

# A Saint for East and West

Maximus the Confessor's Contribution to Eastern  
and Western Christian Theology

Edited by  
DANIEL HAYNES

## Contributors:

David Bradshaw   Nikolaos Loudovikos  
Adam Cooper   Andrew Louth  
Vladimir Cvetković   John Milbank  
Christophe Erismann   Edward Siecienski  
Luis Granados   Torstein T. Tollefsen  
Adrian Guiu   Melchisedec Törönen  
Metropolitan Kallistos Ware   Baron Rowan Williams  
Joshua Lollar



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A SAINT FOR EAST AND WEST

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To see a world in a Grain of Sand,  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour.

—WILLIAM BLAKE

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## Preface

In many areas of contemporary culture, it seems incongruous to consider that a figure from the past could inform present-day life. However, there are those luminous saints of old who challenge us to think things anew. St. Maximus the Confessor is one such saint. Despite the fact that Maximus is a deeply cherished saint of both Eastern and Western Christian traditions, his theology is still not very well known or understood.

Over the last couple of decades, there has been a renaissance of interest in the thought of the Confessor in both traditions. Numerous monographs and articles have been published attesting to his brilliance and importance for understanding central dogmas of both East and West. There is even an interest in aligning Maximus' metaphysics with modern developments in science. The noted Maximus scholar Paul Blowers has recently explored the compatibility of Maximus' doctrine of the *logos* and *logoi* with the scientific theory of evolution.<sup>1</sup> I believe Maximus' theology has the greatest potential to open up ecumenical dialogue and understanding between the major branches of Christianity. And it is this prospect which sparked not only my Ph.D. dissertation on Maximus' doctrine of grace at the University of Nottingham, but principally the multi-day workshop on his theology at the sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies at Oxford University in 2011, out of which the present volume emerged.

In this book, leading scholars, spiritual masters, and theologians engage with Maximus' thought in creative ways. They examine the historical influences and intellectual trajectories of Maximus' theological synthesis in depth, and new theological vistas open up to create possible paths forward in ecumenical understanding.

For practical purposes the book is broken up into three key parts: (1) reception and influence; (2) anthropology, Christology, and spirituality; and

1. Blowers, "Unfinished Creative Business: Maximus the Confessor, Evolutionary



the doctrine of deification as well. The concept we need is a concept that goes beyond the kind of external union conceived in notions of juxtaposition and blending. On the other hand, one has to avoid the extreme kind of union conceived by confusion. The solution is the concept of *unconfused union* (ἀσύγχυτος ἔνωσις). Nemesius, however, appealing to what Porphyry says about the union of soul and body, expands a bit on this concept:<sup>23</sup> an essence may be assumed in such a way that it completes another essence. If we apply this to deification, we may say that the divine activity completes the whole potential of human nature and even transforms it into a new mode of being beyond itself. In this way, the union is not conceived to be an external one, similar to juxtaposition, it is rather an intimate one in which man is transformed creature, transcending his own nature by living the divine life.

As long as one remains in the world of ontological categories one easily slips into the relaxed, philosophical attitude that sets its tools to dissect what in fact is something quite other than a subject for intellectual exercise. It is not at all surprising that the most powerful formulas describing the union of man and God in deification are not of the nature of philosophical concepts, but are rather metaphors. Moreover, the most striking metaphor, for all who have observed the phenomenon, is red-hot iron.<sup>24</sup> Of course, we are still able *conceptually* to distinguish fire and iron as two different things, but even so the iron is in a quite new condition, it is transformed until the most unrecognizable new form: is this reddish white, intensely hot, and almost frightening thing really iron? Here we should recall the words of Rudolf Otto: the divine is met with “like a stored-up electricity, discharging itself upon anyone who comes too near.” The metaphor of red-hot iron is a lot more striking than the metaphor of oil on water because the substance of iron is definitely affected. Something radical has happened to it while nothing striking happens to water or to oil when they are mixed. Philosophical categories may guard the proper distinctions, but maybe fail to grasp the exact character of the unity between created and uncreated being in the condition of deification. On this background, I feel it is not out of the way to talk about the divine activity as *energy* that transforms creatures into an unimaginable glory.

23. Cf. Nemesius, *De natura deorum* 3 (PG 40: 601B–605A). Cf. Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology*, 203–4.

24. Cf. *Confessor Amb.* 5 (CCSG 48, 33).

## 13

## Maximus the Confessor's View on Participation Reconsidered

VLADIMIR CVETKOVIĆ

Participation is a concept widely used by Maximus in his works. However, modern scholars have not paid sufficient attention to Maximus' usage of this concept. This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that there is still an ongoing debate on whether Maximus developed a precise doctrine of participation or whether he merely used the language of participation occasionally. On the other hand, numerous scholars limited themselves to observe that Maximus owes his concept of participation to the previous Platonic tradition, without a real attempt to investigate whether he contributes any novel significant insights to his dealing with this notion.

The first extensive scholarly attempt to define the meaning of participation for Maximus comes from Eric Perl in his doctoral dissertation.<sup>1</sup> Perl argued that participation in Maximus, like in Proclus and Dionysius the Areopagite, is understood as causal activity, or God's self-impartment in creation. According to Perl, creatures do not only exist by their participation in God, but God creates them in order to participate in him.<sup>2</sup> He demonstrates that, in Maximus, participation needs to be understood ontologically. By emphasizing the ontological dimension of participation, Perl

1. Perl, "Methexis."

2. *Ibid.*, 117.



rejects Garrigues' view on participation as a harmony of wills between God and human beings.<sup>3</sup> Distinguishing between the intentional participation based on the harmony of divine and human wills and the participation in Neoplatonic and Dionysian sense, which is understood as possession of the participated by the participants, Perl situates Maximus in the Neoplatonic tradition, especially seeing him as a follower of Proclus.

Another scholar who examined the concept of participation in Maximus is Torstein Tollefsen.<sup>4</sup> He disagreed with Jean-Claude Larchet, who claimed that, apart from using the language of participation, Maximus did not develop a clear doctrine of participation.<sup>5</sup> Similarly to Perl, Tollefsen attempted to place Maximus' doctrine of participation within a long tradition of authors (from Plato, over Plotinus, to Proclus) who used this concept. The study demonstrates that Maximus had rich and consistent usage of the concept. It also reveals that Maximus' concept of participation is quite similar to that of Proclus, suggesting that Dionysius the Areopagite might be the most likely source of this concept in Maximus.<sup>6</sup> Tollefsen claims that, by following Proclus, Maximus divides beings into three categories: the "unparticipated," the "participated," and the "participants."<sup>7</sup> However, in spite of showing how the two authors differ when applying this tripartite scheme in some aspects, Tollefsen concludes that in Maximus, like in Proclus, the highest cause (*Logos* in Maximus) is not participated in by anything. Tollefsen convincingly based this conclusion on a few passages from Maximus' work, which clearly suggest that the *Logos* (*Λόγος*) of God is unparticipated. Applying the Proclean logic to Maximus, Tollefsen suggests that beings participate in divine activity or, as Maximus calls it, the uncreated works of God. The uncreated works of God in which created beings participate by grace are goodness, life, immortality, simplicity, immutability, infinity, and virtue.<sup>8</sup> It is possible for created beings to take part in this realm of the divine attributes, but the supreme realm of God himself remains totally inaccessible by participation.

3. Garrigues, "L'énergie divine et la grâce," 272-96

4. Tollefsen, "Did St. Maximus the Confessor," 618-25, Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology*, 190-224

5. Larchet, *La divinisation de l'homme*, 600-601, n. 305

6. Tollefsen, "Did St. Maximus the Confessor," 622

7. *Ibid.*, 622. Repeated also in Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology*, 215

8. Confessor, *Cap. Gnost.* 148 (PG 90 1100C-1101), 137. Tollefsen deals extensively with the divine activity and the uncreated works of God in *The Christocentric Cosmology*, 138-89

In his book, *Aristotle East and West*, David Bradshaw draws a similar conclusion to that of Tollefsen, relying on the same passage from Maximus' *Ambiguum* 7:<sup>9</sup>

There is the same duality here as in the pagan Neoplatonists: the *Logos* is wholly transcendent and unparticipated, yet becomes "many" by its procession into beings, and can even be said to be equivalent to the many *logoi* (*λόγοι*). Maximus illustrates the relation of the *Logos* to creatures by the familiar illustration of a center and its rays. Whereas the pagan Neo-Platonists typically understand this relation in terms of an impersonal necessity, however, for Maximus the plurality of the *logoi* is due to the divine will.<sup>10</sup>

It seems to me that Bradshaw applies the same model as Tollefsen; firstly, by stressing Maximus' similarity with the Neoplatonists, and then by dissociating Maximus from the same Neoplatonists. For Bradshaw, the similarity between Maximus and Neoplatonists is evident in the unparticipated nature of *Logos* and in the procession of *Logos* into many *logoi*. While moving within this Neoplatonic framework, Maximus adapts it to meet the purpose of Christian belief. According to Bradshaw, Maximus' corrective of Neoplatonic metaphysics is in his perception of the procession of one *Logos* into many *logoi* not as necessary deed of the impersonal One, but as willing and creative act of the Christian God. Not elaborating further the purpose of the duality he refers to, Bradshaw leaves the reader to conclude that the *Logos* as the highest reality is unparticipated, while at the same time it is shared by many *logoi*.

It is the purpose of this article to refute this view on participation, which undoubtedly leads to the conclusion that the highest reality in Maximus is unparticipated. In my opinion, this view on participation is characterized by an attempt to overemphasize Maximus' indebtedness to a Neoplatonic, particularly a Proclean metaphysical framework at the expense of the fundamental structure of Maximus' thought expressed in the triad creation-incarnation-deification. In his forthcoming book,<sup>11</sup> by recognizing the aforementioned fundamental Christian structure of Maximus' thought, Tollefsen opts for a more dynamic concept of participation than the one he exposed in the *Christocentric Cosmology*. His "dynamic" concept of participation stresses more the connection between participation and

9. Confessor, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91: 1081BC)

10. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 205.

11. Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*.



activity.<sup>12</sup> My view on “dynamic” participation in Maximus is different from the one adopted by Tollefsen, because it is based on the model of ontological development in three stages so often used by Maximus.<sup>13</sup> If the threefold scheme is applicable to many spheres of both the divine plan and human activities, why should it not be used to explain the participation as a gradually advancing notion? As the incarnation of *Logos* drastically altered the relationship between God and human being, one would expect that this event established a new model of participation. Assuming also that the deification of human beings—and through them that of the whole creation—is seen by Maximus as the purpose of both the creation and the incarnation, then the terms of fullness rather than the language of “part-taking” would better express this anticipated state. Therefore, it is difficult to suppose that Maximus employs the Neoplatonic conceptual framework without adapting it to his Christian vision, which underlines the role of Christ in the divine design.

In my view, the investigation of Maximus’ language of participation enables us to distinguish three modes of participation in God, which correspond to three periods in the history of salvation: the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the age to come. The first mode of participation, mostly elaborated by Perl and Tollefsen,<sup>14</sup> is the participation of created beings in divine intentions or *logoi*. It is rightly pointed out that the *Logos* remains unparticipated at this stage. The second mode of participation made possible by the incarnation of *Logos* is the participation of human beings in the church as Christ’s body or, to be more precise, the participation of believers in the body and blood of Christ through the Eucharist. This mode of participation was under scrutiny in Nikolaos Loudovikos’ book, *A Eucharistic Ontology*.<sup>15</sup> The third, and final, mode of participation, which is restricted to the age to come or the kingdom of heaven, consists in the full participation or identity with Christ attained through perfect likeness with him. Maximus’ analogy of the Old Testament as a shadow and the New Testament as an icon of the ultimate truth of the future age<sup>16</sup> may be employed in order to understand these three modes of participation. The investigation of Eucharistic participation as the icon of the eschatological mode of the perfect

12 See the end of Introduction to *Activity and Participation*.

13 The example of this tripartite structure is seen in Maximus’ triads such as: shadow–icon–truth, becoming–movement–rest, being–well being–eternal well being, practical contemplation–natural contemplation–theological contemplation, deacon–presbyter–bishop, etc.

14 Perl, “Methexis,” 147–79; Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology*, 64–137.

15 Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology*, 165–94.

16 Confessor, *Scholia* (PG 4, 137).

participation may be of particular importance for the proper understanding of the notion of participation in Maximus.

The main contention of this article is that, for Maximus, the participation in the highest principle, or God the *Logos*, is possible. In order to demonstrate this, I intend to base my argument especially on passages from *Ad Thalassium* 59 and *Mystagogia* 21–24, which did not attract the attention of scholars in regard with the concept of participation. My aim is not only to dissociate Maximus from Proclus, but also to show Maximus’ originality in the treatment of this concept in a liturgical or Eucharistic and eschatological context.

Let us begin by having a quick glance at those passages from Maximus’ works that speak against participation in the highest principle. In *Ambiguum* 7 Maximus states the following:

We are speechless before the sublime teaching about the *Logos*, for He cannot be expressed in the words or conceived in thought. Although he is beyond being and nothing can participate in him in any way, nor is he any of the totality of things that can be known in relationship to other things, nevertheless we affirm that the one *Logos* is many *logoi* and many *logoi* are One.<sup>17</sup>

It is obvious from this passage that Maximus’ denial that *Logos* is participated by any being has a clear apophatic context. Maximus here suggests that, by the reading of the statement not in an apophatic, but in a cataphatic context, it is possible to understand how one *Logos*, without being divided, is shared by many *logoi*, and how many *logoi* are One by virtue of their unity with one *Logos*. The duality to which Bradshaw refers to in the above-quoted passage may be explained by the distinction between the apophatic and the cataphatic methods that Maximus combines. However, even if the cited passage is seen exclusively from an apophatic perspective without any possible cataphatic connotations, it is difficult to conclude that the *Logos* is unparticipated. The apophatic method consists not in negating some affirmative content, but in going beyond any affirmation and negation about this content. Thus, Maximus’ apophatic approach in the quoted passage aims not to deny any participation of beings in *Logos*, but to negate any affirmative statement about the possibility of such participation, which remains beyond human understanding. What Maximus clearly denies is that beings participate in God’s essence, not only because this claim establishes identity

17. Confessor, *Amb. 7* (PG 91: 1081B), 57: Ὑπεξηρημένης οὖν τῆς ἄκρας καὶ ἀποφατικῆς τοῦ Λόγου θεολογίας, καθ’ ἣν οὔτε λέγεται, οὔτε νοεῖται, οὔτε ἔστι τὸ σύνολόν τι τῶν ἄλλω συνεγνωσμένων, ὡς ὑπερούσιος, οὐδέ ὑπό τινος οὐδαμῶς καθ’ ὅτι οὐν μετέχεται, πολλοὶ λόγοι ὁ εἷς λόγος ἐστὶ. καὶ εἷς οἱ πολλοί.



with God in nature, but also because it jeopardizes the specific differences of created beings. Apart from negating the participation of beings in the divine essence, Maximus applies apophatic language to the possibility of participation in other aspects of the divine being, such as divine hypostases and divine energies.

God, in whose essence created beings do not participate, but who wills that those capable of so doing shall participate in him according to some other mode, never issues from the hiddenness of his essence; for even that mode according to which he wills to be participated in remains perpetually concealed from all men. Thus, just as God of his own will is participated in—the manner of this being known to him alone—in the surpassing power of his goodness, he freely brings into existence participating beings, according to the principle which he alone understands.<sup>18</sup>

While God conceals the way in which beings participate in him, he allows them by his will to do so. Moreover, God creates beings in order to participate in him.

It is worth noticing that by combining the apophatic and cataphatic methods almost always when portraying the relationship between God and creation, Maximus is careful not to identify God either with some of his attributes, or with the fullness of his attributes. The passage from *The Centuries on Love* III.46 is an excellent illustration of Maximus' intention:

God, full beyond all fullness, brought creatures into being not because He had need of anything, but so that they might participate in Him in proportion (*ἀναλόγως*) to their capacity and that He Himself might rejoice in His works (cf. Ps 104:31), through seeing them ever filled overflowing with His inexhaustible gifts.<sup>19</sup>

Here Maximus also uses both apophatic and cataphatic language. The apophatic language is evident in the statement about God, who is “full beyond all fullness,” while the cataphatic approach dominates the rest of the sentence. By using the expressions “full beyond fullness” and beyond “the

18. Confessor, *Cap Gnost* I.5, 7 (PG 90: 1180C–1181A), 165: ‘Ο τοῖς οὐσίς μὴ κατ’ οὐσίαν ὑπάρχων μεθεκτός, κατ’ ἄλλον δὲ τρόπον μετέχεσθαι τοῖς δυναμένοις βουλλόμενος, τοῦ κατ’ οὐσίαν κρυφίου παντελῶς οὐκ ἐξίσταται· ὅποτε καὶ αὐτός ὁ τρόπος, καθ’ ὃν θέλων μετέχεται, μένει διηλεκτικῶς τοῖς πᾶσιν ἀνέκφαντος. Οὐκοῦν, ὡσπερ ὁ Θεὸς θέλων μετέχεται, καθ’ ὃν αὐτός οἶδε τρόπον· οὕτω καὶ θέλων ὑπέστησε τὰ μετέχοντα, καθ’ ὃν αὐτός ἐπίσταται λόγον, δι’ ὑπερβάλλουσαν ἀγαθότητος δύναμιν.

19. Confessor, *De Char.* III.46 (PG 90: 1029CD), 90: Οὐχ ὡς προσδεόμενός τις οὐκ ὑπερπλήρης Θεὸς παρήγαγεν εἰς τὸ εἶναι τὰ γεγονότα, ἀλλ’ ἵνα αὐτὰ μὲν αὐτοῦ ἀναλόγως μετέχοντα ἀπολαύσῃ, αὐτὸς δὲ εὐφρανθῇ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ, ὁρῶν αὐτὰ εὐφραίνόμενα καὶ τὸν ἀκόρεστον ἀκορέστως αἰεὶ κορεννύμενα.

totality of things that can be known in relationship to other things,” Maximus emphasizes that God cannot be apprehended as the fullness or totality of his attributes that we have opportunity to experience. By being combined with the cataphatic statements about God, these expressions suggest that by participating or sharing some or the totality of divine attributes granted to human beings through grace they do not exhaust their participation in God. Moreover, stating that “creatures participate in God” and that “one *Logos* is many *logoi* and many *logoi* are One,” Maximus points out that only through the direct participation of created being in the *Logos* of God, they may participate in some or the totality of his attributes. According to Maximus, the degree of participation in *Logos* and consequently in his attributes is proportional or analogous to the capacity of created beings to be filled by the divine grace.

The second passage from *Ambiguum* 10, where Maximus gives indication that Christ the *Logos* is unparticipated, develops along the same lines:

Hearing of the bosom of Abraham, we think of God made manifest to us in the flesh as one of the seed of Abraham, truly the provider of all to all who are worthy of his grace in proportion of the quality and the quantity of each one's virtue. For he divides himself indivisibly among different pastures through the natural undivided being of unity, and is not shared out by those who participate in any way whatever. Again through the different worth of the participants he is manifested paradoxically separately to each other who share in accordance with the ineffable unity (something understood by reason).<sup>20</sup>

Here again Maximus underlines the fact that by participating in Christ we do not have a part of him, but the fullness of him. For this reason, Christ is indivisible because he is still *one* in the many participants. Maximus repeats this in a more elaborate form in the *Ambiguum* 22, where, among other things, he claims that God's being is present *as a whole* in an undivided manner in each thing.<sup>21</sup> The paradox, Maximus refers to, is that by being fully and not partially in every participant, Christ reveals himself

20. Confessor, *Amb* 10 (PG 91: 1172BC), 135: Κόλπους δὲ Ἀβραάμ ἀκούοντας τὸν ἐκ σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ τὸν κατὰ σάρκα ἡμῖν ἐπιφανέντα νοήσομεν Θεόν, τὸν ὄντως πάντων χορηγικὸν καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἀξίοις τῆς χάριτος ἀναλόγως τῇ κατ’ ἀρετὴν ἐκάστου ποιότητι τε καὶ ποσότητι, οἷον τινὰς διαφόρως νομάς ἀμερῶς ἑαυτὸν ἐπιμερίζοντα καὶ τοῖς μετέχουσιν οὐδ’ ὅπως οὐκ ἀμερῶς, διὰ τὴν κατὰ φύσιν ἄτμητον ὀντότητα τῆς ἐνότητος, καὶ μάλιν διὰ τὴν διάφορον ἀξίαν τῶν μετεχόντων ταῖς μετοχαῖς παραδόξως καθ’ ἑνωσιν ἄρρητον ἀφοριστικῶς ἐπιφαινόμενον (οἶδεν ὁ λόγος).

21. Confessor, *Amb* 22 (PG 91: 1257A): . . . τὸν Θεὸν ἀμερῶς ὅλον δι’ ἑαυτῆς ἐν ἐκάστῳ . . .



distinctly to each of them in proportion (*ἀναλόγως*) to their worthiness or natural receptive power.

The reasons why I was inspired to give an alternative interpretation of these passages are mainly based on other passages, which are written in a liturgical and eschatological context. The first of these passages comes from *Ad Thalassium*:

The salvation of souls is the end of the faith (1 Pet. 1.9), and the end of the faith is the true revelation of the object of faith. The true revelation of the object of faith is coinherence (interpenetration) of the object of faith in every faithful proportional to his faith, and the interpenetration of the Object of the faith is the return of the faithful to the beginning at the end. The return of the faithful to the beginning at the end is the fulfillment of the desire, and the fulfillment of the desire is the ever-moving rest of those who desire around the desired one. The ever-moving rest is the permanent and unceasing pleasure of the desired, and the permanent and unceasing pleasure of Him is participation in supernatural Divine goods. The participation in the supernatural Divine goods is likeness of the participants to the participated, and the likeness of the participants to the participated is the actualization of the expected identity of the participants with the participated. The actualized identity of the participants with the participated is deification of those who are worthy of deification. The deification is circumscription of all times and ages and the circumference and limit of those which are in time and age.<sup>22</sup>

The whole eschatology of Maximus is concentrated in this quotation. Maximus uses the language of participation together with the terms

<sup>22</sup> Confessor, *Ad Thal* 59 (CCSG 7, 22): Σωτηρία δὲ τῶν ψυχῶν κυρίως ἐστὶ τὸ τέλος τῆς πίστεως· τέλος δὲ πίστεως ἐστὶν ἡ τοῦ πιστευθέντος ἀληθῆς ἀποκάλυψις· ἀληθῆς δὲ τοῦ πιστευθέντος ἐστὶν ἀποκάλυψις ἡ κατὰ ἀναλογίαν τῆς ἐν ἐκάστῳ πίστεως ἄρρητος τοῦ πεπιστευμένου περιχώρησις· περιχώρησις δὲ τοῦ πεπιστευμένου καθέστηκεν ἢ πρὸς τὴν ἀρχὴν κατὰ τὸ τέλος τῶν πεπιστευκῶτων ἐπάνοδος ἢ δὲ πρὸς τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρχὴν κατὰ τὸ τέλος τῶν πεπιστευκῶτων ἐπάνοδος ἐστὶν ἢ τῆς ἐφέσεως πλήρωσις· ἐφέσεως δὲ πλήρωσις ἐστὶν ἢ περὶ τὸ ἐφετὸν τῶν ἐφιεμένων ἀεικίνητος στάσις· ἀεικίνητος δὲ στάσις ἐστὶν ἢ τοῦ ἐφετοῦ διηνεκῆς τε καὶ ἀδιάστατος ἀπόλαυσις· ἀπόλαυσις δὲ διηνεκῆς καὶ ἀδιάστατος ἢ τῶν ὑπὲρ φύσιν θείων καθέστηκεν μέθεξις· μέθεξις δὲ τῶν ὑπὲρ φύσιν θείων ἐστὶν ἢ πρὸς τὸ μετεχόμενον τῶν μετεχόντων ὁμοίωσις· ἢ δὲ πρὸς τὸ μετεχόμενον τῶν μετεχόντων ὁμοίωσις ἐστὶν ἢ κατ' ἐνέργειαν πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ μετεχόμενον τῶν μετεχόντων δι' ὁμοιότητος ἐνδεχομένη ταυτότης· ἢ δὲ τῶν μετεχόντων ἐνδεχομένη κατ' ἐνέργειαν δι' ὁμοιότητος πρὸς τὸ μετεχόμενον ταυτότης ἐστὶν ἢ θέωσις τῶν ἀξιουμένων θεώσεως ἢ δὲ θέωσις ἐστὶ καθ' ὑπογραφῆς λόγον πάντων τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν αἰώνων καὶ τῶν ἐν χρόνῳ καὶ αἰῶνι περιογῆ καὶ πέρας· The English translation is mine.

of likeness and identity. By participating in the supernatural divine goods, participants acquire the likeness not of the supernatural goods themselves, but of the one who possesses these goods as his attributes, that is the *Logos* of God, Christ himself. Therefore, the participation in the divine goods is the participation in the likeness of God. By attaining identity with God, the human beings also attain identity with his attributes or supernatural divine goods and not the other way around. The divine attributes such as goodness, life, immortality, simplicity, immutability, infinity cannot be attained by the human being's natural disposition or fitness. Quite the opposite, the human beings acquire them only in relationship with Christ, and by God's grace. This aspect is confirmed by a quotation from Maximus' *Mystagogia* 24.

By the "One is holy" and what follows, we have a grace and familiarity, which unites us to God himself. By Holy Communion of the spotless and life-giving mysteries we are given fellowship and identity with him by participation in likeness, by which man is deemed worthy from man to become God.<sup>23</sup>

The liturgical context of this quotation corresponds to the eschatological context of the previous. Before turning to the more in-depth analysis of this passage, let us make its context clearer. First, it is important to notice that the *Mystagogia* is the work of Maximus, where he interprets symbolically the liturgical moments from an eschatological perspective. Thus, from the point when the bishop descends from the throne and the dismissal of the catechumens that signifies the second coming of Christ, everything happens in the kingdom of God. The climax of the liturgy is the Eucharist, which signifies a complete identity with Christ. Now, what does "One is holy" mean for Maximus? "One is Holy, one is Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father." "Amen" is chanted by the liturgical community immediately after the bishop or the priest comes out from the altar with the consecrated gifts (bread and wine as the body and the blood of Christ), and it is a reply to his words "The Holy Gifts to the Holy People." This statement is a kind of denial that the holy people and the holy gifts are holy by virtue of, for example, moral and virtuous life or by virtue of a ritual. But, at the same time it is an affirmation of the holiness of both the people and the gifts

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, *Myst.* 24 (PG 91: 704D), 207 Διὰ δὲ τοῦ «Ἐἷς ἅγιος» καὶ τῶν ἐξῆς τὴν πρὸς αὐτὸν τὸν Θεὸν ἐνοποιὸν χάριν καὶ οἰκειότητα. Διὰ δὲ τῆς ἁγίας μεταλήψεως τῶν ἀχράντων καὶ ζωοποιῶν μυστηρίων τὴν πρὸς αὐτὸν κατὰ μέθεξιν ἐνδεχομένην δι' ὁμοιότητος κοινωνίαν τε καὶ ταυτότητα, δι' ἧς γενέσθαι θεὸς ἐξ ἀνθρώπου καταξιοῦται ὁ ἄνθρωπος.



by virtue of their relationship with Christ. Therefore, the statement “One is holy” refers to the sole source of holiness, which is Christ.

A few chapters earlier, in *Mystagogia* 21, Maximus offers a more elaborate interpretation of the profession “One is Holy:”

The profession “One is Holy” and what follows, which is voiced by the people at the end of the mystical service, represents the gathering and union beyond reason and understanding which will take place between those who have been mystically and wisely initiated by God and the mysterious oneness of the divine simplicity in the incorruptible age of the spiritual world.<sup>24</sup>

Maximus once more repeats that “the mode of participation” remains concealed to the human rational and intellectual powers since the gathering and union attained between God and his people is beyond reason and understanding. By referring to the “mysterious oneness of the divine simplicity” Maximus clarifies that the union of human beings is not only with the manifold of supernatural divine goods, but primarily with the one God in his simplicity. Only by virtue of participation in the likeness of God, we participate in the supernatural divine goods such as goodness, eternity, or infinity. Therefore, Maximus explains that the chant “One is Holy” signifies the grace that unites us with God. Holiness, goodness, eternity, and other gifts of divine grace make us participants of the divine likeness.

Maximus’ definition of the Holy Communion from *Mystagogia* 24 corresponds with the definition from *Mystagogia* 21, where he describes the whole process in the following words:

... as the climax of everything, comes the distribution of the sacrament, which transforms into itself and renders similar to the causal good by grace and participation those who worthily share in it.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, those who are worthy of receiving Holy Communion transform into and become similar to Christ by attaining fellowship and identity with

24. Confessor, *Myst.* 21 (PG 91: 696D–697A), 203: Ἡ δὲ κατὰ τὸ τέλος τῆς μυστικῆς ἱερουργίας παρὰ παντός τοῦ λαοῦ γινόμενη τοῦ «Εἷς ἅγιος» καὶ τῶν ἐξῆς ὁμολογία τὴν ὑπὲρ λόγον καὶ νοῦν πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῆς θείας ἀπλότητος κρύφιον γενησομένην τῶν μυστικῶς τε καὶ σοφῶς κατὰ Θεὸν τετελεσμένων συναγωγῆν τε καὶ ἔνωσιν δηλοῖ, ἐν τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ τῶν νοητῶν αἰῶνι καθ’ ἐν τῆς ἀφανοῦς καὶ ὑπεραρρήτου δόξης τὸ φῶς ἐνοπτεύοντες τῆς μακαρίας μετὰ τῶν ἄνω δυνάμεων, καὶ αὐτοὶ δεκτικοὶ γίνονται καθαρότητος.

25. Confessor, *Myst.* 21 (PG 91: 697A), 203: μεθ’ ἧν, ὡς τέλος πάντων, ἡ τοῦ μυστηρίου μετάδοσις γίνεται μεταποιούσα πρὸς ἑαυτὴν καὶ ὁμοίους τῷ κατ’ αἰτίαν ἀγαθῷ κατὰ χάριν καὶ μέθεξιν ἀποφαίνουσα τοὺς ἀξίως μεταλαμβάνοντας. English translation in Berthold, *Selected Writings*, 203.

him by participation in likeness. The whole logic of Maximus’ reasoning is as follows: by participating in divine attributes we participate in the likeness of God. At this moment Maximus still uses the language of participation, because this is the complete identity with God, which has not been achieved. The complete identity with God is something that ought to happen in the future kingdom, and it is symbolically revealed at every Eucharistic liturgy by receiving the Holy Mysteries. While participating in the likeness of God in this life we cannot achieve full identity with the divine. The reason for this is that we are limited by our natural capacities or by our natural *logos*, which determines our fitness and receptivity to receive grace to a certain extent. Therefore, the limitations imposed to the *oros* of being by its *logos* causes the limitation in power and potency to receive God fully or to participate in him perfectly. The participation of the rational being in God in this life is ended when the rational being reaches its natural consummation. Maximus describes this process as a kind of departure from oneself. The rational being reaches the rest (στάσις) of his natural movement, when he is fully embraced by God.

It [i.e., the rational being] no longer wants anything from itself, for it knows itself to be wholly embraced, and intentionally and by choice it wholly receives the life-giving delimitation. When it is wholly embraced it no longer wishes to be embraced at all by itself but is sufficed by that which embraces it. In the same way air is illuminated by light and iron is wholly inflamed by fire, as is the case with other things of this sort.<sup>26</sup>

The new state of the rational beings is characterized by two features. Firstly, the rational beings, being surrounded by the divine, experience a certain transformation of their natural limit. By being circumscribed by God, the limits of rational being are terminated. In this sense, the rational being is not any more limited to receive the divine grace according to its natural power. Maximus claims this once more in another passage from the same *Ambiguum*.

It is absolutely necessary that everything will cease its wilful movement toward something else when the ultimate beauty that satisfies our desire appears. In so far as we are able we will

26. Confessor, *Amb* 7 (PG 91: 1073D–76A), 51. ἐκουσίως ὄλον κατὰ προαίρεσιν τὴν σωτήριον περιγραφὴν δεχόμενον, ἰν’ ὄλον ὄλω ποιωθῆ τῷ περιγραφόντι, ὡς μηδ’ ὄλωσ λοιπόν βούλεσθαι ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο ὄλον γνωρίζεσθαι δύνασθαι τὸ περιγραφόμενον, ἀλλ’ ἐκ τοῦ περιγράφοντος· ὡς ἀήρ δι’ ὄλου πεφωτισμένος φωτὶ, καὶ πυρὶ σίδηρος, ὄλος ὄλω πεπυρακταίμενος, ἢ εἴ τι ἄλλο τῶν τοιούτων ἐστίν.



participate without being restricted, as it were, being uncontainably contained.<sup>27</sup>

The power of created beings to participate in divinity will be extended to the degree necessary to accommodate the infinite God fully in themselves, by containing the grace of God infinitely. Paradoxically, God who, by his nature is infinite and uncontained, is contained by us because of our infinity.

The second feature of the transformed being is passivity in receiving divine grace to infinite extent. Maximus describes the new state by the metaphors of the light-air and fire-iron, frequently used in Christology. Just as the light and fire play an active role in illuminating the air and heating the iron, the role of God in deification is active and the rational beings receive divine grace passively in the same way in which the air and the fire receive the light and the heat passively. Maximus affirms the passivity of the rational beings in other works. He clearly states this in *Ad Thalassium* 22:

Existing here and now, we arrive at the end of the ages as active agents and reach the end of the exertion of our power and activity. But in the ages to come we shall undergo by grace the transformation unto deification and no longer be active but passive.<sup>28</sup>

The same example of fire and light offers more conclusions about the future state. Firstly, the rational beings gain the divine attributes just as the air emits light and iron radiates heat. Therefore, it is established a full identity of the human being with God, because all the divine attributes are fully adopted, without any remains. At this stage, it is no longer possible to use the language of participation, because participation refers to a certain share in something, while here the human being does not have a share of God, rather the human being receives God fully, becoming god himself. The only distinction is that the beings are divine only by grace and not by nature or essence.

Secondly, while the identification of the human being with the divine is something achieved, the beings of the human and the divine are not

27 Confessor, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91: 1076D), 51: Ἀνάγκη γὰρ πᾶσα τῆς κατ' ἔφεσιν τὰ πάντα περὶ τι ἄλλο παύσασθαι ἐξουσιαστικῆς κινήσεως, τοῦ ἐσχάτου φανέντος ὄρεκτου καὶ μετεχομένου, καὶ ἀναλόγως τῆ τῶν μετεχόντων δυνάμει ἀχωρήτως, ἢ οὕτως εἶπω, χωρουμένου. English translation in Blowers and Wilken, *On the Cosmic Mystery*, 53.

28 Confessor, *Ad Thal.* 22, 141: Ἐνταῦθα τοίνυν ὄντες, ὡς ποιοῦντες εἰς αἰώνων τέλος κατανώμεν, πέρασ λαμβανούσης ἡμῶν κατὰ τὸ ποιεῖν τῆς δυνάμεώς τε καὶ τῆς ἐνεργείας. Ἐν δὲ τοῖς αἰῶσι τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις, πάσχοντες τὴν πρὸς τὸ θεοῦσθαι χάριτι μεταποιήσιν, οὐ ποιοῦμεν ἀλλὰ πάσχομεν, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὐ λήγομεν θεουργοῦμενοι.

confused because the distinctiveness of the natures is preserved. Thus, the illuminated air is still air, just as the red-hot iron is still iron. It is important to emphasize this aspect, since the perfect likeness of air with light and iron with fire does not mean that the differences are abolished. As Perl remarked, the participation in likeness of created beings with God needs to be understood not simply as resemblance, but as “the combination of ontological identity and difference.”<sup>29</sup> In Maximus' examples, while the identity of air and iron with light and fire is demonstrated in the ability of air to emanate light and iron to radiate fire, both air and iron remain different in nature from light and fire.

It is important to stress here one more aspect of this union-in-difference, which deals with the preserved differences of the manifold of the created order in the union with the One. It seems to me that one of the reasons for Tollefsen's earlier denial of the participation in God as the highest principle is due to Perl's identification of the *Logos* of God with the highest universal, in whom all the *logoi* are contained.<sup>30</sup> I completely agree with Tollefsen's critique of Perl's claim that the *Logos* cannot serve as the highest universal. Perl's claims that Christ unites all creatures by being common to all like the species of horse unites the individual horses by being common to all of them neglects a very important aspect of Christ's identity with each of the creatures. If Christ is identical with the creatures as the highest universal, then in order to attain likeness with him all the creatures have to restrain from their particular differences. However, this is hardly Maximus' point. In my view, his point here is that the beings participate in Christ by perfecting their gifts like being, well-being or goodness, eternal-well being or life and wisdom by which they resemble the image and likeness of God. All of these gifts are implemented differently in each particular creature depending on its *logos* and on its natural fitness. As Maximus observes in *Ambiguum* 22, the mystery of participation, which is beyond reason, lies in the power of *Logos* to be in each *logos* of each thing in itself and in all the *logoi* together.<sup>31</sup>

To sum up, the passages where Maximus claims that the highest principle or the *Logos* of God is unparticipated should be read in a strictly apophatic context. They also illustrate Maximus' intention to preserve the transcendent nature of the *Logos* of God in spite of both the incarnation of his wills as the *logoi* in the created beings and his incarnation in the God-man Jesus Christ. I have argued in favor of three different modes of participation in God, which enable us to understand better the dynamism

29. Perl, “Methexis,” 140.

30. Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology*, 90; Perl, “Methexis,” 140.

31. Confessor, *Amb.* 22 (PG 91: 1257B).

of participation. The first mode of participation in God is mainly restricted to the participation in his *logoi* or wills about the created universe and each particular being within. The second mode of participation made possible by the incarnation of God is participation in his church as his body. Since the liturgy, for Maximus, has iconic character and it represents both the anticipation and the proclamation of the future splendor, the participation in God through the Eucharist is just a foretaste of the way of participating in God in the heavenly kingdom. The participation in God or, better said, the identity with God in likeness, represents the third and the last mode of participation. Thus, the concept of gradual participation in Maximus differs from that of Proclus, in several aspects. First, in Maximus the created beings are able to participate in the highest reality. Second, the participation of created beings in the *Logos* of God is by activities of both God and human beings. Finally, in the ultimate union with God in the heavenly kingdom, the created beings are not reduced to the “manifestations” of the impersonal One like in Proclus, but they fully preserve their natural identity and at the same time attain divine identity.

## 14

## Christ and the Contemplation of Nature in Maximus the Confessor’s *Ambigua to John*

JOSHUA LOLLAR

Maximus the Confessor gave what would become the decisive articulation of Byzantine Christology through the course of the controversies over the activities and wills in Christ in the seventh century. The technicalities of this Christology, which were defined later in Maximus’ life, derive ultimately from his profound philosophy of nature, a philosophy that was a central aspect of Maximus’ thinking throughout all his works. As such, I would like to make a few remarks here about Maximus’ vision of Christ and the contemplation of nature—*θεωρία φυσική*—as he expresses it in his *Ambigua to John*, his collection of speculative chapters of commentary on various difficult passages from Gregory the Theologian.<sup>1</sup> These chapters, I argue, have as their overarching concern the articulation of the meaning of philosophy and, more precisely, the demonstration of the scope of the contemplation of nature within the philosophical life as Maximus understood it. As he says in the tenth *Ambiguuum*, “creation, by virtue of its own *logos*, teaches ethical, natural, and theological philosophy from its composition of

1. Cf. Lollar, “To See into the Life of Things,” for a thorough treatment of the contemplation of nature in Maximus and his predecessors.