



ONTOLOGY OF TIME AS MEANING TOWARDS ETERNITY

[ONTOLOGIA TIMPULUI CA SENS SPRE ETERNITATE],

Prof. Ph.D. Ionuț VLĂDESCU, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană,
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BOOK REVIEW

Prof. PhD. Ioan Alexandru TOFAN,

Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences,
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi,
ROMANIA

E-mail: atofanro@yahoo.com

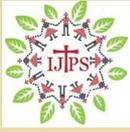
The book of Mr. Ionuț Vlădescu bears an austere title: *Ontologia timpului ca sens spre eternitate/Ontology of Time as Meaning towards Eternity* (Presa Universitara Clujeană, 2024). In fact, it is a reviewed edition of an older version, based on his PhD researches. Thus, the reader may expect an academic discussion with regard to difficult concepts and old and rooted problems of theology. In reality, they shall meet a different kind of address.

The terminological distinctions, analyses of movement and of the new semantics taking place at the borderline between the classic Greek thinking and the Christian thinking, they all come under the question that persists in the architecture of our daily existence: “What is our attitude as Christians and where do we stand in the inexorable passing of time, in a historic framework that encompasses, on an average, 50 – 60 years for each?” (p. 15). In this way, time and eternity lose their conceptual rigor and fill up with an existential content, and the classic problems of theology and philosophy re-articulate.

The two coordinates of the book’s themes (ontological and dynamical) find themselves into an exclusively somewhat unusual relationship. Actually, the author (a tried educator, as his background proves it) proposes a much clearer progress of questions, on rather intuitive coordinates: time “as building” and time “as progress”.

The two dimensions get a theological synthesis in the event of Embodiment that separates and, at the same time, gathers together the old world and the new world. Mr. Vlădescu sums it up to: “Time finds its axis in Christ. Before Christ, history goes towards Him, it is Messianically oriented and drawn towards Him, it is the time of gestation, of previsions and of expectation. After embodiment, everything internalizes, everything is directed by the categories of void and full, of absence and presence, of non-accomplishment and accomplishment, and in this case, the only true content of time is the presence of Christ throughout His expansion” (p. 176).

With Christ, time becomes transparent to eternity, it internalizes and transforms altogether the chronological progress in the draw of the present. From this moment, eternity



is no longer a far-away reference, but it is already here, now, and the way in which it is met becomes totally different. This new draw, accompanied by the loud calling of a new answer is the face that this issue gains in Christianity.

The Greeks (but only them, as Mr. Vlădescu shows), used to find a reconciliation with time, if not through a theoretical construction, at least through a calming conceptual distinction. The Christian man, on the other hand, does not have such instruments at hand. The relationship between time and eternity becomes the interest of a decision that must be taken without delay: “the Church lives time as an active draw towards Parousia since the present is no longer the now of the chronological, equidistant and neutral moment, but bears the draw of the prophecy of the Kingdom to be and it is already quietly present in the Eucharist” (p. 192). Penitence represents to the Christian a rather temporary experience than a moral existence. And that is because it is not the strict expression of respecting a law, but an immediate, irresistible need of renewal that knows the paradox of an empirically attested death, but void of reality and an unseen eternity, that yet gathers in itself the entire reality. The call to penitence is one of the radical messages of the Gospel. In the philosophical-theological language in which Mr. Vlădescu reformulates it, it is no longer a frightful call; it becomes, more gently, a necessity of acknowledging an existential situation. Yet, it does not lose its urgency too: “The time of death becomes the time of penitence in the mystery offered by God to His being. Penitence is to Saint Gregory a spiritual birth with full power in the plan of human existence, the narrow perimeter of this life fallen in time, between birth and death, being the most adequate occasion.” (p. 209).

In relation to the fall of temporary building and necessity of penitence, eternity proposes the bright image of holiness. Just as penitence, holiness is also alien to a strictly moral reference. It is not a prize obtained after some ethical performances. On the contrary, it is a paradoxical manifestation, a theophany (as Father Scrima called it): “Holiness is that which on a human and cosmic level makes for the presence of the Holy Spirit in time” (p. 220). Its grounds can be found in a radical internalization of the human condition, in bringing the world into an inner space where it totally changes its meaning because it meets its transcendental origin.

As far as time is concerned – the central theme of the book – holiness has its own meaning: liturgy. It is it that reveals the interiority of time, making it transparent for eternity. By its eschatological rhythmicity, by the hymnography that constantly emphasizes the actual presence of transcendence, but even more so by the invincible event of the Eucharist, liturgy transforms time into eternity. And together with penitence and clean breath of holiness, it answers the question from which Mr. Vlădescu starts in the first paragraphs of the book.