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CCXCII

THE GENESIS OF CONCEPTS AND THE CONFRONTATION OF RATIONALITIES

THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE, 7th-9th OCTOBER 2015

EDITED BY

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PEETERS

LEUVEN – PARIS – BRISTOL, CT

2018

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SOME REFLECTIONS ON TIME IN THE BIBLE

I. INTRODUCTION: READING THE BIBLE

Before starting my reflections on the concept of time in the Bible, it seems appropriate to offer some basic insights into the Bible as a book. These observations are not meant to give an elaborate point of view on the relationship between science and Scripture, but rather to explain how a Biblical scholar properly understands his or her object of study. The Christian Bible (Old and New Testament) is a library that had been written over a period of about 600 years by a variety of mostly anonymous or unknown authors who were inspired by earlier written or oral traditions. It is largely based on the (religious) *experiences and reflections* of a people, a nation, and a group of individuals. The consequences of this rather trivial first observation are enormous and should never be forgotten.

The Bible is a collective work that exists within a large variety of literary genres. It is not possible to describe the kind of literature we find in the Bible in just one sentence. There are myths, legends, prayers, hymns, historiographical parts, biographical stories, fairy tales, prophecies, wisdom literature, apocalypses, and poetry. It is easier to say what the Bible is not: it is not a history book; it is not a book on biology; it is not a book on cosmology; and it is not even a coherent work on theology. Thus, one should not try to attribute any scientific claim to the Bible that it does not pretend to make in the first place. The notion of infallibility is to be avoided: there is no causal link between “Bible as Word of God” and inerrancy¹. The Bible is, like all other books, written by people. There is not a single “Word of God” that was not spoken, thought, or written in “human words”.

Consequently, the fact that the Bible eventually became one “canonical” book is the result of a historical, i.e. human, process of transmission, repetition, structuration, reformulation, and selection. This process is called “inspiration” within the Christian tradition. I would like to add that the notion of inspiration, in a larger sense, also includes the work that readers put into interpreting the Bible. It is within the limits of this “artificially” composed corpus that an image of “the God of the Bible” is created. The same is *a fortiori* true when one speaks about the idea of time or freedom

1. S.M. SCHNEIDERS, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, ²1999, pp. 53-55 (“Infallibility and Inerrancy”).

in the Bible – the specific theme of this conference. Paul Ricœur rightly criticizes the artificial distinction between Hellenistic circular time and Biblical linear time in an article called *The Times of the Biblical God* (“Les temps du Dieu biblique”, with “times” in plural!)², in which he subtly distinguishes different Biblical meanings of time based on the literary genre of a section³. Yet, regardless of what one might think about this “genesis” of the Bible, it is reasonable to acknowledge that the common connecting theme within the entire Biblical story is the narration of the history of the people of Israel *in light of its covenant with God*. The idea of “time” should be given a place in this narrative theme.

Although the Bible is the story of the concrete experiences, thoughts, and reflections of people in the past, its “message” transcends its socio-historical place in time and continues to appeal to readers today. The meaning of the stories receives a new dimension when readers discover that these stories also concern themselves (the so-called “appropriation” of the text). The revelation of the meaning of the text is not something static or specific to events that happened over 2000 years ago. Rather, it is a dynamic process that happens anew each time a reader rereads the text. The concrete experiences of the past become, through their transmission as written scripture, universal stories, which can be re-experienced (of course, not in an identical way) by any modern individual or community. In this sense, the Bible belongs to the genres of art and poetry, both of which communicate with the spectator or reader at an existential level. The specific characteristic of such a medium is that the meaning of the message is very often revealed through the implicit, the non-said or non-shown, the mysterious, and the paradoxical. In fact, the character of God is one such paradoxical element within the text. The best biblical scholars or theologians are those who do not give any definition of God and who are able to open the spirits towards the mystery, the no-thing⁴. They offer both the audience and the readers the opportunities that are created by a human interpretation of God. Moreover, it is up to the audience or the readers to discover if there is anything of value in the Bible. If they do, the Bible can become “truth” for them.

2. P. RICŒUR, *Les temps du Dieu biblique*, dans *Esprit* (2013) 110-125; originally published in *Archivio di Filosofia* 53 (1985) no. 1 [*Ebraismo, Ellenismo, Cristianesimo. Atti del Colloquio Internazionale, Rome 1985*], 23-35.

3. Four groups are distinguished (“Writings and Law”, “Traditional writings and the message of the Prophets”, “Time according to Wisdom literature: the daily and the immortal”, “Hymns”).

4. A.J. HESCHEL, *Les bâtisseurs du temps*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1978 [1957], p. 114.

II. GOD AND TIME IN THE BIBLE: THE BEGINNING AND THE END

Since the Bible is the story of God and Israel, it is no surprise that we start our reflections by looking more closely at how God and time are related to each other. In his recent movie *Le Tout Nouveau Testament*, the Belgian director Jaco Van Dormael tells the story about God living in an apartment in Brussels. God enjoys bullying human beings on the computer through his commandments. One day, his daughter takes over control of the system and decides to send a message to everyone on earth that reveals to each person the date of his or her death. Some have called it a sacrilegious movie, but I believe that there is no better illustration of the misunderstood nature of God in the Bible. The real issue is that Van Dormael uses his anthropomorphic God to show how mankind is trying to take over God's role, but in the wrong way: by manipulating peoples' lives and determining their end. By inserting the idea of determination, freedom is inevitably taken away. Thus, how is God related to time in the Bible? The Bible itself does not contain a real systematic reflection on or study of time, leaving us to make our own educated deductions.

The Bible itself invites us to do so, since the first page describes the powerful act in which God created everything that exists⁵. The opening verses of Genesis already speak about God making day and night – time so to speak – on the first day:

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day (Gen 1,3-5; quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version).

Even before the sun and the moon were created, time was already present through day and night. God created additional elements that served to indicate time over the next few days. On the fourth day, for example:

And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth". And it was so. God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night – and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the

5. On time and order in Gen 1,1–2,4 as a basis for biblical wisdom literature, see the article in Dutch: B. LEMMELIJN, 'Het werd avond en ochtend': *Tijd en orde in Bijbels perspectief*, in I. CORNU – H. PEX (eds.), *Alle tijd van de wereld: Als gezin omgaan met tijd*, Kalmthout, Pelckmans Pro, 2017, 14-26.

day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good (Gen 1,14-18).

Although we cannot go into the details of this creation story, let us look at three essential ideas within it.

First, by saying that God already existed before the beginning and that time was the first thing he created, the Bible shows that God is eternal – out of time, completely different from humankind – *and* that He is in time. He enters the human world through time. One could say that in creating time, he gives himself to the world. In theological language, the making of time is the first incarnation of God. Contrary to the image of God in Van Dormael's work, God, and not the human being, is the master of time. It is in time that God reveals himself and that he will manifest his great deeds. This story does not say anything about the cosmological origin of the world. It makes clear that when human beings first came into the world, everything was already there. It is not "man" who created the world. Everything is a gift given beforehand. The creation of the "first" man and woman (elaborated upon in Genesis' second creation story, chapter 2) is (only) a prototype story for the birth of every person in this world. We are all Adam and Eve. Thus, from the moment that God created the world, he is the Other one – and remains as such – but he is also the One-in-the-world. This act of God, in conjunction with his presence in time, has inspired Israel's religious belief and represents the background for all other indications of time in the Bible:

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable (Isa 40,28).

"In the beginning" is not a chronological indication, but an ontological one. If you want to understand human history, it is a capital thing ("caput"; head, like the "beginning") to know that God is there and that the world is given. André Chouraqui, in his famous translation of the Bible, translates the beginning of the Bible in the following way: "Entête, Élohîms créait les ciels et la terre" (*entête* = "caption, heading, headline"). Time brings God into history.

Second, the reason why Israel discovered God's creation is that the world is well-organized. The creation story describes the transition from chaos to *kosmos*. The lights that are created, the change from night into day, the seasons, the water and the earth, etc., all create rhythm in life and become the standards used to make calendars and measurements, as outlined above (vv. 14-15). After the creation, the world is complete, nothing is missing. Although the story occurs at the beginning of the

Bible, it is in fact a vision of a future paradise, a horizon, a dream towards which mankind is oriented, a depiction of how life should be. Once again, we are not hearing a lecture on science. We instead understand that one of the most important effects or functions of time is order, regularity, and the structuration of life.

A third important function of time that can be found in the creation story is its necessity for the liturgy. If God made time, there must be special moments in time for God. I will come back to this point later, but it is clear that the idea of the seventh day – a day in which God rests – is a reference to the Shabbat, a Hebrew day of rest. Time offers an opportunity to meet God in a special way “at certain times”. At special occasions, God is to be praised for being there or having done things. I would like to make a little excursion in order to establish a connection with Ricœur’s aforementioned article. In it, he mentions the Hymns as a fourth literary genre in the Bible (see above, n. 3). This is the time of the liturgy. In fact, liturgical gatherings are moments in which all the functions of time are coming together, a point where time stands still:

It is the privilege of the cult to actualize anew salvation, to reiterate creation, to remember Exodus and the installation in the land, to renew the proclamation of the law, to repeat promises. This function of re-actualization is grammatically characterized by the use of “I” and “we”, which – after having for instance designated the king – have become empty places susceptible to be filled by anyone, individual or community, who takes the position of an “orant”. [...] The Psalm is thus the recapitulation, in the present time of cult and prayer, of all specific functions of time in writings, law and prophets⁶.

By making reference to the seventh day in the first story of the Bible, the book makes it clear that all functions of time reach their summit at the moment a cult offers praise and hymns to the deity. From the beginning, the creation story mentions the most important function of time: the possibility for an encounter between God and human beings.

It is time for an intermediary conclusion: since everything is told as stories in the Bible, time is a metaphor used to talk about the presence of God within the world. It expresses how Israel had experienced the presence of God in the first place. Time is sacred because God is present in time. Yet, this sacredness is also linked with being or becoming a human person in a biblical perspective: there is no human life out of time. People will have to learn to live with and in time.

As a counterpart to the stories concerning the beginning of time, there are also those that describe the end of time within the Bible. This so-called

6. RICŒUR, *Les temps* (n. 2), pp. 123-124 (my translation).

apocalyptic literature starts in the Old Testament (a.o. in the book of Daniel), appears frequently in the Jewish-Christian non-biblical literature and in the Dead Sea scrolls of Qumran, and has its most famous Biblical occurrence in the last book of the New Testament, the book of Revelation or the Apocalypse. Like Genesis, however, the Book of Revelation is neither concerned with history nor cosmology. It instead takes up the ideas of Genesis: God is at the beginning, but he is also at the end, meaning he is always. He is the first one and the last (Rev 1,17; 2,8; 22,13), the alpha and the omega (1,8; 22,13), he is the one who was, who is, and who will come (1,4); he is living into eternity (1,17-18). Notwithstanding the clear indications of time (e.g., 1,000 years in Rev 20; 1,260 days in 12,5; etc.), the intention of the book is not to be historically accurate in its representation of the end of time. One only has to read of “apocalypses” in non-Biblical texts to understand that playing with calendars and time is just part of the apocalyptic literary genre. The meaning of the Apocalypse lies elsewhere. To quote one colleague:

The Apocalypse of John does not intend in the first place to reveal the future or the end of times as an objective reality, but it seeks to proclaim the arrival of this end in the Jesus event and the critique of the present world this event implies⁷.

Genesis made it clear that no human being is equal to God. Revelation repeats this idea: that no human ruler, not even the Roman Emperor, should think he is God on earth. Apocalypse creates a counter-cosmos that provides an indication of the real proportions of power. There are three parts to the book: the first contains the vision of the prophet who writes seven letters to seven cities in Asia Minor; the second is about the liturgy of the Almighty Pantocrator (nine times) and his son in heaven; the last tells about the war between good and evil at the end of times. These three parts are presented in chronological order within the story, but the “author” John considers them as happening simultaneously. With the cities in crisis on earth (part 1), Almighty God and the glorified Christ are adored (part 2), while a cosmological war rages in the heavens above (part 3)⁸. Although Genesis and Apocalypse are both using mythological language, they are no less involved with real history than any other book of the Bible.

7. É. CUVILLIER, *Les Apocalypses du Nouveau Testament* (Cahiers Évangile, 110), Paris, Cerf, 2000, p. 34 (my translation).

8. More detailed commentary about this time structure can be found in D.L. BARR, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, Salem, OR, Polebridge, 2012 [1998].

If the Book of Revelation has one lesson to teach about time, it is that every mention of it can be symbolic. Consider the number seven in Genesis: it occurs several times within the book of Revelation (the letters, the seals, the trumpets, the plagues, the bowls, and the heads of the dragon) as an inverted echo of the creation. In symbolic language, it is even possible to say that Jesus is “the faithful and true witness, the origin (ἀρχή) of God’s creation” (3,14), or that they who are before the throne worship God “day and night” (4,8; 7,15; remember Genesis; the perfect liturgy!), or that “the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of human-kind” (9,15). When rereading the last chapters of the book of Revelation, one might be struck by the *absence* of any indication of time. These timeless chapters on the new creation, the new Jerusalem, and the imminent arrival of the Lord (chapters 21 and 22), are a vision of this – our – world and how it could be completely different: new earth, new heaven, new city, no light from the sun or moon is needed (21,23; 22,5), and there will no longer be night (21,25; 22,5). The only indication of time is that this will happen “soon” (ταχύ: 22,6.7.12.20). This vision is another way to show that God is always present for the righteous ones.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away” (Rev 21,3-4).

Just like “time” in Genesis is about any time in which people are living, “time” in the Apocalypse also concerns the idea of “any time”. Both books are not about either chronology or history, but are about us.

III. THE EXPERIENCE OF TIME IN HISTORY

We have been talking about the beginning and the end and we have discovered that one of the major goals of these mythological stories on the two chronological extremes is to show that God is historically with his people. But how does God appear in history? How does Israel experience God in time⁹?

9. Some of the insights in this short contribution were found in the introductory articles by K.S. NASH, *Time*, in D.N. FREEDMAN – A.C. MYERS – A.C. BECK (eds.), *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2000, 1309-1312; H.P. MATHYS, *Zeit. III: Altes Testament*, in *Theologische RealEnzyklopädie* 36 (2004) 520-523; K. ERLE-MANN, *Zeit. IV: Neues Testament*, *ibid.*, 523-533.

We have already mentioned how the order of things in *nature* is the manifestation of God. God's creation is for everyone. Thus, the regulation of time in nature is for everyone. There is both a time for the production of fruit (Ps 1,3) and for rain (Lev 26,4; Zech 10,1). These, however, represent only some elements of God's activity: Job 38–39 is a long list of questions God is asking to Job in which he says that he regulates everything in both nature and life:

Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you observe the calving of the deer? Can you number the months that they fulfill, and do you know the time when they give birth, when they crouch to give birth to their offspring, and are delivered of their young? (Job 39,1-3).

Many indications of time are given through mentioning sunset or sunrise. The calendar was determined by the position of the moon (from new moon to new moon) and feast days took place at full moon (like Passover or Sukkoth). The reverse of this is that God also intervenes with plagues, famine, destruction, war, or inundation when the order is not respected. In both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, these actions of God are sometimes called "The day of the LORD" (about 25 times):

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed (2 Pet 3,10).

The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there (Zeph 1,14).

Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it? (Amos 5,20).

Moreover, Israel is the place of God in *history*. There is no theoretical, physical, or mathematic insight in time (the Hebrew word *et* is usually translated as *καίρως* in the Greek translation of the Septuaginta, but may also appear as *χρόνος*), but there is the experience and the interpretation of things that happened. Time in history – like the stories of the beginning and the end – is neither "neutral" nor "objective". It is symbolic and has meaning. One could say that the most important "time" is the present, the now, the moment in which God is giving his commandments.

If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the

land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob (Deut 30,16–31,1).

However, this “today” (60 times in Deuteronomy), in which the Law is given to the people, is not timeless, but embedded in the story of Israel and cannot be understood without the past. Ricœur speaks about “a narrativisation of ethics and an ethicisation of (hi)story”¹⁰. When Moses receives the ten commandments, the first words the Lord says are: “I am the lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Deut 5,6). The past is important not because of the things that happened, but because of what we can learn from it today. While Hebrew people are moving ahead in time, they constantly look back towards the past; this is what is “in front of” (*qedem*) the present moment. Thus, they can always add more meaning to what happened in the past. There is a cumulative aspect of stories that happened in the past (James Barr and Paul Ricœur)¹¹.

That was for the LORD a night of vigil, to bring them out of the land of Egypt. That same night is a vigil to be kept for the LORD by all the Israelites throughout their generations (Exod 12,42).

Just remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs and wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the LORD your God brought you out. The LORD your God will do the same to all the peoples of whom you are afraid (Deut 7,18-19).

The major feasts of Israel, which originated out of the context of phenomena in nature, were reinterpreted in light of major historical events. Another aspect of the meaning of time is its sanctification. We already talked about this when mentioning the seventh day of the creation: a period of time to do nothing. In his two important books, *Les bâtisseurs du temps* (1957) and *The Sabbath* (1951), Abraham Heschel emphasizes how Judaism is not a religion of space, but of time. It is through respect for the Sabbath (and other liturgical feasts) that Jews make time *qadosh* (“holy”, like in Gen 2,3: “So God blessed the seventh day and *hallowed*

10. RICŒUR, *Les temps* (n. 2), p. 116: “une narrativisation de l’éthique et une éthicisation de la narration”. I understand “narration” here as history that is transformed in story.

11. In his article, Ricœur often refers to J. BARR, *Biblical Words for Time*, Naperville, IL, Allenson, 1962.

it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation"). It is through time (and not spatial elements) that we can reach our deepest existence: "In the kingdom of the spirit we are not able to distinguish one second from a century, one hour from a complete being"¹².

Yet, during the history of Israel, sanctification is not always at the top of the agenda. It suffices to read the famous books of Wisdom (Qohelet or Ecclesiastes, Job, Proverbs). Here again, we refer to Ricœur. In those books – without history but not without time – we are confronted with universal experiences that go beyond Israel's history. There is a kind of timeless – or of all times? – reference to suffering, (quasi-)nihilism, searching for sense, and a confrontation with the limits of our being as a part of our "condition humaine". These books are sometimes considered to be the ones that are most adaptable to our (post-) modern times. There is a time for everything, but there is also nothing new (Qoh 3). As such, what does it mean to live in this world and during this time? Where is God if time becomes "meaningless"? These questions as well are present in the Bible. I think we should read these texts as part of the paradoxical presence of God in this world, which I mentioned at the beginning of this article. It is, according to the Bible, perfectly possible to have the experience of the absence of God in time. The co-existence of time's different manifestations is an invitation to hear the Bible in stereo. Hymns in which time becomes eternity are alternating with philosophical or existential moments of feeling God's complete abandonment. Such can be human life in this "time", a story already told in the Bible.

IV. JESUS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

So far, we mentioned the New Testament only in regard to the book of Revelation. While the fundamental insights on time within the Hebrew Bible do not change in the New Testament, it is clear that the central character of Jesus and his message are working as a centripetal force for almost all of the New Testament's 27 writings. Compare, for example, these passages:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Cor 5,17)¹³.

12. HESCHEL, *Les bâtisseurs du temps* (n. 4), p. 200; Id., *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951.

13. See also the genealogy of Jesus from the beginning of times: Jesus was "the son of Adam, the Son of God" (Luke 3,38).

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children (Gal 4,4-5).

Jesus brings salvation to humankind, not as an automatism, but as an opportunity for people to act according the rules that are valid in the Kingdom of God. Mark's summary of the first words of Jesus is paradigmatic:

The time (καιρός) is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news (Mark 1,15).

The καιρός (84 times NT), a special moment, has come. God is near and people have to act according to this good news: they should repent and believe. I think that we cannot repeat enough that Jesus' message concerns, first and foremost, the announcement of God's Kingdom in this world. As Matthew formulates it:

But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today (Matt 6,33-34).

Or Luke:

Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing". All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth (Luke 4,21-22).

It is as if we hear an echo of the words of Deuteronomy that we have already mentioned: it is today that you can choose between life and death.

The power of the Kingdom is so strong that it cannot be stopped. I interpret the very difficult words in Mark 9,1 in the same manner:

And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power".

This means the Kingdom is at hand, it is here and now, open your eyes and look.

The idea that the καιρός, or the opportune time of the Kingdom, is now finds a curious counterpart in the use of the expression "the day" (ἡμέρα) – which we have already mentioned before – and that it indicates a day to come in which something new will happen. This will be a renewal of the old:

They will say to you, "Look there!" or "Look here!" Do not go, do not set off in pursuit. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his *day* (Luke 17,23-24).

The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious *day*. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2,20-21).

He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the *day* of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1,8).

Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the *day* of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? (2 Pet 3,11-12).

This "*day*" is not only a day of judgment but also of salvation, and it is not only a day in the far away future, but also in the present: "As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain". For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you". See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! (2 Cor 6,1-2).

It is clear that Jesus and early Christianity exist within the tension created between the present time and the idea of definitive change that will come in the future. However, what exactly this "coming" is remains vague. Only metaphorical and symbolic language is used. "The day" is one of these metaphors. It does not make sense to take it literally. In fact, it can be seen as a parenetic warning to those who are following Jesus to live as he has asked them to live. Once again, time is linked with the presence of God (through Jesus in the New Testament). The idea in both present and future indications of time is that the concept of time is given by God to human beings as an opportunity to act according to the message proclaimed by Jesus. If they accept that the Kingdom of God has come in Jesus and if they act accordingly, then they are already in that Kingdom – in the present. The quality of time – be it *καίρως* or *ἡμέρα* – is only revealed when a positive human response is given to it:

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time (*τὸν καιρόν*), because the days (*αἱ ἡμέραι*) are evil (Eph 5,15-16).

In other words, there are conditions to be fulfilled in order to give the present time the chance to become a new world. In the second incarnation – the first one being creation – Jesus, as a manifestation of the divine eternal God, gives a new program to live in time "today". One has to become like children, to give away all that one possesses, to live according to his paradox: "Anyone who gives away his life and becomes the slave of all will enter the Kingdom of God" – not later,

but now (see, e.g., Mark 8,35; 9,35; 10,43-44). The only criterion that counts in the so-called final judgment is “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matt 25,31-46, v. 40). Yet, this paradox represents the tension between present and future time in the New Testament: Jesus is already asking *now* what you have done to “these who are members of his family”. In fact, we find in this a complement to what we already said about liturgy and hymns as a moment in time where the divine and the human meet. “Time” not only reaches eternity in moments of liturgical adoration, but also in the action of loving the poor, one’s enemies, and the weak. It is in practicing the paradoxes of the Gospel *now* that one can see eternity’s spark.

How do we understand this? Can this be proven? Of course not! There is no human logic in it. Is it *intellectus quaerens Deum* or *fides quaerens intellectum*? I am not sure that the Biblical scholar who reads narrative stories understands this option very well. S/he only discovers that the “practical wisdom” of Jesus is offered through the story as a possible way of living in time. “To you the mystery of the kingdom of God is given”, Jesus says to his disciples in the parable discourse when they do not understand his teaching (Mark 4,11-12: Ὑμῖν τὸ μυστήριον δέδοται τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ). But what exactly this mystery is remains ... a mystery.

Jesus’ wisdom is not a theory one has to reflect upon. He himself lived what he spoke. And he did so until his death. Is it a coincidence that Matthew (26,18) and Paul (Rom 5,6) call the passion and the death of Jesus *καιρός*?

He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is near (Ὁ καιρός μου ἐγγύς ἐστίν); I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples’” (Matt 26,18).

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly (κατὰ καιρὸν ὑπὲρ ἁσεβῶν ἀπέθανεν, Rom 5,6).

Before concluding, I would like to add one more indication of time: “the hour” (ὥρα). It is remarkable that the author of the gospel of John used this rather precise indicator of time as a metaphor for the moment of salvation that is given to the world by the passion, the death, the resurrection and the glorification of Jesus (while for Matt 26,45, it was still reserved for the moment of the passion). The center of time in history is called the hour, a measurement consolidating the opportune or appointed time into one of humankind’s shortest moments; eternity concentrated into a twinkle. In fact, “time” no longer has a temporal function. It has

become synonymous for entering into the mystery of God. Yet, was that the opportunity God gave to humanity when he created time?

Jesus answered them: “The *hour* has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12,23-25).

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his *hour* had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end (John 13,1).

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