as a totality, a “whole” with a beginning and an end, and to assert that it is in the end that the meaning of history is disclosed. It is, therefore, through the end that we can understand the beginning and the past: eschatology interprets history. Up to this point, theological and philosophical hermeneutics concur.

When, however, we come to the Christian faith, we are faced with fundamental differences between theological and philosophical hermeneutics, at least regarding the way the latter has been presented by Heidegger and Gadamer. The first difference has to do with the way we understand the future as the basis for interpreting history. For Heidegger, the futurity of being is identical with *death*: it is our finitude that draws us back to the past in order to understand, or interpret, our historical existence (an infinite being does not need hermeneutics.) For the Christian faith, it is the *abolition of death* by the Resurrection that leads us back to the past in order to interpret history. The consequences are existentially important. In the case of Heidegger, the future brings us back to a state of existence in which we are still under the threat of death, struggling to overcome it, moving *toward* the end and never experiencing it as presence but always as a *possibility*. History is only an *anticipation* and not a real presence of the future, a “not yet” and never an “already.” An “already” would threaten the temporal character of being, which is, for Heidegger, fundamental

to ontology.

For Christian theology, time needs redemption. While being a relational and unitive factor in existence, time also separates beings in many ways, above all through death. For this reason history cannot acquire an ontology without the abolition of death, and this is precisely what the Resurrection offers to time: its redemption from death. By entering history, the Resurrection grants it *being-without-death*, thus providing hermeneutics with the “horizon” of *communion* between past and present persons and events, granting life and being to what death naturally divides, turning tradition from a museum relic into a living reality. It is by acquiring a future through the entrance of the Resurrection into history that the various generations and epochs meet one another, forming a common *culture*.

There is, thus, a difference between a “history of effects” (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) that emerges from “anticipation,” as with Heidegger, and a culture and tradition that draw their existence from an entrance of the future resurrection into history. In the first case, history is, at best, a purely human achievement and, at worst, a “natural,” ontological necessity (cf. evolutionary historicism). In the second case, that of the entering of the future resurrection into history, history and its creative effects are not simply human achievements subject to mortality but *gifts of God* coming to humanity (and creation) through the risen Christ, which are offered back to God in thankfulness and gratitude. The hermeneutical “horizon” becomes, in this way, *eucharistic* and history becomes *Christocentric* in its very being.

Such a “eucharistic” approach to hermeneutics means that cultural achievements *can* acquire eschatological significance provided that they are freed from mortality, from “being-unto-death.” Eschatological hermeneutics involves the discernment of historical effects, since the coming of the eschaton comprises also the *judgment* of history, its purification from whatever smacks of death. Cultures and traditions are not sanctified automatically and generally; an acceptance of history *qua* history, as we find it in many contemporary theologians (Orthodox included), is incompatible with eschatological hermeneutics.

Since the entrance of the future into history through the Resurrection of Christ, this purified history has been sanctified, and it is no longer necessarily a carrier of mortality. Fr Florovsky is right in insisting (against existentialistic tendencies in modern theology) that “the *Heilsgeschichte* is still going on.”⁵⁷ But this cannot be made to include all the historical events and historical products, and thus all of history *as such*. Florovsky himself recognizes the problem, as he refers to St Augustine’s efforts to offer a survey of historical events in the story of the “two cities.”⁵⁸ Is history to be divided into two compartments, as Augustine seems to suggest? Is there a “secular” and a “sacred” history living side by side, sometimes in agreement and sometimes in conflict? This seems to be the general assumption in most of modern Christian theology, but it has its problems, if placed in the light of eschatological hermeneutics. History is one, but it is, in its present state, ambiguous in its nature. Good and evil are still intermingled in it. The question whether history is “good” or “bad” is a false di-

lemma, because it is both; it contains being and nonbeing side by side. Viewed from the angle of eschatological ontology, which claims that being is true being only if it is ever-being, history possesses truth and being (an ontology) only, however, because of the entrance of the eschaton into its course.

We may conclude, therefore, that instead of the “two cities” image (of two histories running in parallel), we may conceive of history as a single entity, a tree whose fruits are fed by its roots which lie in the future, while its environment provides it with the ambiguous (positive as well as negative) conditions for its existence in time. The image of the “seed” to describe the presence of the Kingdom in history is biblical (Mk 4:26–32; Lk 8:5–11) and suggestive almost in every detail of the above description. The hostile environment (the “winds,” the “hard rocks,” etc.) is provided by history together with the fertile ground (“the good earth”) for the seed of the Kingdom to grow and bear fruit. History is an ambiguous entity and does not lend itself to ontological or moral categorizing. It is through its relationship with the Kingdom that history acquires its ontological (and moral) status.

This leads to the significance of the *Church* in eschatological hermeneutics. If the Church is conceived as an eschatological community existing in history (*in* the world but not *of* the world: Jn 15:18; 17:6,14), and if history is “judged” and confirmed ontologically through the entrance of the Kingdom into its course, it follows that the Church provides *by her very existence in history* a hermeneutical tool, a “horizon” in which historical events and actions are “received” and “transmitted” (by παράδοσις, that is,

creatively interpreted) as events and actions of *communion*, not only among human beings (historical), but also with God and his Kingdom (eschatological). By placing the past in the “horizon” of the future, as happens in the Eucharist, the Church receives and incorporates all historical acts and effects *that can fit into this “horizon” of communion*, blesses and “sanctifies” them by incorporating them into herself as Christ’s body, and thereby grants certain forms of culture not only moral quality and “value” but indeed life eternal,⁵⁹ which is true being.

X. Death and Resurrection

The employment of the notion of being and ontology with reference to history and to philosophy itself has been strongly attacked in our times, thus also putting into question the idea of eschatological ontology: what sense can the idea of being make in a philosophical context that has exorcised ontology? Since the notion of ontology occupies such a fundamental place in the present study, its rejection by modern thought cannot be bypassed.

This questioning of the idea of ontology is encountered, in our time, particularly among phenomenological philosophers and post-modern thinkers. Emmanuel Levinas regards the notion of being as implying a “totalization” that threatens otherness, while theologically inspired philosophers, such as Jean-Luc Marion, propose a “God without Being.”⁶⁰ Post-modernism also in its various forms takes a negative stance against ontology trying to protect “difference” from the domination of “identity” and stability, and

ultimately of truth.

The reasons given for this categorical rejection of ontology show that the only kind of ontology known to Western philosophy is the *protological* one. This kind of ontology does, indeed, involve some form of totalization that is detested by contemporary thinking, since it presents being in terms of “substance” and leaves otherness and particularity outside ontology, making it secondary and dependent upon the general and the “whole.” Protological ontology *does* display this trait ever since Parmenides and the pre-Socratics, with classical Greek philosophy in its entirety sticking faithfully to it. Being in this case is a “given” to the particular human being, imposed on it and thus a threat to its freedom. No wonder, therefore, that a thinker such as Levinas would react strongly against Heidegger’s *il y a* (there is) as an ontology implying generalization and a “tyranny” over the other, the particular, the “hypostatic.” This leads this philosopher to the categorical rejection of ontology by seeking refuge in the Platonic “beyond substance” (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας) combined with the Cartesian idea of the “infinite,” which is presented as breaking into existence through the appearance of the “other.”

Levinas’s rejection of ontology is, thus, worked out with the help of protological ontological categories (the priority of the infinite over being). Eschatology does appear in his thought but it does not seem to determine his system. It is tied up with what he calls “the messianic time” in which “the perpetual is converted into the eternal,”⁶¹ entering into the continuity of time through or in the form of the other who makes us his “hostage.”⁶²

Eschatology, thus, does not refer to a “future.” It is “either a new structure of time or an extreme vigilance of the messianic consciousness,” which “forewarns against the revenge of evil which the infinite time does not prevent (*interdit*) from returning.”⁶³

This “breaking into” the course of time of what Levinas calls “the messianic time (or consciousness)” resembles the Christian idea of the entrance of the Resurrection into history. There are, however, fundamental points of difference which affect the concept of eschatological ontology. The first point was already mentioned and has to do with the idea of the future. For Levinas, the association of the idea of eternity with that of infinity manifests itself *within time*: “the infinite being is produced as time.”⁶⁴ Against Heidegger, Levinas insists that, “it is not the finitude of being that makes the essence of time ... but its infinity.”⁶⁵ Time is discontinued; there is no *ekstasis* of being in time. The infinite interrupts the course of time, and it is through its interruptions that time acquires infinity.

According to Levinas, this interruption of the course of time by the entrance of the infinite brings about a “nothing,” a “dead time,” which the infinite transforms into a “resurrection”: “the nothing of the interval—a dead time—is the production of the infinite. The resurrection constitutes the principal event of time ... Death and resurrection constitute time.”⁶⁶ Underlying this is Levinas’s idea of *fecundity*, in which “the infinite being is produced as time, that is in a number of times through the dead time (*le temps mort*) which separates the father from the child.”⁶⁷ In the father-son relationship “being is produced as multiple and as divided

into Same and Other.... It is society (*société*) and, through that, time.”⁶⁸

Death, therefore, is not for Levinas an ontological problem; it must not be reduced to the scheme of “being versus nonbeing.”⁶⁹ Death is the *non-response*: the separation from the other, *the death of the other*, which “individualizes me in my responsibility towards him”—“the culpability of the survivor.”⁷⁰ Far from being an annihilation, as in the case of Heidegger, death gives birth in and through fecundity to my identity as I (*moi*) and, at the same time, to my responsibility for the other and, thereby, to *ethics*.

Resurrection, therefore, is not for Levinas something to be expected in the future; it occurs as part of the continuum of time that is interrupted by the entrance of the infinite. The “messianic time” is identical with this interruption, the entrance of the infinite bringing about the “messianic consciousness” as a “prewarning” against the revenge of evil, the return of which the infinite time cannot prohibit. Levinas dissociates death from being and the resurrection from the future, removing, thus, the ground for the construction of an eschatological ontology.

Christian theology takes a different view. Death is regarded by the Christian faith as an ontological problem because it turns “beings” into “nonbeings” (τὰ ὄντα into μὴ ὄντα: Rom 4:17). However, in the resurrection, God raises the dead (τοῦ ἐγείραντος τοὺς νεκρούς) and “calls nonbeings to be beings.” As Marion notes,⁷¹ the Bible does not know the concept of being in its metaphysical sense (τὸ εἶναι), while it does refer to “beings” (τὰ ὄντα) in their concrete particularity. This points to an ontology (the notion of “being” is

ontological by definition) of *beings* rather than *being*. Death is not “annihilation” (as Heidegger conceives it), but this does not remove it from the scheme of “being versus nonbeing” (as Levinas suggests). We are rather faced with an ontology in which the particular being is *constitutive* of “being,” a *hypostatic* rather than an *ousianic* ontology.

In previous writings⁷² I have tried to show that for the Cappadocian fathers, for example, being is not, as it is for Thomas Aquinas, something that beings “have” (*ens dicitur quasi habens esse*), but rather something that beings “are,” *a category that applies to particular beings by definition*. Ontology, according to the Cappadocian fathers, replies to two questions simultaneously: *what* (τί) someone or something is (the οὐσία or φύσις) and *how* (ὅπως or πῶς) someone or something is (ὑπόστασις).⁷³ The first of these two does not ontologically precede the second, and the second (the particular) does not derive from or “contain” the first. As St Basil explains in writing to Apollinarius (*Ep.* 361 and 362), the beginning or origin (ἀρχή) of the particular human beings is not to be found in human substance, either “standing above” (Platonic) or “standing underneath” (Aristotelian), but *in a particular being, Adam*. It is the particular hypostasis that makes beings *be*.

This, not only does not allow us to give priority to the one God (*De Deo uno*) over against the Trinity—something that Scholastic theologians did not avoid⁷⁴—but it also makes it unnecessary to speak of “God without being.” The concept of being can be applied to God (as was in fact done by the Greek fathers) without introducing thereby the impersonal and totalizing *il y a* that rightly

alarmed Levinas, while making it possible (contrary to Heidegger’s objections) to employ ontology in theology.

All this affects the concept of eschatological ontology: in what sense is eschatology an ontology? If the central act of eschatology is the resurrection, in what sense can it be said that resurrection grants *being*? We have seen that Paul (Rom 4:17) speaks of God as giving life to the dead and thereby calling “nonbeings as beings (τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα).” This means that death amounts to nonbeing and resurrection to granting being. Is Christian theology, therefore, closer to Heidegger who identifies death with nonbeing than to Levinas who dissociates death from the structure “being versus nonbeing”? To speak of death as annihilation would lead to understanding the resurrection as a sort of *creatio ex nihilo*. This would not do.⁷⁵ Christ’s Resurrection itself retained, in a very real sense, some kind of continuity with his pre-Resurrection body (Lk 24:39; Jn 20:27). And the Creed speaks of the resurrection *of the body* or the “flesh.” In what sense, then, is a dead being nonbeing and its resurrection an ontological fact?

Florovsky rejects the idea that the human soul can constitute the ontological ground of the human being. In death, he writes, “only the body can disintegrate. Yet it is not the body that dies but the whole man.”⁷⁶ This means that the survival of the soul is not enough to allow us to speak of the survival of the human being. Death disturbs the ontology of the human being, and the resurrection of the body restores not just a part of human being, but its very being itself: *without eschatology the human being simply disappears*. Florovsky bases this on the evidence of early fathers, such

as Irenaeus and Athenagoras of Athens for whom, “if there is no resurrection (of the body) human nature is no longer human.”⁷⁷ This allows Florovsky to speak of death, “as a metaphysical catastrophe.”⁷⁸

But how can it be said that death is an ontological catastrophe if it is not, as we have seen, an annihilation? How can we associate death with nonbeing and resurrection with being if being somehow continues in spite of death? These questions arise inevitably only if being is conceived in itself apart from the *concrete mode* of its existence. Such an understanding of being as pure *esse* inevitably suggests nothingness as its opposite. Nihilism arose in Western philosophy precisely because of this kind of ontology. (Gottfried Leibnitz’s question “why there is something rather than nothing?” leads directly to nihilism as the alternative to being.). If, however, we associate ontology with the idea of *beings*, of *hypostasis* as a primary ontological category, then the ontological question is not why there is something rather than nothing, but why something is *in this particular mode of being and not in another one*. If the mode of being (the *hypostasis*) is not a secondary and derivative ontological category but an ontologically constitutive one, death can be an ontological problem even if it does not involve annihilation. The “metaphysical catastrophe” would consist in this case in the loss of the *particular way of being*, the unique and uncommunicable identity of particular beings, their *hypostasis*.

The eschatological resurrection, therefore, must be seen as a resurrection not of being, but *of beings*. This does not make it less

ontological in character, since, as we have argued, particularity or “mode of being,” what the Cappadocian fathers called *hypostasis*, is a primary ontological category: its absence is tantamount to the status of a $\mu\eta\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$, a nonbeing. This witnesses to an ontology other than the substantialist one (which has nothingness as the alternative to being). Since a hypostasis is constituted through its relationships, death and resurrection affect the *relationality* of being: they dissolve and restore respectively the *relations* that constitute the “mode” of a being. To put it briefly “no one lives to himself and no one dies to himself” (Rom 14:7). Life and death are not simply individual experiences; they affect the way beings relate to one another, their *hypostasis*, that is their very ontological ground (cf. Rom 5:12f.; 1 Cor 15:21f.).

The death (and the resurrection) *of the other* acquires this way a crucial significance. Levinas is right in pointing out that we have access to the reality of death only through the death of the other. His interest is, of course, in the quest of meaning rather than being (it is, in his view, meaning that leads to being and not the reverse),⁷⁹ and he sees in the death of the other an *ethical* rather than an ontological significance. Being for him is totally incommunicable from one being to another,⁸⁰ and the idea of communion carries for him no ontological import whatsoever.⁸¹ In our perspective here, however, being not only is communicable but *depends* on communion. The death of the other causes the break of my relation with him, and it is in *this* sense that it is tantamount to my own death, to the removal of the ground of my own being,

since as a being (a *hypostasis*) I acquire my being only through relationship with the other.

Eschatological ontology, therefore, presupposes as its basis the idea of “*being as communion*.” The resurrection is not, as we said, a *creatio ex nihilo*—the being it grants is not the opposite of nothingness. The resurrection is *a restoration of the relationships that constitute the “mode of beings” (their hypostasis)*, which are broken by death. When Christ raises the dead young boy at Nain (Lk 7:11f.), the evangelist adds with meaning that after that “he gave him to his mother.” The resurrection is a restoration of communion, not simply the revivification of a corpse. We miss its meaning entirely if we regard it as the raising of “individuals,” of autonomous entities.

The eschatological resurrection is a resurrection *in Christ* (1 Cor 15:22f.). The life it offers is nothing else than the incorporation into the body of Christ. *Theosis* is essentially *incorporation into Christ* and only through its participation in the life of God as *filiation*. This Christological ground of *theosis*, which is often forgotten in theology, implies that the eschatological state of existence is a *corporate* way of being, a life of communion. It is for this reason that the Holy Spirit is operative in the resurrection both of Christ and of the eschata (Rom 8:11f.): by being life-giving (Jn 6:63; 2 Cor 3:6) and at the same time *communion* (2 Cor 13:13), the Spirit makes the being granted by the resurrection relational, a *communio sanctorum*.

The entrance, therefore, of the eschatological future into history through Christ’s Resurrection brings with it the assurance

that death does not break the relations that make up our “way of being” (our *hypostasis*) in an ultimate way but only temporarily (as a “sleep”—κοίμησις), and that at the present state of our historical existence the Holy Spirit keeps alive and “guarantees” (2 Cor 1:21) our relationship with those who have departed, by placing them in the *communio sanctorum*, in the body of the risen Lord. By being “remembered” in the context of the communion of the body of the risen Christ, those who have died maintain their “mode of existence,” their *hypostasis*, through their communion with the living ones within the Body of Christ, in the Spirit. The survival after death granted by the entrance of the risen Christ into history is, thus, conceived in terms of an ontology of communion (the survival of each one’s *hypostasis*) rather than of substance;⁸² it is given as participation in Christ’s body through the communion of the Spirit. The Church as the body of Christ and the *communio sanctorum*, particularly through its eucharistic *anamnesis*, emerges as the historical *locus* of the *proclamation* and the *experience* of this mystery and gift of God’s love to the world—the gift of ever-being through Christ’s Resurrection.

XI. Toward an Eschatological Ethics

The entrance of the eschaton into history through Christ’s Resurrection and post-Easter appearances brings into time not only the *message* and the *hope* but also the *experience* of the future Kingdom. How is this experience manifested in historical existence? We have noted so far the importance of *worship* and, par-

ticularly, the *Eucharist* as ways of experiencing the entrance of the future into history: the eschaton is *remembered*, *celebrated*, and *participated in* as an “already” which is present and at the same time eagerly expected, as the assurance of the final victory over death, as the liberation of history from its antinomies, and as the transformation of being into *ever-being*. All this affects the human experience of time and history, as the past acquires onto-

logical significance by being liberated from death and the historical “facts” or “events” cease to be “passed” by obtaining a future. In the same way, not only facts but also *beings* in general who exist in time under the domination of death are resurrected into the relations that constitute their particularity, their “hypostasis.” Eschatology acquires in this way an ontological significance; *it becomes ontology*.