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Church and Time (Georgios I. Mantzaridis, Professor)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Today is New Year's Day for the Church (1st day of Indictos), so we publish an article of Emeritus Prof. G. Mantzarides on the role of time on christian spirituality.

CHURCH AND TIME

The coming of Christ brought the kingdom of God into the world, and the place where the kingdom of God is made mani-fest is the Church. It is the Church that introduces eternity into history and offers history the perspective of eternity. The Church is the Body of Christ, which transcends place and time and joins mankind to a communion that is beyond time, a transcendent communion where all things are present in the Holy Spirit. In the Church, time and the whole cosmos are redeemed. Whatever God has offered to the world is to be found in the Church and passed on to man for his salvation and regeneration.



The kingdom of God is not simply awaited as something that is to come; it is also

perceptible as something now present. The resurrection and regeneration in Christ as well are not only awaited in the future, but are also already offered in the present: «The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.» [1] The voice of Christ, which has already been heard, and has summoned men from death to life, will also summon those who are in the tombs and grant them life. The hour which is coming, but which is also already present, is the hour of the presence of Christ. It is Christ himself. The *eschata*, the last things, exist in the last Adam, Christ. The things hoped for are already offered in his person. The period of the presence of Christ and his Church is the period of the «last days» [2] It is the period during which God and his kingdom are made manifest in history. [3] It is the beginning of eternal life, which cannot be interrupted by death. [4]

The Transfiguration and Resurrection of Christ are already manifestations of the kingdom of God in the world. And the times after the coming of Christ are the last times. The manifestation of the glory of God in the Church with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, like the personal manifestations we encounter in the saints of the Church, are eschatological events. And the experiences of these events are experiences of the last manifestation of God, which, since they take place in space and time, where corruption and death continue to exist, are of the «knowing in part» [5] kind. Thus, the *eschata* are at once present yet awaited, experienced yet expected.

The founding of the Church brought about the communion of God with man. The uncreated and eternal God was united ontologically with created and mortal man. Eternal life manifested itself in temporal life. Created and mortal man thus becomes through grace uncreated, eternal and everlasting, or, in other words, unoriginate, because the grace which regenerates his existence is uncreated, eternal and unoriginate. There is nothing left anymore to prevent the joining of created and uncreated, temporal and eternal, present life and life to come. The time of the realization of these events is 'last' time. The day and the hour are 'last.' Nothing else is awaited, neither Messiah, nor Paraclete, nor Antichrist. All things are present—Christ, and the Paraclete, and the Antichrist. Christ is present with the Holy Spirit in the Church, and the Antichrist is present too as an evil spirit that makes war on the Church. [6]

The presence of the Antichrist constitutes an eschatological phenomenon not so much in itself, as in relation to, or, to be precise, in contrast with, the eschatological presence of Christ. All those things which the incarnate manifestation of God in history have a share in bringing about (i.e., his Crucifixion and his Resurrection) create the last times, the last day, the last hour, which exists

here and now.

The *eschata*, then, the last things, are not limited to the end of history, but exist already in the life of the Church. The last times encompass the whole period following the coming of Christ. And Christ who is «the Alpha and Omega ... which is, and which was, and which is to come,» [7] is the Lord, the beginning and the end of history. Whoever has Christ, has life. [8] The experience of this life already exists in the Church. The renewal and deification of man in Christ, which is awaited in the age to come, is already lived in this life: «Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.» [9]

Although it is revealed to the world «through a glass, darkly,» [10] the kingdom of God does not cease to be truly present. The symbols whereby it is offered to us are neither metaphors nor analogies, but real symbols. The uncreated light of the Transfiguration, the Resurrection, Pentecost, and that which is seen by the saints of the Church, is the light of the kingdom of God. It is the real symbol of its presence.

1. John 5:25.

2. See Acts 2:17. 2 Tim. 3:1. Heb. 1:2. James 5:3. 1 John 2:18. Athanasios, *Against the Arians* 1,55, PG 26, 125C.

3. See Matt. 16:28. Mark 9:1. Luke 9:27.

4. See S. Agourides, «Chronos kai aioniotis (eschatologia kai mystiko-patheia), en ti theologiki didaskalia Ioannou tou Theologou,» *Epistimoniki Epetiris Theologikis Scholis*, vol. 3, Thessaloniki 1958, p. 156.

5. 1 Cor. 13:9.

6. «Little children, it is the last hour and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour.» 1 John 2:18. Cf. *ibid.* 4:3. For more on the Antichrist, see my study «Orthodoxi theologia kai koinoniki zoi», Thessaloniki 1989, pp. 126-135.

7. Rev. 1:8.

8. 1 John 5:11.

9. 1 John 3:2.

10. 1 Cor. 13:12.

From Emer. Proff. G. Mantzarides' book, 1996, *Time and Man*, transl. Julian Vulliamy, South Canaan, Penns.: St Tikhon's Seminary Press.