

## Time's Reason to Be – The Eternity of the Holy Trinity

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**Abstract:** For Orthodoxy, the eternal Christ does not abolish our time, but fulfills it, capitalizes on it again and redeems it. True events no longer disappear, but are kept in God's memory (prayer for the dead requires God to “remember them”). Positive time surpasses, neutralizes negation, destruction, and shows that human eternity does not mean the absence of time, but its fulfillment: the messianic feast will see at the same table Abraham, Isaac, James, and people of all historical ages. Eternity is solidary with time, without being confused with it. Eternity is the origin and perspective of time and the force that moves time towards it. In the end, eternity will overwhelm time, give it its quality. Then there will be no more time, because we will have in us only love.

**Keywords:** eternity, time, salvation, history, freedom, holiness.

The eternity of the supreme Person, more precisely, the eternity of the supreme personal communion is not thought about as an amorphous, unconscious eternity, devoid of freedom and of an inner relation. Everything revolves around the mysterious means through which the Eternal trinitarian God creates time and sustains it as the path that advances through every man in connection with others towards Him. Such an existence, certainly, may open to a relationship with the temporal person, called to an increasingly accentuated communion with other persons alike, but also to the personal supreme and absolute Communion.

The possibility of a relation, as stated by Father Dumitru Stăniloae, between the supreme and eternal personal Communion and the temporal one is given by the fact that both are consciously open to good, the first being able to descend from an impulse of the good towards persons created to aspire towards a growth in the good of the communion, and the second, capable to raise towards the good of the

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supreme Communion. Personal consciousness is, by itself, willing to open to other consciousnesses, towards a communion with them and this is united with the good.<sup>2</sup>

In God, possibilities to manifest and communicate the good are given, but He chooses them as required by the changing situations of creatures. This could even express to some extent the creation of time, or of the changing beings by God, eternal and unchanged in His being, but infinite in His possibilities of manifesting the good, found as a source in His being. It can even explain a relation between time and God's eternity, without questioning the unchanging of His being. Had the world been eternal, it would no longer be the work of His will and there would be no difference between it and God, and the inadequacies in the world would have their cause in His being (including the evil in it). But time and the world are not eternal, statement which avoids the eternity of incompleteness and evil and their attributions as being God's.

In the conception of the Fathers there is a close connection between the infinity of God and the fact that divinity is incomprehensible to the mind. C. Stead<sup>3</sup> argues that St. Gregory of Nyssa is the first to "introduce a new factor when describing God as infinite" which naturally follows from the fact that he is entirely transcendent. However, the continuity in which the Cappadocian Father stands in relation to Origen in this regard cannot be overlooked. Origen is the first to say that God is "infinite"<sup>4</sup> in His being and works: there is no limit to God's glory, and His providence for all creation is "from infinity to infinity and beyond", He is omnipotent<sup>5</sup>. St. Gregory follows him when he speaks of the glory and power of God in terms of infinity, without limit: "the glory of the power of God is infinite", the power of God is "infinite". Moreover, infinity is an ontological feature of the divine nature because while "human nature is small and easy to describe, the divinity is infinite; therefore, it cannot be grasped by any man"<sup>6</sup>.

Andrutsos' phrase, "God is only logically anterior to the world" is not the happiest to explain the relationship between the world and divinity. The creation of the world in time can be reconciled, in the opinion of Dumitru Stăniloae, with the admission of a "before" in God through the teaching about the difference

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<sup>2</sup>Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos – lumina lumii și îndumnezeitorul omului*, Editura Anastasia, București, 1993, p.43.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, Cambridge 1994, p. 202.

<sup>4</sup> Origen, *Contra Iulius Celsus* III, 77, in PSB 9, trad., studiu introductiv și note de Pr. Prof. Teodor Bodogae, Editura IBM al BOR, București, 1984, p. 188.

<sup>5</sup> Origen, *Fragmenta ex commentariis in Proverbiae*, 18, (PG 17.204) transl. by A.F. Gregg, *Journal of Theological Studies*, 3, London, 1953, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> Sf Grigorie de Nyssa, *Marele cuvânt catehetic*, 10, trad. G. Teodorescu, Editura Sophia, București, 1998, p. 112.

between the being and the uncreated works of God. Thinking of an “everlasting age”, when God conceived the world, we do not introduce time into the eternity of His being. The Holy Apostles also write in the New Testament that God “chose us in Christ before the ages” (Ephesians 1:11; I Peter 1:19-20; Revelation 13:8). But this “before” when God conceived, does not introduce time into the being of God, nor does His anterior thinking introduce it to what is happening in the world after the world appeared. On the contrary, time protects God from evolution, or from an appearance in Him of something at the moment when He accomplishes that thing in time, thus allowing it to be as He thought about that thing previously.

God did not introduce into Himself, when He created the world also time, a temporal “before”, because He conceived them “before the ages”. For this, however, he was not compelled to create the world before the ages, for the contemplation of the world and of time, or of different times before the ages was not a necessity for His being, but an act of His will. The idea of the world and of time conceived before the ages was not a necessity, and therefore they did not come out of God as everlasting need. Here is the mystery of the Person of God, compelled to think and work something by His very Being, thus having in His being immediately a “before” of any thought and work, but a basis for them.

Starting from the account in Exodus 3:14 “I AM the existing One”, St. Gregory of Nazianzus says that they express eternity as eternally present, above the subdivisions of “was” and “will be” of the time experienced by human beings, in this way, due to the instability of nature in continuous transformation. God, Who “is eternal” is “existence without beginning and without end, He is like an endless and boundless ocean of being, which transcends all thinking about time and nature”.<sup>7</sup> The very notions of “without beginning” and “without end” as descriptive attributes of eternity are simple outlines from the perspective of the creature, the unspeakable of the divine life which, being neither time nor part of it cannot be contained, measured, in a word conceived by man, a temporal being by definition. Eternity is, through the economy of an analogy, what time is for man as a created being: an extension of the uncreated divine life: “namely, everything that flows together with the eternal, as a movement of time and as an interval”.<sup>8</sup>

Time and eternity are defined in this passage by antithesis and analogy: eternity is neither time nor part of time because it does not belong to creation but to the uncreated God. Nevertheless, it can be seen as an extension, as an extension of the divine life altogether, beyond the flow of temporality in the sense that the

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<sup>7</sup> Sfantul Grigorie de Nazianz, *Cuvantare la aratarea lui Dumnezeu* 1, I, 29 in *Taina m-ans, Cuvantari*, trad,note si comentarii de pr. dr. Gheorghe Tilea, Editura Herald, Bucuresti, 1999, p. 179-180.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, 1, I, 31, p. 180.

movement of time and the interval that borders it are inseparable from the temporal condition of man.

In order to define the notion of “infinity” vis-à-vis the one of “eternity”, Father Dumitru Stăniloae makes a relevant statement inspired by the thinking of Saint Maximus. He answers the philosophical dilemma of the relationship between the actual infinity and the potential one that “...endless discussions...” start from the misidentification of the continuous aspiration to the absolute with the limit of this aspiration. The present infinity of God is the expression of our inability to express the richness of plenitude, in which there is no interval of course, at the end of which to begin another interval<sup>9</sup>. This divine plenitude is better expressed by the notion of stability, not in the sense of stone-stillness, but “a stability in the sense of persistence in one’s own being [...] a stability that does not exclude perfection<sup>10</sup>”.

Man, although living in a limited condition, especially temporally, is called to reach God’s plenitude. The word “infinite” is only the expression of this impotence of creation, and “eternity” is associated with the plenitude of the intra-trinitarian divine communion as the living infinity of love. The spiritual rhythm of human life is given by the transforming movement, sustained by the longing for the absolute whose expression is the concept of infinite potential. In this way the eternity of God allows time to exist.

Father Stăniloae shows that “eternity cannot be deprived of the most essential dimension of the inexhaustible character, which must be at the same time a dimension of life in plenitude. An eternity devoid of free and conscious life is at best an ambiguous eternity, devoid of the fullness of existence, so in essence a false eternity. Even the eternity of pure reason is a monotony that kills and is therefore limited. True eternity must be the quality of a perfect subjectivity, for only this is totally incorruptible and possesses the most essential dimensions of the inexhaustible character and of the infinite novelty of manifestation: interiority and free will. Only the subject is totally uncomposed, inexhaustible in all its possibilities, and free”<sup>11</sup>.

Inexhaustible plenitude is the perfect communion of perfect Persons and is a movement of divine love above all movement, above any temporal determination. In the Trinity there can be no question of overcoming the communion already achieved towards a fuller one. The *raison d’être* of time is only eternity because

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<sup>9</sup> Sfantul Maxim Marturisitorul, *Răspunsuri catre Talasie*, trad. și note de Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, ediția a II-a, Editura Harisma, București, 1993, p.439.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem.*, nota 592, p.504.

<sup>11</sup> Pr. Prof. D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, editia a II-a, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, vol.I, p.122.

“... Only because it is through Him – the plenitude is above all determination and becoming, of every increase and decrease – God was able to create a world destined to share in His eternity understood as the fullness of interpersonal communion [...]. Only an eternity in this sense makes it possible to understand time.<sup>12</sup> St. Gregory Palamas says that the deified becomes without beginning and without end.

In summary, Florovski synthetically approaches what has been presented so far and states: “The idea of the world, God’s thinking and will regarding the world are obviously eternal, but not in a co-eternal sense and not absolutely connected with Him, its idea being distinct by His will from His «being». This distinction does not introduce any separation or cutting into the divine existence ..., which expresses the distinction between being and will ... The idea of the world is based not in essence, but in the will of God. He conceives the world in perfect freedom and, only by virtue of this completely free thought ..., He becomes Creator ... He could also not have created ... And the restraint from its creation would not have altered or impoverished the divine nature”.<sup>13</sup> If the above is true, God, deciding by His will to create the world and time, could think of them before creating them on the basis of the power given in His being, but He was not compelled to think of them and he brings them to fulfillment by work, or to emanate them, or to give birth to them by being.

At least on a semantic level, the Greek language has tried to resolve this antinomy, distinguishing between the eternity of God’s being, His thinking and His will concerning the world and time, before the ages, using for the former the term eternity, and for the latter, the term ageless ages. The world is thought “before all eternity”. God’s thinking about what is special about Him underlies “eternity”. The world also takes place through the thinking and work of God in a way in Himself and through it in eternity, which is not thought of or does not exist without a relation to time, whether it is future (thought by God as future) or present, or past. “Thus, God not only descends in time, thinking of him, giving him existence, or raising those who have lived in time, in Himself, but he has it since He thinks of it in a way in Himself, dependent on Him, full of Himself. Time is similar, especially until it is only thought and after it has been lived by the beings created as another eternity.”<sup>14</sup> In this way, we pray to God for an eternity of His being that He possesses, or an eternity in a fundamental sense “before” the thinking and creation of the world, placed in an eternity conceived as a connection of God with

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p.124.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 45.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p.46.

the world or the world with God, without which it cannot be thought, realized and perfected.

This eternity implies a relationship of God with the world and with time, before their existence, without taking Him out of His own eternity, exclusively His, or His being's. But this means that God willingly sits, not through His "infinite being or infinite before the ages"<sup>15</sup>, in relation to the time of the world, contemplating to give the temporal world real existence. If He hadn't conceived the world and time before the creation, the world would no longer be a creation, but an emanation. If He were to create the world once with its conceiving before the ages, it would also no longer be creation, but emanation. God is also free from time, not producing it when he thinks of it, but time also acquires great value, being thought of by God before the ages.

To understand the interpenetrations and inter-conditions between time and eternity we must consider their relationship and their relation to the eon. In this sense, the words of Saint Maximus the Confessor are particularly eloquent: "Time, when it stops moving, is an eon, and the eon, when measured, is time carried by movement. Thus, the eon is, to put it briefly, time without motion, and time, the eon measured by motion"<sup>16</sup> or: "Deification, to put it briefly, is the concentration and end of all times and all ages and all that is in time and eternity"<sup>17</sup>. This means that the eternity that will be installed at the end of time will be a concentration of all time, together with the efforts made by men, a concentration penetrated by the eternity of God, with which man entered into full communion.

In other words, the eon becomes time when creation appears with its movement, and time becomes an eon when creation stops in its movement, in God Who is above movement, as One who has in Him everything from eternity to age. The aeon pre-exists as time virtuality in the bosom of divine eternity, without being confused with it, as a reason of time related to the reason of the cosmos (Acts 17:26).

Time, no doubt, began with the created world. However, without a pre-existing eternity, he could not have begun. But he is not just a simple period in the endless periods that have been and will be. Eternity before and after time is

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<sup>15</sup> Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, 60; P.G. 90, 621 urm., in Filoc. rom., vol. III trad. și note de Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, ediția a II-a, Editura Harisma, București 1993, p.46.

<sup>16</sup> Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua*, apud. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, p. 187, Idem., *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, 59, în Filoc. rom., vol. III, p.315, apud. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *op.cit.*, p.187.

<sup>17</sup> Idem., *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, 59, în Filoc. rom., vol. III, p.315, apud. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *op.cit.*, p.187.

something other than time. But eternity explains the time that comes from it and ends in it. It was in it as a virtual eon and ends as an eon updated and perpetuated with all the realities lived as unfolded time.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae says that eternity is the basis of time, and this, as the unfolding of the eon, is a kind of extended scale of eternity, or of a work of it, towards the created world. It is a scale extended by the eternity of God made available to me, according to my measure, by a work of God at my level, because I cannot yet live eternity as such. But the highest relationship between the divine and the human person can only be a relationship of love and can pursue nothing but union in full love, the vision of the intimate connection between eternity and time meant to become an eon imbued with eternity, it can be transcribed in terms of this relationship. In other words, God's eternity can be conceived as present in our time through the offering of his love, which provokes and helps our response. As creatures, we are limited, but at the same time, we are able to outdo ourselves and tend to outdo ourselves. It introduces time, that is, the past with a dissatisfaction for what it was and the degree to which we have given ourselves, and the future with a tendency to be more.

The eternal God is placed in an expectation in relation to us. Under these conditions, the relation between Him and time also appears. From this it is seen that God keeps time bound to His eternity. Eternity accepts time in it, namely, God accepts the creature, who lives in time, in His eternity, although time also represents a spiritual distance between created persons and God. Eternity is thus both in time and above time. There remains a distance between us and God, but at the same time, this distance takes place within love, therefore, within the eternity of God. Distance is, therefore, time, as an expectation of eternity directed towards creatures and as a hope of the creature directed towards eternity.<sup>18</sup>

But, on this path of ours to eternity, God himself lives with us the expectation and therefore the time, in the plan of its energies or of his relations with us. This is because He Himself voluntarily experiences the limitation of the offer of His love. This is a kenosis voluntarily accepted by God for creation, a descent (*katabasis*) in relation to the world, lived simultaneously with the eternity of His trinitarian life. He lives them both by making them feel the offer of His eternal love even in our temporal moment. But this means that, in the need to answer, we also live not only our temporality, but also the eternity from which this offer comes, even if we answer only half, or refuse to answer.

Time means for God the length of time between His knock at the gate of the soul and our act of opening it.<sup>19</sup> He does not forcefully enter the hearts of men,

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<sup>18</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *op.cit.*, p. 190.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p.191.

time also implies in this respect the respect granted by God to conscious creatures. Union with Him in love cannot be achieved without people's free response to the offer of His love. But God, waiting, lives time without forgetting His eternity, without coming out of it, while we, when we hear His voice, live a time without the consciousness of eternity.

Our time is still a reality for God, but He also remains above time. He is above even by the fact that man is moved inwardly by God's offer, or by His call, by the fact that we are moved in response to God's eternal love. Father Dumitru Stăniloae tells us that through the action manifested by the continuous call, God is like a bow stretched over the interval between His offer and our answer, between eternity and time. Only when we become totally insensitive to this offer, when we no longer have any preoccupation to answer, are we no longer hanging on to God's work, and are we no longer bound by it in a move toward eternity.<sup>20</sup> Thus, God makes His eternity effective in the fact that we are led to exceed the duration between the offer of His love and our response, and therefore to the exceeding of time. We are led to this transcendence by the power of His intra-terrestrial love, so by the eternity of God, His love, and His life beyond time.

The "fulfillment of time" for the coming of God as a man shows that mankind was not allowed to advance alone towards Him, having only a distant help, but it was necessary that He came to it also as a man, in time, to lead man from his maximum closeness to His eternal life. Time is eternally conceived by God, not only as a framework in which men advance toward God somehow by themselves, but also in order to be assumed by Himself, to give them, from His immediate vicinity the power of advancing with Him to eternity: "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20)<sup>21</sup>. The fulfillment of His time and purpose by the Incarnate Son of God is also a fulfillment of him by the loving Trinity. For once the Son as One in the Trinity has become a participant in human time, the Trinity itself participates in our time, but filling it with the unchanging eternity of His love, thus raising us from now on to this eternity, though we do not live it unchanged and fully, but we often fall from living in Him fully.

The moment of the Incarnation of the Son of God could be considered a center of time, but the New Testament calls it rather the after age, but not the very end of time. This is because, after the coming of the Incarnate Son of God, time has been filled with God himself, to Whom it was made to reach. Not only has God entered into time, but time has entered into God's eternity, though it has not

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p.193.

<sup>21</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, Editura Cristal, București, 1995, p.74.



yet reached its end. If a modern time — without a transcendent God coming into it — is not capable, as the motion of an essence, of any real progress toward an ultimate goal — in Christ, as the One transcendent of time through His all-perfect deity, time reached its ultimate and culminating goal for the humanity assumed by Him and towards that culmination, He helps to bring closer those who cling to Him, still in the course of history, and thereby leads them to eternity beyond time also with the body, after the resurrection at the end of history. This gives the whole time, as its goal, the eternity, or the plenitude of the endless life of those in it, in the loving God in His Trinity of perfect Persons.

Christ brought eternity into our time through His godliness, into humanity assumed at the Incarnation and fully through the Resurrection, but He also showed us how we can advance to eternity through our time. He attained eternity with His humanity by the total goodness and sacrifice with which this was imprinted by union with the divine hypostasis. He has shown us that the eternity to which we are called is one with perfection, and that we must make every effort to advance, with His help, toward the perfection which He has shown to us as Incarnate. Through His incarnation, He has shown to us what time is given to us for and also its significance and importance for our endeavours to reach an end. The eternal One assumes our time, not giving up eternity, but giving meaning and eternal value to those lived in time, according to eternity, which makes them worthy of eternal duration. By this, He shows the connection between the two, He shows the value of time for eternity, He shows time as a servant of eternity, though not necessarily, but through the freedom of human persons; He shows the good, done in time, capable of an eternal value and duration.

Paradoxically, there is a situation in which time completely loses its valences and characteristics. This happens when man responds to God's call of love with a continuous refusal that fixes the spiritual creature in a total inability to communicate. In this case there is neither expectation nor hope, because there will be nothing new and so it can be said that then there will be no real time, because there will be nothing from eternity in him, and he will be empty of any content. This is the time that has become insignificant, useless, through its total vacuum, through the absence of any movement, of any direction, of any target. This will be, as Father Dumitru Stăniloae tells us, a wretched eternity, which is just beneath time (Saint Maximus the Confessor also speaks about it).<sup>22</sup>

Time totally fallen from the radius of eternity into an unchangeable and fixed monotony, has nothing of its character, being an eternity contrary to true eternity. It is no longer proper time, because it is no longer a succession of ever new states,

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<sup>22</sup> Idem., *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, editia a II-a, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, vol. I, p.200.

stimulated by the hope of repeatedly reaching further into eternity, but it is an eternity of monotony, of emptiness, in which hope is no longer possible, neither waiting nor fulfilling. It is the time empty of substance or succession with a meaning, as nothing else is expected, nothing is done in it, because it is no longer attracted to eternity. It is a unique endless state, lived as a curse, as a petrification, or as a conscious death. It is the impossibility or the black eternity of hell, the darkest outside (of existence), the absence of life lived yet as a torment.<sup>23</sup>

In conclusion to what has been said so far, we can say that eternity is solidary with time, without confounding itself with it. Eternity is the origin and perspective of time and the force that moves time towards it. In the end, eternity will overwhelm time, give it its quality. “That there should be delay no longer (Revelation 10:6), because we will have in us only love.” Saint Maximus the Confessor says that: “Through love we can have not only one nature, but also a single deliberative will with God, having no interval (διάστασις) between us and God and between ourselves.”<sup>24</sup> “Then God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 21:4), of those who will be fully with Him and in Him. Only in connection with eternity, created by the eternal God and serving Him or His creatures to reach Him, do those committed in the passing time acquire an eternal value, an inexhaustible depth, because they remain connected with the creature who is created to pass through time, but at the same time it binds the creature to God, making it able to reach with the help of those made in time, in eternity. In this sense, Father Dumitru Stăniloae tells us that man is not made for a passing time, but for eternity, time being defined in this case as the road to eternity.<sup>25</sup> The value of time as a path to eternity was shown by God himself, assuming life in time, therefore, a transient life in time. The fact that the Son of God, by assuming the creature, assumed his time, gave our life eternal value.

Man's communion with the eternity of God means his entry into the divine communion of the Most Holy Trinity, not alone, but with others. Man “will have God fully when he is united with all his fellows in love.”<sup>26</sup> The whole “logical” structure of the cosmos, the reunion of all the particular meanings of created beings, is activated, it is updated in eschaton through and together in the communion of the saved with the Holy Trinity, with the whole deified creation. Eternity can thus be seen from the perspective of the wholeness of the being, as an

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p.201.

<sup>24</sup> Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Epistola a II-a către Ioan Cubicularul*, P.G. 91, col. 396 B., apud. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *op.cit.*, p.204.

<sup>25</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, p.80.

<sup>26</sup> Pr. Prof.. D. Staniloae, *Dumnezeu este Iubire*, în *Ortodoxia*, an XXIII, nr.3 (1971), p. 391.

endless multitude of actualized relationships within it. From the perspective of set theory, it could be said that the possibility of time derives from here, because time appears to us as a complete order<sup>27</sup> relation, the poorest complete relation that mathematics can imagine.

God's unchanging character, which He shares with those who grow in love, is in fact the unchangeability of His loving fullness, beyond which there can be nothing else. Through the Incarnation, God gives Himself to human beings as Hypostasis, in Christ's Mystery, in full communion with the Person of God Himself becoming possible. Through His pneumatized humanity and exalted at the right hand of Father Christ, He remains connected to us and our temporality finds, like a storm, the dawn of His eternity. In the Incarnation of God's Word, any temporal interval between us and God transcends, and there begins an endless inner connection between God's eternity and man's temporal condition.

The relationship of the divine Logos with the time of the human being can be traced in multiple scriptural hypostases from the act of creating the world to the Last Judgment and Restoration. The premise of Origen's theologizing is the absolute transcendence of God's temporality and it is clearly stated: "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit transcend all times and all ages and all eternity. The rest of the things, yet, those who are out of the Trinity, must be measured in centuries and periods of time".<sup>28</sup>

According to Origen, as of his forerunner, Philo of Alexandria, God did not need time to create the world because no limitation of His omnipotence can be conceived. This leads to a strictly symbolic interpretation, in the spirit of the Alexandrian school, of the six days of creation: they are not temporal durations but rather an expression of an order, of a rationality of the creative work of the divine Logos.

The logos, although present in the world, does not need a certain duration for His saving work, His work does not depend on temporality but overwhelms it, overwhelms it divinely. The time of the divine work is not extended: "even if one needs a long time to share the wealth of the poor, the Logos will not be kept in

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<sup>27</sup> "A relationship is complete if each element involved appears in at least one of the pairs. In general, relationships follow two natural sentences, which are reflexivity (any element should be in relation to itself, if not in its own sense, then at least in the sense of limit) and transitivity. If the relation is also symmetric, we speak of an equivalence relation, and if it is antisymmetric, we speak of an order relation", see Ioan Sturzu, *Viziunea Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul și a Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae asupra Revelației naturale. Reflecții asupra valorii teologico-ontologice a paradigmei experimentaliste în fizică*, Teza de doctorat, Editura Universității Al. Ioan Cuza, Iași, 2006, p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Origen, *Despre principii*, IV.4.1 PSB 8, trad., studiu introductiv și note de Pr. Prof. Teodor Bodogae, Editura IBM al BOR, București, 1982, p. 203.

time to make perfect one who works in this way”<sup>29</sup> and consequently salvation itself can be understood as a work of a moment, and “we should not hesitate to say that this man suddenly becomes perfect”<sup>30</sup>

Starting from the prayer of the Saviour in John 12:27 “Now, my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this I came to this hour”, Origen comments on the meaning of “this hour” which is not a temporal duration but a present, an all-encompassing “now” of His spiritual struggle with the power of evil. This is, he says, “the meaning of the word now (gr. p. 258); because as soon as it began it ended; and it was in fact a point in time”<sup>31</sup> (gr. p.258). His struggle against the powers of the enemy did not take place in time but in a “now” and was enough for the soul of the Saviour to overcome by obedience all the power of evil. His work takes place in time but has no duration.

Elsewhere, referring to the word of the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15: 51-52: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet”, we find a parallel between the Resurrection of the dead and the Judgment, both the particular and the last. The fulfillment of the future judgment does not need time, but “as it is said of the Resurrection that it will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, similarly I think it will be with the Judgment”<sup>32</sup>. Continuing, Origen says that if one can speak of a beginning and an end with regard to the coming Judgment, it will begin with “those who are most indebted” to the Lord, but gives this “beginning” only the meaning of intellectual conception, for the beginning and end of this time’s divine works coincide.

We therefore have a distinction between the time of extension, the time of duration of creatures, the so-called χρόνος διαρκείας, and the time without extension: the moment without ακαταίωτος of the divine work uncircumcised by temporality. The second is as real as the first and is part of it not so much in a quantitative sense, for it does not add moments to its extent but qualitatively because it is the time of the divine life-making works which create, sustain and save the creature.

P. Tzalmakis<sup>33</sup> makes an interesting comment on the way in which Origen conceives this time without duration, saying that the Alexandrian author accepts

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<sup>29</sup> Origen, *Comentarii la Evanghelia dupa Matei*, 15,18, in PSB 7, trad., studiu introductiv si note de Pr. Prof. Teodor Bodogae, Editura IBM al BOR, Bucuresti, 1982 , p.177.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 178.

<sup>31</sup> Origen, *Comentarii la Evanghelia dupa Ioan LXXXVIII*, in PSB 6, trad. si note de Pr. Prof. Teodor Bodogae, Editura IBM al BOR, Bucuresti, 1981 , p. 114.

<sup>32</sup> Idem, *Omiliile 1-39 la Evanghelia dupa Luca*, 79 in PSB 7, trad., studiu introductiv si note de Pr. Prof. Teodor Bodogae, Editura IBM al BOR, Bucuresti, 1982, p .254.

<sup>33</sup> cf. P. Tzamalikos, *op.cit.*, p. 259.

the possibility of the ad infinitum division of time until the beginning and the end tend to coincide. The notion of temporal infinity has two complementary dimensions: what is infinitely long in duration and what is infinitely short. A parallel between the notion of spatial and temporal continuum may be relevant early in the language of Greek philosophy, the term for a geometric point of a line and the one that designates a moment in time is one and the same.

Analysing the problem of the mathematical division, S. Sambursky<sup>34</sup> finds that Greek mathematics has failed to accurately conceive and develop basic notions of infinitesimal calculus such as limit and the process of convergence towards a limit related to modernity. Zeno's paradoxes, considering space a continuum of points, reach the logical impossibility of motion, and only Stoic thought managed to overcome this impasse by advancing remarkably in the field of infinitesimal calculus and the foundations of set theory.

Like Aristotle<sup>35</sup>, the Stoics conceive the present moment, the “now” as the final limit of the past and at the same time the initial limit of the future in a vision of geometric inspiration over time. For the Stoics, as for Aristotle, time is continuous and infinitely divisible, that is, infinite in the sense of duration without beginning and end, and can be divided indefinitely toward an infinitesimal duration. Origen rejects the unscriptural conception of time without beginning and end but would accept<sup>36</sup> the possibility of the existence of an infinitely short duration and considers it a means of God's work in time.

The problem is that the construction of the notion of the divisibility of time in Greek thought is completely foreign in essence from the Revelation. Aristotelianism and the Stoics started in the conception of time from completely different premises than Origen. Thus, for Stoicism there is no transcendence and therefore time is conceived in the architecture of a logic that starts from the irreducible and definitive immanence of the world whose “extension” it is, while for the Alexandrian thinker the timeless time of divine work is the unseen “place” in which the eternity of God touches on the time of this world. In other words, no mathematical determinations such as the limit that tends to 0 can be applied to it. In other words, the timeless duration of the divine works, as Origen understands it, cannot be one and the same with the time of the Stoics, and therefore no comparison is in fact possible.

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<sup>34</sup> Samuel Sambursky, *Physics of the stoics*, London, 1959, p.89.

<sup>35</sup> Ursula Coope, *op.cit.*, p.72.

<sup>36</sup> P.Tzamalikos, *op.cit.*, p.255.

St. Maximus the Confessor says that “the reasons of time are in God”<sup>37</sup> and thus reveals to us the complexity of a movement in which there is a reciprocity of the meanings in the relationship between God and creation. The same Holy Father stands out in his work for a linear, chronological historicity, according to which history is a succession of events and moments in a temporal framework. The ages of this world offer us the chance to participate from here on in the transfiguration of history, the simultaneous presence of the eschaton with history making us taste the mystery of the kingdom. The world is the frame of manifestation of the Kingdom of God, a space in which history intertwines with the eschatology, without the present time being identical, in nature, with eternity.

This understanding of reality makes us penetrate the deep meaning of the transfiguration of all creation. The ages subject to temporality here give us only a sequential foretaste of eternity, of final communion with God and the whole cosmos. Instead, the ages beyond the present existence make us partakers of a continual deification, of an infinite advance in communion with God, in eternity. “Thus, the ages of life in the flesh, in which we live now, are the ages of the active state, and the future ones, which follow those here, are the ages of the spirit, of the transformation into the suffering state. So, here we find ourselves in a state of activity, we will reach once, at the end of the ages, the end of our power and work through which we activate, and in the ages to come, suffering the transformation of deification by grace, we will not be in activity, but in passivity, and that is why we will never reach the end of our deification”.<sup>38</sup>

It is in this attitude an overcoming of the geometrized conception, which allowed the measurement of time through the distance between moments. The time of waiting for God offers us a new paradigm of understanding it. It represents the interval between God’s call and man’s free response. This definition is par excellence a personal interpretation of time, which captures the mystery of the interrelationship between God and man. Understanding time in this way allows us to observe the extraordinary dignity of the human being, the crown of all creation. Man has the possibility that through his free answer he can advance in his communion with God, to the point that the limits of time can be overcome by his transfiguration into eternity.

Saint Maximus, thinking about time, as one of the characteristic structures of the created order, is a personal one. “He links time and movement as realities specific to imperfect creation. But, on the other hand, they are not fallen as negative or sinful realities, but as mediators to God’s eternity. It emphasizes God’s

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<sup>37</sup> Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua*, P.G. 91, col. 1164 D; cf. Fapte 17, 26, apud. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *op.cit.*, p.183.

<sup>38</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *op.cit.*, p. 87, apud. Gheorghe Angheliescu, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

participation in time to receive temporal creation in His eternity. Thus ... time is an interpersonal reality traversed by divine love, by the expectation of God.”<sup>39</sup> Regarding the meaning of the so-called seminal logoi of beings in the thought of Saint Maximus, the logos of an existence is its essential principle or reason, which defines it fundamentally and characterizes it as such, but also its reason for being; its principle and finality are in God, Saint Maximus emphasizing more the “speculative-spiritual side that the contemplation of the seen world offers, through the prism of its symbolic realism, contemplation that reveals in it the spiritual reasons, namely, those spiritual “logoi”... roads that lead to the rational meaning of the whole existence”<sup>40</sup>.

Saint Maximus rejects the Origenist conception according to which the diversity of the seen creation is subsequent to the fall into sin as the beginning of the movement of the beings in their return to the original unity. At the same time, the Platonic conception of the particular is overcome as a fall from the universality of the Idea by valuing each particular existence as the subject of Providence.

Reasons are only God's thoughts, according to which He brings beings into existence by the determination of His will. Any existence corresponding to a logos makes both the diversity of the created world and the uniqueness of each existing being be founded in God.

The perfect unification of the logoi of creatures is worked out in and through the Logos of God, Who is the beginning and end of all logoi contained and subsisting virtually in Him before beings as such were brought into existence. Divine reasons as all beings' proper “vocations”, of their fulfillment in God, are not inert<sup>41</sup> models, but volitional creative powers of God that involve the preparation of the models of things. The reasons of creatures, though eternal, do not belong to the uncreated nature but are an expression of His will. Reasons are not existences, but volitional thoughts of God, which means that through creation, one passes from the field of thought to the ontological field, from the field of the creatures thought by God, to the field of their existence by the will of God. Contemplating the divine reasons of created things, we discover their dynamism in time towards the higher purpose of time: For all God's creatures, contemplated by us through our nature, with the help of proper science and knowledge,

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<sup>39</sup> Maciej Bielavski, *O viziune filocalică asupra lumii*, Sibiu, Editura Deisis, 1999, p.247.

<sup>40</sup> Pr. prof. dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Darul lui Dumnezeu către noi*, în MMS, nr.344, 1970, p. 267.

<sup>41</sup> Diac. prof. Vicentiu Romanu, Pr. Prof. Patrut Banaduc, *Creația ca dar dumnezeiesc și logositatea ei. O încercare de reinterpretare a cosmo-antropogenezei*, în Studia theologica 2003-2009, p. 3.

mysteriously announce us the reasons they were made for, and through them he reveals to us the purpose set by God in every creature<sup>42</sup>.

From the perspective of God Who sees movement and wills it in the reasons of things, their purpose is their deification. The eternal existence of divine reason and their dependence on the divine will are simultaneous with the will of creatures and their freedom to advance or not to this end. Therefore, every creature exists through its logos, virtually in God before eternity, but present, according to the same logos, it begins to be in time when God, according to His eternal wisdom, considered it opportune to create it: “For in Him reasons of everything are firmly fixed, and it is said of these reasons that He knows them all before they are made, in their very truth, as some that are all in Him and He has them, even if all these, all, those that are, and those that will be, have not been brought into existence together with their reasons, or since they are known by God, but each receives his actual existence and self-existence at the right time, according to the wisdom of the Creator, being created all according to their reasons; for the Creator always exists to the ages of ages as present, while the creatures exist in potency, but not yet as forever present<sup>43</sup>”.

The “right time” presupposed by the logos of each creature leads from a chronological vision of existence to a sabbatical one in which the kairo-logical and eschatological fulfillment of time is the eternal Passover of rest in God.

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<sup>42</sup> Sfantul Maxim Marturisitorul, *Ambigua*, op.cit., p. 92.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 93.