

## THE ETERNITY.

## WHAT DOES THE MANUAL DESCRIBING IT LOOK LIKE?

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Ioan Chirilă, *A învăța să trăiești vesnicia.**Un dialog cu Sandu Frunză*[*To learn to live eternity. A dialogue with Sandu Frunză*]

(Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2019), 145 p.

If I were to answer the question in the title, I would say two things: I don't know what such a manual looks like, and certainly, this book does not tend to be one. I know that Rev. Prof. Chirilă's work does not address the daily "obsession" of exact recipes and descriptions in ten simple steps at most. It does not even deal as systematically as one might expect with different facets of the idea of *eternity*. Instead, the title resonates perfectly with the message of the book, and in what follows I will try to show why.

For the Eastern tradition, the main feature of eternity is *communion* or *the hypostasis of sitting in dialogue*. Seen in this light, the fact that this book contains a dialogue between two people concerned with elements beyond the every day shows its real openness to the idea of eternity, even if the author may not have intuited this. Moreover, if we look at the history of the Church, we will see that dialogue has often been the framework that has cultivated faith and maintained the hope of eternal life. In this case, too, the dialogue that the book presents favour the reader's access to the "seeds" of immortality, randomly scattered in the interview that Sandu Frunză takes with Rev. Ioan Chirilă.

The seeds mentioned are nothing more than a few constants in Rev. Chirilă's discourse, constants that I believe can truly define eternity. The beautiful thing is that we do not find these "seeds" only in the discussion that our book reproduces, but in every word of the Rev. Professor, whether written or spoken publicly. It is not by chance that Sandu Frunză states at one point that the Ioan Chirilă promotes a "theology of light, of ascension, of openness to the transcendence of the other's being and to God" (p. 144). But in this book, the seeds have much more explicit content, such as the idea of *unity*. Rev. Chirilă repeatedly mentions the need for unity in any human structure,

whether it is a family, a class, a group of teachers, a university senate or any other level of society mentioned throughout the interview. Unity is an essential element of experiencing eternity, or in other words, of living an endless life in proximity to the Holy Trinity, the structure of absolute unity. Thus, in the author's view, earthly unity helps us to foresee something of the unity of the one above, which embraces eternity.

Another coordinate may be the freedom-peace structure, which also "permeates" the thinking of the Rev. Chirilă. Although they appear separately in the book, we can find several passages that speak of both elements at the same time, which we have not chosen by chance. In the area of Scripture and patristic thought, they are often associated with the eternity of God. The experience of true unity is simultaneously also the experience of these two "gifts" of the Holy Spirit. This is why the constant appeal to them makes Rev. Chirilă's speech really opens the horizon of the timeless.

Taking all these issues into account, we can conclude in the same way we started. Thus, I still cannot portray the perfect "eschatology" manual. However, the dialogue between Sandu Frunză and Rev. Ioan Chirilă can be a "spark" in the not-very clear horizon of eternity. The few elements I have tried to point out, such as dialogue, unity, freedom and peace, maybe the beginning of a complex ascent towards immortality. Finally, the very title of our book does not proclaim the absolute path but only makes a free and open opening (through autobiographical discussions) to how the eternal can be experienced. When I say this, I have in mind the fact that the title uses a verb in the infinitive ("to learn" [...] eternity), a tense which in this situation shows an active approach and an open "end", in total contrast to the tendency of current literature to use almost only verbs in the imperative ("learn" [...] eternity). In these circumstances, as Rev. Prof. Chirilă, we can only look to the One "who has eternity and does not sell it but gives it" (p. 145)!