

Emanuele Severino & Angelo Scola
IL MORIRE TRA RAGIONE E FEDE
Marcianum Press, *Dialogoi Series*

Rather than “Il morire tra ragione e fede” (Looking at death between reason and faith” – the first book of Marcianum Press *Dialogoi Series* - could be titled “Eternity between reason and faith” given that its two authors, notwithstanding their different viewpoints, agree that death is a passage to everlasting life.

The book is actually a transcript of a debate between the Catholic Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Angelo Scola, and the Italian philosopher, Emanuele Severino, held during an international conference on the practices to assist terminally ill people.

For Severino, who has already devoted particular attention to the topic in a book titled *La morte e la terra* (Adelphi, Milano, 2011), the idea of death as the disappearance of what “is” into what “is not” is a contradiction in terms because something that “is not” cannot exist. According to Severino, the dichotomy between being and non-being is a flaw which has marred the western philosophical discourse since its inception in ancient Greece when a being (or anything that “is”) was thought of as coming from nothing, granted existence temporarily and eventually returning into nothing.

Severino argues that the entire history of philosophy is based on this fundamental mistake which occurred when Greek philosophy no longer denied the idea of non-being and created that of becoming. Thinking that reality is a constant becoming, a “becoming something other” is an error that brings one to conceive of death as an annihilation. For Severino it is not the becoming, but eternity which sustains the world.

Cardinal Angelo Scola looks at the problem from a Christian perspective and sees death as a prelude to eternity, not on the basis that nothing does not exist but because death was defeated by God after becoming man and dying on the cross. Hence two ways of affirming eternity, one through reason and the other through faith. Two lines of thought, apparently irreconcilable but not mutually exclusive. As a matter of fact, after reading this book one has the

clear impression that the two theses, though diverging from the common avowal of eternity, cannot do without one another.

What would become of reason and faith if each claimed total control of the human mind? This question has been abundantly answered by history. Trusting only reason or only faith, human beings have committed and still commit horrible things, and eternity, however may come about, cannot delete what history has left behind. It is therefore necessary that reason and faith do not exclude one another but together contribute to form the human spirit.

To this regard Cardinal Scola, drawing on the most mature Catholic thought, shows a greater open-mindedness than Severino's. «Faith – he says citing the eminent Catholic theologian, Giuseppe Colombo – feeds on revelation, not on opposing reason but granting revelation, as it was agreed upon in Vatican Council II, its Christological qualification as truth both on a transcendental and historical basis which reason cannot deny because reason cannot disregard history.»

Yet for Severino, “transcendental and historical truth” is falsified not only by the philosophical tradition but also by Christianity which aims at salvation on the conviction that “what is” comes from nothing. Nonetheless Severino, though basing his thesis on eternity on the logical principle of non-contradiction (“what is” cannot come from nothing because nothing can come nothing) loses his grip on reason when he mentions the “immense spectacle” that appears at the moment of death. Not having experienced death, his pronouncement can only rely on faith.

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