

FOREWORD

by Pope Francis

To hold this book by John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon, in my hands is for me still to clasp his hands in the friendship that bound us together. A posthumous book, as the title tells us, it comes to me as a sign springing from a past that has been liberated in the Future of God.

I first met John Zizioulas in 2013 when I welcomed the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople that came to Rome for the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. It was a meeting that confirmed for me the conviction of how much we still have to learn from our Orthodox brothers and sisters with regard to episcopal collegiality and the tradition of synodicality.

In our conversations during successive meetings, he often brought up the topic of an eschatological theology that for years he had been hoping to turn into a book. When we prayed and reflected on the unity of Christians, he communicated his realism to me: this would only be achieved at the end of the ages. But in the meantime, we had the duty to do everything possible, *spes contra spem*, to continue to search for it together. The fact that it would be achieved only at the end should not feed complacency or find us idle: we had to believe that the Future was already in operation, “the cause of all being.” A Future that comes *toward* history, that does not emerge *from* history. Not simply the end of the journey, but a companion in our life that is capable of “coloring” it with the colors of the Resurrection and with the voice of the Spirit that would have “remembered new things.” He avoided the danger of our having our gaze fixed on a past able to make us prisoners, prisoners above all of old errors, of failed attempts, through accumulating negative junk, through encouraging the implanting of mistrust. We all suffer the negativity of looking backwards, and the sincere search for the unity

of all Christians suffers from this in a particular way. The value of our traditions is to open up the path, and if instead they close it, if they hold us back, that means that we are mistaken in the way we interpret them, prisoners of our fear, attached to our sense of security, with the risk of transforming faith into ideology and mumifying the *truth* that in Christ is always *life* and *way* (John 14:6), path of peace, bread of communion, source of unity.

The *eschaton* knocks at the door of our daily life, seeks our collaboration, loosens the chains, liberates the transition to a good life. And it is at the heart of the eucharistic canon that for Zizioulas the Church “remembers the future,” completing as he does in the chapters of this book a doxology to “Him who comes,” a theology that he has written on his knees, in expectation.

I want to awake the dawn (Psalm 108:2). The psalm’s verse calls on all the instruments and voices of humanity to cry out our need for God’s Future. Let us awake the dawn within ourselves, let us awake hope. Indeed, “the substance of things hoped for” (Heb 11:1), the gesture that constitutes Christianity, is to give a sign, a tangible and daily sign, a humble and disarmed sign, of “Him who is and who was and who is to come” (Rev 1:8).

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Francis