

UNIVERSITY „OVIDIUS” OF CONSTANȚA  
FACULTY OF THEOLOGY  
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***THESIS SUMMARY***

**TIME AND ETERNITY IN THE  
GREEK PHILOSOPHY AND  
THEOLOGY OF THE NEW  
TESTAMENT**

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# THESIS SUMMARY

## ***TIME AND ETERNITY IN THE GREEK PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT***

### **1. ARGUMENT AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The thesis *Time and eternity in the Greek philosophy and theology of the New Testament* is an interdisciplinary approach to a fundamental problem of human existence: its time and value to humans.

The concept of time is generally expressed by two terms: καιρός and αἰών. The distinction between these two terms is likely to discover the two fundamental aspects of time: the aspect of continuance and the aspect of succession, of blading. Καιρός used in the Old Testament and the New Testament has a particular meaning of a crucial, decisive moment. "Why should you die before your time?" (Eccl. 7, 17). Another meaning is of a favorable moment: "There is a time for every matter under the heaven" (Eccl. 3, 1). The classic spot from the Holy Scripture which reveals the meaning of the time of the special moment, crucial in existence is the one from the *Epistle to the Galatians* chapter IV, 4-5: "And when the set time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under Law, that those under law, to redeem them, to gain adoption."

These good times - chosen by God in the economy of salvation are sprinkled during the biblical time. What Christ was doing for the salvation of the world, was committing at willful moments and determined by Him, when the "time was coming" (Matthew 26; 45; 14; 35). Καιρός meeting - distinct from one another – form the ascending line of salvation. "I work today and tomorrow, and the third day I will end" (Luke 13, 32).

Αἰών is the term used to indicate a stretch of time, or time duration. He expresses the time of this world: "The ages were founded by the word of God" (Heb. 11, 3), but also the eternity of God (Rom. 16, 26). The same term is used to define the life of today of the future life is - "the currently aeon of the future aeon". The present aeon is identical with the world's time; the future aeon is the new one, that comes: the kingdom of God. Therefore, the term αἰών signifies in the Holy Scripture: an unlimited time - divine eternity; a time limited in both directions – the length of this world and a limited and unlimited time, future age, or limited in one direction.

The Book of Genesis, covering the creation of the world, reports that: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1, 1). This beginning is interpreted by the Holy

Fathers and Orthodox theologians as not being only the beginning of creation; but at the same time, also the start time. St. Basil the Great expresses this idea thus: "As the beginning of the road is not yet a road, neither a house is not yet a home, just as the beginning of time is not the time, it is not from it not even the smallest part".

This start, as a prime moment, it may not be thought by us. He is not divisible, not infinitesimally small, but is without measure after time, it is the time limit, so without lasting. The creature appears in a "snapshot" suddenly, "eternal" and temporal, at the boundary of eternity with time. "The beginning - notes a theologian – analog to the geometric limit concept between two plans, is kind of a timeless instantaneity itself, but whose creative explosion gives birth to time. It is the achievement point of divine will with what henceforth becomes and lasts. The origin itself of the creature is thus a change, a beginning (the beginning of a transition from nothingness to being), and for this time is a form of created existence, while eternity belongs in an own way to God. "Therefore, deeply notifies St. Augustine: "the world was not created in time, but with time" and "and before the world existed, there wasn't any time - notes another Christian thinker. The One through who the world was made (John 1, 1) is the One by which there was the world (Heb. 1, 2).

As for the essence of time, what is inside, besides the problem constitutes a difficulty, sensed in the various research areas. Even if the mystery cannot be exhausted, there can be captured some aspects of the nature of time. The very beginning of the world is a passage from nothingness to being, this movement is a fundamental feature of the created world, in conjunction with the becoming, which was printed to the creature as support and opportunity to progress, to a bigger perfection, continue.

Not to be confused with the movement itself, the category of time – in the thinking of the Holy Fathers - is closely linked to it. St. Maximus the Confessor states that: "everything that the existence received from nothing is moving, there from being driven immediately to a certain cause." Existence mode of the creature, time is inherently and unavailable linked to her. "No time cannot be without creature" - St. Augustine expresses. As also St. Basil the Great described him, the time is the "mark of the creature itself". There is a natural affinity - says the same holy father - among this world, the animals and plants that are in it, and over time, which always hurries and flow without ever weakening its momentum."

Time being the existence mode of the creature, eternity is the existence mode of God. The two existence modes are distinct, but not opposite. Orthodoxy has not defined time and eternity as diametrically opposed, because if in the relationship with time it sits inevitable the movement, the change, passing from one state to another, may not oppose to them, term by term: immobility, immutability, an eternity static invariability; this would be an eternity of the

intangible world of Plato's philosophy, not of the living God. The existence mode of God overcomes the opposition of the mobile time and of the immobile eternity.

When it is said that "in God there is neither movement nor shadow of change" (James 1, 17) we must understand that "the Godhead is still, as one who is the fullness of all", is the plenitude of life hasn't got anything more to tend to. The eternity of God transcends our way of living and thinking. In this regard, St. Maximus the Confessor reveals that: "God neither moves, nor is standing ... being by nature above all the movement and condition, and does not in any sense submit to our ways." For Orthodoxy, time and eternity, not being in an relation of opposition, although distinct, they can communicate, and this constitutes a prerequisite for the possibility of God's descend in time and our participation in the eternal life.

As objectives, our research will follow the theses:

1. The conceptual philosophical analysis for the terms *time* (καῖρός) and *eternity* (αἰών), in the way that the Greek philosophy had thought these terms.
2. The theological analysis of the terms *time* (καῖρός) and *eternity* (αἰών), as used in the New Testament writings.
3. Establishing a thematic correspondence between the philosophical and religious meanings of the terms *time* (καῖρός) and *eternity* (αἰών).
4. The significance of time in the New and Old Testament's theology.
5. The biblical eschatological frame in the human's history horizon.
6. Highlighting the relevance of *time* for the today's secularized man with reference to *the liturgical time*.

## **2. THE THEMES RELEVANCE IN THE CURRENT RESEARCH**

The relationship between time and eternity, as shown in the Holy Scripture, is not an exclusive report. Between time and eternity there is, undoubtedly, a big ontological distinction and qualitative; however, both meet without disbanding. If the time is created by God, then eternity does not abolish the time, but it gives birth to and maintains it, coexisting with it. Establishing an exclusive contrast and an irreducible opposition between time and eternity, it makes possible the connection between the eternal God and the temporarily man.

Eternity is the creative cause of time: time has its origin in eternity. Time being the existence mode of the creature, eternity is the existence mode of God. The two modes of existence are distinct, but not opposite. For the Orthodoxy, time and eternity, not being in a relation of opposition, although different, they can communicate with each other, and this constitutes a prerequisite for the possibility of God's descend in time and our participation in the eternal life.

The Holy Fathers have been reluctant to define eternity as opposed to time, because if the time categories are the movement, the change, moving from one state to another, then the term of immobility, of immutability cannot be applied to God's eternity, for this would be the eternity of Plato's intelligible world, not that of the living God. If God lives in eternity, this alive perpetuity must exceed the opposition between the mobile time and the unmoved eternity. St. Maximus the Confessor, talking about the relation between time and eternity, compares the world with a room. The room is an ontological category: narrowing the world through itself. Thinking of a boundless room and infinite time is a contradiction. As the world is finite, bounded like a room, so the "time is a bounded motion".

Thus God's eternity does not seem anymore opposed to time. On the contrary, eternity is turned to time, for it comes with it to ontologically fulfill. Time has no existence itself, but a shared one. He is only maintaining in contact with eternity, which gives meaning and value to time. Eternity makes it possible to understand the time. God made us beings able to answer; thereby He gave us the relation with eternity and in communion with Him we will receive eternity. But this eternity is obtained by grace and it will not be as God's.

In biblical perspective, between time and eternity there must be established the nuptial rapport of the theandric mystery of Christ with the theandric mystery of the Church, the wedding rapport of Cana with the feast God's Kingdom. Time is an open way to eternity, in which the creature begins the dialogue with God. So it was the paradise time, in which God was communicating with the creature as with a friend. The human nature tended towards God, because during the paradise time to the creature it was given the ability to rise to the image of its creator.

Time-shift was given by God as a measure of growth and ascension of the creature to Him. The fact that the transition from the image to the likeness of God had to realize itself for us under the time specie, is a challenge in addition as also the time, as an embodiment of the transition, had in God's plan multiple meanings and positive content.

Time gives possibility in introducing a meaning and value into the cosmos. He gives meaning to all the events because it serves to the macro - and microcosm as medium and preparation tool for the eternal happiness, as the gateway to the existential plenitude and in full participation in the Supreme Being. Only in time the cosmos can be achieved as a whole harmonious and reach the fulfillment of its final destiny, at the fullness of God's kingdom. Time appears as a cosmic albie, constitutive to the created existence, through which leak, beneath the light sky of eternity, the changes of the creatures. But time is not identified with these changes or the created existence, as the albie of the river is not identical to the river's water. Time and existence are distinct realities.

The solidarity of time with the whole creation is full right from the beginning. The fall produces a profound corruption of time. The initial sin unites time with death. Time had been given to the human to go to the love and the fullness of its existence, through the likeness of God. The man transforms, by falling, time in death. The divine time presence is transformed into a time of absence open on nothingness.

Time-shift towards the deification of man is henceforth also a measure of the passage toward death (Rom. V, 12). But, time was not entirely fallen, he was not identifying with the fall. The fallen time is strengthened by the blessing of God upon him, so at this time the creature can return free to God, to want him and to understand the immensity of love. Time will be the waiting of God, the communion preparation with the divine.

If the cyclic time of the pagan religions depersonalize God and the creature wanting to absorb eternity, the Old Testament time is the linear time, the "Teacher to Christ" time (Gal. III, 24) which does not repeat, an ascending time of God's actions. All of the Old Testament linear time meaning, all of its tension to a yet future fulfillment will summarize in the sermon of St. John the Baptist: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near (Matthew III, 2).

However, the linear time of the holy history isolated God of the creature, and kept the duality between God and the creature, and the creature could not enter into communion with the divine. Only once with the Incarnation of God's Son - and the restoration of the human nature through a perfect union with His divine nature, time will be "filled with God", will become again a paradise time of the divine-human dialogue.

### **3. SHORT FRAME OF THE WORK**

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## 4. THE METHODS AND APPROACH USED

The central objective of this paper is to analyze the concept of *time* (*καῖρός*) and *eternity* (*αἰών*) in the Greek philosophy and New Testament theology, with direct reference to the biblical texts, using an appropriate research methodology of them. Therefore, we presented the methods, techniques and procedures used in this scientific endeavor. Using as a reference point the biblical scientific approaches, I will use the specific methods of research of this kind:

a) *exegetico-hermeneutical method* through which have been interpreted in a biblical perspective, dogmatic and apologetic the Old Testament and New Testament texts with reference to the time, as points that best expresses the general frame of time in the Jewish mentality and perception of temporality, as the ontological dimension the creation, in the New Testament theology. The interpretation of the various passages from the Psalms was based on the works of the Holy Fathers, Romanian theologians, but also on the modern and contemporary works of the theologians belonging to the western area. The focus was particularly on the diachronic exegesis, by guiding my thesis to the author / authors of the biblical texts and the context in which they occurred, but also the synchronic one by focusing on the biblical text and to the recipients as their receptors. Therefore, attention was paid equally both to the biblical author's intention, and to the text's intention among its receptors, with a great relevance to the contextualization of time's importance and value in man's condition today.

b) *The historical method*, tries to outline the conceptual development of the idea of time in Greek philosophy and New Testament biblical theology and to watch it, then, from the phenomenological perspective. The purpose of using this method in my work was the



observation of the relationship's characteristic between the *philosophical time*, thought in the manner of the Greek philosophers (Plato, Aristotle, Parmenides, Plotinus, etc.), and the *theological time* thought in the biblical manner in the Old and New Testament interconnection, but also in the patristic theological manner of Maximilian and Dionysian type. Thus, it can be outlined a complex historical picture of the idea of *time* in the thinking of the Greek religious philosophy, which offered also to the Orthodox theology the notional terminology vocabulary, or course by reinterpreting in a lesser or radical measure of the concepts into their meaning.

c) *The analytical method*, through which I aimed to emphasize the analysis of each Greek philosopher from the register of our attention, but also the distinctive theology of every biblical and patristic author, in order to respond to a series of fundamental questions for this study: what did the author wanted to say, which was the context, what does the author understand, what effect has his development upon the human from then and now? The advantage of this method is its capacity to highlight the unique thinking particularity of each philosopher, biblical author and every patristic theologian and his specific accents.

d) *The anthropological method*, given the fact that the largest part of my work has dealt with the problem of *time* relevant to the human. For these reasons, I tried to avoid an arid research, abstract, but my intention was to define the value of *time* for man, as an essential dimension of his earthly existence.

Given the vast amount of research conducted on *time* and *eternity*, my PhD thesis resorted to consulting bibliographic resources. Thus, closely related to the fundamental notions which operates this work are the historical sources and the specialty literature. For this, it was necessary first consulting a rich bibliography and work tools with the purpose of introducing and familiarizing with the philosophical and theological principles of the idea of *time* and *eternity*, particularly with the ancient Greek mentality. The most important for our work were those papers that we can consider as some extremely useful manuals which helped us to familiarize with the theology of *time*. Firstly we mention here the patristic writers: (St. John Damascene, *Dogmatica*, translated by Pr. D. Fecioru, Editura Scripta, București 1993, Dionisie Areopagitul, *Despre numele divine*, trans. D. Stăniloae, în *Opere Complete*, Paideia, București, 1996, Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Comentariu la Psalmi*, translation Ol. Căciulă, in „Izvoarele Ortodoxiei”, nr. 2, București, 1943, Sfântul Ioan Gura de Aur, *Comentariu la Evanghelia după Ioan*, translated from french by Diacon Gheorghe Băbuț, Editura Pelerinul Roman, Oradea 1997, Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Scrieri, partea I, Ambigua*, translation, introduction and notes by

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