

Dionysius the Areopagite  
between Orthodoxy and Heresy



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Edited by

Filip Ivanović

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

# PREDETERMINATIONS AND PROVIDENCE IN DIONYSIUS AND MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR

VLADIMIR CVETKOVIĆ

In his pivotal work *Maximus the Confessor*, Andrew Louth remarks that the theme of providence was of a major concern for Byzantine theology and that Maximus takes pride of place in a long line of reflections on this topic.<sup>1</sup> While this topic has a decisive significance for the Byzantine Fathers, its importance in the modern scholarship is downplayed. Therefore it is of cardinal importance to tackle this subject. According to Louth, in his treatment of providence Maximus is heavily dependent on a work of Nemesius, the fourth-century Bishop of Emesa. Louth points out that Maximus quotes Nemesius' definition of providence as "the care (*ἐπιμέλεια*) that comes from God to the things that are".<sup>2</sup> In a recent article "God's *Logoi* and Human Personhood in St Maximus the Confessor", Grigory Benevich not only confirms Louth's claim but he ponders further on the nature of this dependence. According to Benevich, Maximus also closely follows Nemesius' idea of God's providence for both universals and individuals.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Benevich observes the influence of Dionysius the Areopagite on Maximus in regard to this aspect, stating that Maximus borrows from Dionysius the theory according to which God realizes His providence through His processions (*πρόοδοι*).<sup>4</sup> Benevich brings as evidence for this influence Maximus' usage of the expression "providential procession" (*προνοητικὴν πρόοδον*). Hans Urs von Balthasar was among the first scholars who brought to the fore Dionysius' figures of procession and return in connection to Maximus' theory of *logoi*

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Louth, *Maximus*, 96.

<sup>2</sup> Compare *Ambiguum* 10 (PG 91, 1189AB) with Nemesius' *De natura hominis* 43.

<sup>3</sup> Grigory Benevich, "God's *Logoi* and Human Personhood in St Maximus the Confessor", *Studi sull' Oriente Cristiano*, 13:1, 2009, 137.

<sup>4</sup> DN V.2, 816C -817A.

of beings, but he also claimed that the Alexandrian theology of *logos* is a more likely source for Maximus' view on *logoi*.<sup>5</sup> Polycarp Sherwood maintained Dionysius' direct impact on Maximus in his theory of *logoi* and his teaching of procession and providence, offering as an evidence for this influence the Neoplatonic image of the centre of the circle and the radii that both authors use.<sup>6</sup> Torstein Tollefsen went further arguing that Dionysius applied the image of the centre and radii of the circle to the relationship between the Good and processions, while Maximus applied the same image to the relationship between Logos and *logoi*.

By applying the circle model both authors found solutions to two important problems: 1) the problem of the relationship between the one and the manifold, and 2) the problem of the relationship between universals and individuals.<sup>7</sup> In spite of describing Maximus' theory of *logoi* as a "lonely meteorite in the night sky of Byzantine thought", Louth also acknowledges a possible influence of Dionysius on Maximus on this subject.<sup>8</sup> Along similar lines, Benevich's main intention in the aforementioned article is to show a close connection between Maximus' teaching on providence and his theory of *logoi* of being. In light of these observations, if there is a close connection between providence and procession in Dionysius and providence and *logoi* in Maximus and if Maximus is dependent on Dionysius' teachings, it may be relevant to explore in depth the nature of this dependence. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to elaborate the relationship between divine predeterminations and divine providence in Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor.

## Predeterminations

At the end of the fifth book of his *Divine Names*, Dionysius explains that the principle of every created thing pre-existed in God in the form of the divine will, and that the sum of the divine wills constitutes the future

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<sup>5</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2003), 95.

<sup>6</sup> Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of St Maximus the Confessor* (Rome: Herder, 1955), 172-3.

<sup>7</sup> Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 64-81.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Louth, "The Reception of Dionysius". The phrase "lonely meteorite in the night sky of Byzantine thought" is applied for Dionysius by Jean Vanneste, in "Is the Mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius Genuine?", *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 3, 1963, 288-89.



unity of God with the creation. These principles are differently called; the philosophers call them paradigms, while the theologians refer to them as predeterminations:

We say that paradigms are the principles that pre-exist as a unity in God and give being to what is, which the theologians call predeterminations (*προορισμοὺς*) and divine and good wills, that are definitive and creative of what is, in accordance with which [principles] the One beyond being predetermines and directs everything that is.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly to Dionysius, Maximus also introduces the principles that pre-existed in God terming them *logoi*:

..., each of the intellectual and rational beings, whether angels or human beings, through the very Logos according to which each was created, who is in God and is ‘with God’, is ‘called and indeed is’ a ‘portion of God’ through the logos that pre-existed in God...<sup>10</sup>

Maximus clearly refers to Dionysius’ teaching of predeterminations as a source for his doctrine of *logoi*:

With examples from Scripture St Dionysius the Areopagite teaches us to call these *logoi* “predeterminations” and “products of the divine will”.<sup>11</sup>

It would be difficult to discern the influence of Dionysius on Maximus simply by comparing the passages where Dionysius uses the term “predetermination” with the passages where Maximus applies the term *logoi*, because Dionysius uses the terminology of predeterminations randomly. Nevertheless, by following Maximus’ reasoning regarding the relationship between Logos and *logoi*, it is possible to track down the passages in Dionysius that influenced Maximus. As it has been previously remarked, Maximus’ treatment of the relationship between Logos and *logoi* usually occurs in the context of the discussion regarding unity and manifold. Thus, one would expect to find Maximus drawing on Dionysius in his dealing with the theme of unity and manifold. In fact the influence of Dionysius on Maximus may be confirmed on the basis of the similar

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<sup>9</sup> DN V.8, 834C). The English translation is by Andrew Louth, from “The Reception of Dionysius”, 593.

<sup>10</sup> *Amb.* 7, 1080B. The English translation in Paul Blowers and Robert L. Wilken, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press 2003).

<sup>11</sup> *Amb.* 7, 1085A.

imagery that both authors use in their treatment of the relationship between the one and many. There are at least two figures that both authors use almost identically: the image of the centre and the radii of the circle and the image of the seal.<sup>12</sup> For the purpose of the present work I will focus solely on the former investigating Maximus' dependence on Dionysius' usage of the circle model.

### The circle model

There are two passages in *The Divine Names* where Dionysius by applying the Neoplatonic model of the centre and the radii of the circle, attempts to solve the problem of the relationship between one and many. Dionysius claims that

if differentiation can be said to apply to the generous procession of the undifferentiated divine unity, itself overflowing with the goodness and dispensing itself outward toward the multiplicity, then the things united even within divine differentiation are the acts by which it irrepressibly imparts being, life, wisdom and other gifts of all-creative goodness...It is rather like the case of a circle. The centre point of the circle is shared by the surrounding radii.<sup>13</sup>

Further on in the fifth chapter Dionysius develops the same idea:

Every number preexists uniquely in the monad and the monad holds every number in itself singularly. Every number is united in the monad; it is differentiated and pluralized only insofar as it goes forth from this one. All the radii of a circle are brought together in the unity of the centre which contains all the straight lines brought together within itself. These are linked one to another because of this single point of origin and they are completely unified at this centre. As they move a little away from it they are differentiated a little, and as they fall farther they are farther differentiated. This is, the closer they are to the centre point, the more they

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<sup>12</sup> DN II.5, 644A and *Amb.* 7, 1076C.

<sup>13</sup> DN II.4, 644A: Εἰ δὲ καὶ θεία διάκρισις ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγαθοπρεπῆς προόδος τῆς καὶ διακρίσεις. Εἰ δὲ καὶ θεία διάκρισις ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγαθοπρεπῆς προόδος τῆς ἐνώσεως τῆς θείας ὑπερνωμένως ἑαυτὴν ἀγαδότητι πληθυσύσης τε καὶ πολλαπλασιαζούσης, ἠνωμένοι μὲν εἰσι κατὰ τὴν θείαν διάκρισιν αἱ ἄσχετοι μεταδόσεις, αἱ οὐσιώσεις, αἱ ζωώσεις, αἱ σοφοποιήσεις, αἱ ἄλλαι δωρεαὶ τῆς πάντων αἰτίας ἀγαδότητος, (...) ἐν μέσῳ κύκλου πρὸς πασῶν τῶν ἐν τῷ κύκλῳ περικειμένων εὐθειῶν.

are at one with it and at one with each other, and more they travel away from it the more they are separated from each other.<sup>14</sup>

These two passages from Dionysius' *Divine Names* correspond in many aspects with three passages from Maximus' works. The first passage is particularly relevant for the investigation of the problem of the one and many in the context of the Dionysian procession, and it is taken from *Ambiguum 7*:

Because the One goes forth out of goodness into individual being, creating and preserving them, the One is many. Moreover the many are directed toward the One and are providentially guided in that direction. It is as though they were drawn to an all-powerful center that had built into it the beginnings of the lines that go out from it, and that gathers them all together. In this way the many are one.<sup>15</sup>

The following passage where Maximus mentions the circle model comes from the *Centuries on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation of the Son of God* or as it is popularly known the *Gnostic Centuries*:

As in the centre of a circle we see the indivisible point of origin for the strait lines that go out from it, so the one who is worthy to be found in God comes to know in him all the preexistent ideas of the things that have come to be, in a simple and indivisible act of knowing.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> DN V.6, 820D-821A: Καὶ γὰρ ἐν μονάδι πᾶς ἀριθμὸς ἐνοειδῶς προϋφέστηκε, καὶ ἔχει πάντα ἀριθμὸν ἢ μονὰς ἐν ἑαυτῇ μοναχῶς, καὶ πᾶς ἀριθμὸς ἡνῶται μὲν ἐν τῇ μονάδι, καδ' ὅσον δὲ τῆς μονάδος πρόβεισι, κατὰ τοσοῦτον διακρίνεται καὶ πληθύνεται. Καὶ ἐν κέντρῳ πᾶσαι αἱ τοῦ κύκλου γραμμαὶ κατὰ μίαν ἔνωσιν συνυφαστήκασιν, καὶ πάσας ἔχει τὸ σημεῖον ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὰς εὐθείας ἐνοειδῶς ἡνωμένας πρὸς τε ἀλλήλας καὶ πρὸς τὴν μίαν ἀρχήν. ἀφ' ἧς προήλθον, καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ μὲν τῷ κέντρῳ παντελῶς ἡνῶται. Βραχὺ δὲ αὐτοῦ διαστᾶσαι, βραχὺ καὶ διακρίνονται, μᾶλλον δὲ ἀποστᾶσαι, μᾶλλον. Καὶ ἀπλῶς, καδ' ὅσον τῷ κέντρῳ πλησισιαιτέραί εἰσι, κατὰ τοσοῦτον καὶ αὐτῷ καὶ ἀλλήλαις ἡνῶται, καί, καδ' ὅσον αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τοσοῦτον καὶ ἀλλήλων διεστήκασιν.

<sup>15</sup> Amb. 7, 1081C: κατὰ μὲν τὴν ἀγαθοπρεπῆ εἰς τὰ ὄντα τοῦ ἐνός ποιητικὴν τε καὶ συνεκτικὴν πρόσοδον πολλοὶ ὁ εἷς, κατὰ δὲ τὴν εἰς τὸν ἕνα τῶν πολλῶν ἐπιστρεπτικὴν τε καὶ χειραγωγικὴν ἀναφορὰν τε καὶ πρόνοιαν, ὡσπερ εἰς ἀρχὴν παντοκρατορικὴν ἢ κέντρον τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ εὐθειῶν τὰς ἀρχὰς προειληφός καὶ ὡς πάντων συναγωγός, εἷς οἱ πολλοί.

<sup>16</sup> CG II.4, PG 90, 1128A: Ὡσπερ ἐν τῷ κέντρῳ τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ κατ' εὐθεῖαν ἐκτεταμένων γραμμῶν ἀδιαίρετος θεωρεῖται παντελῶς ἡ θέσις· οὕτως ὁ ἀξιοθεὶς ἐν τῷ Θεῷ γενέσθαι, πάντας εἰσεται τοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ τῶν γεγονότων προϋφαστώτας λόγους, καδ' ἀπλὴν τινα ἀδιαίρετον γνῶσιν. The English translation in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 95.

The third and final passage where Maximus uses the circle model derives from his *Mystagogia*:

It is he [God] who encloses in himself all beings by the unique, simple, and infinitely wise power of his goodness. As a centre of straight lines that radiate from him he does not allow by his unique, simple, and single cause and power that the principles of beings become disjoint at the periphery but rather he circumscribes their extension in a circle and brings back to himself the distinctive elements of being which he himself brought into existence.<sup>17</sup>

Even if the figure of the circle's centre and radii is of Neoplatonic origin it helped both authors to transmit the Christian message of God as Creator and the cause of all things created. In the passages above both authors insist that all creation participates in God on the basis of its relationship with Him as the cause. For both Dionysius and Maximus, God contained the ideas and principles of every created being before He created them. By these principles God predetermined His creation in accordance with His will. Therefore, the predeterminations or *logoi* in Maximus are also perceived as divine wills imprinted in creation.

Dionysius also explains that in the process of creation God endowed every created being with concrete gifts such as being, life, wisdom and other gifts of all-creative goodness. Although it is not evident from the passages quoted above, Maximus follows Dionysius in this respect, but he adopts the Dionysian idea of divine gifts in a slightly different form. First, Maximus extends Dionysius' number of processions from three (being, life, wisdom) to four, adding goodness as well. This is not a striking change since Dionysius himself in *The Divine Names* claims that Good, Being, Life and Wisdom are good processions of God.<sup>18</sup> Second, Maximus replaces the term Life, meant as eternal Life by Dionysius,<sup>19</sup> with the term eternal being (τὸ ἀεὶ ὄν) and the term Goodness with the term well-being (τὸ εὖ εἶναι). By replacing the term Goodness with well-being Maximus follows Dionysius too, because Dionysius uses the term well-being (τὸ εὖ

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<sup>17</sup> *Myst.*, I.4, PG 91, 668AB: ὁ πάντα κατὰ μίαν ἀπλὴν τῆς ἀγαθότητος ἀπειρόσσοφον δύναμιν ἑαυτῷ περικλείων, ὡσπερ κέντρον εὐθειῶν τινων ἐξημμένων αὐτοῦ, κατὰ μίαν ἀπλὴν καὶ ἐνιαίαν αἰτίαν καὶ δύναμιν τὰς ἀρχὰς τῶν ὄντων τοῖς πέρασιν οὐκ ἔων συναφίστασθαι, κύκλῳ περιγράφων αὐτῶν τὰς ἐκτάσεις καὶ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἄγων τοὺς τῶν ὄντων καὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ γενομένων διορισμούς· The English translation is of George C. Berthold in Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings* (London: SPCK, 1985), 187.

<sup>18</sup> DN V.2, 816C.

<sup>19</sup> DN VI.1, 825C.

*εἶναι*) as the product of the procession of goodness in various passages of his works.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Maximus employs the four divine gifts: being, eternal being, well-being and wisdom in an anthropological context. Thus, according to Maximus, by creating man in accordance with His image and likeness, God attributed being and eternal being (*εἶναι καὶ ἀεὶ εἶναι; τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ ἀεὶ ὄν*) to human essence to resemble His image. The elements of human likeness to divine being granted by God are well-being or goodness and wisdom and they are subsumed under the power of human will or inclination.<sup>21</sup> Although Maximus engages with Dionysius' ideas and develops them in a novel way, it is obvious that he remains faithful to Dionysius' view regarding creation. Next, apart from agreeing on the role of God as Creator, Dionysius and Maximus consider Him as the provider of the creation and the final goal of everything created.<sup>22</sup> The relationship of every single being with its Creator affects its relationship with other beings too, because all created beings have one single cause and origin and because they are united "within the divine differentiations". This means that by sharing the same divine gifts of being, goodness, life and wisdom and also by having their origin in God who is the wise distributor of these gifts, created beings are linked inseparably one to another. The closeness of their relationship again depends on how far they are from God. By being closer to God, they are closer to each other. Both authors maintain that complete unification of the creation is only possible in God, because He is the single place of origin for all creation. One can notice that Dionysius and Maximus describe two subsequent processes: one that comes from God being directed toward the created world which they term procession, and another that is exercised by the multiplicity of beings, oriented toward God, which they name return or conversion. I shall attempt further to explain these two processes.

### **The movement of procession**

The double movement of procession and conversion helped both Dionysius and Maximus to solve the problem of the one and the manifold.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Dionysius argues that many processions should be perceived as one because of the single cause of these processions:

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<sup>20</sup> DN IV.2, 696C; V.8, 821D; CH XIII.4, 304D; EH I.3, 373D.

<sup>21</sup> *De char.*, III.24-5, PG 90, 1024BC.

<sup>22</sup> DN I.7, 596C and CG I.10, 1088A.

<sup>23</sup> Tollefsen, *The Cristocentric Cosmology*, 78.

I do not think of the Good as one thing, Being as another, Life and Wisdom as yet other, and I do not claim that there are numerous causes and different Godheads, all differently ranked, superior and inferior, and all producing different effects. No. But I hold that there is one God for all these good processions and that he is possessor of the divine names of which I speak and that the first name tells of the universal Providence of one God, while the other names reveal general and specific ways in which he acts providentially.<sup>24</sup>

There are several aspects which need to be mentioned here. First, the divine differentiations such as goodness, being, life and wisdom are the divine attributes of one God who, in a single act of creation perceived as proceeding from the Cause, imparts these attributes to the multiplicity of created beings. Second, as Paul Rorem has already noticed,<sup>25</sup> the Neoplatonic double movement of procession and conversion is associated with the notion of providence that allows us to perceive the process of conversion as something providentially guided. Third, Dionysius distinguishes here the universal act of divine providence from the general and specific ways in which God exercise His providential role.<sup>26</sup> This last aspect introduces us to the problem of universals and particulars.

In my view all these three aspects may be also encountered in Maximus. Thus, like Dionysius, Maximus explains the relationship between the one and the manifold through the portrayal of the relations of one Logos of God to the multitude of *logoi*. Following closely Dionysius' reasoning, Maximus claims that the one Logos are many *logoi* on the basis of one divine procession, but he substitutes the original Neoplatonic term "procession" (*πρόοδος*), with the more elaborate expression "the creative and preservative procession" (*ποιητική και συνεκτική πρόοδος*).<sup>27</sup> The purpose of the added attributes is to stress the twofold character of procession, or the two roles of God, one as Creator and another as Provider.<sup>28</sup> Next, in explaining how many *logoi* are one Logos Maximus applies the Neoplatonic term "conversion" in a slightly revised form. Thus, many *logoi* are one Logos due to the converting and hand-leading

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<sup>24</sup> DN V.2, 816CD: Οὐκ ἄλλο δὲ εἶναι τὰγαθόν φησι καὶ ἄλλο τὸ ὄν καὶ ἄλλο τὴν ζωὴν ἢ τὴνσοφίαν, οὐδὲ πολλὰ τὰ αἷτια καὶ ἄλλων ἄλλας παρακτινὰς θεότητας ὑπερχειούσας καὶ ὑφειμένους, ἀλλ' ἐνὸς θεοῦ τὰς ὅλας ἀγαθὰς προόδους καὶ τὰς παρ' ἡμῶν ἐξυμνουμένας θεωνυμίας καὶ τὴν μὲν εἶναι τῆς παντελοῦς τοῦ ἐνὸς θεοῦ προνοίας ἐκφαντικὴν, τὰς δὲ τῶν ὀλιγωτέρων αὐτοῦ καὶ μερικωτέρων.

<sup>25</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, 83, n. 160.

<sup>26</sup> Also in DN I.8, 597A.

<sup>27</sup> *Amb.* 7, 1081C.

<sup>28</sup> DN I.7, 596C and CG I.10, 1088A.

transference and providence (*ἐπιστρεπτική και χειραγωγική ἀναφορά τε και πρόνοια*). Similarly to Dionysius, Maximus connects the conversion with the providence, although the providence is also associated with the process of procession, in particular with the preservative procession. Finally, as it has been mentioned above, Dionysius distinguishes the universal act of divine providence from the general and specific ways in which God exercises His providential role. The universal act of providence in Dionysius may correspond to creative procession (*ποιητική πρόοδος*) in Maximus, while the general and specific ways in which God exercises His providential role in Dionysius may correspond to the preservative procession (*συνεκτική πρόοδος*) in Maximus.

### **Creative procession**

In order to describe the creative act of God, Dionysius uses the term *οὐσιοποιού προόδου*,<sup>29</sup> which is similar to the Maximian term *ποιητική πρόοδος*. The movement of creative procession can be interpreted in terms of the circle model used by both authors. Thus, the divine creative procession is a movement from the centre of the circle along each radius up to the last point of the radius situated on the circumference of the circle. God, referred by Dionysius as monad and by Maximus as Logos, is located in the centre of the circle. By creating human beings, God confers them being and eternal being in actuality and well-being and wisdom in potentiality. Every individual being possesses being and eternal being without restrictions. If the individual rational being is represented by a radius, then every single point of the radius, from the centre to the circumference contains these two processions, i.e., being and eternal being.

As the divine processions that are granted in potentiality are well-being and wisdom, they are not immediately available to rational beings and they should be acquired on the way to God. Therefore, not all points on the radius contain these processions, but only the points that are closer to the center of the circle, i.e., God. The rational being attains these two gifts conferred in potentiality only in the vicinity of God on its way back from the circumference toward the centre of the circle.

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<sup>29</sup> DN V.8, 825A.

## Preservative procession

Apart from creative procession, both Maximus and Dionysius maintain the idea of preservative procession, which corresponds to the role of God in sustaining the creation in existence.

Maximus distinguishes the original creative act or creative procession from every subsequent act of creative intervention or preservative procession, which has for its purpose the preservation of the creation. He explains the difference between what God has already created and what He is still creating in the following way:

The *logoi* of all things known by God before their creation are securely fixed in God. They are in him who is truth of all things. Yet all these things, things present and things to come, have not been brought into being contemporaneously with their being known by God; rather each was created in an appropriate way according to its *logos* at the proper time according to the wisdom of the maker, and each acquired the concrete actual existence in itself.<sup>30</sup>

The creative processions happen in accordance with the original divine design, which is in fact a very refined structure of the *logoi* of beings. The difference between the original creative act and every subsequent creative act of the divine power lies in the creation of universals and individuals.

## Universals and Individuals

According to Maximus, originally God creates according to *logoi* of universals and according to those *logoi* of individuals whose proper time was at the beginning. Subsequently He creates concrete beings no longer according to *logoi* of universals but in accordance with their individual *logoi* and their *logoi* of time and position. The *logoi* of the universals are the most general *logoi* of being and nature, the subsequent *logoi* of highest genus (*γενικώτατον γένος*), the intermediate genera (*γενικώτερα γένη*), the species (*εἶδη*), the specific species (*εἰδικώτατα εἶδη*),<sup>31</sup> as well as the *logoi* of time and the *logoi* of providence and judgment. They determine the immutability of created nature and the inclination of the particular beings cannot affect the established order, because they are immutable by their *logos* of nature, while they are movable in their properties and accidents.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Amb.* 7, 1081A.

<sup>31</sup> *Amb.* 10, 1177C.

<sup>32</sup> *Amb.* 15, 1217B.



According to Dionysius, God created the world by the act of universal providence, while by the general and specific acts of providence He preserves every individual being. Dionysius explains the difference between these two providences in the following quotation:

For the unnamed goodness is not just the cause of cohesion or life or perfection so that it is from this providential gesture that it earns the name, but it actually contains everything beforehand within itself—and this in an uncomplicated and boundless manner—and it is thus by virtue of the unlimited goodness of its single all-creative Providence.<sup>33</sup>

This passage may be the source of Maximus' inspiration about the divine principles that God contains beforehand in Him. According to Dionysius, by the single creative act of His providence, God clothes the principles that exist beforehand in His mind in matter. Dionysius also explains the divine distribution of beings or the creation of universals:

In the domain of mind, in the area of God's providence, whether it be with the respect to his gifts, his appearances, his powers, his attributes, his allotments, his abodes, his processions, his distinctions, or his unions, these are variously represented in the forms of man, of wild or domestic animals, of plants and of stones.<sup>34</sup>

The general and specific acts of providence correspond to the preservation of each individual being in its full natural capacity to act, even if this act is opposite to the divine will. Dionysius expresses this idea by claiming that

its [Good's] character as Providence is shown by the fact that it saves the nature of each individual, so that the free may freely act as individual or as a groups, insofar as the nature of those provided for receives the benefactions of this providing power appropriate to each one.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> DN I.7, 596D-597A: Οὐ γὰρ συνοχῆς ἢ ζωῆς ἢ τελειώσεως αἰτία μόνον ἐστίν, ἵνα ἀπὸ μόνης ταύτης ἢ τῆς ἐτέρας προνοίας ἢ ὑπεράνυμος ἀγαθότης ὀνομασθεῖη. Πάντα δὲ ἀπλῶς καὶ ἀπεριορίστως ἐν ἑαυτῇ τὰ ὄντα προεἴληφε ταῖς παντελέσι τῆς μιᾶς αὐτῆς καὶ παναιτίου προνοίας ἀγαθότησι...

<sup>34</sup> Ep. IX.1, 1105A: ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν νοητῶν τοῦ θεοῦ προνοιῶν ἢ δωρεῶν ἢ ἐκφάνσεων ἢ δυνάμεων ἢ ἰδιοτήτων ἢ λήξεων ἢ μονῶν ἢ προσόδων ἢ διακρίσεων ἢ ἐνώσεων ἀνθρωπαστίαν τῷ θεῷ καὶ θηρίων καὶ ζῴων ἄλλων καὶ φυτῶν καὶ λίθων ποικιλομορφίαν περιπλαττούσης...

<sup>35</sup> DN IV.33, 733BC.

The circle model is applicable to the explanation of the relationship between the universals and individuals. Both Dionysius and Maximus deal with this problem, but only Maximus employs the terms “expansion” (*διαστολή*) and “contraction” (*συστολή*). The process of expansion is a movement from the Logos of God placed in the centre of the circle along each radius toward the circle’s circumference. The general logos of being and subsequent *logoi* of most general genus, intermediate genera and species are arranged all the way along each radius, while the *logoi* of each individual rational being, angel, man and woman are placed on the circumference at the final point of each radius. The points on the radii that are closer to the centre of the circle belong to the domain of the most general logos of being. By moving away from the centre along the radii toward the circumference, the procession or expansion of being generates the forms of general and intermediate genera and species. Accordingly, the last point on every radius that is the most distant from the centre of the circle represents the logos of each individual angelic and human being. The above quoted passage from *The Divine Names* describes in the best way the whole process of expansion of beings. Dionysius stresses that the beings are linked one to another in the centre of the circle where they are completely unified with God and among themselves. The difference among the beings increases with the distance from the circle. Therefore the unification among beings and with God is only possible if the beings are moving not further away from the centre of the circle but towards it.

A couple of aspects need to be mentioned here. First, that each point on the radius further away from the centre contains the points, which are closer to the centre. Thus, every individual angelic and human being is a bearer of all universals within himself or herself and the existence of humanity or creatureliness is not possible as such but only as existing in a concrete human being. Secondly, the ultimate point of identity of the *logoi* of individuals is not in universals, but in the centre of the circle, which is the Logos of God. In case of human beings it means that they cannot be fully united among themselves neither in the abstract idea of humanity proposed by modern humanisms, nor in the idea of all-inclusive sensible nature advocated by contemporary environmental movements. The perfect unity of human beings is possible only by being the children of God and by sharing the same divine life with the Holy Trinity. Thus, the individual beings by following their natural *logos* converge toward other human beings by discovering that they share the same humanity or creatureliness, but these are just stations on the movement along the radius toward the centre of the circle which is God.

## Conversion

As it has been said above both Dionysius and Maximus maintain that God is not only originator and provider of all the created being, but that He is also the ultimate goal of their movement.<sup>36</sup> Both authors describe this movement toward God by the Neoplatonic term of “return” or “conversion” (ἐπιστροφή). According to Dionysius each being looks to the Good as a source, as the agent of cohesion and as an objective (ὡς ἀρχῆς, ὡς συνοχῆς, ὡς τέλους)<sup>37</sup> and moves accordingly. The movement of return to God or conversion is indivisibly connected with divine providence. Therefore, the whole process consists of two elements, one conversional and another providential. The process of conversion begins with the decision made by the rational being to move toward its cause or beginning and its proper end, which is in both cases God. It is important that the rational being has decided to convert, i.e., to move toward God, because only then the providential element will be included in the whole process. According to Dionysius, God is available to all and becomes all things in all through providence and for salvation and He gives Himself outward for the sake of the divinization of those who return to Him.<sup>38</sup> Thus, God exercises His providential role only over the beings who return to Him. Dionysius is very clear that providence is not something that leads to virtue against the will of the subject, because it does not act against the nature of rational beings.<sup>39</sup> Dionysius locates the source of providence in God, who in good love for all things and through the excess of His loving goodness, exercises providence as care for all that is.<sup>40</sup> The purpose of providence is the return of all the beings which God contained beforehand to Him as their final home.<sup>41</sup>

### Converting and hand-leading transference

Like Dionysius, Maximus closely connects the movement of conversion with the providence. This is particularly obvious in *Ambiguum* 7, where Maximus claims that many *logoi* are one Logos due to the converting and hand-leading transference and providence (ἐπιστρεπτική καί χειραγωγική ἀναφορά τε καί πρόνοια). Instead of using the Neoplatonic term

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<sup>36</sup> DN I.7, 596C and CG I.10, 1088A.

<sup>37</sup> DN IV.4, 700A.

<sup>38</sup> DN IX.5, 912D.

<sup>39</sup> DN IV.33, 733B.

<sup>40</sup> DN IV.13, 712 AB.

<sup>41</sup> DN I.7, 596CD.

(ἐπιστροφή), Maximus opts for more precise terms such as “the converting and hand-leading transference or offering” (ἐπιστρεπτική καὶ χειραγωγική ἀναφορά). Maximus describes this process of deification as the transference (ἀναφορᾶ) of all created beings in the union with God, in which beings become united without confusion (ἀσυγχύτως) among themselves and with God.<sup>42</sup> Maximus prefers the term “transference” (ἀναφορᾶ) to the term “conversion” for at least two reasons. First, the “transference” (ἀναφορᾶ) or the whole phrase “converting and hand-leading transference and providence” (ἐπιστρεπτική καὶ χειραγωγική ἀναφορά τε καὶ πρόνοια) refers not to one, but rather to two agents in this process. It is obvious that the conversion takes place in the created beings, but the guidance of the transference belongs to God, who exercises it by His providence. Second, the term ἀναφορᾶ apart from “transference” means “offering” and in this context is exclusively employed in the liturgy. This term again refers to a certain cooperation between God and rational beings, because if there is offering there should be also a reception of this offering. By offering themselves to God, the human beings follow the example of God, who by taking human nature, offered Himself to the world. Maximus employs sometimes the term “reversion” (ἀντιστροφή) in order to stress the reciprocity between the hominisation of God and the deification of man. As the final result of the process of hominization of God was the hypostatic union between divine and human nature in Jesus Christ, the final result of the process of the deification of human being should be also the hypostatic union between divine and human nature in every man and woman. It is important to stress that the process of deification is the common work of God and human beings, in the same way in which the process of Logos’ Incarnation was the common work of God and human beings, or in the last instance the work of the Holy Spirit and Mary, the Mother of God. In both situations, i.e., the Incarnation of Logos and the deification of humanity, God takes a leading or hand-leading (χειραγωγική) role. According to providence God receives the rational beings who offer themselves and the whole creation back to Him and bestows deification upon them.

### Love and yearning as the source of providential care

The process of return of all beings to God is initiated by a similar yearning and love for Him, as He has for all things. According to

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<sup>42</sup> *Amb.* 7, 1077C: ...τῆ πρὸς αὐτόν τῶν πάντων ἀναφορᾶ δι’ ἐαυτὸν ἀσυγχύτως ὑπάρχοντα.

Dionysius this yearning and love for God can have various forms. On the basis of the fourth chapter of *The Divine Names*,<sup>43</sup> Ysabel de Andia has discerned four ways in which created beings can express love and these are: the way of conversion, the way of communion, the way of providence and the way of preservation. The way of conversion is a process in which the subordinates convert to the superiors out of love, the way of communion (*κοινωνία*) is a process in which the equals commune out of love, the way of providence describes the care that the superiors provide for the subordinates out of love and the way of preservation is the relationship of being toward oneself or love for oneself.<sup>44</sup> Andia remarks that the process of return to God is a complex process of two opposite movements: 1) the movement of the inferiors, which in their way toward God as the final goal, convert to the superiors, who are closer to God and 2) the movement of the superiors, who for the purpose of fulfilling the divine will of complete unification of everything created with God, assist the inferiors in their movement toward the One. Again in the fourth chapter of *The Divine Names*<sup>45</sup> Dionysius offers an example of angelic powers who inspired by the love for divine being assist those below to convert to God. It is worth noticing that for Dionysius the longing for God and the appropriate movement toward Him grounds the beings in being and confers them well-being.<sup>46</sup> According to the institution or law of God (*ὁ θεῖος θεσμός*) the superior beings are obliged to share the acquired gifts with those below them. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that apart from God who exercises the universal providence as care for the creation, every single class or order of beings also exercises the providential care in accordance to the divine plan for their subordinates. Thus, angels who are closest to God and move in a circular movement around Him by their providential power move in a linear fashion toward the souls, who are beneath them.<sup>47</sup> After reaching the souls, angels move in a spiral fashion uplifting the souls beneath them toward the final goal in God. The same process of providential care for the subordinates is exercised by the souls who direct their care toward the bodies beneath them. The lowest rank of unreasonable souls of animals and plants and non-living matter does not possess providential power, because they do not have subordinates over whom to exercise it. Apart from the divinely instituted power to convert (*ἐπιστρεπτικῶς*) to their superiors, i.e., the souls of human beings, they

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<sup>43</sup> DN IV.10, 708A.

<sup>44</sup> Andia, *Henosis*, 142.

<sup>45</sup> DN IV.1-2, 693C-696B.

<sup>46</sup> DN IV.1, 696A: *αὐτῆς ἐφιέμεναι καὶ τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὸ εὖ εἶναι ἔχουσι.*

<sup>47</sup> DN IV.8, 704D.

also exercise the power of self-preservation (*συνεκτικῶς*) and the power to commune (*κοινωνικῶς*) with the equals.<sup>48</sup>

In conclusion, Dionysius claims that every created being, either of the highest rank like angels or of the lowest rank like unanimated matter by converting to their Cause establish themselves in being and acquire well-being. At the same time, all orders of being, except the loftiest, exercise the providential (*προνοητικῶς*) power and love and care for their subordinates in accordance to the wise divine plan.

### Providence and unification

Like Dionysius, Maximus has also a sophisticated teaching about the divine providence. He reflects on this topic in separate meditations of his *Ambigua*. Thus, in *Ambiguum* 10, Maximus touches upon the subject of providence in the context of the five modes of natural contemplation: being, movement, difference, mixture and position. He directly connects the movement with providence and the difference with judgment. Here Maximus exposes his criticism of Origenistic and Evagrian understanding of converting providence as guiding force in ethical issues and of judgment as educative and punitive corrective for sinners. Maximus' understanding of providence and judgement goes more along the lines of Dionysius. Thus, the role of providence is to preserve the unvarying sameness of each of the things in universe and to preserve the universe in accordance with the *logoi* of which it consists. According to Maximus the role of providence is to hold the whole creation and every single being within the unity with God and among themselves. This feature of the Maximian thought corresponds with the aspect of Dionysian thought that deals with the things united in differentiations.<sup>49</sup> As the judgment is indicative of difference the role of judgment is to preserve the wise distribution of beings, in accordance with which each of the things, has an inviolable and unalterable constitution in its natural identity.<sup>50</sup> Even if Dionysius does not use the term "judgment" it is obvious that Maximus' application of this term corresponds to the idea of preservation of differences in union in Dionysius.

In *Ambiguum* 10 Maximus treats the theme of providence extensively. He offers four definitions of providence. Thus, providence for Maximus is: 1) the care that comes from God to the things that are; 2) the will of

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<sup>48</sup> DN IV.10, 708A.

<sup>49</sup> Louth, *Denys*, 89-90.

<sup>50</sup> Louth, *Maximus*, 66.

God through which everything that is receives suitable direction; 3) the one who is truly known to be the Creator, and 4) a power exercised by the Creator of all things. Maximus dedicates the major part of this meditation to the criticism of the pagan teachings that God cares only for universals, but not for particulars. Maximus mostly relies in his criticisms on the arguments of Nemesius of Emesa. The stance that God exercises His providential care for both universals and particulars led Maximus to identify the double movement of return and providence with the movement of contraction of particulars to universals. Thus, in his *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 2, Maximus links the two movements by the means of providence:

God, as he alone knew how, completed the primary principles of creatures and the universal essences of beings once for all. Yet he is still at work, not only preserving these creatures in their very existence but effecting the formation, progress, and sustenance of the individual parts that are potential within them. Even now in his providence he is bringing about the assimilation of particulars to universals until he might unite creatures' own voluntary inclination to the more universal natural principle of rational being through the movement of these particular creatures toward well being, and make them harmonious and self-moving in relation to one another and to the whole universe. In this way there shall be no intentional divergence between universals and particulars. Rather, one and the same principle shall be observable throughout the universe, admitting of no differentiation by the individual modes according to which created beings are predicated, and displaying the grace of God effective to deify the universe.<sup>51</sup>

This long quotation summarizes what has been already said above in regard to the *logoi* of God and the divine constant work on the creation. It also provides the link between providence and the movement of contraction. The movement of contraction of particulars and assimilation

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<sup>51</sup> *Thal.* 2, CCSG 7.51, PG 90, 272AB: Τοὺς μὲν πρῶτους τῶν γενομένων λόγους ὁ Θεὸς καὶ τὰς καθόλου τῶν ὄντων οὐσίας ἅπασ, ὡς οἶδεν αὐτός, συμπληρώσας, ἔτι ἐργάζεται οὐ μόνον τὴν τούτων αὐτῶν πρὸς τὸ εἶναι συντήρησιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν κατ' ἐνέργειαν τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς δυνάμει μερῶν δημιουργίαν πρόοδόν τε καὶ σύστασιν, ἔτι μὴν καὶ τὴν διὰ τῆς προνοίας πρὸς τὰ καθόλου τῶν μερικῶν ἕξομοίωσιν, ἕως ἂν, τῷ κατὰ φύσιν γενικωτέρῳ λόγῳ τῆς λογικῆς οὐσίας διὰ τῆς πρὸς τὸ εἶναι κινήσεως τῶν μερικῶν τὴν αὐθαιρέτον ἐνώσας ὁμήν, ποιήσειεν ἀλλήλοις τε καὶ τῷ ὅλῳ σύμφωνα καὶ ταυτοκίνητα, μὴ ἐχόντων τὴν γνωμικὴν πρὸς τὰ καθόλου τῶν ἐπὶ μέρους διαφοράν, ἀλλ' εἰς καὶ ὁ αὐτὸς ἐφ' ὅλων θεωρηθήσεται λόγος, μὴ διαιρούμενος τοῖς τῶν καθ' ἑν ἴσως κατηγορεῖται τρόποις, καὶ οὕτως ἐνεργουμένην τὴν ἐκδευωτικὴν τῶν ὅλων ἐπιδείξεται χάριν·

by universals on which Maximus insists is guided by providence. It proceeds from the *logos* of individual human being over the *logoi* of universals and general *logos* of being and nature to the Logos of God. In the above mentioned circle model, the *logos* of the individual being is represented by the last point of the radius on the circumference, the *logoi* of universals are placed along the radius toward the centre, and the Logos of God, where all radii, namely *logoi* of beings are united, occupies the centre of the circle. Providence leads the movement of the individual rational being from its particular *logos* at the circumference through the *logoi* of universals that are along the radius, toward the Logos of God located in the centre of the circle. By referring to harmonious and self-moving motion of rational beings in relation to one another and to the whole universe, Maximus alludes to the divine law (*νόμος Θεῖος*) implanted in rational beings to exercise the providential care over subordinates in the process of their conversion. Thus, Maximus claims that it is lawful and just for the worse to be led by the better, and the humans should imitate the self-sufficiency and consecrated rest of the angels.<sup>52</sup> Maximus applies the same principle to the bodies, which God created to be providentially led by the souls.<sup>53</sup> Maximus' position in this respect is identical to Dionysius' view, which states that the providential care of superiors over subordinates is a matter of divine institution. Finally, at the end of the quoted passage, Maximus discloses the purpose of the divine creative and preservative work as well as His providential care, which is the deification of the creation.

### Well-being and providence

Maximus and Dionysius have similar views concerning the process of attaining well-being as providential guidance to deification. God bestows well-being in the process of deification. Dionysius explains this in the following quotation:

The source of this hierarchy is the font of life, the being of goodness, the one cause of everything, namely the Trinity which in goodness bestows being and well-being on everything. Now this blessed Deity which transcends everything and which in one and also triune has resolved, for reasons unclear to us both but obvious to itself, to ensure the salvation of

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<sup>52</sup> *Amb.* 10, 1160A.

<sup>53</sup> *QD* 18, CCSG 10.17. The English translation by Despina Prassas in *St Maximus the Confessor's Questions and Doubts* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010).



rational beings, both ourselves and those beings who are our superiors. This can only happen with the divinization of the saved. And divinization consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God.<sup>54</sup>

God as the source of being and also as the source of goodness confers being and well-being to created rational beings. While being is the gift that maintains created beings in existence, well-being leads them to the process of deification. For Dionysius, deification means that created beings acquire likeness to God and achieve union with Him. Moreover, the process of acquiring well-being coincides with that of attaining the likeness (*ἀφομοίωσις*) of God and it is governed by divine providence.

It is said too that wisdom built itself a home and got ready there the solid food and drink, as well as bowl. This is said so that anything giving a sacred meaning to the divine things would clearly discover that the universal cause of being and well-being is also the perfect Providence which proceeds in stages upon everything. Thus Providence occurs everywhere.<sup>55</sup>

According to Dionysius, God has providentially prearranged that by receiving the gifts of being and well-being from Him, the created beings head toward their goal, which is their deification in God. Additionally, God guides the creation and exercises the role of providence while the creation is in the process of attaining well-being.

Similarly to Dionysius, Maximus deals with the notions of well-being, providence and deification. In order to achieve the final union with God preconceived before ages, every created being should acquire the *logos* of well-being.

For whoever does not violate the *logos* of his own existence that pre-existed in God *is* in God through diligence; and he *moves* in God according

<sup>54</sup> EH I.3, 373CD: Ταύτης ἀρχὴ τῆς ἱεραρχίας ἢ πηγὴ τῆς ζωῆς ἢ οὐσία τῆς ἀγαθότητος ἢ μία τῶν ὄντων αἰτία, τριάς, ἐξ ἧς καὶ τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὸ εὖ εἶναι τοῖς οὐσι δι' ἀγαθότητα. Ταύτη δὲ τῇ πάντων ἐπέκεινα θεαρχικωτάτη μακαριότητι τῇ τρισσῇ τῇ μονάδι τῇ ὄντως οὐσῃ κατὰ τὸ ἡμῖν μὲν ἀνέφικτον αὐτῇ δὲ ἐπιστητὸν θέλημα μὲν ἐστὶν ἡ λογικὴ σωτηρία τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς τε καὶ ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς οὐσιῶν· ἢ δὲ οὐχ ἑτέρως γενέσθαι δύναται μὴ θεουμένων τῶν σωζομένων· ἢ δὲ θεώσις ἐστὶν ἢ πρὸς θεὸν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοίωσις τε καὶ ἔνωσις.

<sup>55</sup> Ep. IX.3, 1109C: Οἰκοδομοῦσα δὲ καὶ ἡ σοφία οἶκον ἑαυτῇ λέγεται καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ τὰς στερεὰς τροφὰς καὶ τὰ πόματα καὶ τὸν κρατῆρα προτιθεμένη, ὡς εἶναι τοῖς τὰ θεῖα θεοπερῶς συμβάλλουσι δῆλον, ὅτι καὶ πρόνοια παντελής ἐστὶν ὁ τοῦ εἶναι καὶ τοῦ εὖ εἶναι τὰ πάντα αἴτιος καὶ ἐπὶ πάντα πρόεισι καὶ ἐν τῷ παντὶ γίγνεται καὶ περιέχει τὰ πάντα...

to the *logos* of his well-being that pre-existed in God when he lives virtuously; and he *lives* in God according to the *logos* of his eternal being that pre-existed in God. On the one hand, insofar as he is already irrevocably one with himself in his disposition, he is free of unruly passions. But in the future age when graced with divinization, he will affectionately love and cleave to the *logoi* already mentioned that pre-existed in God, or rather, he will love God himself, in whom the *logoi* of beautiful things are securely grounded.<sup>56</sup>

Maximus identifies a few steps on the path of human being to achieve the final union with God. The first step for every human being is to acknowledge its *logos* of being and not go against it. The next step consists in virtuous life and it requires acting in accordance with the *logos* of well-being that preexists in God for every human being. The final step of every human being is the realization of its *logos* of eternal being or achieving eternal life.

Maximus' terms "logos of being", "logos of well-being", and "logos of eternal being" coincide with what Dionysius calls the divine gifts or the processions of God conferred to the rational beings. According to Maximus, God created the human being according to his image and likeness, by granting being and eternal being to his image and well-being or goodness and wisdom to his likeness. The human being is an icon of God in actuality, while attaining the likeness belongs to human potentiality. Therefore the process of conversion amounts to the process of acquiring well-being and wisdom or a movement from the logos of being toward the logos of well-being and subsequently to the logos of eternal well-being. Maximus states explicitly that the "providence leads us toward well-being".<sup>57</sup> Similarly to Dionysius Maximus links well-being with attaining the likeness of God. The only difference between the two authors lies in the fact that Dionysius uses the term *ἀφομοίωσις* in order to designate "likeness", while Maximus maintains the more traditional form *ὁμοίωσις*.

In the circle model used by both authors this movement may be described as movement from the last point of the radius situated on the circumference, where is the *logos* of being, towards the middle of the radius where is the *logos* of well-being, further toward the centre of the circle where the *logos* of eternal well-being coincides with the Logos of God. Dionysius does not use the expression eternal well-being, but it may

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<sup>56</sup> *Amb.* 7, 1084BC.

<sup>57</sup> *Thal.* 64, CCSG 22.235.

be argued that this state means for him the attainment of likeness and union with God as eternal Goodness.

In conclusion, apart from using the same notions such as “well-being” and “likeness” Dionysius and Maximus view deification in a similar way as the process of acquiring well-being and of attaining likeness to God in union with Him.

## Conclusion

The above examples from Dionysius’ and Maximus’ treatments of the themes regarding predeterminations and providence serve to illustrate the dependence of the latter on the former. Maximus does not only quote, paraphrase or make allusions to Dionysius’ work, but he explicitly reveals the source of his inspirations by mentioning Dionysius by name, usually with the preceding attribute “God-bearing”. Thus, Maximus specifies that the source of his teaching on *logoi* is Dionysius himself. Although Dionysius does not use the terms *logoi*, Maximus claims that the Dionysian term “predeterminations” (*προορισμοί*) serves the same purpose as *logoi*.

Maximus frequently uses a terminology similar to that of Dionysius, although sometimes he adapts it to his purpose. They use similar notions borrowed from the Neoplatonic vocabulary such as “procession” (*πρόοδος*), “conversion” (*ἐπιστροφή*) and “providence” (*πρόνοια*), but both authors go beyond the traditional Neoplatonic usage of these terms, employing them in a strictly Christian context. Maximus is more innovative than Dionysius in this respect. While Dionysius employs the Neoplatonic terms in their original form, but usually with a new meaning, Maximus coins new terms, which either substitute the Neoplatonic expressions or explain better the new context due to more precise additional attributes. Thus, instead of using the term “procession”, Maximus introduces the new expression “the creative and preservative procession” (*ποιητική καί συνεκτική πρόοδος*). Maximus’ dependence on Dionysius is also apparent in his use of the expression “creative procession” (*ποιητική πρόοδος*) which may be said to be a revised form of Dionysius’ *οὐσιοποιῦ πρόοδου*. Furthermore, Maximus’ view on “preservative procession” (*συνεκτική πρόοδος*) equally hinges on Dionysius, who teaches that God institutes the law, according to which every created being exercises the power of self-preservation (*συνεκτικῶς*). Both authors maintain that this power is imprinted in created beings by divine law. Dionysius and Maximus differ in the way in which they term the idea of divine law. Dionysius terms “divine law” (*ὁ θεῖος θεσμός*) the power of created beings to convert (*ἐπιστρεπτικῶς*) to their superiors, to commune (*κοινωνικῶς*) with their equals, to providentially

(προνοητικῶς) guide the subordinates and to exercise self-preservation (συνεκτικῶς). In turn, Maximus uses the term “divine law” (νόμος θεῖος) in order to designate the same type of power. Maximus also attempts to describe the power of conversion, communion, preservation and providential care by speaking of “converting and hand-leading transference and providence” (ἐπιστροπικὴ καὶ χειραγωγικὴ ἀναφορά τε καὶ πρόνοια). In doing this, Maximus emphasizes the role of God, not only as the origin of the instituted order and its preserver, but also as the active agent in the deification of the creation by His incarnation. Therefore, Maximus substitutes the term “conversion” (ἐπιστροφή) with the term “reversion” (ἀντιστροφή) in order to stress this reciprocity between the hominisation of God and the deification of human being.

Maximus introduces the terms “expansion” (διαστολή) and “contraction” (συστολή), which are not present in Dionysius in order to describe the relationship between universals and individuals. In spite of the absence of these terms in the works of Dionysius, both authors explain the process by recourse to the same figures: the model of the circle and the model of the seal in order to explain the relationship between one and manifold and universals and individuals.

For both Dionysius and Maximus God is the source, the agent of cohesion and the objective of created beings. God providentially guides all creation towards union with Him. Both authors describe God’s providential work as a process of acquiring well-being, which also coincides with attaining the likeness of God.

On the basis of all the textual and notional similarities discussed so far it is possible to conclude that Maximus follows directly Dionysius with regard to his teachings of *logoi* and providence. However, Maximus creatively uses the material he finds in Dionysius and develops it further. Although both Dionysius and Maximus use Neoplatonic vocabulary in the investigation of the ideas of *logoi* and of providence, they deal with these notions in a specifically Christian context. By showing how closely Maximus follows Dionysius in this respect my intention is to challenge the traditional scholarly view that Maximus baptizes the Neoplatonic Dionysius.