

‘ALL IN ALL’ (1 COR 15:28): ASPECTS OF THE UNITY BETWEEN GOD AND CREATION ACCORDING TO ST MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR

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This paper investigates three types of unity between God and creation in the works of St Maximus the Confessor. Following Maximus’ claim that God is beginning as creator, middle as provider, and end as goal, this paper argues that, in each of these three stages, God forms different kinds of unity with created beings. I will show that the first type of unity, between God as creator and created beings, is based on the relationship between the Logos and the *logoi* of beings, in which the Logos serves as the centre of all *logoi*. The second kind of unity, between God as provider and created beings, is established on divine providence, which causes created beings to converge towards each other by the singular force of their relationship to God as both their origin and their final goal. Finally, the unity between God as end and created beings, based on full participation, presupposes the ceasing of the natural activities of created beings, and liberation from the constraints of their natural definition or *horos*.

The aim of this article is to show how Maximus perceives the unity between God and rational beings. Following Maximus’ claim that God is beginning as creator, middle as provider, and end as goal,¹ I will attempt to point out the three kinds of unity between God and the world that depend on the role of God and also on the status of created beings. In the first section of my article, I will explore the unity between God as the Logos and the *logoi* of rational beings, as they are preconceived by the divine power. Next, I will deal with the unity between God as provider and rational beings, which are separated by time and space. In this section, I will mostly establish my argument upon Maximus’ concepts of the ‘creative and sustaining procession’ and the ‘revertive and inductive return’ (*ποιητική και συνεκτική πρόοδος και ἐπιστρεπτική και χειραγωγική ἀναφορά*),² as they are seen from an ontological, anthropological, and liturgical perspective. Finally, the third part of the article focuses on the unity established by God as goal and created beings after His second and glorious coming. I will argue that this unity is established on the participation of

¹ 1.10 (PG 90:1088A); The English translation of George C. Berthold in Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 130.

² *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1081C); The English translation is in Maximus the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas, vol.1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 101.

being in God. This kind of participation is the full participation of rational beings in God and differs from participation based on the receptive powers of the beings present in this life. Maximus symbolically identifies full participation, or complete identity with the Divine, as an eschatological event with the liturgical Eucharist in his *Mystagogia*. The liturgical perspective on this point will therefore be taken into consideration. Moreover, I will attempt to show that all three kinds of unity are conceptualized with the help of Neoplatonic vocabulary. The form of unity between Logos and *logoi* reveals the Neoplatonic solution for the problem of the ‘one and many’, while the other two forms of unity, namely, the one of the procession and reversion, and the other of the participation, are defined by Neoplatonic concepts. In spite of the fact that Maximus uses Neoplatonic vocabulary, these terms often acquire a different meaning and serve different purposes compared with Neoplatonic systems. In addition, all of these three categories of unity are successive in a logical sense, while in terms of temporal precedence they overlap each other, making it difficult to draw a distinction between them.

The Logos of God and the Logoi of Beings

The unity of God as creator with created beings is based on the relationship between the Logos and the *logoi* of beings. Maximus describes the unity of the Logos and *logoi*, commencing from the premise that ‘the one Logos is many *logoi* and the many are One’.³ The one Logos is many *logoi* on the basis of their incomparable differences among created beings and ‘their specific individuality, which remains unconfused both in themselves and with respect to one another’.⁴ On the contrary, many *logoi* are the one Logos on the basis of his unconfused existence in them and their return to him as the beginning and the cause of all things.⁵

Two aspects are noticeable here. First, when Maximus describes how the One is many, he does this in terms of the undivided and unconfused manifold, while, when he describes how the many are the one, he applies the term ‘unconfused union’. The terms that Maximus extensively uses in relation to this point are ‘undivided’ (ἀδιαίρετος) and ‘unconfused’ (ἀσύγχυτος). In previous Maximian scholarship, these two terms are often associated with the set of the four Chalcedonian Christologic

³ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1081BC): πολλοί λόγοι ὁ εἰς λόγος ἐστί, καὶ εἰς οἱ πολλοί; Maximos the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 100–101.

⁴ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1077C); Maximos the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 94–95.

⁵ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1077C). Maximos the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 94–95.

terms,⁶ but as Törönen argued in his book,⁷ more likely sources for these terms are the Cappadocians, Cyril of Alexandria, and Dionysios the Areopagite. We will explore Maximus' usage of these terms, not in a Christological, but rather in a cosmological or ontological context, that reinforces Törönen's argument.

Secondly, one can discern the Neoplatonic solution to the philosophical problem of 'one and many' behind the doctrine of the Logos and the many *logoi*. This solution is based on the premise that the unity of plurality is due to one single cause and beginning. Both these concepts need more explanation.

Maximus stresses that in plurality, the *logoi* of beings are established as unique and unconfused with others, but also undivided one from another due to their relationship with the one Logos. The unity of all the *logoi* in the one Logos is based on the unconfused existence of the Logos of God as cause and beginning in every *logos* of beings, and on the return of all *logoi* towards the one Logos.

The many *logoi* are at the same time undivided and unconfused among themselves. The *logoi* are undivided among themselves on the basis of something common that unites them.⁸ Maximus claims that all beings are generically united by virtue of their 'common and universal identities'.⁹ Therefore, from the most general *logoi* of being and nature, and subsequent *logoi* of the most generic genus (*γενικώτατον γένος*), more generic genera (*γενικώτερα γένη*), particular species (*εἶδη*), most specific species (*εἰδικώτατα εἶδη*),¹⁰ to the *logoi* of individuals (*ἄτομα*) and accidents (*συμβεβηκότα*), all the *logoi* are undivided by their participations in the higher *logos* of being. Thus, the accidents are undivided due to the unity in the substance, the individuals due to the unity in the most specific species, the most specific species due to the unity in particular species, particular species due to the unity in more generic genera, more generic genera due to the unity in the most generic genus, and the most generic genus in the most general *logos* of being. The most general *logos* of being is also undivided from the one Logos of God, because it has its cause and source in him.

The second crucial term which determines the uniqueness of beings is the term 'unconfused' (*ἀσύγχυτος*). The *logos* of each particular being maintains the beings'

⁶ The four Chalcedonian Christological adjectives, which describe the relationship between two natures in the Incarnate Logos, are 'unconfused' (*ἀσύγχυτως*), 'unchanged' (*ἀτρέπτως*), 'undivided' (*ἀδιαίρετως*), and 'unseparated' (*ἀχωρίστως*). See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, translation and forward by B.E. Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2003), 65–70; Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Lund: Gleerup, 1965), 21–37.

⁷ Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1–6.

⁸ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 41 (PG 91:1312BD).

⁹ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 41 (PG 91:1312C). The English translation is in Maximus the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 116–17.

¹⁰ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 10 (PG 91:1177C); Maximus the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 288–89.

undivided relation to the general order, but it also keeps the beings out of confusion one with another. Maximus elaborates on the fixity of every being in general in his *Ambiguum* 15:

...they [*i.e.* created beings] are unchanging in their nature, potential, and activity, as well as in their rank and station in the general order of things, so that they do not in any way go beyond their natural properties or change into other things and become confused with them.¹¹

The natural *logos* of every being is defined and circumscribed not only by the *logoi* of essence, nature or species, but also by the *logoi* of relationship, mixture, position, power, activity, passion, quantity, and quality that preserve, unconfused, particular beings from other beings.¹² By his insistence on the term 'undivided', Maximus preserves the unity of the *logoi* amongst themselves and with the one Logos, while by the insistence on the term 'unconfused' he establishes all beings as unique.

The reversible process of establishing the particularity of the *logoi* of beings is the process of uniting them in the one Logos. Maximus again uses the terms 'unconfused' and 'undivided' in order to claim that the Logos of God exists in all beings without confusion or division. The term 'unconfused' here shows that created beings are mostly defined by their own *logoi*, which prevent any unnatural mixture. The Logos exists in *logoi* indivisibly as their cause and source, while the *logoi* exist in the Logos by virtue of the transference of all beings towards the Logos as the beginning of all. Thus, Maximus metaphorically compares the Logos with the centre of a circle and the *logoi* of beings with its *radii* in several places,¹³ in order to stress the existent unity. The *logoi* arranged in the Porphyrian tree are always connected with their source and, although they model the particularity and distinctiveness of the created world, they also serve as gathering agents. Once more, unity is based on the virtue of the one Logos as the cause and the source of all of the *logoi*.

It seems that Maximus, by using the Logos-*logoi* language, applies the Neoplatonic solution to the problem of 'one and many'. However, to claim the influence of Proclus and other Neoplatonists on Maximus based on the resemblance of Maximus' thought to the Neoplatonic systems would be going too far. A more likely source for Maximus' Neoplatonic vocabulary is Dionysius the Areopagite, to whom he frequently refers. One also needs to be aware of the fact that Maximus perceives Dionysius as the disciple of the Apostle Paul from the first century and not as an anonymous author from the fifth century, whose thought is coloured by Neoplatonic

¹¹ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 15 (PG 91:1217AB); Maximus the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 366–67.

¹² *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 15, (PG 91:1228AC). See also on this point Jean-Claude Larchet, 'La conception maximienne des énergies divines et des *logoi* et la théorie platonicienne des Idées', *Philothoes* 4 (2004), 276–83:281.

¹³ *Mystagogia* 1.4 (PG 91:668A) and *Capita theologica et oeconomica* 2.4 (PG 90:1125D–1128A).

elements. Thus, although it seems that Maximus repeats Proclus' *Proposition* 5, that the manifold, posterior to the One, participates in the One,¹⁴ he actually refers to Dionysius the Areopagite,¹⁵ who claims that all the things that come from God, participate in God.¹⁶ Similarly, although Maximus' premise that the Logos, as the cause and the source of all the *logoi*, unites them¹⁷ resembles Proclus' *Proposition* 28, which states that the effect necessarily participates in the cause, inasmuch as it derives its being from the latter,¹⁸ a more likely source again seems to be Dionysius,¹⁹ because Maximus refers to him by name just a few lines earlier in the text. Thus, Maximus is not directly influenced by Proclus, but he receives Proclus' formulations via his reading of the Areopagite.

The highly philosophical and abstract speculation on the relationship between the Logos and the *logoi* that resembles the Proclean system finds its Christian significance in the liturgical aspect of Maximus' thought. Maximus' depiction of unity in the liturgical context clearly opposes the argument of a direct Neoplatonic influence. According to Maximus, the Logos of God has a threefold incarnation: in Jesus Christ, in the world, and in the Scriptures.²⁰ By incarnation in human form, the Logos of God presented 'Himself symbolically by means of His own self',²¹ because the human being was created according to God's image and likeness. The incarnation of the Logos in the world, as we could see above, is through the *logoi* of both universals and particulars, which are arranged in accordance with the Porphyrian tree. The incarnation of the Logos in the Scriptures takes place through letters, syllables, and sounds (*γράμμασι καὶ συλλαβαῖς καὶ φωναῖς*), which lead the faithful to unity with the Spirit of the Logos.²²

In the *Mystagogia*, Maximus identifies the human being with both the world and the Scriptures. The human being consists of body and soul, and he is called 'human being' because of the intelligent and rational soul according to which he is an image and likeness of God.²³ According to Maximus, the human body is identified with the historical letters of the Scriptures, while the soul symbolizes the meaning and the purpose of the letter.²⁴ Furthermore, the human body resembles the sensible world, while the human soul denotes the intelligible world.²⁵ The body and the soul of the

¹⁴ Proclus, *The Elements of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 6–7.

¹⁵ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7, (PG 91:1080B).

¹⁶ Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names* 5.5–7, *Corpus Dionysiacum I. De divinis nominibus*, ed. Beata Regina Suchla (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 183–85.

¹⁷ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7, (PG 91:1077C).

¹⁸ Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, 33.

¹⁹ Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names* 5.10, in *De divinis nominibus*, 189.

²⁰ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 33 (PG 91:1285C–1288A).

²¹ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 10 (PG 91:1165D); Maximus the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 68–269.

²² *Ambigua* 33 (PG 91:1285C–1288A).

²³ *Mystagogia* 6 (PG 91:684D).

²⁴ *Mystagogia* 6 (PG 91:684B).

²⁵ *Mystagogia* 7 (PG 91:685A).

human being, the historical letters and the hidden meaning of the Scripture, as well as the sensible and intelligible world are in a perfect unity due to the Logos of God as the source and unifying force of everything preconceived before the ages. The role of the Logos as unifying power is clearly expressed in *Mystagogia* 7:

In conformity with this law [of the one who binds all thing together] there is engendered principle of the unifying force which does not permit that the substantial identity uniting these things be ignored because of their difference in nature, nor that their particular characteristics which limit each of these things to itself appear more pronounced because of their separation and division than the kinship in love mystically inspires them for union.²⁶

Maximus further claims that a guarantor of this kinship between beings is the invisible and unknowable presence of their cause in them, which unites them more to each other than to themselves.²⁷ Thus, God, by his divine energy, is indivisibly present as a whole in all beings according to their *logos*.²⁸ By being present as a whole in common manner in all of them, and in specific manner in each of them, the divine Logos reveals the preconceived unity of the creation.

God as Provider, or the Procession and the Return of the Created Beings

The form of union between the Logos and the *logoi* in most cases defines the union between God as Provider and the created beings. On the ontological level, the unity of God and the created being is mostly described by the Neoplatonic terms of procession and reversion, while on the anthropological level it is described by attaining the good or the logos of well-being. As the Church symbolically represents the world and the human being, the unity between God and human is also established on the liturgical level through the Mysteries.

I will begin with the ontological aspect of the unity between God and creation that Maximus portrays by employing the revised form of the Neoplatonic dialectical pair of procession and reversion (*πρόοδος-ἐπιστροφή*). As it is seen above, Maximus claims that the one Logos are many *logoi* on the basis of a creative and sustaining procession (*ποιητική και συνεκτική πρόοδος*), while the many *logoi* are the Logos due to a revertive and inductive return and providence (*ἐπιστρεπτική και χειραγωγική ἀναφορά τε και πρόνοια*).²⁹ The first member of this pair consists of two elements: one creative, another sustaining. The creative procession can be identified with the creation of beings according to the wisdom of the Creator, at the appropriate moment

²⁶ *Mystagogia* 7 (PG 91:685AB). Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 196–197.

²⁷ *Mystagogia* 7 (PG 91:685B).

²⁸ *Ambigua* 22 (PG 91:1257A).

²⁹ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1081C).

in time and in a manner consistent with their *logoi*.³⁰ Maximus' understanding of the preservative procession is best presented in a passage from his *Mystagogy* 1:

For God who made and brought into the existence all things by his infinite power contains, gathers, and limits them and in his Providence binds both intelligible and sensible beings to himself and to one another. Maintaining himself as cause, beginning and end all beings which are by nature distant from one another, he makes them converge towards each other by the singular force of their relationship to him as origin. Through this force he leads all beings to a common and unconfused identity of movement and existence ...³¹

God preserves created beings by containing, gathering and limiting them. The whole process is dependent on the creative procession, because the *logoi* of beings predetermine the being. The term predeterminations should be taken in a loose sense, because the level of resemblance of created beings with their *logoi* depends either on the predeterminative quality of the *logoi* or on the inclination of the created beings. One may distinguish between the *logoi* of universals and the *logoi* of individuals. The former *logoi* strictly predetermine universals, such as genus, genera, and species, without leaving room for individual beings to escape these definitions. Thus, the individual human being can never escape the categories of being human, being perceived by sense and being created, even when he deliberately acts to establish his identity in opposition to these categories. The *logoi* of individuals, however, are not imposed by God with such strictness on individual human beings, and they can, on the basis of their deliberation and inclination, act in accordance with or in opposition to their individual *logoi*.

Maximus claims that particular beings are immutable by their *logos* of nature, while they are movable in their properties and accidents.³² Therefore, the most general *logos* of being and nature, and the subsequent *logoi* of the most generic genus (*γενικώτατον γένος*), more generic genera (*γενικώτερα γένη*), particular species (*εἶδη*), and probably most specific species (*εἰδικώτατα εἶδη*),³³ as well as the *logoi* of time and the *logoi* of providence and judgment, establish the immutability of created nature and the inclination of the particular being cannot affect the established order.

However, the binding authority of the *logoi* of particular rational beings is weak, not because the Creator was unable to impose his power over the particulars, but mainly because he has left to them the freedom to fulfil the purpose for which they were created.

³⁰ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1081A).

³¹ *Mystagogia* 1.2 (PG 91:664D–665A); Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 186.

³² *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 15 (PG 91:1217B).

³³ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 10 (PG 91:1177C).

This freedom is given to rational beings, namely angels and humans, while the sensible creation merely defined by the general *logoi*, or genera and species, is changeable on the level of properties and accidents due to their participation in the different *logoi*, such as the *logoi* of mixture, position, quantity, and quality. Balthasar rightly pointed out that ‘the motion of the beings is a way of establishing itself as a particular and distinguishing itself from every other nature’.³⁴

Therefore, the process of reverte and inductive return begins when the rational beings establish themselves on the basis of their movement. Every created being is endowed with movement, and movement is therefore intrinsic to the nature of being. However, every movement is directed towards an end, and we can define every movement in accordance with the goal of movement. Maximus teaches that from God ‘come both our general power of motion (for he is our beginning), and the particular way that we move towards him (for he is our end)’.³⁵ Therefore, the rational being, through its faculty of reason, can choose in general two directions of his movement. The first way has the end (τέλος) of its movement in God, and the second way has the end of its movement in everything else, namely creation. The process of reverte return begins with the decision made by the rational being to move towards God as its cause, beginning, and end. By making the choice to revert towards God, the rational being receives divine help, or grace,³⁶ to persist on its course. This inductive return of beings towards God is becoming god through God.³⁷

Therefore, the whole process of the unity between God the Provider and the beings begins with the creative and sustaining procession where the beings are created in proper time according to their *logos* and preserved through their relation to God as their cause, origin, and end. This is a potential union because its final result depends on the inclination of the rational beings to move towards God as their cause. If they, by their reversion, choose to have the end of their movement in God, they are led by divine grace to their final rest (στάσις).

I will turn now to the anthropological aspect of the unity between God and creation that is described as a process in which the human being attains the good, or the *logos* of well-being. God the Provider enters into unity with every human being. Human beings establish themselves by their movement, which is a proper movement (οὐσιώδης κίνησις), when it is in accordance with their particular *logos*. Maximus claims that the human being attains his proper movement according to his *logos* by harmonizing what belongs to his nature with what it is within his volition, or by following the natural will.³⁸ By creating the human being in accordance to his image and likeness, God attributed being and eternal being (εἶναι καὶ ἀεὶ εἶναι;

³⁴ Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 155

³⁵ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1073); Maximos the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 86–87.

³⁶ *Capita de charitate* 3.25 (PG 90:1024BC).

³⁷ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1084A).

³⁸ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1076BD).

τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ ἀεὶ ὄν) to human essence to resemble his image. The elements of the human likeness to the divine being granted by God are well-being, or goodness and wisdom, and they are subsumed within the power of human will or inclination.³⁹ By neglecting the *logos* of well-being, Adam chose the direction opposite to his own *logos*, and he broke the link between the being and eternal well-being, establishing a separation from Divine eternity, which permanently affected human nature. However, Christ not only repaired human nature from the effects of Adam's fall, but he also accomplished the task originally assigned to Adam by his particular *logos*. First, Christ connected the *logos* of being with the *logos* of well-being, bridging the separation and distance Adam caused between the two *logoi*. Secondly, he drew the *logoi* of being and well-being in the *logos* of eternal well-being,⁴⁰ accomplishing the role originally designed for Adam. Therefore, the particular human being acts in accordance with its natural *logos*, only if it chooses by its will to link its *logos* of being with its *logos* of well-being. Maximus describes the inclination of the will towards its own *logos* as an aptness for well-being, having the free gift of ever-being from God as a result.⁴¹ On the anthropological or ethical level, the ontological concept of procession and return work in the following way: God endowed human beings with being by creating them out of non-being. This could be seen as procession. The reversion, or revertive return, is the decision of a human being to bind its being with well-being in order to attain likeness with God. The divine reply, in the form of 'hand-leading transference', is conferring grace in the form of eternal being to a human being.

The third aspect of the unity between God the Provider and created beings is liturgical. It seems that, for Maximus, the ontological and ethical schemes are rooted in the liturgical context. The Mystery of Christ represents the core of the liturgical aspect of the union. Maximus teaches that all the ages of time, and the beings within those ages, have received their beginning and end in Christ.⁴² The union of Creator and creation, preconceived in Christ and manifested in his incarnation, occurs by virtue of the future union of those who find the end of their movement in Christ. Thus, Christ is the beginning, middle, and end of all ages. The union of those who are deified with Christ, intended for the end of ages, has already come in potency of faith,⁴³ or 'one simple and indivisible grace and power of faith'.⁴⁴

In his *Mystagogia*, Maximus symbolically interprets the liturgical moments in their proper eschatological perspective. The course of the Liturgy begins with the entrance of the bishop, who is followed by the congregation, into the holy church,

³⁹ *Capita de charitate* 3.24–25 (PG 90:1023ABC).

⁴⁰ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 42 (PG 91:1384D).

⁴¹ *Capita de charitate* 3.24 (PG 90:1023AB).

⁴² *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 60, in *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium* (CCSG 22), eds. Carl Laga & Carlos Steel (Turnhout: Brepols, 1990), 75.

⁴³ *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 20, in *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium* (CCSG 7), eds. Carl Laga & Carlos Steel (Turnhout: Brepols, 1980), 139.

⁴⁴ *Mystagogia* 2.3 (PG 91:668B).

and this event symbolizes the incarnation of Jesus Christ and his first appearance in this world. This is the beginning of the Liturgy of Catechumens in the Orthodox tradition, or the Liturgy of the Word in the Roman-Catholic, which has its climax in the reading of the Gospels. For Maximus, the reading of the Gospels symbolizes the end of the ages.

The holy Gospel is in general a symbol of the fulfilment of this world; in particular it indicates the complete disappearance of the ancient error in those who have believed; in the active, the mortification and the end of law and thinking; and in those who have knowledge, the gathering and ascent from the numerous and various principles [*logoi*] towards the most comprehensive principle [the Logos], once the most detailed and varied natural contemplation has been reached and crossed.⁴⁵

One may easily notice how Maximus applies Neoplatonic language in a liturgical context. The Platonic notions of procession and reversion, transferred by Maximus into the notions of creative and sustaining procession, and revertive and inductive return, acquire a new dimension. Firstly, by referring to the comprehensive Logos (*συνεκτικώτατος λόγος*), Maximus underlines his role of sustaining the manifold *logoi* in the unity. Moreover, by using the term *anaphora* (*ἀναφορά*), which means transference and offering, Maximus stresses that the revertive movement of the created beings should be seen as the Eucharistic offering.

Secondly, the liturgical aspect symbolized by the readings of the Gospels draws together the two aspects mentioned above. On an ontological level, the reading in general signifies the divine wishes or intentions expressed through the *logoi*.⁴⁶ The reading helps the faithful to proceed to the truth of the all-inclusive Logos, by bringing together the spiritual *logoi* of sensible realities and of the providence in what concerns them.⁴⁷ The reading of the Gospels in the liturgical context also helps the faithful to draw together all the *logoi* of the Scripture expressed through letters, syllables, and sounds, in one single unity with the Spirit of the Logos.⁴⁸

On an anthropological level, the reading of the Gospels signifies the progress in faith and the firm disposition of virtue of the faithful that lead them to the complete disappearance of the ancient error. The ancient error to which Maximus is referring is Adam's failure to link the *logos* of being to the *logos* of eternal being by the *logos* of well-being. The role designed for Adam is fulfilled by Christ, who by acting in accordance with the natural *logos* of the human being, brought man into union with

⁴⁵ *Mystagogia* 7 (PG 91:708BC). Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 209.

⁴⁶ *Mystagogia* (PG 91:705D).

⁴⁷ *Mystagogia* (PG 91:708A).

⁴⁸ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 33 (PG 91:1288A).

God. Therefore, by acting in accordance with one's particular *logos*, every faithful Christian is led to the unity with the divine Logos.

We may conclude that by limiting, gathering, and containing all beings by his divine power, and drawing them into union with himself as their beginning and end, Christ exercises his providential role.

The Final Unity by Participation

The unity between God as end and created beings is due to the participation of the rational beings in God. However, we should distinguish two kinds of participation: the first kind of participation is during this life, while the other characterizes the life to come.

The first kind of participation is characterized by the rational being's employment of natural energy, and by acting in accordance with its *logos*. This participation in God is called participation by energy, because the rational being employs his natural capacities represented by the energies of his nature. It means that the rational being, by participation in its particular *logos*, also participates in God. The limitations imposed on the definition, or the *horos*, of being by its *logos* causes the limitation in power and potency to receive God fully or to participate in him fully. The participation by energy of rational beings in God ends when they reach their natural consummation and the rest (*στάσις*) of their natural movement. Maximus maintains that 'every act (*ἐνέργεια*), circumscribed naturally by its own *logos*, is the end (*τέλος*) of the essential movement logically preceding it'.⁴⁹ However, the *telos* of the energy and essential movement is not the end of being, but the end of its natural *logos*, which determines the essence of being and it is realized in the natural energy of being. This means that, although created beings will be still distinguished among themselves on the basis of their natural *logoi*, they will be defined now by the Logos of God and will passively receive divine energies. Maximus explains this metaphorically:

All things created in time according to time become perfect when they cease their natural growth. But everything that the knowledge of God affects, when it reaches perfection, moves to further growth. For the end of the latter becomes the beginning of the former.⁵⁰

The end of natural growth signifies the attaining of the limits of the natural *logos*, while the new beginning is not confined within the limits of the natural definition (*ὅρος*) of being and its energy. Then, it begins a new mode of existence for rational beings. Maximus describes this process as a kind of departure from oneself.

⁴⁹ *Capita theologica et oeconomica* 1.3 (PG 90:1084B).

⁵⁰ *Capita theologica et oeconomica* 1.35 (PG 91:1096C); Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 134–35.

It [rational being] will not cease until it is wholly present in the whole beloved, and wholly encompassed by it, willingly receiving the whole saving circumscription by its own choice, so that it might be wholly qualified by the whole circumscriber, and, being wholly circumscribed, will no longer be able to wish to be known from its own qualities, but rather from those of the circumscriber, in the same way that air is thoroughly permeated by light, or iron in a forge is completely penetrated by the fire, or anything else of this sort.⁵¹

Three concepts are important for the understanding of Maximus' reasoning here. The first concept is what Conostas translates as 'the saving circumscription' (σωτήριον περιγραφήν), the second is 'a voluntary surrender of the will' (ἐκχώρησις γνωμική), and the third is the concept of passivity.

As we can see above, the present union with God, where we participate in God by virtue of our natural potency and activity, determines our receptivity (ἐπιτηδειότης) to receive grace. Due to the limits of our nature, the capacity to receive grace is also limited. When a being is circumscribed by God, it experiences the cessation of its natural definition. Therefore, the being can participate in God without being restricted to its natural definition (ὅρος) and receive divine grace to an infinite extent. It means that we can fully contain one who is by nature infinite and uncontainable,⁵² because we gain infinity by being circumscribed.

The second concept of 'a voluntary surrender of the will' suggests that the change in the being takes place not only on the level of definition but also on the level of will. Thus, the being does not only will to know and to unite itself with God, but also wills to be known, to be embraced and circumscribed by God. Maximus explains this as the total submission of rational beings to the divine will.

And this will take place because that which is within our power, I mean our free will—through which death made its entry among us, and confirmed at our expense the power of corruption—will have surrendered voluntarily and wholly to God, and perfectly subjected itself to His rule, by eliminating any wish that might contravene His will.⁵³

However, Maximus warns that this firm and steadfast disposition (θέσις) to fix our will in the divine will is not giving up of our free will (αὐτεξούσιον), but it is rather ἐκχώρησις γνωμική,⁵⁴ a 'voluntary surrender of the will' (as Conostas trans-

⁵¹ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1073D–1076A); Maximus the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 86–89.

⁵² *Ambigua* 7 (PG 91:1076D): '..., καὶ ἀναλόγως τῇ τῶν μετεχόντων δυνάμει ἀχωρήτως, ἵν' οὕτως εἴπω, χωρουμένον·

⁵³ *Ambigua* 7 (PG 91:1076AB). Maximus the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 88–89.

⁵⁴ *Ambigua* 7 (PG 91:1076B).

lates it), or a ‘voluntary outpassing’⁵⁵ and ‘a complete handing-over of our self-determination’⁵⁶ (as Sherwood suggests). Constas’ translation of ἐκχώρησις γνωμική with ‘voluntary surrender of the will’ might lead someone to think that the human being voluntarily gives up its will. However, the expression ἐκχώρησις γνωμική does not connote the negation of the will, because for Maximus the will belongs to nature,⁵⁷ but rather the mode of willing (πῶς θέλειν), or better said the willing in accordance with intention (γνώμη), as a particular mode of willing affected by sin. Similarly, Lars Thunberg’s identification of γνώμη with the personal and individual disposition (διάθεσις) and the habitus (ἔξις) of the will⁵⁸ may be also misleading, because γνώμη is not the actualised capacity of determination, but rather a way of using our capacity of willing in order to achieve self-determination. Only when the gnostic will acts in accordance with nature, and thus not in opposition to God,⁵⁹ may one think of γνώμη, in spite of its changeable character, as the personal and individual disposition and the habitus of the will. Acting in accordance with its *logos* of nature, the human being submits his own will to the divine will. By doing this, the human being does not negate, but affirms his own free will (αὐτεξούσιον), and by the steadfast disposition of the human will in the divine will, this self-determination is re-affirmed over and over again.

The rational being voluntarily surrenders itself to God, expecting God to act further in order to achieve union. Therefore, having unconditional trust or faith in God, the rational being expects to be embraced by the divine being and not to actively seize him. However, theoretically speaking, God is not obliged to move one step towards the rational being, and the union might, therefore, never take place.

The third concept which characterizes the new state of the rational beings is passivity in receiving God.

Existing here and now, we arrive at the end of the ages as active agents and reach the end of the exertion of our power and activity. But in the ages to come we shall undergo by grace the transformation unto deification and no longer be active but passive; and for this reason we shall not cease to be deified.⁶⁰

Maximus describes the nature of the future union between God and the rational beings by the metaphors of light-air and fire-iron, frequently used in Christology.

⁵⁵ Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor* (Rome: Herder, 1955), 129.

⁵⁶ Polycarp Sherwood, *St Maximus the Confessor. The Ascetic Life. The Four Centuries of Charity*, ACW 21 (New York: Newman Press, 1955), 59.

⁵⁷ *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:292D–293A).

⁵⁸ Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 216–17.

⁵⁹ *Opuscula theologica et polemica* 7 (PG 91:80A).

⁶⁰ *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 22 (CCSG 7:141). The English translation of Paul M. Blowers and Robert L. Wilken, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 117.

By this example, Maximus shows us a few things. Firstly, that the role of God in deification is active just as light and fire play an active role in illuminating and heating, while rational beings receive divine grace passively in the same way in which air and fire receive light and heat passively. Secondly, the distinctiveness of natures is preserved in the future union. Thus, the illuminated air is still air, just as the red-hot iron is still iron. Thirdly, rational beings gain divine attributes just as the air emits light and iron radiates heat. By adopting the divine attributes fully, without leaving anything apart, rational beings establish a full participation in God. However, it is no longer plausible to use the language of participation for the attained stage of the rational being, because such language refers to a certain share in something, while the rational being does not have a share of God, but rather it receives God fully. Therefore, Maximus replaces the language of participation with the terms likeness and identity. He shows this language transformation clearly in *Ad Thalassium* 59:

The participation in supernatural divine goods is likeness of the participants to the participated, and the likeness of the participants to the participated is the actualization of the expected identity of the participants with the participated.⁶¹

Therefore, participation in the uncreated divine attributes such as goodness, simplicity, immortality, life, immutability, infinity is participation in the likeness of God, or the attainment of the expected identity with him. The only distinction is that beings become gods not by nature, but by grace which unlimitedly flows in them. Therefore, humanity will be deified in every respect, lacking only the identity in essence with God.⁶²

I will turn now to the liturgical aspect of the full participation, or to the future unity proclaimed at the liturgical level. To render the liturgical context clearer we have to make a few preliminary remarks. The descending of a bishop from the throne and the dismissal of the catechumens that happens after the reading of the Gospels signifies the second coming of Christ. Therefore, everything in the Liturgy from this point onwards happens in the Kingdom of God. The dismissal of the catechumens and the closing of the doors is followed by the kiss of peace, which Maximus symbolically identifies with the single unity of all the *logoi* and modes (*τρόπους*) of the world.⁶³ This unity, as Thunberg remarks, signifies the limit beyond which man can go only through the grace of God.⁶⁴ The highest point or climax of the Liturgy is the Eucharist, which represents a complete identity with Christ. Maximus describes these moments by the following words:

⁶¹ *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 59 (CCSG 22:53). The English translation is mine.

⁶² *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 22 (CCSG 7:140).

⁶³ *Mystagogia* 23.2–4 (PG 91:700BC)

⁶⁴ Thunberg, *Microcosm and mediator*, 429.

By the 'One is holy' and what follows, we have a grace and familiarity which unites us to God himself. By Holy Communion of the spotless and life-giving mysteries we are given fellowship and identity with him by participation in likeness, by which man is deemed worthy from man to become God.⁶⁵

What does 'One is holy' mean for Maximus? '*One is Holy, one is Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen*' is chanted by the liturgical community immediately after the bishop (as an icon of Christ) or the priest comes out from the altar with the consecrated Gifts (bread and wine as the Body and the Blood of Christ), and it is a reply to his words '*The Holy [Gifts] to the Holy [People]*' (Τὰ ἅγια τοῖς ἁγίοις). This section of the liturgy reveals the whole economy of salvation, which consists of procession (πρόοδος) and return, or offering (ἀναφορά). Firstly, the Gifts which are offered to us symbolize the whole of creation given by God through procession. By receiving the gifts, we also receive ourselves as given. Secondly, the process of reversion (ἐπιστροφή) or return is expressed as the Eucharistic offering (ἀναφορά), where we offer ourselves back to Christ. By offering ourselves to Christ, we receive him through the Holy Mysteries.

Maximus explains that the chant 'One is holy' signifies the grace that unites us with God. Holiness, goodness, eternity, and other gifts of divine grace make us participants of the divine likeness. It is clear in the second part of the quotation which deals with Holy Communion that Maximus closely connects the terms likeness and the expected identity with the term participation. The whole logic of Maximus' reasoning is as follows. By participating in divine attributes, we participate in the likeness of God. Maximus uses the language of participation when the rational beings participate in God by their natural energies, because the complete identification with God has not been achieved at this stage. The complete identification with God is an identification which ought to happen in the future Kingdom, and it is symbolically revealed at every Eucharistic liturgy through the reception of the Holy Mysteries. Thus, by the total submission of our will to the Divine, we allow God to act in us and increase our participation in him to the level of full identity. Moreover, in the liturgical gathering the future flows into the present, and the expected identification with God in the future realm lays the foundation for our participation in God by our energy in the present realm. Thus, the future union of human beings and God established on likeness serves as a model for the present union established on faith and the grace of God, and is realised through the Divine Mysteries.

We may come to the conclusion that the future union of deified beings with God is formed through the full participation by grace (κατὰ χάριν μεθέξει), as Maximus calls it.⁶⁶ This kind of unity between God and the relational beings who participate in him is different from the union between God and beings achieved by the natural

⁶⁵ *Mystagogia* 24.2 (PG 91:704D); Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 207.

⁶⁶ *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 22 (CCSG 7:139); *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 60 (CCSG 22:70).

powers and activities of the beings. The former unity is perfect unity of identity and likeness, while the latter is not. Once more, Maximus portrays his doctrine by means of Platonist vocabulary. The term participation, which is originally Platonic, gains a new usage. The whole process of participation is based on the likeness of the participants with the participated, and every participant will imitate the participated.⁶⁷ However, in Maximus the participated assimilates the participants and elevates them to the position of participated.⁶⁸ Moreover, in the full participation by grace, God is the one who by his energy increases the likeness of the participants to him, forming the union of identity between him and participating beings. The unity of beings in God formed by full participation is the last and eternal union between God as end and rational beings themselves.

Conclusion

The final union between God and the world is not something that should be formed in the course of the movement of rational beings towards him, rather it is something which is preconceived in God before all ages, preserved through time and transferred to eternity. The unity of Logos and *logoi* established through creation is the initial form of unity between the Creator and creation which leads to the next step. The next step happens in the course of history, and it represents the positive answer of rational beings to the divine call. On the ontological level, this unity is established through the conversion of rational creation and its offering to God. Anthropologically, unity is achieved when human beings act in accordance to their particular *logoi*. Moreover, this unity is expressed by the firm determination of the human being to adopt well-being as a crucial element of likeness with God. On the liturgical level, the unity between God and human being is established through the faith of believers and grace of God, and it is revealed through the Holy Mysteries. According to Maximus, everything that was created, including the two above-mentioned unions, exists on account of this final union, and this final union itself exists on account of nothing.⁶⁹ This final goal will be achieved at the end of time by the submission of our will to the divine will and through the work of one single divine activity, which penetrates all things and makes God to be *all in all*.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, pr. 28, 63, 65, 103, 138.

⁶⁸ *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 22 (CCSG 7:139).

⁶⁹ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1072C); *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 60 (CCSG 22:75).

⁷⁰ *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1076C).