Ontological aspects of sacred time

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Abstract:

The main trait of the festive time is that, in the shared conscience of the community, these practices are firmly believed to date back to an ancient, mythical era. The festive time encompasses a time span of an importance and value that are greater than the daily routine and presupposes the intermission of all common activities in favour of dedicated practices. The ontological perspective of festive, liturgical time refers to the sacred time in humanity's general perception – Mircea Eliade's point of view, to the feasts regarding the history of salvation in the Judaic and Christian faiths and to the *rites of passage* in the cycles of life and the Christian feasts. The Christian liturgical time is both linear and cyclic, which dilated up to the point where it included past, present, and future. Its linearity refers to the historical parameter of time, and its cyclicity is given by the commemoration of certain events from Christ's life, events that build into the matrix of the liturgical year.

Keywords:

time, liturgics, anthropology, feast, Orthodoxy

As a religious ritualistic manifestation, the feast has always been far and widely recognized considering the integral religiousness of the human being, as *"Quintessential time"*.[1] Thus, the sacred time becomes a distinct interval that stands out through its special characteristics and through an obviously higher importance when compared to the flow of the average time. From the standpoint of

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[1] O. Bischofberger, „Feste und Feiertage", in: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie,* vol. 11, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, New York, 1983, p. 93.

social sciences, *the feast* (*festival)²* could be defined as *"a special, recurrent social and religious opportunity that engages all the members of an ethnic, linguistic, religious, historic, or ideological community, through a multitude of forms and a series of coordinated events…"³*

A feast celebration presupposes the initiation into another dimension of the temporal cycle, and through that, the acknowledgement of a personal and active engagement in this structure of the cosmic or social time. All festive celebrations have a set of common general characteristics:

- The main trait of the festive time is that, in the shared conscience of the community, these practices are firmly believed to date back to an ancient, mythical era. Thus, the myth and the ritual converge and combine - the myth gives the ritual sense and legitimacy, while the ritual becomes the element by which the myth is brought up-to-date.[4]

- The festive time encompasses a time span of an importance and value that are greater than the daily routine and presupposes the intermission of all common activities in favour of dedicated practices. Oftentimes, the social and political structures fall under chaos due to some lascivious, excessive and irresponsible celebration patterns, which highlight the state of degeneration that the fallen humanity delved into, in its misdirected attempt to get nearer to God.

- The feast is a complex event that comprises a sum of inter-related events that yield social cohesion, such as: music, dances, games, processions, ritual drama acts, sacrifices, rich festive meals, and special costumes. The feast was thus meant to be an event that would reinforce and reaffirm the identity of a community.

The sacred festive time can be classified according to three major groups of feasts:

a) The sacred time in humanity's general perception - Mircea Eliade's point of view

b) The feasts regarding the history of salvation in the Judaic and Christian faiths.

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² The etymology of the term *festival* is anchored in two different Latin roots: *festum-i - i.e. public joy, entertainment, party,* and *feria-ae - i.e. day of rest in honour of the gods*. Both terms were used in the plural - *festa, feriae -* which indicates that the feast would usually last for many days and that it involved more than one event. Cf. G. M Martin, „Feste und Feiertage",in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie,* vol. 11, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, New York, 1983, p. 132.

³ A. Falassi, „Festival: Definition and Morphology", in Falassi A. (ed.) *Time out of Time. Essays on the Festival*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1987, p. 2.

⁴ S.K. Roll, *Towards Origins of Christmas*, Kok Pharos, Kampen, 1995, p. 17.

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c) *The rites of passage* in the cycles of life and the Christian feasts. [5]

a. The sacred time in humanity's general perception – Mircea Eliade's point of view

It is worth mentioning the temporal model proposed by M. Eliade, and all the more so, as it seems the Western liturgists have a very *natural* tendency to refer to Eliade's sacred-cyclic time vs. profane-linear time schema as if it were a reference point in the field of religious anthropology. However, the application of this model to Christian feasts needs a little nuancing and clarification work.

Eliade wrote about ancient cultures that were defined by a heightened religious sensitivity, wherein the time was not understood as a homogeneous uninterrupted reality in its nature, as the sacred time of the feasts represented an *infusion* of a temporal dimension entirely superior to the common time.[6] Therefore, through special rituals and celebrations, a bridge is built between the profane and the sacred, mythical time, whose essence lies in the primary events that marked the beginnings of the universe. The sacred time is thus based on myth, i.e. that symbolic narrative of sacred, primary events, which accounted for the mystery of

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[5] Streza D.A., *Sărbătoarea Naşterii Domnului: Originea apostolică, evoluţia şi importanţa ei în cadrul anului liturgic /The Feast Of The Nativity: its apostolic origin, evolution and significance in the liturgical year*, „Lucian Blaga" University Publishing House/Andreiana, Sibiu, 2011, p. 38

[6] Eliade's take on time is defined in many of his works, of which the most important are: M. Eliade, *Sacrul şi profanul/The Sacred and the Profane,* Romanian transl.: Brînduşa Prelipceanu, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1995; Idem, *Traité d'histoire des religions*, Paris, Payot, 1974; Idem, *Le mythe de l'eternel retour*, NRF, Gallimard, 1969; Idem, *Istoria credinţelor şi ideilor religioase/A History of Religious Ideas*, 4 vols., Bucharest, Ed. Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1986; Idem, *De la Zamolxis la Genghis-Han/From Zamolxix to Genghis-Khan,* Bucharest, Ed. Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1980; Idem, *Drumul spre centru/ The Way to the Center of the World*, Univers, Bucharest, 1991; Idem, *Eseuri – Mitul eternei reîntoarceri/ Essays - The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Univers enciclopedic, Bucharest, 2008; Idem, *Aspecte al mitului/Aspects of Myth*, Bucharest, Univers, 1978; Idem, *Imagini şi simboluri/ Images and Symbols,* Humanitas, Bucharest, 2000; for further critical references to Eliade's work, see: I. P. Culianu, *Mircea Eliade*, Nemira, Bucharest,1992; Idem, *Studii românesti/ Romanian Studies, Fantasmele nihilismului/ The Phantasms of Nihilism. Secretul doctorului Eliade/ Dr. Eliade's Secret*, Nemira, Bucuharest, 2000; Ghe. Glodeanu, *Mircea Eliade. Poetica fantasticului şi morfologia romanului existential/ The Poetry of the Fantastic and the Morphology of the Existential Novel,* Ed. Didactică şi Pedagogică, Bucharest, 1997; B. S. Rennie, *Reconsiderându-l pe Mircea Eliade/Reconsidering Mircea Eliade*, Criterion Publishing, 1999; R. Reschika, *Mircea Eliade. Zur Einführung*, Junius Verlag, Hamburg, 1997; A. Mioc, *Problema timpului în opera lui Mircea Eliade/The Problem of Time in Mircea Eliade's Work. Structura temporalităţii în lucrările teoretice/ The Structure of Temporality in the Theoretical Studies,* Marineasa Publishing House, Timişoara, 2001; S. George, *Arhaic şi universal/ Archaic and Universal*, Eminescu, Bucharest, 1981, W. Danca, *Mircea Eliade*, Definitio Sacri, Ars Longa, Iaşi, 1998; A. Codoban, *Sacru şi ontofanie/ Sacred and Ontophany*, Polirom, Iaşi, 1998.

life and universe and also presupposed the possibility of regaining some degree of control over a cosmic force that would have an impact on the community. *"[...] sacred time appears under the paradoxical aspect of circular time, reversible and recoverable, a sort of eternal mythical present that is periodically integrated by means of rites."* [7]

This temporal reality is obviously hard to define, and the paradox seems to be its main distinctive element. In any case, according to the characteristics mentioned by Eliade, the sacred time would have to be defined as: *circular, reversible, recoverable, eternal present.* At a first sight, this type of time looks contradictory, as it is both cyclic, and immobile, all at the same time. [8] Yet, the most important merit attributed to Eliade is his grasp of the sacred at an ontological level. [9] *"Religious man's desire to live in the sacred* - states Eliade - *is in fact equivalent to his desire to take up his abode in objective reality, not to let himself be paralysed by the never-ceasing relativity of purely subjective experiences, to live in a real and effective world, and not in an illusion."* [10] And what is even more, time is seen as a real *ontological obsession* of the archaic man. [11]

Therefore, the mythical, sacred time might invest the existence with another character, as it is a time qualitatively different from the profane one. Any daily event will do, as long as its meaning surpasses the immanent, if and only if it is placed in a certain context or ritual, wherein its profound significance is allowed to be actualized. Being that the myth represents not only a commemorated primordial event within sacred rituals, but also its revival in all of its effects, the sacred time can be neither static, nor linear, but purely reversible, and the primordial events always reiterable. The sacred time is thus, at its very core, entirely superior to the profane and ephemeral time, which is characterised by the process of becoming and decaying. [12]

The sacred time is always revived in an internal cyclical rhythm of a certain frequency, a rhythm that was revealed to, and not invented by the man. This marks the difference between the religious and the non-religious sensitivity: while both mentalities perceive time as flexible and having the capacity to vary in intensity according to certain internal or external factors, only a religious mindset and sensitivity is able to perceive the existence of a *meta-time* that transcends the senso-

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[7] M. Eliade, *Sacrul şi profanul.../The Sacred and the Profane...,* pp.65- 67.

[8] A. Mioc, *Problema timpului în opera lui Mircea Eliade.../The Problem of Time in Mircea Eliade's Work...,* pp. 105-106

[9] A. Codoban, *Sacru şi ontofanie.../Sacred and Ontophany...,* p.60.

[10] M. Eliade, *Sacrul şi profanul.../The Sacred and the Profane...,* p. 27.

[11] *Ibidem, p*p. 87.

[12] *Ibidem, p*p. 68-70.

rial existence, whereas for the non-religious, time is the simple duration of a finite segment that is marked by birth and death.

Therefore, the natural paradigm for the cyclicity of the sacred time is easily noticed in the obviousness and importance of the cosmic phenomena, and especially in their typical recurrence. The religious time refers to the reiteration and rediscovery of the primordial sacredness, *"in illo tempore", the consistent* time of the origins of the universe and of the primary fullness of meaning.[13] The fact that this time is accessible through various rituals enables the humanity to resist the process of decline and that of becoming, as the revival of myths begets the recovery of the primary purity, and thus yields a new beginning. New Year's rituals constitute a clear example, as they reiterate the primeval chaos of creation, which breeds a new world, unblemished and rich in significance.[14]

To the profane, historical man, time is irretrievable and lacking the possibility to attain any significance. *"Hence religious man lives in two kinds of time, of which the more important, sacred time, appears under the paradoxical aspect of a circular time, reversible and recoverable, a sort of eternal mythical present that is periodically reintegrated by means of rites". "This attitude in regard to time suffices to distinguish religious from nonreligious man; the former refuses to live solely in what, in modem terms, is called the «historical present»; he attempts to regain a sacred time that, from one point of view, can be homologized to «Eternity»..."*[15]

All in all, this would be the schema M. Eliade proposed in relation to time and man's perception of it. This model is the primary reference that many liturgist researchers use as basis in their endeavours to explain the nature of festive time and of Christian feasts.[16] In this respect, there is now a tendency to associate the concept of *cyclical time* to agrarian, less *sophisticated* cultures, and to link the concept of *linear time* with the inherent historical character of Judaism and Christianity, both of which are founded on God's intervention in the history on purpose to fulfill His oeconomia, i.e. His plan to save the world, which was brought to completion through the Incarnation, Sacrifice and Resurrection of Christ, the Messiah.[17] However, these two apparently incompatible concepts are somehow *reconciled* and harmonized via the annual feasts cycle characteristic to Judaism and

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[13] Idem, *Imagini şi simboluri.../Images and Symbols...,* p. 58.

[14] Idem, *The Myth of the Eternal Return...,* p. 83-114.

[15] Idem, *Imagini şi simboluri/Images and Symbols,* p. 62.

[16] Cf. O. Bischofberger, *Feste und Feiertage...*, p. 93; H. Auf Der Maur, „Feiern im Rhythmus der Zeit I. Herrenfeste in Woche und Jahr", in (GdK 5). Regensburg 1983*,* p. 21.

[17] H. Micks, *The Future Present. The Phenomenon of Christian Worship,* Seabury, New York, 1970, pp. 47-48.

then to Christianity; this reconciliation serves as proof that the religious, sacred time has a cyclic and reiterable sense.[18]

As a result of the *fusion* between the linearity and cyclicity of the religious, liturgical time, oftentimes they propose a schema in the shape of a temporal spiral that *opens up and grows in God*, thanks to Christ's Sacrifice and Resurrection, which *tore* and destroyed the temporal cyclicity that was confined within its own limitations, in an absurd flow marked by an endless mortality.[19]

This confined cyclicity is the expression of man's refusal to respond to God's love through Adam's sin, and its consequence is the stiffening of the entire material world in a state of impossibility to re-establish its long lost communion with God. This humanly insurmountable distance is annulled by the Incarnation of Christ Who, by overcoming this same distance within Himself, bequeaths Himself through the Holy Mysteries to those who open up to Him, so as to make them overcome – alongside Him – the temporal interval that separates them from a plenary communion with God.[20]

Still, this temporal schema and its resolve based on the *spiral* model, raises a few questions that uncover several fuzzy areas. The image of the time-spiral as a union between two different temporal concepts does not properly justify the way time is perceived and experienced – like continuous dynamics of some spontaneous and unpredictable rhythms related to man's life and activity. A simple association of the elements of a very rigidly expressed temporal dualism does not necessarily result in a synthesis which would allow the formation of a new temporal dimension of reality.[21]

Then again, the psychological impact of the cyclic time as the antonym of the linear time might even suggest the opposite of Eliade's schema - a model that attributes the concept of cyclicity to the agrarian societies, as an attempt to *escape* the historical and destructive time, whereas the linear time represents an expression of *courage*, of the dignity to stand up to history. Yet, this temporal linearity may simultaneously be an attempt to circumvent history, as time is a succession of meaningful events that are far from coincidental, whereas the cyclicity may be the expression of an absurd existence in a vicious, suffocating and terrifying circle,[22]

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[18] B. Fischer, *Kirchenjahr. I. Liturgisch*, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, vol. 6*, Herder, Freiburg, 1961, p. 226; cf. A. Santantoni, *L'anno liturgico oggi: interpretazione teologica, itinerario di fede, funzione catechetico-pastorale*, in *L'anno liturgico,* pp. 65-67.

[19] L. Bouyer, *Life and Liturgy,* Sheed and Ward, London, 1956, pp. 196-198; cf. O. CASEL, *Das christliches Festmysterium,* Paderborn, 1941 p. 7.

[20] D. Stăniloae, *Dogmatica/The Dogmatics, vol. I...*, pp. 134-136.

[21] S. Roll, *Towards Origins of Christmas…*, p. 21.

[22] Cf. A. Camus, *Mitul lui Sisif/The Myth of Sisyphus,* Rao Books, Bucarest, 2001, passim.

which can only be escaped from via a historical time whose sense and purpose are very well established by the Creator.[23]

Subsequent to these critical considerations, M. Eliade's model of religious time seems both too simplistic and too rigid to comprise and explain the subjective perception of time, with all its variables.[24]

b. The value of Time in Judaism and Christianity

The sacred time, that is perceived by the archaic man as cyclical, recoverable, and in opposition with the profane linear time, is thus endowed with a new dimension by the man who relates to the supernatural Revelation, i.e. to God's active intervention in history, by which He chose and prepared a people whence the Messiah, the Saviour of the world was to be born.[25] Time then acquires a special meaning, while it keeps both of its dimensions.

Firstly, *the sacred time* does not stand in opposition with *the profane time* anymore. To Israel, the people God chose to have the closest relationship with, time does not appear as an enemy, or a tyrant that devours its sons. The Jewish people no longer recomposes the world and God's time in a mimetic manner, by periodically reciting the creationist myth, but rather it observes His works in the world, embraces events as a succession of wondrous circumstances that God designed in order to bring it back to its former state. For the Jews, God does not identify with the cosmos or the time (Chronos), but He is a reality beyond those, one that governs over and controls them in favour of His people. The essence of interpreting *the biblical time* is no longer the cosmogony, but *the historical event,* which is quintessentially represented, in a typical and exemplary way, by the *Pascha-Pesah* – the event marking the liberation and birth of a new people.[26]

The beginning of creation is no more celebrated as a regenerating kernel, but as an event that encapsulates the promise of the future. As the inexorable cyclicity of time is overcome, to Israel, *Chronos* - the frightening god that consumes its own progeny - becomes *Kairos* (Gr. occasion, opportune moment), i.e. the moment the divine providence manifests itself, the sign of God's personal intervention in favour of His own people.[27]

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[23] Z. Werblowsky, *In Nostro Tempore: On Mircea Eliade,* in *Religion* 19 (1989), pp. 129-136.

[24] D.A. Streza, *Sărbătoarea Nașterii Domnului/The Feast Of The Nativity…,* p. 43

[25] D.A. Streza, *"The Christian Calendar and the Historical Birth Date of the Lord",* Revista Mitropolia Olteniei, Nr. 1-4/2014, p. 230-232.

[26] D Borobio (ed), *La celebrazione nella Chiesa*, vol. III, Elle Di Ci, Torino, 1994, p. 29.

[27] D. Vanca, *Introducere în teologia liturgică…/Introduction to the Liturgic Theology,* pp. 167-168.

In the Old Testament, eternity is expressed via the Hebraic term *"olam"*, whose meaning is of *perpetual* rather than *eternal*; when this word is applied to God, it cannot signify an absolute and completely atemporal eternity.[28] Most of the researchers agree that the Christian profound vision and understanding of eternity could not have sprung from the Old Testament Judaic notion of it, which draws no distinction between these dissimilar aspects - time, eternity and God. It appears that the old Judaic scripture pleads more readily for an *infinite time*, rather than a *time beyond time*, although the only plausible affirmation remains the one which states that, philosophically speaking, one cannot make a clear distinction between the various levels where time and eternity are placed in the Judaic mindset.[29]

On the other hand, Christianity has always taken at least two stances on time: the first states that, at the end of the historical time, the world would enter another kind of time, i.e. the time of God's Kingdom, the second view is put in words by Jesus Himself, Who textually says that God's Kingdom is already present in time, and substantially manifest within people: *"[...]The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.[...]"* (Luke 17:20-21). The main idea that arises from this renders the dual perspective on the historical time, as the eschatological explanation on the one hand points to a terminus of the historical time, while on the other hand it alludes to the *uninterrupted present of faith*.[30]

These two kinds of time co-exist in parallel and simultaneously: the heavenly time of God's Kingdom does not follow at the end of the historical time, but is rather a real, continuous presence, that Christ brings into the contemporaneousness of those who believe in Him and obey His commandments, through the Holy Mysteries of the Church. The first view was gradually surmounted - as the awaited event of *the Second Coming* failed to happen -, and then it gave way to the second view, which actually constitutes the starting point of the entire philosophical reflection on time in Christianity.[31]

While Eliade's vision presented the humanity imprisoned inside the profane time, unable to free itself except by breaking out of this time, in the brand new dimension of Christianity, salvation is possible only within and under time, as a consequence of God's will to intervene in history in order to fulfill His plan to bring the whole creation to a plenary communion with Him. In this sense, the most significant fact is that God has totally immersed Himself in history, and by assuming the complete human condition in the personal Hypostasis of the Divine Logos,

[28] A.G. Padgett, *God Eternity and the Nature of Time*, St. Martin Press, 1992, p.24.

[29] *Ibidem*, p. 27.

[30] D.A. Streza, *The Christian Calendar...*, p. 235-236.

[31] J.C. Yates, *The Timelessness of God*, University Press of America, 1990, p.12.

He fulfilled under time the acts of redemption and salvation of the people, and thus He divided the history in two.[32] Therefore, whilst the Jews view the coming of the Messiah as an event of the future, for the Christians, it is a past event where the Kingdom of God has already debuted under time with Christ's Incarnation, Sacrifice and Resurrection, and is now somewhat mystically manifest, only to be completely unveiled at the end of time.[33]

The New Testament stance on time views it as linear, finite and in a continual ascension, as God designed the world to have a beginning and an end. The terminology used here is based on a certain dualism between *kairos* - a fixed time or duration, with God as the One Who manifests an intention in that specifically determined moment – and *aion*, which designates *eternity* seen as a super-temporal dimension that goes beyond any limitation or constraint, and not as a temporal void. In this way, the end of time coincides with the beginning of eternity, granting the latter a *post-temporal* character, as it follows the final event of the apocalypse.[34] The fact is that many researchers have concluded that time and eternity are two concepts which cannot be clearly and rigorously defined only on the basis of the biblical text. It can be therefore stated that, according to Alan Padgett, *"that not even in the New Testament can one find that kind of eternity, specific to the Middle-Age Christian philosophy."*[35]

Nevertheless, beyond the Hellenistic influences upon the Christian mindset, the question that arises relates to the manner in which the Holy Fathers' view on time and eternity managed to be theologically explained, with quotations from the Holy Scriptures. Boethius, the acclaimed founder of the Christian philosophical view on time and eternity, has a simple argument: without openly stating it or clearly contradicting it, the Scripture is compatible with the Greek philosophical view.[36]

However, Blessed Augustine's *Confessions* mark the first systematic attempt to define time from a Christian point of view. For him, God is the Creator of time and sits outside of time. There is no clear image as to whether that divine space beyond time is with or without duration.[37] Alan Padgett claims that, in some paragraphs, Blessed Augustine outlines the idea of a timeless God: *"These excerpts, combined with the*

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[32] D.A. Streza, "Historical considerations regarding the birth date of our Lord", Revista Teologică, vol. 23 1/2013, p. 55.

[33] O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, SCM, London, 1951, pp. 39, 45-50.

[34] A. G. Padgett, *God Eternity and the Nature of Time…,* p.31.

[35] *Ibidem*, p. 33.

[36] Boethius, *Consolatio Philosophiae, 5.6,* Romanian transl. by Popescu David, in PSB 72/ Writings of the Church Fathers, IBMBOR, Bucharest, 1992, p. 167.

[37] Blessed Augustine, *Confesiuni/Confessions*, *Cartea a XI-a/Book XI, Chapter XIII-XV,* quoted Romanian transl. pp. 355-65.

well-known Neoplatonic influence, leads us to believe that for him, God is timelessly eternal, He lives His entire life all at once, in a single timeless moment...''[38].

The best-known definition given to eternity is though Boethius's, who would go on and shed light on the missing links in Augustine's argumentation. His definition, now a classic, is also massively influenced by Neoplatonism: *"Now, eternity is the possession of endless life whole and perfect at a single moment." (Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio).[39]* This fragment is essential, as it compacts all the basic characteristics of eternity: the idea of life and of lifestyle that Plotinus also mentions, with a reference to the super-phenomenal world of Forms, and then the ideas of wholeness, undividedness, unitariness, which are also characteristics of the Platonic *Ideas*, and finally, the idea of simultaneousness that denotes the said *eternal present*. Since God is eternal, He embraces all the types of time simultaneously and in the same moment. The problem that arises in Boethius' works and in the writings of the Neoplatonic philosophers is the presence of that dialectic equation in which both time and eternity are engaged, as men can properly understand the essence of eternity only in relation with time.[40]

Another structure that involves a dualism is often suggested in the explanation given on the experience of liturgical time by the primary Church. This diagram refers to the conceptual distance between the *quantitative time* - as an objective duration of events that happen consecutively, and also repetitively on the basis of cosmic cyclicity - and the *qualitative time* - which expresses the uniqueness and non-recurrence of each event, as an absolutely necessary requisite of the relationship between man and God. [41] This final concept has given birth to the idea of a *history of salvation*, as a structure of non-recurrent acts that are defining for the humanity, and whose effects are infused in each liturgical celebration, for they are closely related to the Person of Christ.[42]

Christianity thus brings the idea of *sacred time* to a new meaning, centred on the divine and human Person of the Saviour. The Christian liturgical time, as well as the Judaic, preserves the two stages: unlike Judaism, the Christian *promise* and *delivery* of salvation affirms Christ as the centre of the new time axis.[43] With the

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[38] A. G. Padgett, *God Eternity and the Nature of Time…,* pp.44-45.

[39] Boethius, *Consolatio Philosophiae, 5.6…*, p. 38.

[40] For further references and comments, see: L.S Ford, *Boethius and Whitehead on Time and Eternity*, in *International philosophical Quarterly,* 8, 1968, pp. 38-67 and T. P Mc.Tighe *Eternity and Time in Boethuis,* in *History of Philosophy in the Making,* Washington, 1982, pp.35-62.

[41] S. De Vries, *Time in the Bible,* in *Concilium,* 142, (2/1981), pp. 4-5.

[42] J. A. Melloh, *Liturgical Time…,* p. 735.

[43] Th. J Talley, „The Liturgical Year: Pattern of Proclamation", in: *Worship: Reforming Tradition.* Washington, Pastoral Press, D.C., 1990, 126-127.

incarnation of Christ came a new time, the time of the Kingdom, both linear and cyclic, which dilated up to the point where it included past, present, and future. Its linearity refers to the historical parameter of time, and its cyclicity is given by the commemoration of certain events from Christ's life, events that build into the matrix of the liturgical year.[44] The temporal course of a liturgical year does not return to the same point, to a fatidical *ab initio*, but mediates the Christian's progress towards the eschatological Kingdom of God, and not towards a materialistic, earthly future.[45]

The beginning of a new church year represents a novel beginning that grants each person a new chance to live with Christ, and while the liturgical year revives some events from Christ's life, it is not because the Church desires to compile a historical drama, but that the purpose of the whole liturgical celebration is to offer the faithful external assistance in their ascension towards God. Odo Casel's words are defining in this sense: *"During our God-given life, we have to renew, over and over again, the same celebrations, in order to touch the profound contents of the liturgical year and assimilate them. Just like a road meanders around a mountain and slowly advances, in a gradual ascent, on the steep cliff, so must we gradually travel the same road, on an increasingly elevated plane, up until we will have reached the final stop - Christ, our Omega. That is why the authentic protagonist of the liturgical year is the mystical Christ, i.e. our One and Only glorified Lord Jesus Christ, and not us, the imperfect humans.*[46]

c. The *rites of passage* in the pagan world and the Christian feasts

As previously defined, the notion of sacred and liturgical time may be completed by the complementary tackling of two themes related to it: the role and importance of *the rites of passage* within the liturgical time, and the issue of the Christian feasts instituted without any direct relation to the historical dimension of the events or persons commemorated.

As for the cosmic feasts that are connected to natural phenomena, one might say that, in a sense, they could be coined as *rites of passage*, for the movement of the celestial bodies exerts a major influence on the human life. Of these phenome-

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[44] D.A. Streza, *The Christian Calendar…,* p. 240-244.

[45] J. Hennig, *Martyrologium and kalendarium*, in *Studia Patristica* 5 (1962), pp. 78-80.

[46] O. Casel, *Das christliches Festmysterium…,* p.108; see also: D.A. Streza, "Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae şi Odo Casel - viziune comparată asupra misterului liturgic creştin/Father Dumitru Stăniloae and Odo Casel – Compared Perspective on Christian Liturgical Mystery", in vol. *Părintele profesor Dumitru Stăniloae sau consonanţa între dogmă, spiritualitate și liturghie/ Father Dumitru Stăniloae – the Consonance between Dogma, Spirituality and Liturgy,* Ed. Cetatea de Scaun, Ed. Mitropolia Olteniei, 2015, p. 509-520.

na, the ones related to the winter solstice provide the perfect example, and the fact that the Roman feast of the Birth of the Sun - *Natalis Sol invicti* - was appointed on the day of the winter solstice is a reflection of the deep reasons within the human psyche. However, a distinction must be made between these collective rites and the actual rites of passage, which refer to the stages of the human life and the transition that each person makes when passing through life's major events: birth, adolscence, marriage, and death.[47]

The literature in the field recognises three stages in a person's rites of passage: *integration, transition, and separation.* These rites have the precise purpose to initiate, and also to *accompany* the stages of the actual transition, which represents a *passage*, a change, an initiation, going the distance from profane to sacred, from familiar to a brand-new dimension of life. The *passage* may be the inevitable result of the natural growth and evolution of the human life, or it may well be the person's conscious choice, as is the case with marriage. However, the rites brought about by these occasions have the role to support both the person going through them, and more importantly, the whole community that that person belongs to; through these ritualistic acts, social stability and cohesion is heightened.[48]

In all times and all human cultures, this transition has presupposed a special religious adjustment that has transformed it into a well-defined feast, closely connected to the historical time. In this way, each meaningful event in the human life was invested with depth, strength, communion, and a conscious opening towards the transcendent.[49]

From the very beginning, Christianity valued these events as equally important, and gave them a new meaning by integrating them into the Liturgy as Holy Mysteries of initiation – Baptism, Chrismation, and Eucharist –, as the Holy Mystery of Marriage, and as the Burial, which is a special *hierurgy*. All the above have a deep impact on the Christians' lives and communities.

Not all feasts are strictly connected to the day or period when they are celebrated though, nor do they all relate to any personal life rhythms. To some feasts descending from various ancient cultures, it was often impossible even to establish the reasoning behind their origins. To some other, their festive celebration on a certain date did not provide an immediate justification.[50] However, there are

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[47] A. Van Gennep, *Riturile de trecere/ The Rites of Passage,* Romanian transl. by L. Berdan and N. Vasilescu, Polirom, Iași, 1996, pp. 15-17.

[48] *Ibidem, p*p. 23-24.

[49] Cf. Ş. Anghelescu, *Introducere în problematica generală a riturilor de trecere/ Introduction to the General Problematics of the Rites of Passage,* http://inoe.inoe.ro/ianus/Serban%20 Anghelescu.htm.

[50] A. J. Chupungco., *Liturgies of the Future: The Process and Methods of Inculturation,* N.J.: Paulist, New York and Mahwah, 1989, pp. 198-200.

feasts that seem to have been purposely appointed, so as to challenge the social conscience to accept certain doctrines or adopt a certain attitude and devotion towards the accomplishment of well defined objectives. In other words, a feast can be consciously planned and promoted, instead of being naturally born from the popular conscience, the cultural tradition and the faith of a community. In all these situations, the object of the feast is independent from the temporal context.[51]

In this respect, the term *idea-feast* is used to designate the opinion that *"in their nature, the great feasts of Christianity are not historical commemorations of some events pertaining to the history of salvation; they were, in fact, instituted as expressions of the greater theological ideas"*. This opinion was formulated by the great Western liturgist Anton Baumstark, and by the erudite researcher Christine Mohrmann.[52]

This notion is used only in relation with the origins of the feast of Our Lord's Nativity, to designate the fact that, although there are many themes lying at the basis of the feast of Epiphany, all of them are connected with the Nativity theme. At the same time, this notion also refers to the process of liturgical evolution, through which a feast, starting out as a simple commemoration, gradually adds new meanings and themes to its core, and then assimilates and breeds them into its own hymnography. This is also the case with the Nativity feast, also called *Epiphany* or *Theophany – i.e. the revelation and manifestation of God –* whose initial theme is the Nativity of Christ, but which, under some biblical and liturgical influences of specific cultural areas, has been combined with themes such as The Adoration of the Magi, the Wedding at Cana, and the Baptism of Christ. [53] Therefore, the relationship between the celebration date and the thematic content of this feast is fluid and dynamic, and it depends on each cultural, social, and political context where Christianity flourished, and also on the relationships and the mutual influence exerted between the members of those cultures.[54]

The introduction of thematic feasts has become a widely spread event since the IVth – Vth centuries, when the Church developed and crystallised its liturgical expression, under the new conditions of freedom and support granted to Christianity by the Byzantine imperial power.

Yet, the introduction of doctrine-related feasts raises an issue that is often misunderstood within the Western theological circles: the *impelled* enforcement

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[51] S. K. Roll, *Towards Origins of Christmas…*, pp. 24-25.

[52] A. Baumstark, *Liturgie comparée,* IIIrd edition, Éditions Chevetogne, Chevetogne/Paris, 1953, p. 173; however, the concept of thematic feast (*idea-feast*), is generally attributed to Mohrmann Chr., *Epiphania. Etudes sur le latin des chretiens,* Roma, 1958, pp. 245-275.

[53] T.J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year,* 2nd emended ed., Liturgical Press, Collegevilie, Minnesota: 1991, pp. 129-134

[54] D.A. Streza, *Sărbătoarea Naşterii Domnului/The Feast Of The Nativity…,* p. 52-54.

of a feast or of a liturgical ritual, which is done by the superior hierarchy of the Church, under strong influences coming from the political power of the age, a fact that would place the entire liturgical tradition under scrutiny. Although the political influence upon the Church has sometimes and unfortunately been too large and too damaging, as the political interests have always taken precedence in the gracious attitudes displayed by the Byzantine emperors, the Church has still had the great chance to develop as a living organism, by adapting and responding to the internal and always current challenges, and needs to redefine itself more and more plenary and explicitly, as the quintessential locus where man meets God. Also, the issue of enforcing things *top-down (the top-down approach)* has always been solved in the Church by the application of the reverse of this attitude, i.e. the faithful's ecclesial adoption of certain themes, doctrines and feasts.[55]

Therefore, the depth, intensity and sense giving power of the liturgical time is also based on a *bottom-up* orientation, which refers to the faithful's adoption of the life and doctrines of the Church that were established by the Holy Fathers in close connection with the Byzantine imperial power.

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[55] S.K. Roll., *Towards Origins of Christmas…*, p. 27.