

# WISDOM AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONCEPT IN BYZANTINE PHILOSOPHY: PARADIGMS FROM DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, AND PHOTIUS THE GREAT

SMILEN MARKOV

*The St Cyril and St Methodius University of Veliko Turnovo, Bulgaria*

In the theology of the Eastern Church, wisdom is related to divine economy, which is why, apart from the epistemic and the ethical aspect, it is concerned with the hermeneutics of divine revelation. The goal of acquiring wisdom has anthropological dimensions, since divine revelation is addressed to man, and man is in the image of God. Therefore, the criteria for perfection in terms of practical reasoning are not merely cognitive, they are anthropological. For Origen, the ways of wisdom are transcendent to the plurality of the created world and man can achieve wisdom by following the epistemic structure of unification. In the understanding of Dionysius, the recognition of the harmony of the ontological hierarchy and volitional participation in this hierarchy is the road of wisdom. Maximus introduces the dynamism of Christology into the concept of wisdom: for him wisdom is not just following the natural hierarchy, but participating in the transformation of the latter through Christ. In this participative concept of acquiring wisdom, Photius introduces existential and epistemological uncertainty as an axiomatic starting-point, which enables man to accept wisdom as a divine gift and to take responsibility for the Christological transformation of creation.

## *Introduction*

In the philosophical tradition, wisdom is normally associated with practical reasoning, *i.e.* with the intuitive perception of the first principles that regulate concrete human actions. It depends on the capability of man to attain knowledge of the world. In the theology of the Eastern Church, however, wisdom is related to divine economy, which is why, apart from the epistemic and the ethical aspect, it is related to the hermeneutics of divine revelation. A strong emphasis is put on the anthropological criteria of wisdom. Human powers, as well as the conditions of human existence in general, are not merely the launching pad for the search of wisdom. The goal of acquiring wisdom has anthropological dimensions, since divine revelation is addressed to man and man is in the image of God. Therefore, the criteria for perfection in terms of practical reasoning are not merely cognitive, they are anthropological.

As for the link between divine image in man and the concept of wisdom, here the ways of the different trends in Eastern theology part. For Origen, the entire human species is the bearer of the divine image.<sup>1</sup> The image is perfect when the individual, fragmentary, and dynamic existence of each man is transcended. Theologians such as Maximus and Photius claim that divine image was perfectly realized in history, when Christ became man. Maximus insists that, according to the *logos* of human nature, the divine image in man is manifested in the union of soul and body.<sup>2</sup> The Pauline motif of the last Adam<sup>3</sup> is used as proof that divine image is perfectly manifested in every single man, through the entirety of humanity's natural powers and within the process of history. As Photius puts it, man's task is to become a 'product' (*ἔργον*) and 'artifice' (*φιλοτέχνημα*) of the divine image.<sup>4</sup> Wisdom is the way to achieve this ontological goal.

In this paper, some stages of the development of the concept of wisdom in the period between Origen and Photius will be studied. It will be demonstrated that the speculation of Maximus the Confessor is the central focus in the Christocentric critique of the concept of wisdom. The modification of the concept is traced in terms of the positive metaphysical grounds of human knowledge. At the same time, attention is paid to the critique of rational epistemology from the perspective of charismatic participation in divine revelation.

### *Origen: Wisdom as a Name of Divine Unity*

By virtue of a tradition founded in the Old Testament, Wisdom is one of the divine names.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, as with all of the other names of God, Wisdom is accessible insofar as it has been revealed in creation. Origen is convinced that divine intellect contains the eternal archetypes of all creatures. The appearance of the latter as self-dependent essences in time is merely a manifestation of the archetypes.<sup>6</sup> Wisdom is interpreted from a pedagogical perspective: as a norm leading creatures to the ultimate return towards God.

<sup>1</sup> Origen, *Hexapla* 10, in *Origenis hexaplorum*, ed. F. Field, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1875). In his *Amphilochia* 36, Photius notes with a critical tone that for some text-critics of the biblical text—and he has Origen in mind—the proper formulation should be 'in the image of God' (*ἐν εἰκόνι Θεοῦ*) and not 'according to the image' (*κατ' εἰκόνα Θεοῦ*). See Photius, *Epistulae et Amphilochia*, in *Photii patriarchae Constanti-nopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia*, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana, eds. B. Laourdas and L.G. Westerink eds., 6 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1983–1988).

<sup>2</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Opuscula theologica et polemica* 1 (PG 91:37BC).

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 15:45. This motif is found also in Origen. Cf. Origen, *Commentarii in Evangelium Joannis* 1.31.225, in *Origène. Commentaire sur saint Jean*, ed. C. Blank, 5 vols. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1966–1992).

<sup>4</sup> Photius, *Amphilochia* 36.134.

<sup>5</sup> Prov 8:22ff.

<sup>6</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 1.2.2; 1.4.3–5, in *Origenes vier Bücher von den Prinzipien*, eds. H. Görgemanns and H. Karpp (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976). Cf. Ch. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie und kaiserzeitliche Philosophie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 299–302.

Origen tries to integrate the neo-Platonic scheme '*exitus-reditus*' into the model of the Trinitarian revelation. In his *De principiis* he writes: 'God, therefore, is altogether one and simple. Our saviour, however, because of the many things, since God 'set' him 'forth as a propitiation' and first fruits of all creation, becomes many things, or perhaps even all these things, as the whole creation which can be made free needs him.'<sup>7</sup> It is through the multitude of the names of Christ that every single human being has the opportunity to know Christ in an individually-specified way. Origen insists that each of the different names has a full meaning, and that no name dominates over the other. However, the names 'Logos' and 'Wisdom' have priority, as they specifically point to the hypostatic status of the Son.<sup>8</sup> Whereas the name 'Logos' reveals that all the principles of the created things rest in the Son,<sup>9</sup> the name 'Wisdom' denotes the role of the Son in creation, as he is the absolute beginning of everything (cf. John 1:1).

'Wisdom' contains the blueprints for the entire divine plan for the world. This is why the metaphysical structure of being is first of all to be deciphered through divine Wisdom: it contains the beginnings, the causes, and the species of all things.<sup>10</sup> It precedes all other names, and in it every form and species that was to be subsists.<sup>11</sup> This divine name is an illustration of the metaphor of the road that marks the development of the changing cosmos. The beginning of the world implies a task and a direction towards its realization. The task set by the Logos for the world is the contemplation of God, whereas the road towards this state is 'doing justice'.<sup>12</sup>

Divine Wisdom unifies the plurality of created being and guarantees the return (*reditus*) towards unity. The ways of wisdom are transcendent to the plurality of the created world and this is why man can achieve wisdom by following the epistemic structure of unification. This is in line with the spiritualistic anthropology of Origen, in which the unity of the noetic substance is the leading principle. The substantial unity is manifested differently in the contingent world, and thus the plurality of species and categories occurs. This ontological model of substantial modalism is valid in anthropology too.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Origen, *Commentarii in Evangelium Joannnis* 1.119. The translation is from *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Books 1–10, trans. Robert E. Heine (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 1.2.3. In his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, he notes that they are not identical.

<sup>9</sup> Origen, *Commentarii in Evangelium Joannnis* 1.125.

<sup>10</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 1.2.2.

<sup>11</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 1.2.2. Cf. Tom Greggs, 'The Many names of Christ in Wisdom: Reading Scripture with Origen for a Diverse World', *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 7, no. 1 (2008). <http://jsr.shanti.virginia.edu/back-issues/vol-7-no-1-january-2008-spreading-rumours-of-wisdom/the-many-names-of-christ-in-wisdom/>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Robert Berchman, 'Origen and the categories', in *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. Robert Daly (Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 231–52.

*Divine Wisdom in Dionysius the Areopagite*

Dionysius the Areopagite rejects Origen's concept of divine Wisdom in his work, *De divinis nominibus*. There, he states that all of the names of God pertain to the entire divinity: there is no distribution among the persons of the Trinity, or differentiation according to the created plurality.<sup>14</sup> In a polemical passage, Dionysius notes that the division of the divine names into names pertaining to the entire divinity and names referring to its manifestation is typical of a philosophy which is not 'our philosophy'. If one follows the scriptural revelation, it is clear that the division and unity of the divine names is a *theological articulation*, an alternate expression of the stages of the appropriation of the ineffable divine light.<sup>15</sup> In this context, Dionysios states that the first name of God is 'Good'. The other names, such as 'Wisdom', are derived from the experience of the *good* divine gifts. These names refer to the causal dependence of all goods on the first Good.

Dionysius points out that the principle of unity and equality of the divine names does not violate the hypostatic distinction of the persons of the Trinity. In a paragraph obviously addressing the theology of Origen, he shows that he is ready to accept that the man Jesus manifests divine characteristics in accordance with the capacities of his human nature and in correspondence with his divine economy.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, he is not willing to differentiate the divine names according to the degree of their participation in the multitudinous creation.

Whereas for Origen divine Wisdom traces the ways of God in creation, for Dionysius this is done by divine Goodness. Goodness enables participation in itself (*μέθεξις*), stimulated by love and beauty. Through this participation the divine providential ideas about the world (*ἐπίνοιαί*) are expressed.<sup>17</sup>

*Wisdom as Participation*

Origen and Dionysius both expose cognitive models for acquiring divine Wisdom. In line with the ontological principle of substantial modalism, Origen conceptualizes wisdom as a guarantee for grasping the different modes of substantial being. Dionysius focuses especially on created being as a starting point for acquiring wisdom. He insists that the noetic transformation of contingent movement requires the participation of creatures in the illuminating divine energy through love and ecstasy. This change in metaphysical perspective has some consequences for the anthropological relevance of wisdom. Whereas for Origen human powers should be

<sup>14</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 2.1.124.10–15, in *Corpus Dionysiacum I. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. De divinis nominibus*, ed. Beate-Regina Suchla (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 2.2.151.1.

<sup>16</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 2.3.126.1.

<sup>17</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 4.11.159.1.

overcome in a movement towards unity, Dionysius speaks of the transformation of human passions through divine grace.

Dionysius demonstrates how love towards the divine Good guarantees participation in divine Wisdom and transcends the fragmentation of the created world (including the material relations, passions, etc.). God, explains Dionysius, perfectly knows the created being without adopting its ontological deficit. His Wisdom is not dependent on discursive reasoning: 'He does not take into consideration the single concepts but knows and encompasses everything in the unique and all-embracing content of the cause'.<sup>18</sup> Thus, knowing itself, divine Wisdom knows the truth of everything: the corporeal is known incorporeally; the fragmented, uniformly; the manifold, unitedly. God endows knowledge to things and to each single thing, that is, knowledge for other things.<sup>19</sup> The endowed knowledge is beyond the intellect (*κατὰ τὴν ὑπὲρ νοῦν ἔνωσιν*), but could be accessible to man, if the human being is freed from all created and from itself and is united with the unsearchable depth of wisdom (*τῷ ἀνεξερευνήτῳ βάθει τῆς σοφίας*).<sup>20</sup>

In any case, the starting point of this noetic journey is the created world. In an obvious allusion to the golden chain of Proclus, Dionysius explains that divine Wisdom connects the end of the supreme with the beginning of the lower beings in harmony (*ἀρμονία*).<sup>21</sup>

### *Participation and the Practical Sphere*

The recognition of harmony is an important precondition for acquiring wisdom. Besides the metaphysical implications, this concept also has existential relevance. Dionysius' existential perspective is metaphysically grounded in the works *Celestial Hierarchy* and *Ecclesial Hierarchy* through the correspondence between 'participation' (*μετουσία, μετοχή*) in divine grace and 'self-governance' (*αὐτεξουσιότης*).<sup>22</sup> Each nature has a certain capacity for 'illumination' (*ἐλλαμψις*) by divine Goodness, depending on its position in the ontological hierarchy (*ἱερὸς τάξις*).<sup>23</sup> When 'wilful self-governance' (*αὐθαίρετος αὐτεξουσιότης*) violates the hierarchy, the intellect is deprived of the light of being.<sup>24</sup> This separation can take place in two different ways: 1) as a deliberate turning away from divine light due to self-inflicted shading of the ability for illumination; 2) as a transgression of the borders of the accessible good and trying to acquire illumination, which exceeds the ontological potential of the

<sup>18</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 7.2.197.1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 7.3.198.1.

<sup>21</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 7.3.198.1.

<sup>22</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *De caelesti hierarchia* 3 (PG 3:268C–269C).

<sup>23</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* 2, (PG 3:400C).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* (PG 3:400A).

nature. The second option is described by Dionysius as follows: ‘the self-governing will meets in an imperfect way the Perfect [light]’.<sup>25</sup>

The *scholion* to this text explains that the criterion for the disposition of the will is the *measure* (μέτρον), which regulates the desire to acquire more of the light.<sup>26</sup> Recognizing the measure in which one is able to participate in the illuminating light requires knowledge of the optimal predisposition of the will. This knowledge does not refer to the object of will; it falls within the domain of wisdom. The measure is practically achieved by entering the hierarchical structure of the church, seen as a new pattern of interpersonal relations (to the sponsor, to the priest, to the bishop, etc.).<sup>27</sup> Between the inclination towards the proper self and the ontological *prius* (*pimum per se*), Dionysius places the hierarchical structure of the church as a path for cultivating the virtue of rational will.<sup>28</sup> The first result (‘sacred gift’) of this virtue is that the proselyte gets to know ‘his proper self’ (ὅστις ἔστιν).<sup>29</sup> Achieving one’s selfhood is realized through communion, based on the truthful and graceful contemplation of one’s own human nature. The newly-initiated in the Church should be ‘unattached and unbending to the separations from the Uniform’,<sup>30</sup> and ‘free of the last relations to his former life’.<sup>31</sup> In other words, the ‘participation’ (μετέχειν) in the extremes of created being is substituted with ‘communion’ (κοινωνία) with divine unity.<sup>32</sup>

The approaches of both Origen and Dionysius towards wisdom imply an epistemic methodology, based on giving priority to one particular element of divine being, as revealed in the creature. For Origen, Wisdom is the proper expression of the substantial unity of God, in which all causes and structures of created being abide uniformly. For Dionysius, the recognition of the harmony of the ontological hierarchy and the volitional participation in this hierarchy is the road of Wisdom. The new element in Dionysius’ understanding of wisdom is that self-reflection is focused on all powers of man, and not only on the noetic ones.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* (PG 3:400B).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* (PG 3:400B).

<sup>27</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* 2.4 (PG 3:409C).

<sup>28</sup> The Church is not a mere mediator facilitating the communion.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 4 (PG 3:409C). This is not the case for Proclus, from whom Dionysius borrowed the formal structure of his speculation. When describing the returning to the self, Proclus notes that introspective contemplation reveals the whole cosmic order, as well the divine. Cf. Proclus, *The Theology of Plato* 1.3, in *The Six Books of Proclus on the Theology of Plato*, trans. T. Taylor (Prometheus Trust), 50, <https://archive.org/details/ProclusOnTheTheologyOfPlato-ElectronicEdition>.

<sup>30</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* 2, *Contemplation* (PG 3:401B).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, (PG 3:401B).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, (PG 3:401B).



*St Maximus the Confessor on Wisdom*

We will now focus on St Maximus' concept of wisdom, as developed in his *Ambiguum ad Ioannem* 7. The motto of the text is a song praising divine Wisdom from the sermon *De pauperum amore* by St Gregory the Theologian. The Bishop of Nazianzus expresses his wonder that man, being part of God, is able to contemplate Christ amidst the struggles with the body. Maximus' main thesis is that Gregory's argumentation does not imply that man should scorn and abandon the body as a transient and improper substrate of the pure intellectual soul.

The sermon *De pauperum amore*<sup>33</sup> is dedicated to love towards one's neighbour. For the bishop of Nazianzus, this love (ἀγάπη) is the highest manifestation of divine wisdom in human life. For Dionysius, love is an important guarantee on the road towards wisdom, whereby one form of love (ἀγάπη) is transcended by another form (ἔρως). The latter enables the movement up the ontological hierarchy. However, the overtones of Gregory's reasoning suggest that this perfect love is not merely a recognition of divine harmony: love has to do with disharmony and perishability, too. Gregory uses the example of the people ill with leprosy. One should love them, he claims, although their perishable bodies are in such an ineffable state, and what is still sound has yet to endure inexpressible suffering.

Maximus uses this speculation to formulate the main difficulty of his treatise: if Wisdom is God and the world is wisely created by him, how should man relate to the world, in order to acquire wisdom?<sup>34</sup> In order to give an answer, Maximus describes the ontological constitution of the created world, as well as the specific place of man in it. A key concept that guarantees the compatibility between the anthropological and the ontological perspectives is that of movement (κίνησις). The manifestation of divine Wisdom in the world and the acquiring of wisdom by man are both realized in movement.

The ontological completeness of God is characterized as immutability: God is present in all created things and there is no need for him to move.<sup>35</sup> Creation, on the contrary, is in constant movement towards perfection. Acquiring wisdom does not imply grasping the principles of creation in order to acquire a state of being, which is 'above' and 'before' creation. For Maximus, wisdom is the process of deepening the experience of divine Goodness in the world, along with the movement of contingent being. This movement has no compensative or restorative function; it is eschatological, *i.e.* achieving its goal is not merely a necessity but the ultimate goal of every desire (τοῦ ἐσχάτου τυχόν).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *De pauperum amore* (PG 35:857A–909C).

<sup>34</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 4.14.160.6.

<sup>35</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.3.57, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, ed. and trans. N. Constas., 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>36</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.3.6.

For Origen, wisdom is not a transition towards the divine goodness, the latter remaining completely transcendent to the contingent being. It is only the Father who is good in the proper sense.<sup>37</sup> This means that the desire for Good through wisdom is instigated by an immanent ontological deficit. For Maximus, on the contrary, the growth of wisdom is instigated by its tasting. Thus, wisdom acquires the connotation of sharing, love, and participation.

### *St Maximus' Correction of Origen's Ontology*

In his *Ambiguum ad Ioannem* 7, St Maximus the Confessor corrects Origenian ontology, developed in the work *De principiis*, by formulating the sequence of the three different modes of being: beginning (γένεσις), movement (κίνησις), and rest (στάσις). Rest is intrinsic only to divine being, since God is the only one who rested after creating the world on the seventh day.<sup>38</sup> Nothing created is in rest, or in a state free of passions (ἀπαθής) and relations (ἄσχετον).<sup>39</sup> All created being is *passionate* in the sense that it is not fixed in its existence, it is in movement. However, it is exactly through this movement that created being can have a share in divine rest.

The next important metaphysical correction of the Origenian model relates to the orientation of the ontological movement. This movement is not merely towards the beginning (ἀρχή), but also towards 'well-being' (εὖ εἶναι). Well-being is the perfect manifestation of love towards God, since God is good. But instead of reaching a limit, this love is constantly amplified—so much so, that in the end the lover is not determined (περιγραφή) any longer by his ontological boundaries, but by the beloved One. This existential state is called by Maximus 'ecstasy' (ἔκστασις). In the state of ecstasy the epistemic ground of self-knowledge changes. From knowledge based on self-reflection, the cognitive focus is transferred to being-known-by-the-beloved-One; at stake is knowledge-in-communion-with-the-other.

The beginning of being and the eschatological goal of well-being are synthesized in the Christological event, when Christ recapitulates all creatures.<sup>40</sup> Maximus offers an alternative to the models of Origen and Dionysius. They rely on logical structures that imply a one-way transition of the ontological mode of created being. According to Maximus, the ontological status realized in Christ is orientated to the first principles of being (λόγοι), which are manifested in the initial state of creation, but also to eternal well-being, the latter meaning a deified ecstatic being.

<sup>37</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 1.2.12.

<sup>38</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.9.17–19.

<sup>39</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.7.7; 11.

<sup>40</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.16.10–20.



*The Epistemological Dimensions of Wisdom in Maximus*

On the basis of these metaphysical prerequisites, Maximus develops a specific concept as to how man can acquire wisdom. To be sure, this concept is Christ-centred, hence its anthropological focus.

As Vladimir Cvetković observes, the movement towards the beginning and cause is performed by rational beings through their will and reason (λόγος).<sup>41</sup> This movement takes place for the purpose of gaining knowledge. There is, however, another vector of movement, movement towards God by nature. This movement is realized through the mind (νοῦς) out of love. The movement of reason is returning (ἐπιστρεπτική), whereas the movement of the mind is orientated towards the future.<sup>42</sup> The two types of movement are not opposed to one another; rather, they are complementary, because they both coincide in the Person of Jesus Christ. In Christ, God is the giver of both being and well-being, and this model can be labelled as ‘metaphysical pan-Christism’.

According to this pan-Christism, wisdom is not merely the recognition of a norm or a movement towards an existential state; it is an ecstatic opening of the self for divine revelation. What drives human cognitive activity is not merely the natural intention of reason, but also the fact that man is lovingly known by God.<sup>43</sup> Within this dialogical process human intellect is brought to eternal rest. Only in this sense is it legitimate to claim that the intellect is driven towards its inherent ontological realm. Maximus clarifies that only in this sense are men part of God.

Ecstatic noetic knowledge is not contrary or parallel to discursive knowledge. What is known according to its natural ontological state through reason is now known in a ‘godlike’ (θεοειδῶς) manner, *i.e.* without any study.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the mistakes caused by the insufficiency of discursive knowledge are corrected. The result of this correction is not simply a deriving of a clearer concept of things. It is not the cognitive intention and its correction which are at stake, but the divine image: Now human existence stops circulating around things and immediately encounters them. Thus, the divine image in man is perfectly realized.

*Pathos and Desire*

As already demonstrated, for Maximus, wisdom does not consist only of rules and patterns for cognitive reasoning and self-reflection, or of pure noetic contemplation; it is *pathetic* too, *i.e.* it has to do with the transformation of the irrational powers of man. This reference towards humanity’s irrational powers in the context

<sup>41</sup> Vladimir Cvetković, ‘The Transformation of Neoplatonic Philosophical Notions of Procession (*proodos*) and Conversion (*epistrophe*) in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor’ in *The Ways of Byzantine Philosophy*, ed. Miconja Knežević (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2015), 176.

<sup>42</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:325A).

<sup>43</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.24, 20–25.

<sup>44</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.25, 16.

of wisdom is not a novelty: as was already mentioned, Dionysius also pleads for the transformation of all human powers and relations in accordance with the wise ecclesial hierarchy. The new element here is the specific account of the criteria according to which the rational will assesses and influences the irrational powers. This is done by the *gnōmē* (γνώμη), which is defined as the habitus of the will. Elsewhere Maximus analyses in detail the *gnōmē* as a structural element of human volitional act. Here we are interested only in the principles that regulate the *gnōmē* in terms of the concept of wisdom.

*Gnōmē* is a disposition of the two discursive powers of man: reason and will. It is the domain in which man takes the metaphysical risk of entering well-being or of falling into non-being.<sup>45</sup> Non-being is the immanent existential boundary of every material being. Rational beings are always on the edge of annihilation. Noetic beings, such as the angels, are stabilized in a certain mode of essential existence; for them the boundary of non-being is realized not as a possibility, but as a realized option. The moving agent of *gnōmē* is well-being. But the normative criterion for the optimal state of *gnōmē* is ontologically higher than well-being. In his seventh *Ambiguum*, Maximus claims that the ultimate goal of *gnōmē* (τέλος of γνώμη) is 'eternal well-being'. The latter aspect cannot be grasped at all, since it is inaccessible. It can be foretasted as a passion, as a drive towards the beloved God. Love is an agent supporting and supplementing human knowledge. Symptomatically, Maximus uses here the metaphor of the gift. Whereas God gives well-being (δοτήρ), he donates eternal well-being (χαριστικός).<sup>46</sup>

On the path of wisdom one has to purify his or her perception of the natural order. Then one should overcome the deficits of discursive knowledge. However, in order to participate in divine Wisdom, one is supposed to accept divine life as a gift.

### *St Photius' Concept of Wisdom*

Like Maximus, Photius stresses that the Logos is the en-hypostasized Wisdom of God. This Wisdom is eternal (τοῦ αἰώνος) and it initiated everything (ἀρχόντων).<sup>47</sup> The economy of Christ is an essential manifestation of divine Wisdom, an authentic realization of divine energy in its revelatory mode, *i.e.* in its orientation towards the created world. For Photius, the Christological event has two basic determinants: a creationist and an anthropological one.

<sup>45</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Thomam* 3, in *Maximi Confessoris Ambigua ad Thomam una cum Epistula secunda ad eundem* (CCSG 48), (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.10.6.

<sup>47</sup> Photius, *Epistula* 165.22.

### 1) *The Creationist Determinant*

Photius conceptualizes the economy of Christ as a specific mode of creation. By ‘creation’ (κτίσις) he understands not only the transition (παραγωγή) from non-being to being, but also the transition from being to well-being.<sup>48</sup> As in Maximus, ‘well-being’ means participation and delight in the eternal divine wisdom.<sup>49</sup> This transition corresponds to the plan of God for the created world and its ontological content is equal to that of the Christological event. Created being is not driven simply by necessity, or by teleology. In question here is a dialogical, transformative process. It is exactly in this perspective that creation participates in the divine Good, and itself becomes good.<sup>50</sup> This is, put briefly, the meaning of the power (κράτος) of divine energy over creation. This divine power is the paradigm for the power of man in the world.

### 2) *The Anthropological Determinant*

Man’s power exemplifies the status of man being in the image of God. One should note that, unlike Nemesius, Maximus, or the Damascene, who place the divine image in the noetic powers of the human soul, Photius chooses the perspective of practical human actions. Although he also enumerates some noetic powers as being bearers of the divine image (like reason and volition),<sup>51</sup> his concepts of divine image cover a number of practical acts and virtues, such as: man’s position of power in the world, wisdom, creativity, manliness, invulnerability towards passions, consubstantial word (meaning that human word is consubstantial to human nature, just as the Word of God is consubstantial to God), and in ascent towards divinity.<sup>52</sup> One could postulate that here there is a transition from the Platonic supremacy of the contemplative to the Aristotelian preference for the practical dimension in ethics. Divine image is not a goal reached through practical activity. If it were so, the optimization of the divine image in man could be conceptualized through the Aristotelian model of teleological causation. In fact, this is precisely the explanatory model of Origen. For Origen, the dynamics of the divine image in man can be explained through Aristotelian causation.<sup>53</sup> While Aristotelian, Photius chooses here a different approach. God does not engrave (γράφω) the divine image in man as a noetic paradigm, neither does he

<sup>48</sup> Photius, *Amphilochia* 167.

<sup>49</sup> Photius, *Amphilochia* 13.6–8.

<sup>50</sup> Photius, *Amphilochia* 13.35–39.

<sup>51</sup> It is noteworthy here that Photius does not make will a separate agent of the divine image in man that parallels to reason. Reason and will are both elements of the cognitive act (νοεῖν). For a comparison with John Damascene’s concept of divine image in man, see Smilen Markov, *Die metaphysische Synthese des Johannes Damascenus: historische Zusammenhänge und Strukturtransformationen* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 179–202.

<sup>52</sup> Photius, *Amphilochia* 36.

<sup>53</sup> Photius, *Amphilochia* 36.

set it as a task to be fulfilled (κελεύω).<sup>54</sup> Every single human being is a perfect image of the three-hypostatic God.

### *The Wisdom of Christ*

Human knowledge has two sources: cognition (κατὰ ἐπιστήμην) and experience (κατὰ πείραν). Photius poses the following questions: when Christ states that the Day of Judgement is known only to the Father, what kind of knowledge does he manifest? Is experience or discourse the source of Christ's ignorance?<sup>55</sup> Photius stipulates that he speaks of these two types of knowledge concerning God not in the proper sense, but analogically. So, the Father has knowledge about everything according to cognition, but, sending his Son to judge the world, the Father acquires also empirical knowledge of the Day of Judgment. Being the judge of the world, Christ eternally possesses empirical knowledge of it, but, when he obeys the Father's decision, he also obtains cognitive knowledge. Thus, the path of acquiring human wisdom, which is accompanied by ignorance and uncertainty, becomes immanent to the inter-hypostatic relations between the Father and the Son. In Christ, man acquires the ability to recognize the eschatological meaning of time, even if he does not know the future. In this context, Photius uses the concept for historic time: *καιρός*.<sup>56</sup>

### *The Road of Wisdom According to St Photius*

The road of wisdom starts with realizing one's own ignorance (ἄγνοια). This is not an epistemic or ethical category, but a conclusion about one's own existential deficit.<sup>57</sup> The negation of this ignorance is a state of blindness and an insensibility to the divine salvific activity in creation. This is an active negation of participating in divine salvation, which is not only a subjective state, but an intersubjective dialogue in truth.<sup>58</sup> This is the way to sin.

In order to be ready to answer to divine invitation, one has to become worthy of divine benevolent providence (τῆς φιλανθρώπου προνοίας καταξιοῦται),<sup>59</sup> through which divine Wisdom is manifested in the world. Thanks to this providence, human

<sup>54</sup> Photius, *Amphilochia* 252.12.

<sup>55</sup> Photius, *Amphilochia* 228.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Smilen Markov, 'The Byzantine Concept of Historic Time: Origin and Development' in *Proceedings of the International Conference 'Ontology and History'*, Delphi (Greece), 29–31 May 2015, ed. Andrew Kaethler (forthcoming); Georgi Kapriev, 'Der Zusammenhang, Geschichte-Metaphysik als Drehpunkt der byzantinischen Philosophie' in *Philosophia* 11 (2016), <https://philosophia-bg.com/archive/philosophia-11-2016/der-zusammenhang-geschichte-metaphysik-als-drehpunkt-der-byzantinischen-philosophie/>.

<sup>57</sup> Photius, *Amphilochia* 76.55.

<sup>58</sup> Photius, *Amphilochia* 76.60–65.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 57.

intellect is illuminated and is brought up to salvific contemplation (*σωτήριος θεωρία*).<sup>60</sup> Unlike in Maximus, noetic contemplation is not the concluding stage of the epistemic ascent to God, surpassing discursive knowledge.

Photius also speaks of another higher state of contemplation that is purely noetic and above the senses. This higher knowledge of the divine enables the introspection (*κατανόησις*) of divine guidance of nature (*χειραγωγείν*) towards well-being.<sup>61</sup> The preparatory human practice searching for this kind of contemplation encompasses different types of ascetic, ethical, and epistemic activities. One has to study non-Christian philosophy in order to sift what is useful in it. Photius pays special attention here to the acquaintance with its ethical aspect. The second level is the study of the tradition of natural and divine contemplation. This element obviously has to do with salvific contemplation as a fruit of *μετάνοια*, and should be seen as a deepening of this aspect of divine knowledge. Third, one has to acquire divine philosophy and to practice the ethics stemming from it. Here Photius appropriates the Aristotelian division of theoretical and practical philosophy in the sphere of divine contemplation.

The methodology in all these aspects of acquiring wisdom is a combination of epistemic procedures and holistic existential transformations. One has to scrutinize the cognitive content implanted in the propositions of each sphere of knowledge, *i.e.* the different sciences and practical skills. However, at the same time, one has to perceive the order and harmony (*ἀκολουθία καὶ ἐναρμόνιον*) which is engraved in nature.<sup>62</sup> Here we see again the two sources of knowledge: discursive methodology and experience. An important factor is the ability to perceive the risk of maltreatment and corruption (*λύμη*). The warning of the Ecclesiastes is quoted: 'He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits logs may be endangered by them' (Eccl 10:9). The avoidance of this risk is possible through the correction of any superfluous action.

### *The Role of the Skill in Acquiring Wisdom*

Photius is convinced that the discursive sciences, as well as the skills acquired through learning, are useful on the road of divine Wisdom. They contribute to the shaping of nature and make the speech more eloquent; for those serving the divine Logos, the skill of rhetorical is advantageous. To be sure, Christ also accepted the unskilled (*ιδιώτας*), but it is precisely the fishermen, and not just any unskilled group of people, that are sent to catch human souls.<sup>63</sup> The uncertainty which accompanies

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 60.

<sup>61</sup> Photius, *Amphilochia* 64.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 14.

<sup>63</sup> Photius, *Epistula* 165.49.



sophistication in any skill or sciences, is cured by divine Wisdom, as the latter fulfils and improves the existence of those who recognize divine presence in history.

### *Conclusion*

Just as in classical Greek thought, all four authors consider wisdom in connection with the concept of the Good. Wisdom is the striving of man towards God, who is the ultimate Good. At the same time, the necessary precondition for practicing wisdom is the awareness of one's ignorance. Whereas for Aristotle, wisdom is specified according to the methodology of the theoretical and practical sciences, *i.e.* according to general epistemic criteria, the concepts of wisdom of all four authors depend on how they interpret the divine image in man. For Origen, the divine image is realized on purely epistemic grounds. Wisdom is the divine plan for a perfect and harmonious state of being, which precedes creation. The particularization of created being is an error, which can only be overcome beyond the creature's capacity. In that sense, wisdom in human existence is active as a pedagogical principle personified by Christ, the incarnated Wisdom, through which salvation from this state of created being can be acquired. The epistemic principle in the conceptualization of wisdom is valid also for Dionysius, in whose works this principle is exemplified by the order of the cosmological hierarchy. Here wisdom provides a transformative returning, whereby all human powers and relations, not only the cognitive ones, are restructured according to one's capacity for participation in divine Goodness. Thus, the ontological hierarchy is internalized as a hierarchy of human powers. For St Maximus, the Christ-centered transformative movement of creation has two vectors: progressive and retroactive. This is why the optimization of human powers is found not merely in an epistemological scheme, but is located in the dynamics of a Christ-centred history. The error has different cognitive and existential dimensions, whereby the most hazardous and irreversible error is refusing the divine gift of communion, denying eternal life and being afraid of love. St Photius interprets wisdom primarily as recognition of God's revelation in the different aspects of human existence. He does not use a general metaphysical principle, neither does he refer to a certain ascetic paradigm. He bases his analysis on the interconnection between truth and experience. Thus, all the cognitive elements of Wisdom, concerning the propensity to err, are reframed according to the eschatological state of being.