

Olivier Clément's *Transfiguring Time* will be published in English for the first time by New City Press in January 2019

The great French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément was born in the village of Aniane in the Languedoc region of South-West France, to a non-religious family. "I grew up in an environment in which Christianity played no part. I was not baptized and received no religious instruction." Attracted first by poetry, especially that of Rainer Maria Rilke, and then by the Bible, he spent his twenties exploring the religious traditions of India. "For ten years I searched through this vast world of religions and myths. I was drawn to all of it. But I found myself trapped between the spirit of India, where all is sacred, divine, and immersed in the ocean of divinity, and my sense of the uniqueness of the human person."¹

It was Clément's encounter with Vladimir Lossky's *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* that showed him another way. Lossky's chapters on the Trinity, and man made in God's image, thrilled Clément. "The Trinity appeared to hold the solution to the impasse: a total unity, greater by far than that spoken of in India, and completely different." At the same time, he began to read the great Russian writers, including Dostoevsky and Berdyaev. "I discovered Christianity and I asked myself what I should do with this discovery."² Baptized as an Orthodox Christian in 1952, Clément went on to study with Lossky in Paris, while teaching history at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand. In 1965 Clément was invited by Paul Evdokimov to join the faculty of the Saint-Serge Theological Institute in Paris, where he taught for over thirty years.

Transfiguring Time, Transfigurer Le Temps – Notes sur le Temps à la Lumière de la Tradition

Orthodoxe, his first book, was written when Clément was thirty-seven. It carries all the excitement of his fresh encounter with Orthodoxy and the Fathers of the Christian Church. In it, he draws on his deep study of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Indian myths to differentiate the conception of time and eternity in archaic religions, in Hinduism and in Buddhism, from the Christian, and specifically Orthodox, understanding of time and eternity. The print run was very small and the book disappeared from view,

1 Interview with La Croix, 2001, cited by Nicolas Sénèze, "Olivier Clément, grand penseur orthodoxe du XXe siècle, est mort," La Croix, January 16, 2009

2 Ibid

almost without a trace. It was referenced only occasionally.³ This newly translated edition will bring Clément's early work to a new generation of readers.

According to Monique Clément, the author's widow, *Transfiguring Time* is a bridge between Clément's research in the years before his baptism, and his immersion in the Orthodox faith. It is also a meditation on history. These reflections on the "sense of history" contribute to one of the main currents of post-war French thought.⁴ The book gives an Orthodox perspective on those questions that Albert Camus was exploring at the same time, from the perspective of an atheist.

Starting from an in-depth examination of the understanding of time as cyclical repetition in pre-Christian religions, Clément teases out the status of human experience and of the human person in these vast cyclical systems, that "burn up" time in annual ritual festivals and that deny the autonomy of the individual. In his view, by the time of the ancient Greeks and the gnostics, increased knowledge and self-awareness was accompanied by an increasing sense of entrapment.

By contrast, Clément reveals key Old Testament stories to be explorations of human freedom, and of the growth of understanding of God's working in time and in human history. The cyclical and cosmic events of ancient religions are transformed "from primitive celebrations of a cosmic liturgy to memorials of God's work." Thus, in the Old Testament he sees the beginning of historical time, in which there is both remembrance of the past and expectation of the future.

Then comes the Incarnation, which, for Clément, is the central event in human history. "The cyclical time of nature and the historical time of the Covenant contract into, or in the words of St. Paul, are recapitulated in Christ...The Incarnation draws in and transfigures all human and cosmic reality." The Incarnation opens up the possibility of the fullness of the human person. This is an event that contains all time: Christ said "I am the Alpha and the Omega."

With the Resurrection and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost begins the "deified time of the Church." For Clément, as for St. Ignatius, the Church is constituted as Christ's body in the world, whenever Christians assemble in communion. The deified time of the Church both exceeds and encompasses the earlier conceptions of time. The nostalgia for paradise of ancient cultures is given a

³ *Transfigurer le Temps* received a favorable notice from Yves Congar, *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, 1961, vol. 35

⁴ Monique Clément, personal communication, 2017.

new form, reopening paradise to mankind. "Christ is more than paradise, as, by extension, is his Church: the light of the eighth day already shines there."

Clément concludes with a profound exploration of the working of the Holy Spirit in the world. He anchors this in an uncompromising adherence to human freedom, that includes the freedom to reject God, and in the idea of the humility of God: God standing at the door waiting to be invited. Clément sets a very high bar for the role of Christians in the world, who "by force of their prayer, through their act of being present and then through their participation in creation ...fight to transform the earth into sacrament and to transform culture into an icon of the heavenly Jerusalem."

The concepts explored in the book: paradise, eternity, eon, act, freedom, liturgy, and sacrament are constantly reexamined and rewoven into a fuller understanding, in the light of the Incarnation. Clément's text resonates with biblical imagery and with the language of Orthodox hymns and troparia. His work has lost none of its freshness and relevance. While providing an extensive analysis of the conception of time and eternity in archaic religions, Greek philosophy, and Eastern religions, *Transfiguring Time* stands on its own as a meditation on the meaning of time and eternity, rooted in both the Patristic tradition, and in the newness and shock of Clément's encounter with Christianity.

Jeremy N. Ingpen, Hartsdale, NY

Translator

It is striking to what extent
The themes found in the book,
The central importance of human
freedom, are core to Clément's
work throughout his life - as
found in "On Human Being" and
in his last work "A small Spiritual
Compass (not yet translated)"

Transfiguring Time, Olivier Clément

(page numbers refer to the English translation, New City Press, 2019)

Time, History and Personal Revelation p.44

I would like to point out certain temporal structures, found both in the Scriptures and in the Fathers, that make clear the completely new and henceforth fundamental value that the Judeo-Christian revelation confers on time, history and personal revelation. There are four major inter-related propositions that express this reappraisal of time:

1. The eternal nature of the Living God cannot be defined as an exception to time;
2. Time, speaking metaphorically, is a creature and therefore, as is true of all creation, it is good and has meaning;
3. The value of time is inextricably linked to the revelation of personhood and love;
4. In the Parousia, in the Kingdom, time does not so much disappear as become transfigured.

Time as God's vehicle p.54

It was the man Noah who testified that time could 'march with God', even if it no longer carried the assurance of the ascension of the created towards the uncreated. Noah demonstrated that time, even in its opacity, could become the medium of the promise of faithfulness and of alliance. With Noah, time received stability and grace from God: "as long as the earth endures, summer and winter, day and night, will never end." From that moment, time has become God's vehicle, witnessing to his wisdom through its rhythms.

Time as a test of human freedom p.56

Time is therefore both a test of human freedom and, movingly, of God's expectation. As Martin Buber noted, the Biblical metaphysics of time are also those of dialogue, of an authentic dialogue in which the word of man has as much weight as the word of God. God awaits the human word. He wants to be interrupted. "I heard the voice of the Eternal saying whom shall I send and who will go for us, and Isaiah offered himself saying send me."

Time is not made for death but for eternity p.79

... time was not made for death but for eternity. Time was created not to destroy and be destroyed but to expand into eternal life.

The Incarnation: the central event of human history p.48

"And the word became flesh and dwelt among us ... No-one has seen God: only the Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has seen God." The Living God contains all that is positive of temporal existence. He both reconciles and surpasses stasis and kinesis. On the cross, the Eternal-become-Temporal draws into Himself all that is negative in temporal existence. This act not only annihilates all that is negative but also inverts its meaning, saturating the negative with light, so that henceforth "the glory as of the only Son from the Father" is conveyed in time through all aspects of temporal existence. Thus time is revealed not as opposition to Eternity but as the vessel chosen by God to receive and communicate the truth of eternity.

Deified time p.82

Our fallen existence in time, assumed by the Lord even into the depths of hell, is transformed into deified time. Living water flows henceforth from the cracks of fragmented non-being. In our hands the Cross is the magician's wand that causes living water to flow.

Transfiguration of history p.88

If Christ recapitulates human history, he also gives the cosmic cycles their full meaning. The Fathers followed up on Philo's suggestion that all the cosmic symbolism of Greek religion could be assumed into the worship of a personal God.

All is summed up in Christ and the Church in communion is Christ's presence on earth p.94

All the mystery of time and eternity is summed up in the meaning of the first day, the Lord's Day, as St. Basil showed. Sunday is at one and the same time the first day and the eighth day, the beginning and the end, the moment at which eternity gives birth to time and the moment at which eternity welcomes in time. If the unfolding of the week symbolizes the unfolding of the whole universe, Sunday reveals God's design, conceived from the beginning of the world, "to unite all things in Christ." Sunday is Paradise regained and the inauguration of life in the resurrection, the miraculous suddenness of dawn, and the light without end of the eighth day, when God is finally all in all.

Divine humility: God waits at the door to be called p.111

Is not the apex of divine humility seen in the survival of the fallen world, the world in which man can believe in his own autonomy? Is this not the supreme mark of God's respect for our freedom? The manifestation of Glory is restrained by divine economy, for otherwise where would be the space for personal dignity, human trials and collaboration?

The deified time of the Church sums up and encompasses all earlier intimations of immortality p.131

The deified time of the Church both encompasses and exceeds the two conceptions of temporal existence that we have explored. The paradisiacal nostalgia of archaic cultures is filled to overflowing by Christ's recapitulation of human history, reopening Paradise to man, the Paradise identified by the Fathers with the Church. But Christ is more than Paradise and so, by consequence, is His Church. The light of the eighth day already shines there.

We participate in divine life in the real world of here and now p.128

The Christian does not flee from time in search of this sanctification: time is where s/he serves and bears witness. And so s/he is strangely torn between the mysterious new creation, in which s/he participates in divine life, and the fallen world, in which s/he is wounded, and whose suffering s/he feels all the more deeply. For the more a person participates in divine life, the more s/he becomes the bearer of a love that makes them open to the suffering of mankind and to the groaning of the cosmos. And s/he feels more and more culpable of all the suffering in the world. No doubt it is for this reason that the saints shed so many tears.

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Building The Kingdom of God p. 159

if a person comes to Christ not just passively accepting the truth, but bearing stones, or better still becoming a stone in the building of the tower that Hermes describes, then they come with their whole being with all their personal experience, and with cosmic specificity.

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Olivier Clément, *Transfiguring Time: Understanding Time in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Jeremy N. Ingpen, Hyde Park NY: New City Press, 2019

Originally published in 1959, this early work by renowned French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément finally appears in Jeremy Ingpen's clear translation. Clément is notoriously dense and challenging in his writing but ultimately he is extremely discerning, so the investment of the encounter is always worthwhile. This is most definitely the case with this examination of time.

He came to Christianity as an adult, having been raised in Languedoc without any exposure to religion. Trained as a historian and professor at Lycée Louis-le-Grand, Clément's

own education is evident in the first third of the book, in which he takes us through the Asian traditions and their vision of time. It was Vladimir Lossky's work that first introduced him to Christianity in the Eastern tradition. And in Paris in the post WWII years, his further encounter was with that array of diverse yet supremely gifted philosophers and theologians often referred to as the "Paris school," even though they did not teach in the same institution or even belong to the same Orthodox church body. This was the case with Vladimir Lossky, with whom Clément studied, the great theologian remaining in the Russian patriarchal church rather than the Paris exarchate, which came under the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the late 1920s. Clément was invited to teach at this church's school, St. Sergus Theological Institute, by Paul Evdokimov, a member of its first graduating class and important theologian in his own right. Though the first generation luminaries like Berdyaev and Sergius Bulgakov were gone, Kartashev remaining, Clément would have as colleagues the second generation—Evdokimov, Afanasiev, Kern, Zander, Bishop Cassian and later Boris Bobrinskoy, as well as Alexander Schmemmann and John Meyendorff as students there. What Clément shared with these, now tragically gone, was an openness to both the western churches and culture. Like Evdokimov, he wrote in French, was ecumenically engaged and drew on all the great world traditions of faith. Toward the end of his life he conducted lengthy interviews with Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and Brother Roger of Taizé, publishing these as books.

Some will be surprised at Clément's striking breadth of sources and perspectives. While the last third is devoted to Eastern Church sources, both patristic and Russian, Clément is generous, as noted, in consulting Hindu, Buddhist, ancient Greek and Judaic traditions. He is at home with the early Christian writers like Origen and the author of *The Shepherd of Hermas*. He is well acquainted with church fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus Confessor, Cyril of Alexandria, Irenaeus of Lyons and Augustine. But he cites the Syriac divine office and theologians of our time like Cullman, Bulgakov. Like others in the "Paris school," the liturgy is the *theologia prima*, thus the Byzantine liturgy and its texts figure prominently for their applications of the scriptures, their proclamation of the tradition of the church.

Central is the conviction that in the Holy Spirit's economies time is transfigured as we also are, in the resurrection and Pentecost. In the liturgy, its various services and texts, time is sanctified, time becomes where and how we are transformed into the image and likeness of God—our deification. Time figures prominently in all the scriptures, from the creation in Genesis all the way through and in the Book of Revelation where we see time ultimately transfigured in the new Jerusalem and the Parousia, Christ's coming again. We become ourselves, transformed in the self emptying (*kenosis*) of God, Father, Son and Spirit in love for us. The conflicts and struggles of our individual lives as well as the clashes of history, of the world's time around us, also figure in this plan of transfiguration. Clément never takes flight into the last days and things. The path to the fulness, when God is all in all, leads through the everyday, through

all the cruelty, violence and misery we know all too well. None of this is wished away in the vision of the kingdom of heaven. Rather, we are the ones, the only ones, through whom God acts in order to bring healing peace, the joy of the Spirit.

On the one hand the elder Sophrony tells us to keep our spirit in hell without despairing, while Seraphim of Sarov greets everyone, all the time, with "Christ is risen, my joy." These two are almost personifications of the transformation that takes place in God's time. Often, Clément almost sounds like a liturgical text, because his writing is so steeped in the scriptures, liturgy and in the living witness of holy women and men. This is a marvelous meditation then, one which now should have a place in the lectio divina/spiritual reading of many. Thanks are especially due to Jeremy Ingpen for his graceful translation, excellent notes and for bringing this beautiful work back before us.

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Colloque consacré à l'œuvre d'Olivier Clément
à l'occasion du 10^e anniversaire de sa mort

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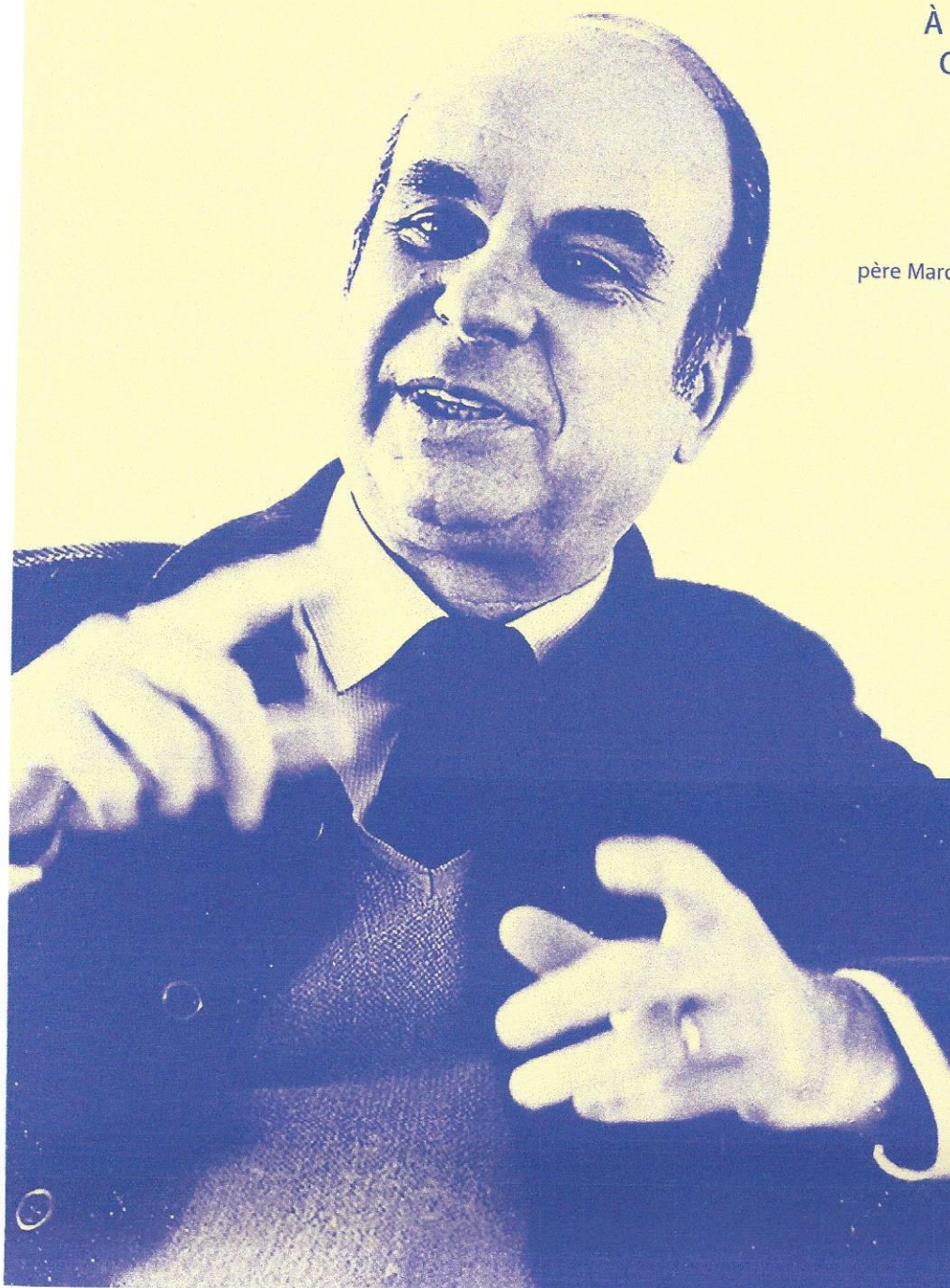
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