

Peter KUZMIČ

Time and Eternity

Ethics, Politics and Religion

Matica hrvatska [Matrix Croatia] Osijek, 2006, 275 pp.

translated by Roger Massey

Petar Kuzmič is a theologian of Protestant provenance, who, after his study at Harvard earned his doctorate from the Catholic Theological Seminary with his dissertation *Bible Societies and Their Bibles on Yugoslavian Soil in the 19th Century*, which the Zagreb publishing house *Kršćanska Sadašnjost* printed in 1983 under the title “Vuk-Daničićevo Sveto pismo i biblijska društva” [The Vuk-Daničić Scriptures and the Bible Societies] in their edition of *Analecta Croatica Christiana*. Kuzmič is considered one of the leading and most reputable intellectuals in Croatia.

Most texts, before being put into book form, were published as newspaper columns in Croatia’s daily and weekly papers and periodical magazines, from the end of 2000 through the end of 2005. In that way, the varied specter of print media can point to authors to reach a wide range of readers.

Reading this work, one could think, on the out set, that it is about separate and, for the most part, disconnected works. But, when we dig a little deeper, we see how the texts contain the sense of a guiding star, like when one keeps a diary. Diaries are, by their nature, subjective because they speak of intimate observations and even estimations. Sometimes at the beginning is not thought about circulating them among

wide public, especially not to offer them as a well-arranged book. Kuzmič accomplishes exactly that with his simple and approachable writing style.

The majority of his articles were printed in *Glas Slavonije* [The Voice of Slavonia] and the rest in the weekly paper *Danas* [Today] (“Zahvalnost bez oduševljenja,” [Thankfulness Without Enthusiasm] and “Došlo im do mozga,” [It Came to their Brain]. “Tri uskrsna poziva Lijepoj našoj,” [Three Easter Invitations to Our Beautiful Homeland], in the daily paper *Vjesnik*, 2001. “Hrvati ne slušaju Papu,” [Croatians Don’t Listen to the Pope], in the *Feral Tribune*, 2003. “Paljenje knjiga,” [Burning Books] in the Catholic journal *Glas Koncila*, 2003. “Nije bilo sukoba s Bozanićem,” [It Wasn’t a Fight with Bozanić] in the daily paper, *Jutarnji list*, 2003. And in the magazines *Izvori*, “Što sam govorio Tuđmanu,” [What I Said to Tuđman], 1996, and *Duhovno Vrelo* (“Nema evangelizacije bez učenja,” [There is no Evangelization Without Teaching], 2005).

This collection of columns, even in their titles, speak of the characteristics of this present age and not just in Croatia and the surrounding regions but also of the wider world. The article, “Autobiografsko-essekerski fragmenti,” [Autobiographical-Osijekian Fragments], was printed in an

anthology of writings *Nebo nad Osijekom* [*The Sky Above Osijek*] (MH Osijek, 2003), and during the second half of the 90's, four texts, translated into English, were published in *Christianity Today*, 1994 and 1996, "Protiv plemenske Europe," [Against a Tribal Europe] and "Bosanske gorke istine," [Bitter Bosnian Truths]. In *Religious Broadcasting*, 1996 "Izazovi post-komunističke Europe," [The Challenges of Post-Communist Europe], and in *Contacts 2004*, "Moral i realnosti izgradnje nacije," [Moral and the Realities of Nation Building].

Petar Kuzmič attempts, through his texts, to unite the temporality of time with eternity. In his texts, he doesn't pretend to remain on a theoretical level; rather, he wants to be practical. Once he was characterized by the *Jutarnji List* columnist Darko Pavičić in the column *Ispovjedaonica* [the Confession Booth], "Kuzmič za predsjednika," [Kuzmič for President], *Jutarnji list*, 16. prosinca [December] 2006). Pavičić wrote that Kuzmič "isn't a self-satisfied social theologian, who from the heights interprets to the society the need of Christians to strive for the general good but is a real 'working stiff,' who will roll up his sleeves and scurry from one end of the earth to the other when necessary."

When speaking of his book, which has a forward written by Yale professor Miroslav Volf, one could say that it is comprised of four entire wholes. In the first part, entitled *Hrvatska između prošlosti i suvremenosti*, [Croatia Between the Past and the Present] Kuzmič reflects upon the Croatian reality, without getting bogged down in "digging up the past." In the second part, *Duhovno-etički i ekumenski izazovi*, [Spiritual-Ethical and Ecumenical Challenges] just as the title implies, he speaks of religious, particularly of Christian interrelations. In the third part, *Europske teme i globalne dileme*, [European

Topics and Global Dilemas] he touches on real and current intergovernmental and personal relations, especially as observed through the actions of the individual. With regard to the fact that Kuzmič is a reputable professor on the post graduate studies at the Gordon-Conwell in Boston, it's not surprising that the fourth chapter, *Iz američke perspektive*, [From the American Perspective] sets forth the considerations of a person born in the area of the former Yugoslavia who observes the present day from the American perspective.

The objective power of texts is in that they most often are related to the time that is ahead of us, and not to the time that we have experienced. That doesn't just concern ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, even though the book is aimed at that, but that politics without ethics cannot serve humanity. The intention of the author is not to be polemic, either about politicians or theologians, but to express concern about contemporary Christianity and warn about the need of facing the challenges of time and eternity.

Two processes that are interdependent and that mark the modern world and the European scene are globalization and regionalism. If globalization leads to a greater connectedness and codependence in all areas of international cooperation and communication, then regionalism strives to create a strengthening of international connection between countries which are connected by geographical proximity and regional affiliation, and as a result of that, numerous integrations and groupings have occurred. Kuzmič observes globalization as a process that has its good as well as its bad sides. Precisely, the individual by his moral engagement, needs to contribute to positive globalization.

Perhaps some other contexts of tal-

king about the heavens and the city, which certainly doesn't need to be related only to Osijek, could consider the touching or encounters of reality and the ideal, the material with the spiritual. Observing the interrelation of time and eternity, we could imagine that - if God created time, in which mankind lives, - eternity is unending time because God lives in eternity. Through Kuzmič's texts, we could discern that time cannot become eternity because it is a sequence of events that immediately becomes the past, and we just anticipate the future.

Still, the arrival of Jesus Christ in the world made it possible for man to reach eternity in which he will live after time. Exactly that Way, about which Kuzmič speaks in his book, the meaning of life - in it man is not just directed to time, but he has the real opportunity to receive eternity. Just as Jesus reminds to read the signs of the time so that we could interpret events through the eyes of faith, so Kuzmič touches on the need of an awareness of reality - it is

passing, but works remain for eternity.

While speaking about Boris Trajkovski, the forward-thinking Macedonian peacemaker, and a Protestant president in an Orthodox country - who died in an airplane crash on route to a conference in Mostar - Kuzmič cited Tolstoy, "The deeper you become acquainted with life, the less you believe that it can destroy death."

And in the end, instead of a classic conclusion, in his book Kuzmič stresses the message, a little like a pair of gloves tossed into contemporary thought, "Where God and man meet, there heaven and city touch." Kuzmič confirms how it is possible to dive deeply into time, while at the same time holding on to eternity. Even though it will appear to *some new children* that the time about which Kuzmič writes looks far away and hard to understand, it is important that they leave a trail and that they attempt to fathom where to look for an answer - because time is passing, but eternity is here, it just needs to be grasped.

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