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**Synergy in the anthropological teaching of  
Venerable Maxim the Confessor**

ABSTRACT

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## Introduction

### 1. Relevance of the topic

Anyone who has touched more or less on the legacy of St. Maximus the Confessor will understand how difficult it is to begin with these introductory words. Many articles, monographs, studies, etc., in general studies covering all spectrums of the "academic genre" have been written on topics from his work. This interest in the Confessor in itself speaks of his place not only in theology, but also in the field of spirituality in general.

Despite all this sea of research, I chose to work on the synergy in his anthropological teaching, guided by my desire, in the process of preparing this dissertation, to be able to familiarize myself with texts, of contemporary mostly Orthodox theologians, on anthropological problematics and so for myself to fill a void resulting from my apparent withdrawal in the years following my graduation from the Faculty of Theology.

The topic of synergy reveals the authentic essence and we can say the goal of the Reverend Father's theology, it reveals his eschatological vision not only for man, but also for creation in general, the Divine design in relation to the existing.

Moreover, the synergistic unity of God and man is at the core of Orthodox theology, defining its character not as a purely intellectual pursuit, but as a communion with the gracious Divine energies, in which "the experience of the saints in the vision of God, the vision of the uncreated light, the experience of meeting in the multitude of theophanies (epiphanies) are the events of the history of salvation".<sup>1</sup>

Theology is also a science of salvation, of the healing of the human soul and restoration of its lost unity with God - the synergy in this aspect is the joint actions for its healing. As Metropolitan Hierotei /Vlahos/ rightly notes, theology itself is a fruit of therapy and at the same time points the way to it , only those who have healed and reached communion with God are theologians in the true sense of the word.<sup>2</sup>

**The second** important point in choosing the topic is related to the special importance of this issue for modern Orthodox theology. Examining synergy in its various aspects will enable

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<sup>1</sup> Rybolov, S. Tradition and context in the religious thought of the Greek fathers. Sofia: Synodal Publishing House, 2014, p. 34 .

<sup>2</sup>Hierotheus (Vlahos). Orthodox psychotherapy. Veliko Tarnovo: Praxis, 2009, p. 28 .

Orthodox theology to explore the interrelationship between "Divine energies and those energies which constitute human being, together with the cooperation between God's salvific actions and man's ascetic effort".<sup>3</sup>

This thesis of my supervisor provoked my interest in the reception of the problem of synergistic unity through the prism of the three-stage scheme of the ascetic feat of St. Maximus and to consider the stages in the manifestation of this cooperation in the ascent of man to God.

Asceticism is a special area of the Reverend Father's theology, it is the space of living communion with God, where his statements from the other areas of his searches are practically realized. The ascetic ideal is the one that is at the basis of his theological contemplations, and it is precisely through asceticism that his theology is God-thinking and God-vision.

Purely ascetic issues with the Venerable were not the subject of independent research. In the fundamental developments of Balthasar, Thunberg and Ludovicos it is considered in the context of his overall teaching. Here I dedicate a section to asceticism, so to speak in its "pure form", but the entire systematic part of the study is oriented towards it and the development of the synergistic unity of God and man in it.

## **2. Purpose and tasks of the research**

**The purpose** of the research is to study the synergistic union between God and man in the anthropology of St. Maximus the Confessor, to present the Venerable's view of the relationship between them in the aspect of man's ascent to God, because man's participation in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4), the deification of human nature is the goal of human existence . And insofar as this idea of theosis runs through his entire work, one can speak of a comprehensive development scheme of synergistic cooperation, mainly related to Christology, anthropology, ecclesiology and asceticism.

To achieve this goal, the following **tasks were set** :

**First:** A description of the age in which he wrote the Confessor, on the basis of which to show the Venerable's motives for defending the fullness of the human will in Christ. The entire pathos of the theological justification of this completeness testifies to his devotion to the work of

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<sup>3</sup>Hristov, I. Synergy in the teachings of St. Gregory of Nyssa.  
[https://dveri.bg/component/com\\_content/Itemid,100521/catid,280/id,19227/view,article/](https://dveri.bg/component/com_content/Itemid,100521/catid,280/id,19227/view,article/)

the Chalcedonian Fathers and the unyielding defense of Orthodox teaching from the political in nature of secular power. In the context of this, his confessional feat for Orthodoxy also stands out.

**Second:** Analysis of the influence of certain fathers and teachers of the Church on the formation of the theology of St. Maximus. Through this analysis, on the one hand, the unity of the patristic theology is revealed, and on the other hand, the original contribution of St. Maximus in the formation of the Patristic tradition is shown. In terms of authorities, those who most distinctly influenced him, the Cappadocian Fathers - St. Gregory the Theologian and St. Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius, are examined

Before the systematic part of the study, **tasks** related to the analysis of the foundations of synergistic unity are set, which cover three main plans: ontological, anthropological and Christological.

**First:** In order to fulfill them, one begins with an analysis of the ontological views of St. Maximus, contained in his teaching about logos and their relationship with the Divine Logos.

We cannot proceed to the study of synergistic unity without first examining its grounds contained on an ontological level in the logosology of the Confessor. In the relationship between the Logos and the logos of the existent, the relationship between the Creator and the creation is revealed, the natural movement toward God as the goal of the existent, to a certain extent, illuminates the problem of synergistic cooperation in an ontological plan.

**Second:** After the synergy is substantiated at the ontological level, one moves on to the anthropological problematic. Here we are already looking for its foundations in the field of his teaching about man.

The divinity of man according to St. Maximus is interpreted on the one hand in connection with the entire patristic tradition, on the other hand it is considered in its direct connection with the dynamics of god-likeness, which, applied to the synergy, provides the framework for its realization.

It should be studied with the dyad, logos – tropos, which is basic to understanding the entire theology of the Confessor.

After the anthropological problems, in order to fulfill the task, an analysis of the Christological concept of St. Maximus will be made, where the question of synergistic union finds its ideal in the Person of the God-man.

Christology is the axis around which the Holy Father develops his entire theological vision - man was created in the image of Christ and he is called to become Christ-like, the mystery of Christ contains the Divine providence for the existing. The reverend teaches: "The sacrament of the Incarnation of the Word contains within itself the meaning of all the mysteries and images of the Scriptures, as well as knowledge of visible and intelligible entities. He who has known the mystery of the Cross and the Sepulcher also knows the purpose for which God brought everything into being."<sup>4</sup>

The communion of the two perfect natures in Christ also makes possible the deification of the human as the goal of its existence.

The mysterious incarnations of the Word in the ascetic's soul are the result of the synergistic cooperation between the Divine and human energies and make the person partaker of the Divine life here on earth in the ecstasy of the foretaste of the future blissful state.

**The third task** , which is set before the research, is to study the realization of the synergistic union in its very manifestations.

It will be decided on the basis of an analysis of the ascetic teaching of St. Maximus, which, as already noted, permeates his entire theological system, moreover - its integrity is definitely formed on the basis of his teaching on the ascetic life as a path to communion with God and unity.

As **an additional task** , which arose in the course of the study, is to see if and how the degrees of spiritual development, ministry, natural contemplation and theology are present in the development of this union.

After the analysis of the texts, it turned out that this three-level scheme was used by the Confessor precisely to describe the ascent in this synergistic unity, which was also an expected conclusion in view of the internal logic of the Holy Father's exposition.

### **3. Research methodology**

In solving the specific tasks set before the research, methods corresponding to the specific results that had to be achieved were also used.

In the first part, priority was given to **the historical-analytical method** , which aimed to identify the main influences on the formation of the theology of the Confessor, as he himself

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<sup>4</sup> Th. Oec . I , 66 .

mentions them, on the one hand, and on the basis of a comparative analysis of the presence of the specific problematic in the tradition and its interpretation, on the other. This made it possible to emphasize the main authorities that shaped the holy father as a theologian and to filter out the not so great ones or those with a questionable influence on him.

In the second part, the main method was **a comparative analysis** of the texts of the Venerable, which analysis was mainly related to the tracing of one or another line of thought tied to the subject of the study.

**The systematic method** was also applied here , related to the organization of the results of the analysis of the texts and their arrangement in a certain systematic order.



#### **4. Object and subject of the research**

**The object of the study** is the anthropological teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor set forth in the corpus of the works of the reverend father, covering two volumes of PATROLOGIA GRAECA, 90 and 91.

**The subject of the study** is the synergistic union between man and God in the context of the anthropological teaching of the holy father.

#### **5. Status of research**

As already mentioned, numerous works have been written on the theology of the Venerable, and in this sense it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to make even a cursory review of all of them. For the purposes of the present study, however, an approach will be chosen that will highlight the most significant ones, which, apart from their denominational affiliation, will also be classified in view of the themes of St. Maximus' work on which they emphasize.

For the first time in the West, it was known through Eriugena's translation of the Ambiguities of John, but its discovery for science took place in the 20th century, with the fundamental study of one of the great Catholic theologians of the 20th century appearing in 1941. Hans Urs von Balthazar's *Kosmische liturgie*, which was greatly revised and supplemented, was reissued in 1961.

Despite some peculiarities in the interpretation of the theology of the holy father, dictated by the confessional affiliation of the author, it remains among the mandatory aids for the study of the legacy of St. Maxim until now. The fact that the author was awarded the Golden Cross of Mount Athos for him is indicative in this regard.

The next chronological study of the Confessor, which also belongs to the classical circle, is that of Lars Thunberg, his doctoral dissertation, *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, published in 1965. Although with an emphasis on anthropology, something that had not been done until Thunberg, the work is characterized by a comprehensive view of the theology of St. Maximus.

In 1985, the publishing house of the Seminary of St. Vladimir published the second book by the same author, *Man and the Cosmos: The Theological Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor*, which is based on the seminar on St. Maximus conducted by Thunberg in France.

Another scholar with a serious contribution to the study of Rev. Maxim's legacy is the Benedictine monk Polycarp Sherwood, whose name is also associated with a dating of the Confessor's writings that has become established in science. His work, *The Earlier Ambigua of St. Maximus the Confessor* (1955), examines in detail the attitude of the holy father to the legacy of Origen.

Without delving further into the history of Western research on the legacy of the Reverend Father, we will note that a detailed bibliography on them in the period up to 1986 can be found in Gatti, and those after that year up to 2012 in <sup>5</sup>Knežević <sup>6</sup>.

Scholarly interest in the legacy of the Venerable in the Slavic-speaking Orthodox world was initially largely connected with the research of Russian theologians before the revolution.

In 1888 Orlov's study appeared, "Works of St. Maximus the Confessor on the Disclosure of the Dogmatic Doctrine of Two Wills in Christ", then in 1915 the professor of the Moscow Theological Academy, M. Muretov published the life of the reverend with a request and for publishing translations of his works. As noted by one of the great modern patrologists, Prof. Sidorov, this work of Muretov is far from the standards of patrological science <sup>7</sup>. The most significant contribution to its rediscovery, not only for Russian theology, but for all of Orthodoxy, was made by S. Epifanovich with his study "Venerable Maxim the Confessor and Byzantine Theology", published in 1915, translated into Bulgarian and published in 2008. Except in him, this too early departed researcher in his master's thesis conducts a fundamental study of his theological stem of the Venerable, according to some sources it was lost in the whirlpool of the Russian tragedy of 1917, according to others it is available and its publication is forthcoming. <sup>8</sup>Epifanovich also left an aid for the study of St. Maxim's work, entitled "Materials for the Study of Life and Works of Rev. Maxim the Confessor", printed in 1917. We also owe this young scientist the start of the translation of one of the fundamental works of St. Maximus, *Questions and Answers to Thalassius*, which began to appear in the *Theological Journal* from 1915, but remained unfinished.

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<sup>5</sup>Gatti, P. Massimo il Confessorē saggio dibibliografia generale ragionata e contributi per una ricostruzione scientifica del suopensiero metafisico e religiose. Milano: Pubblicazioni della Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1987, pp. 136-189.

<sup>6</sup>Knežević, M. Maximus the Confessor (580–662). Bibliography. Belgrade: Institute for theological research, 2012, p. 107-264.

<sup>7</sup>See Sidorov, A. Venerable Maxim the Confessor in discussions of the East and the West, [https:// azbyka . ru / otechnik / Aleksej \\_ Sidorov / prepodobnyj - maksim - ispovednik - v - diskussijah - vostoka - i - zapada /# note 6](https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Aleksej_Sidorov/prepodobnyj-maksim-ispovednik-v-diskussijah-vostoka-i-zapada/#note6) (18.02.2022).

<sup>8</sup> Again there , with .4.

At the moment, there are translations into Russian of all significant works of the Reverend Father.

The most comprehensive is that of Sidorov, divided into two volumes, the first, published in 1993, contains: The Ascetic's Word, Chapters on Love, Epistle to John Cubicularius on Love, Mystagogy, Interpretation of the Lord's Prayer, Epistle to Theopemptus Scholasticus, Interpretation of the 59th Psalm, The Theological Chapters, Various Theological and Homemaking Chapters, and The Ten Chapters on Virtue and Vice. The second, published in 1994, contains the translation of the Questions and Answers to Thalassius /up to the 55th/.

In 2004, Archimandrite Nectarius /Yashunskyi's translation of the other foundational work of St. Maximus's theology, the Ambiguities of John and Thomas, as well as the Epistle to Thomas, which make up the entire corpus of this work, was published.

The Reverend's letters were printed in 2007 in Nachinkin's translation.

In 2010, the translation of Questions and Perplexities by Benevich and Chernoglazov was published.

Again in 2010 is Atinogenov and Muravyov's translation of the Dispute with Pyrrhus.

And the translation of the theological-polemical writings was published in 2014, the work of Chernoglazov and Shufrin.

It should be noted that all the Russian translations of the Venerable are provided with extremely detailed commentaries, and most of them, with the exception of the two-volume Sidorov, and with a variety of indexes.

Of the other Slavic-language authors, we should mention the studies of the Serbian theologian Radosavlevich, on aspects of the anthropology and soteriology of St. Maxim, of Archbishop Athanasius /Jevtich/, on asceticism and ethics.

In its quest to return to its patristic roots, modern Orthodox theology logically turns its gaze to St. Maximus as an exponent of the fullness of church teaching, especially in the context of the God-man-creation relationship and the discourse on Divine energies. His teaching has been the subject of research by great names in Orthodox theological thought.

In 1980, the book of Aristotle University professor, N. Matsoukas, "Life in God according to St. Maximus the Confessor", was published in Athens, this was the first comprehensive study of the work of the reverend father by an Orthodox author.

In the review of the French translation of the book, published in 1994, which makes one of the great connoisseurs of St. Maximus, Jean-Claude Larchet in the *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*, marks significant both factual, mainly related to the life and authorship of certain writings of the Confessor, both interpretive, referring to a misunderstanding of basic positions in the theology of St. Maximus, inaccuracies, concluding that the writing can hardly serve those who want to understand the work of the great father of the Church.<sup>9</sup>

In 1992, again in Athens, the controversial in the words of its author, but classical in its nature study of Prot. Prof. N. Ludovicos, "Eucharistic Ontology. Maxim the Confessor. Eschatological Ontology of Being", the English translation, the publication of which is carried out with the cooperation of the Vatopedi Monastery, has been amended and supplemented and differs significantly from the Greek edition and is rather a second, revised edition of the work.

As said, this study of St. Maximus is of the order of the classics, covers all the significant themes of the work of the Confessor, and has a significant influence on the further study of his legacy. For the purposes of this study, the 2010 edition was used.

Another Greek author with a significant contribution to the study of the work of St. Maximus is Archim. Vasilios /Karayanis/, with his monograph, "Maxim the Confessor. Essence and Energies of God".

Among the English-speaking Orthodox theologians who dealt with the work of the Confessor, we should mention A. Laut, "St Maximus the Confessor", M. Tjoronen, "Union and distinction in the thought of St Maximus the Confessor", which, however, are hardly comparable to the already mentioned study of Ludovicos.

Before proceeding to the research on the reverend from among the Bulgarian authors, special attention should be paid to perhaps the greatest connoisseur of the theology of the Confessor among the Orthodox researchers, the French scholar Jean-Claude Larchet.

The French theologian's doctoral dissertation, *La divinization de l'homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur*, published in Paris in 1996, is a monumental study of the work of the reverend, not only in volume but also in content. In the work, which contains over seven hundred pages, all aspects of the theology of St. Maximus are considered - Christological, ecclesiological,

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<sup>9</sup>Larchet J.-C. *Revue des livres*. Matsoukas, *La vie en Dieu selon Maxime le Confesseur*, [https://www.persee.fr/doc/rhpr\\_0035-2403\\_1998\\_num\\_78\\_3\\_5514\\_t1\\_0363\\_0000\\_1](https://www.persee.fr/doc/rhpr_0035-2403_1998_num_78_3_5514_t1_0363_0000_1) (19.06.2023).

anthropological, etc. In it, Larchet argues that it is with St. Maximus that the idea of the deification of man reaches its peak in the entire patristic tradition, none of the fathers before or after him revealed it in such fullness as the Confessor did.

In 1998, another work by Larchet dedicated to Saint Maxime, *Maxime le Confesseur*, was published again in Paris. *Mediateur entre l'Orient et l'Occident*. In it, he dwells on three delicate themes from the work of the reverend, the original sin, the exodus of St. Spirit and Primacy of the Pope.

These themes are generally not new to the researchers of St. Maximus, Balthasar already tries to integrate these parts of the theology of the Byzantine father into the thought paradigm of Western theology guided by narrowly confessional motives, which also affects his objectivity. In this work, Larchet clearly shows that the tradition in which the Confessor works is that of the One Universal Church, which in his time was not divided into Eastern and Western.

The question of Adam's inheritance is interpreted by the reverend completely in the spirit of the Eastern tradition, which is foreign to the understanding of bl. Augustine. The primacy of the pope was never perceived by the Confessor in his Roman interpretation, and in regard to the filioque, as Larchet clearly shows, the holy father teaches in complete agreement with the Nicene fathers.

In his article, *The Mode of Deification*, entered in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*. (ed. Allen and Neil, Oxford, 2015), he also sharply polemicizes with some trends in contemporary Orthodox theology, influenced by neo-Thomism, whose main exponent is Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamum, to view deification in a personalistic and not in the overall ontological plan, as St. Maximus did.

To Larchet also belong remarkable prefaces to the French editions of any of the works of the holy father, the *Questions and Answers to Thalassius*, the *Ambiguities*, *Questions and Perplexities*, etc.

His eponymous work, *Saint Maxime le Confesseur (582–662)*, was also published in 2003. This book is a synthesized comprehensive study of the legacy of St. Maximus, where the author summarizes the results of his long-term study of the theology of the Confessor. It can also be identified as landmark in the bibliography on the Reverend Father.

The Bulgarian public is only familiar with interpretive literature about St. Maxim in their native language, at least I am not aware of a complete translation of a work of the Venerable that appeared in Bulgarian. An interpretation of the entire work of the Venerable is made by Prof. Kapriev in his books "Byzantine Philosophy" (2001) and "Rev. Maxim the Confessor. An introduction to his thought system" (2010), he is also the author of articles dealing with a number of issues from the Reverend's work.

The influence of St. Maxim's anthropology on Orthodox theology is discussed by Associate Professor Nushev in *The Anthropology of St. Maxim the Confessor and the Development of Orthodox Moral Theology* (2013).

Some of the topics concerning the reverend's legacy are also the subject of research by Prof. Tutekov in "Virtue for the sake of truth".

Not long ago, under the leadership of Prof. Hristov, two projects related to the comprehensive study of the Reverend's work were carried out: *Thesaurus of the language of Rev. Maxim the Confessor*<sup>10</sup> and *Thesaurus of the theology of Rev. Maxim the Confessor*<sup>11</sup>, in the latter of which I had the honor and pleasure to participate .

Prof. Rybolov draws attention to one of the discussion topics in the Venerable's work, that of the restoration of creation, in his "Tradition and context in the religious thought of the Greek fathers".

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<sup>10</sup><http://theol.uni-sofia.bg/caspbl/tlmc/>

<sup>11</sup><http://theol.uni-sofia.bg/caspbl/ttmc/>

## **Chapter One. The context of the sources**

### **1. Biography**

There are two versions of the origin of the reverend, according to the Greek biography, he came from a noble Constantinople family. He received a brilliant education for his time and reached a high position in the office of Heraclius. Contemplating the vanity of the world, he retired to the Chrysopolis monastery, where he indulged in contemplation and ascetic feats. He refused the demands of the brothers to become their abbot, and because of the rising monothelitsvo, he left the walls of the holy monastery and went to Africa.

The Syriac Life published by Brock in 1973, attributed to one George of Reshaynsky, a former student of St. Sophronius of Jerusalem, describes the monk's descent from the lowest strata of society. His mother was a slave of a wealthy Jew named Zadok, and his father, a craftsman, was a Samaritan from Sychar /Palestine/. Seduced by the beauty of the slave, he sins with her and when he finds out that she is pregnant, he buys her from his master.

Due to intolerance on the part of the Samaritans towards the beauty, the father was forced to leave Sychar and they settled in Heshvin, where the monk named Moshion was born. Not long after, his parents converted to Christianity and were baptized Theon and Maria.

When he was nine years old, his father died, and not long after, his mother died as a result of an unfortunate accident, falling from a pomegranate tree.

The benefactor who settled his parents in Heshvin sends Moschion and his younger brother / George also mentions a sister who dies / to the monastery of Chariton, where he accepts the monasticism with the name Maximus.

The records of the monk's African period tell us of his successive residences in Alexandria and Carthage, where he had a dispute with the deposed Patriarch of Constantinople, Pyrrhus, as a result of which the expatriate renounced his Monothelite views, although he later returned to them.

In 649, the monk took an active part in the Lateran Council, at which Ectesisa and Typosa were condemned.

For purely political reasons, Pope Martin and the reverend were escorted to Constantinople, where, because of their anti-Monothelite positions, they were sent into exile, Pope Martin to the

Crimea, where he died not long after / was canonized, his memory is celebrated on 14 April, and St. Maximus in the fortress of Vizia in Thrace.

After this exile, a second trial followed in Constantinople against the monk, who had his tongue cut out and his right hand cut off so that he could not preach and write, and was again exiled, this time to Georgia, in the "land of the vines", where no after a long time in 662 he died.

The Church honors the memory of the Venerable Confessor on January 21 and August 13.

## **2. The background of the era**

The sixth century is the time when, according to most researchers, Byzantinism was formed. Byzantine culture carried out the synthesis of everything valuable from the ancient and Hellenistic heritage through the ideological fusion of Christianity, this influenced Christianity itself by taking it out of the narrow framework of closed religiosity and giving it the universal character of a universal religion.

As a result of this interaction, the language of the theology becomes different from the one with which the gospel sermon begins, the topics are already discussed in the paradigm of philosophical terminology, but enriched with the new Christian content.

At the same time, Byzantium was building a new type of culture, united around the religious ideal. The church and the state represent a single whole, something that is also reflected in the legal framework of public relations. Monasticism emerges as the main factor that preserves the purity of the Christian ideal and expands its influence on the spiritual life of the empire, the literature, mainly that of the Golden IV century of patristic thought, has almost completely pushed out the secular and pagan. Everything secular acquires a religious tone, "the predominance of the spirit over the flesh has become a slogan not only in asceticism, but also in philosophy, in art, in cult symbolism."<sup>12</sup>

There is also a process of ecclesiasticalization of theology, finding its completion in the definition of the Fifth Ecumenical Council, where the authorities of Church doctrine are defined, in it we read: ""In everything we always follow these holy fathers and teachers of the Church: Athanasius, Hilary, Basil, Gregory the Theologian and Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Augustine, Theophilus, John of Constantinople, Cyril, Leo, Proclus, and we accept all that they have set forth

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<sup>12</sup>Epifanovich, S. Rev. Maxim the Confessor and Byzantine Theology . Moscow: Martis, 1996, pp. 14-15 .



for the right faith and for the condemnation of heretics. However, we also accept other saints and Orthodox fathers who in the holy Church of God until the end of their lives preached the true faith without reproach".<sup>13</sup>

Parallel to these processes taking place in society as a whole, the interference of secular power in church affairs and attempts to make compromises with the truths of faith in the name of political goals are intensifying.

The difficult situation of the empire, constant conflicts with the old enemy - Persia, forced Heraclius to seek a common language with the Armenians, and then with the rest of the Monophysites, which was inevitably based on a dogmatic compromise with the spirit of Chalcedon.

The original form of monothelitism is monoenergism, and this is how it was used by Heraclius, but due to its philosophical and unsuitability / each nature, according to Aristotle, has its own and energy, therefore two energies must correspond to the two natures in Christ / and so it passes to the "one will" as a convenient formula for the Monophysites.<sup>14</sup>

This formula did not cause alarm in Sergius, the then patriarch of Constantinople and a close friend of Heraclius, because for him the unity of Christ was the main thing, especially since the Monophysites, in the person of Severus, were not inclined to compromise as far as duality was concerned of the will or actions of the God-man.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>See Rybolov, S., Tradition and context. p.9 .

<sup>14</sup>Cf. Bolotov, Lectures on the History of the Ancient Church. Vol. IV. Moscow, Publishing House Spaso - Preobrazhenskogo monastria, 1994, pp. 438-447, also Benevich, Theological-polemical writings of Rev. Maxim the Confessor and his polemic against monoenergism and monophelitim, in Rev. Maxim the Confessor, Theological-polemical writings, Holy Mountain of Athos - St. Petersburg, RHGA, 2014, p.56.

<sup>15</sup>See Beck, H., The Byzantine Millennium. Sofia: Prozorets, 2017, p. 213 .

### 3. Cappadocian theology

The topic of the formation of St. Maximus as a theologian or the influence exerted on him by certain representatives of the patristic tradition, we begin with some moments from the theology of the St. Cappadocian Fathers, but before that we will briefly consider the two main trends in the theology of the East - the Alexandrian and Antioch.

Although purely technically defined, the two schools have somewhat opposite views on the theological issues.

With regard to the methods of interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, the representatives of the two directions differ radically, for the Alexandrians the meaning contained beyond the letter is important, it is the one that carries the mysterious message of God. For this reason, they look for the hidden meaning everywhere, being so carried away by this pursuit that even at times their representatives try to limit this over-allegorism, which is the cause of departures from the authentic Christian teaching.<sup>16</sup>

This attitude, as well as the living sense of the divine, which does not seem to need much evidence, makes them not so precise in terminology, we know about the mixing of nature and hypostasis in St. Athanasius, as well as the problems surrounding the Christological terminology of St. Cyril Alexandrian.

In contrast, the Antiochian theologians are attached to the literal interpretation of the sacred texts, the proximity to the historical, both in the Scriptures and everywhere, also determines their characteristic more rational, compared to the Alexandrian, perception of the world. This is where their exact formulations and proofs come from, mostly related to their attempts to substantiate the truths of faith with reasonable means, to translate them as far as possible into the language of reason.

Moving on to Cappadocian theology, we want to make an important clarification. In the historical part, only the main problem areas that affect St. Maximus are considered, and as concisely as possible, attention is paid to the details in the systematic exposition of the study.

The one who most concerns St. Maximus of the Cappadocian Fathers is St. Gregory the Theologian.

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<sup>16</sup>See Savrei, V., *The Alexandrian School in the History of Christian Thought*. Moscow: Moscow State University Publishing House, 2012, p.89 .

Together with St. Basil the Great in his polemic with Eunomius, St. Gregory asserts the unknowability of God in His essence, we can only be confident in his existence, in this connection the saint teaches that there is a great difference in being confident in the existence of something and knowing what that something is.<sup>17</sup>

To the teaching of Eunomius on the knowability of God, the Cappadocians contrast apophatic theology with divine ignorance. Man knows not the essence, not that which is behind the first veil and is guarded by the cherubim, but that which is ultimate and extends to us," because it is that which gives us knowledge of God, like the reflection of the sun in water. And finally, he advises, do theology in this way, because everything heavenly and superheavenly, although it repeatedly exceeds human nature, which is of a heavy and impure composition, no matter how close it stands to God, stands far from his knowledge precisely because of its creation.<sup>18</sup>

The other main point here is that knowledge of God is obtained on the basis of communion with the incarnate Word. And this thesis the reverend will repeatedly use to teach about the incarnations of the Divine Logos in believers.

The anthropology of St. Gregory of Nyssa is the object of careful study by the Confessor.

The Bishop of Nysa, similarly to the Theologian, considers man as a "small world in the big one", man is a microcosm, contains in himself all the elements of existence, but this is not the most important human dignity for the saint, because the ancient philosophers defining man with such a loud name, they have honored it with nothing more than the mosquito and the mouse, because they too have the four world elements in their composition.<sup>19</sup>

The saint finds human uniqueness in the godlikeness of his nature, the only creation of man was preceded by the eternal counsel of God.<sup>20</sup>

The image of God embraces the whole nature of man, soul and body.

According to the Bishop of Nisia, man was created according to the abundance of Divine love and is called to participate in the Divine life, according to his innate power to be able to know

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<sup>17</sup>St. Gregory the Theologian, Word 28 (Second on theology). – In: *St. Gregory the Theologian. Creations. Item 1* , Moscow, Sibirskaya Blagzvonitsa, 2007, p. 335 .

<sup>18</sup>There again. p. 334 .

<sup>19</sup>St. Grigoriy Nisiski, On human dispositions. in *the Works of the Holy Fathers in Russian translation, item 37* , Moscow, Typography V. Gauthier , 1861, p.136 .

<sup>20</sup>There again. 3, p.86 .

his creator and desire eternity together with Him, because man is designed in such a way as to become a partaker of the Divine good, of the Divine life.<sup>21</sup>

Another important element of the anthropology of St. Gregory of Nyssa is the unity of human nature and the lack of gender division in it. Adam is not a separate person, but a general, collective concept for all mankind, in foreseeing the fall God created man as male and female, originally there was no such division. Gender differentiation is a result of the Fall.

#### **4. Areopagitics**

The corpus, whose authorship at the time of the Confessor was associated with the name of the student of St. Ap. Paul - Dionysius the Areopagite managed to fill the vacuum in the forming Byzantine theology after the condemnation of Origen by the Fifth Ecumenical Council, managed to feed theology with sufficient material for metaphysical speculation. The confessor uses a number of propositions from his concept of knowledge of God, ontology and ecclesiology, which he places as theoretical propositions in the foundations of his overall theological vision.

God is absolutely unknowable, in fact He is "above all being and life, no light can depict Him, and every word and mind is incomparably far from being His likeness."<sup>22</sup>

Dionysius indicates two ways of knowing God, either through the complete negation of everything that can be applied to the created being as a definition, or through rising beyond the limits of this created being and entering into the luminous darkness of ignorance. These are the paths of kataphatic and apophatic theology. Both lead to some knowledge of God, but apophatics for Dionysius is the higher of the two.

Of God no definition can be given, for definition in its very essence is limiting, therefore, of Him, the only thing that can be asserted is that He is. However much the mind may rise in the cataphatic it is religious to understand the absolute indeterminacy of God.

In the more perfect way of knowing God - the apophatic, the mind is in a state of ecstasy and is immediately honored with mystical enlightenment, thereby achieving union with God and deification, which is also the goal of human life.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>St. Gregory of Nyssa. A big adverbial word. - In: *Works of the Holy Fathers in Russian Translation, item 40* , Moscow: Typography V. Gauthier, 1862, p. 15 .

<sup>22</sup>St. Dionysius Areopagite, *On the Heavenly Hierarchy*. Sofia: LIK, 2001, p.24 .

<sup>23</sup>St. Dionysius the Areopagite. *For the church hierarchy*. Sofia: LIK, 2001, p.85 .

Through the hierarchical structure of being, to some extent, according to Dionysius, this gap between the Creator and the created is overcome, but through it the passage of the Divine energies takes place as existence-affirming and gracious divine illumination, which each one of the existing receives according to the measure of its own nature. Thus everything created by these energies partakes of the divine life.

The Divine energies pass through the hierarchy, which affirm the existence of the individual degrees, those who are in Proximity to God have, so to speak, a "thicker" being, which "dilutes" when condescending to the lower levels of the hierarchy, Dionysius learn about the different creatures; "the foremost powers actually exist and, as it were, residing in the vestibule of the super-essential Trinity, from Her and in Her they have being, and a god-like being. Those after them have a weaker existence, and the most remote ones - extremely low, compared to the angels, who, compared to us, exist in a way that surpasses the world".<sup>24</sup>

Thus, in Dionysius's view, hierarchy rests on principles that also underlie all of creation.

The first expresses the principle of harmony, which is expressed in the mediation of the higher, which acts as inclusive of that which is below it, introducing it to its antecedent beginning.

The second fundamental principle is that of "inclusion" and "manifestation", according to which the higher hierarchical levels possess the perfections of the lower ones in an overabundant degree, but the lower ones are not completely deprived of the perfections of the higher levels, but express them in more weakened steppe n.

The third is the principle of synergy, which expresses the penetration of the entire hierarchical structure by one power and one action.<sup>25</sup>

## **Chapter two. God's providence and the freedom of creation**

### **1. The Divine Logos and the logos of the existent**

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<sup>24</sup>Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names*. Sofia: Gal-Iko, 1999, p.52 .

<sup>25</sup>See St. Dionysius Areopagite, *On the Heavenly Hierarchy*, foreword by Prof. I. Hristov, p.12.

The function of the concept of logos in the ontology of St. Maximus expresses the general creative beginning of the existent as a whole, constituting the separate existent and elevating it through synergy to its Creator.

Studies on St. Maximus are dominated by the view that he constructed his doctrine of logos as a refutation of Origen's ontology, but at the same time with him the Christian concept of the Logos reaches the peak of its development.<sup>26</sup>

For St. Maximus, the Logos of creation are present in God from the beginning, they are His good wills through which He brings into being everything that exists, each of which exists according to its own Logos.<sup>27</sup>

This movement of everything created towards its First Cause, imbedded in its logos, St. Maximus calls a natural force (*δύναμιν φυσικαίαν*), a passion (*πάθος*), naturally inherent in existing, nothing of which according to its logos is immovable.<sup>28</sup>

The natural, that is according to the logos of nature, movement is ontologically inherent in things, it is not related to the changeability of created existence, it is an ascent to the original intention of the Creator, to their Divine purpose, God is the horizon and end of movement, because it is also its beginning, any other movement is actually a perversion, an annihilation of that movement.<sup>29</sup>

Movement, according to the father, should be natural, i.e. according to the logos of nature, even when he calls it passion, he immediately makes the clarification that it must be understood prudently, as a natural drive. And something related to the heart of the topic of the present study - synergy: when in some places the Venerable speaks of movement<sup>30</sup>, he uses "*ἐνεργούμενος*", i.e. moved by something acting, but not independently, but by something external.

It is clear that the idea of movement, in its metaphysical dimensions as purposefulness towards God, is embedded in the logos of the existing, but at the same time the very essence of the logos also expresses the idea of empathy of the existing to the Divine life.

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<sup>26</sup>Cf. Thunberg, L. *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*. Chicago : Open Court Publishing Company, 1995, p.73.

<sup>27</sup> Amb . Io . PG 91,1080 A , 1329A. Regarding the logos as divine wills, St. Maximus reasoned similarly to Pseudo-Dionysius, who defined them as "patterns (paradigms) of the existing and which theology calls predestination and good divine wills", *On the Divine Names V* , 8 .

<sup>28</sup> Ambo . Io . PG 91, 1072B, 1073B.

<sup>29</sup>Loudovikos, N. *A Eucharistic Ontology. Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being*. Brookline - Massachusetts : Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010, p.166-167.

<sup>30</sup>Amb.Io. PG 91, 1084B.

## 2. Image of the Image

The very concept of image plays an essential role in the theological interpretation of the world, the presence of God in it, as well as in the very process of knowing God, and something particularly characteristic of St. Maxim - for him, imagery and symbolism are essential elements of both speech and of his thought system.

According to Thunberg, the concepts of image and likeness are at the core of all of St. Maximus's theology, his contribution being in revealing the relationship between them and the special role he assigns to likeness.<sup>31</sup>

Leading for St. Maximus, and for all patristic anthropology, is the statement that man, being created "in the image of God", is an image of the Eternal Word. As St. Maxim teaches, in the God-human person of the Savior, the "primordial counsel of God" for man finds its goal and end, it is "this great hidden secret, this blessed finale, for the sake of which everything was given a beginning. This is the predestined Divine purpose of created beings, of which we speak as a predestined end for the sake of which everything exists, although it does not depend on anything / from existing /. It is for this end / Christ, who united in a hypostatic unity the Divine and human natures / God created all things."<sup>32</sup>

Christ assumes complete human nature without the consequences of sin through the supernatural mode of conception and virgin birth - this is the tropos of existence of human nature as originally conceived by the "primordial counsel" and which is restored in the God-man.

Man expresses all the richness of the unfolding of the Logos in the universe - he gathers in himself all the directions of cataphatic and ontology. The revelation of the human essence can completely replace the contemplation of nature, which quite often turns out to be the starting point for the mystical reflections of the holy father.<sup>33</sup>

Man is the ontological center of all creation, his soul occupies an intermediate place between God and matter and has the power to unite both with Him and with creation.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Cf. Thunberg, L. *Microcosm and Mediator* . p. 113-114.

<sup>32</sup> QTh . 60, PG 90, 621 A .

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Epifanovich, S. *Venerable Maxim the Confessor*. pp. 75-76.

<sup>34</sup>Amb. Io. PG 91 , 1193D.

In human nature, the two spheres of being find their unity and harmony, expressed in the consonance between mental forces and bodily feelings, each sensory cognitive act is a basis, a symbol of supersensible cognition, just as the sensory world prepares the five senses of man for the cognitive process, so and the soul-powers, having fallen into the world of virtues, prepare themselves for spiritual perceptions, even the bodily feelings by their own logos prepare the soul-powers for the contemplation in the logos of the creation of the One Divine Logos.<sup>35</sup>

### 3. Soul and body

Body and soul are created differently, and man is dual in nature.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, emphasizing the indissoluble connection between the soul and the body, St. Maximus does not so much maintain the immortality of the soul despite its connection with the body, as constitutes God as the sole factor of this indissoluble unity, which as such eternally exists in Him, i.e. . the ancient conception that human nature must consist of these two elements, and therefore the pre-existence of one or the other element of this relation is not possible.<sup>37</sup>

Soul and body are not identical in essence ( *κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν* ) and their being is not identical to one another ( *ἀλλήλοισ μὴ τα ὑ τὸν ἐστι τὸ εἶναι* ), have their own logos, since where there is no identity of being, no community of logos can be sought.<sup>38</sup>

The body is created from available matter ( *ὑποκειμένης ὕλης* ), and the soul is the fruit of the "breath for life" which is united in one hypostasis with the body at the moment of conception.<sup>39</sup>

As a primal beginning, according to the Confessor, the soul must dominate the body, restrain its unreasonable desires, known as instincts in the terminology apparatus of modern science.

If the soul does not succeed, through the observance of the commandments, in making the body invulnerable to the evil acting through the senses, it will always wage war with it, while through abstinence and ascetic labors it strengthens it in the virtues and clothes it with them like a garment of many colors, with which Israel clothed his beloved son Joseph (cf. Genesis 37:3).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 1248B .

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 1373C.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Thunberg, L. *Microcosm and Mediator* . p.98.

<sup>38</sup> Amb. Io. PG 91, 1321C.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 1321CD.

<sup>40</sup> QD. 25, 174, I,27.



#### **4. The Logos of human nature**

The logos of human nature consists in the unity of body and soul.<sup>41</sup>

The unity between the two natures for the Confessor also constitutes the general logos of the composite nature - the human logos is based on this integral relationship of soul and body as each part, being a part of the whole, can be identified with the complete person.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Amb. Io.PG 91, 1341D.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid. 1100A.

## 5. God-likeness

In the context of his understanding of godlikeness. The venerable father also developed his teaching on asceticism as the transformation of human nature and the acquisition of a perfect likeness.

God-likeness as the goal of ascetic works is the result of the synergy in the actions of Divine energies and human efforts - it is given as a reward for the latter and is directly dependent on them, but at the same time it is a fruit, a gift of Divine grace, because it is only "natural" to it it is inherent according to the receptivity (of the existent - the parentheses are mine) to give deification, enlightening nature by supernatural Light, and to do so according to its abundant glory, surpassing its own limitations.<sup>43</sup>

God-likeness is seen as a process of purification of the believer, so that Christ can be found in his heart, in the innermost essence, and He discovers the possibility of achieving true wisdom and knowledge precisely according to the degree of likeness.<sup>44</sup>

Likeness as a dynamic component of the human personality is also revealed in the Chapters on Love, where St. Maximus differentiates the four properties that God gives to man as a rational spiritual being, namely: being, nature, goodness and wisdom. The first two constitute the image of God, inasmuch as created man is called to eternal life, and the other two relate to the will, so that through it man can be joined to the Divine life and, according to the degree of his communion, become what God is in his essence.<sup>45</sup>

## 6. The human will

The very definition of the will, its relation to nature and the hypostasis for the Holy Father is connected with the revelation of the doctrine of the God-human Person of the Savior in the spirit of the Chalcedonian tradition.

*The natural will.*

The natural will refers to the nature of man as a rational being, and is an aspiration to that which is inherent in that nature, it is one of its essential characteristics and supports all that is

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<sup>43</sup>QTh.22.

<sup>44</sup>Car. IV, 70.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid. III,25 .

proper to nature. Thus, the will is a natural energy, it is a movement, an aspiration according to the logos of the existing.<sup>46</sup>

### *The gnostic will*

The gnostic will in the view of St. Maximus, as it is well known to men, is related above all to human choices after the fall. As a result of it, in the reasoning preceding the choice, we see ignorance, doubt and contradictions, man thinks about the doubtful and not about the undisputed and does not think impartially.<sup>47</sup>

## **7. The Fall**

St. Maximus views the sin of the ancestors as a catastrophe of a cosmic order, the consequences of which concern not only man, but also encompass the universe as a whole, after which it becomes a place of death and disintegration.<sup>48</sup>

St. Maximus writes that God, in creating human nature, did not create with him either sensual pleasure or suffering, but invested in him the power of spiritual pleasure, thanks to which man could in an inscrutable way taste the bliss of communion with God, but has directed this power to sensible things (πρὸς τὰ αἰσθητὰ), as a result of which a pleasure appears, leading to motion contrary to nature (παρὰ φύσιν ἐνεργουμένην τὴν ἡδονήν).<sup>49</sup>

## **8. Death**

The new theological contribution consists in the interpretation of the problem in the light of purely Maximian concepts such as logos of nature (λόγος τῆς φύσεως), well-being (τὸ εὖ εἶναι) and virtue (τὸ ἀεὶ εἶναι).<sup>50</sup>

In connection with this, Prof. Hristov notes all three original views of St. Maximus in the purely soteriological plan of his teaching on death, namely: God's power over opposites; God's ability to cause the givenness of the eidos (ἔξις) through the acceptance of privation (στέρησις) and the cancellation of the causal connection between sin (passion birth) and death.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup>Opusc.3, PG 91, 45D, Opusc.1, PG 91, 12C.

<sup>47</sup>Pyr., PG 91, 308D.

<sup>48</sup>Ep. 10, PG 91, 449B.

<sup>49</sup>QTh . 61.

<sup>50</sup>See Hristov, I. The theme of death in the theology of St. Maxim the Confessor. *Christianity and Culture* , 4 (2013), p. 15 .

<sup>51</sup>ibid. , p.16 .

### 9. The mystery of the Incarnation

The entire theological system of the Confessor is Christocentric, the act of incarnation of the Logos being the central event to which all his lines of thought lead. This event is subject to interpretation and interpretation in all the plans of theology, because they are possible only through it and contain within themselves the various dimensions of communion.

The secret of salvation, in the words of Rev. Justin (Popovich), in everything agrees with the act of the Incarnation of God, everything that makes up this secret is reduced to the life of the Son of God in the flesh, God in the flesh, this is the Savior and He is not a stolen philosophical abstraction or religious transcendentalism, but the Living God, the God-man, Who through his life on earth created a new reality in which salvation and redemption and the sanctification and deification of man are present.<sup>52</sup>

Through the incarnation of the Word, economy overcomes ontology, the barriers of death, sin and nature itself are crossed, the path of union with God for sinful humanity merges with the path of salvation. In the Confessor's line of thought, incarnation and deification are mutually agreed upon and mutually presupposed.<sup>53</sup>

The economy of salvation for St. Maximus divides human history into two periods - one concerns the preparation for the sacrament of the Incarnation, and the other concerns the earthly history of the Church as a space of synergy leading to deification.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Rev. Justin (Popovich). Dogmatics of the Orthodox Church. Soteriology and Ecclesiology. – In : *Collection of works of the venerable Justin. Item 3* , Moscow, Palomnik, 2006, p. 24 .

<sup>53</sup>See Loskey, W. The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church. Veliko Tarnovo: Slovo, 1993, p. 75-76 .

<sup>54</sup>QTh . 22 .

### 10. The complex hypostasis

Traditionally, St. Maximus works and speaks in the language of Chalcedonian Christology, like Leontius of Byzantium he opposes nature as something general and contemplated only in the thinking of the hypostasis as something concrete, but which is not exhausted only by its peculiarity and is above all an independent being ( καθ' ἑαυτό).<sup>55</sup>

To explain the unity of the natures in Christ, Leontius and other theologians before him use the analogy of man, who consists of soul and body, the two natures are ontologically united and mutually interpenetrating, here the Monophysites also agree with this comparison, which in their essence expresses a moderate Platonist view of the relative independence of the two elements in man.<sup>56</sup>

In connection with the species-generic affiliation, St. Maxim also substantiates the composite hypostasis of the Savior.

Although, according to the theory, the parts of the composite hypostasis must have arisen at the same time, he does not refuse to define the hypostasis of the incarnate Word as composite, on the ground that it belongs to no species, for every composite hypostasis is composite not alone by itself, but by nature and contains within itself the species to which it belongs, just as the separate (generic) contains within itself the general (species).<sup>57</sup>

However, Christ is neither a species because the species is included in a genus, nor is he a genus because the genus includes many individuals.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, as a composite hypostasis, Christ is one and thus has a common nature with the Father on the one hand and with man on the other, with Him the unity is only at the level of the hypostasis, while with man soul and body interact in a way that is unthinkable among the natures of the God-man.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>See Florovsky, G. *Eastern Fathers V - VIII centuries*. Moscow: Pilgrim, 1992, p. 213 .

<sup>56</sup>Cf. Balthasar, H., *Cosmic Liturgy. The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, San Francisco , Ignatius Press, 2003, p.237.

<sup>57</sup>Ep.12, PG 91, 489A.

<sup>58</sup>Ep.13, PG 91, 520AB, 529A.

<sup>59</sup>Ep.13, PG 91,532B.

### **11. Two energies. Two wills**

Sotiriology is again the basis of St. Maximus's argument for the presence in Christ of two wills, human and Divine, because the absence of a natural autonomous human will also leads to an incomplete human nature.<sup>60</sup>

For Confessor a, the will cannot be a property of the person, but of the nature, and so, if Christ is not something else, different from the natures that compose him, of which and in which he is, then obviously being one and the same, he will act accordingly on their natures, as is inherent in each one of them.<sup>61</sup>

## **Chapter Three. The synergy**

### **1. The Tropos**

St. Maximus was not the first to use the concept of tropos, we find it in St. Basil the Great, Didymus the Blind, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Amphilochius of Iconium, bl. Theodoret of Kirski, etc., where it is used mainly in a Trinitarian context in relation to the hypostasis /St. Basil the Great/, in relation to the first people / the pair logos of the essence - tropos of existence under St. Gregory of Nyssa/, again in the teaching about St. Trinity of bl. Theodoret and St. Amphilochius, etc.<sup>62</sup>

According to Sherwood, the very understanding of the logos in St. Maximus is difficult without the understanding of the tropos as a mode of existence of nature, therefore the dialectical relationship between them also explains concretely existing as a phenomenon.<sup>63</sup>

Any renewal of the properties of a given nature takes place in relation to its tropos, not to its logos, because it, as the ontological principle constituting the concrete thing, is immutable. Thus even the wonderful renewal, viz. renewal, transcending the limits of the existing itself, is again related only to the tropos, because in its essence it remains the same as it was.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Opusc. 15, PG 91, 157A.

<sup>61</sup>Pyr., PG 91, 289C.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. Larchet, J. *La divinization de l'homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur*, Paris : Les éditions du Cerf , 1996, p.141.

<sup>63</sup>Cf. Sherwood, P. *The Earlier Ambigua of St. Maximus the Confessor*, Rome : Pontificiae Universitatis Gregoriana, 1955, p.165-166.

<sup>64</sup>Amb. Io. PG 91, 1341D.

The tropos in St. Maximus is connected with the concretizing element of the individual being, especially in man, because from the concrete tropos of the existence of the individual human nature – the personality – also depends on what will be its positioning in relation to God, whether according to its movement, inherent in the logos of his nature, man will regain his status as a "particle" of God, i.e. having a place in Him or on the basis of his unnatural movement, departing from his logos, will incur condemnation in the Body of Christ <sup>65</sup>.

## **2. The uncreated energies.**

Completely in the spirit of tradition, St. Maximus understands the concept of energy, on the one hand, as internal activity, on the other - as external action, as the eternal internal and outward-directed activity of God.<sup>66</sup>

For St. Maximus, the Divine creative and industrial energies are "imprinted" in the logos of existing things, and through their contemplation the mind ascends to God, knowing Him in this His creative and industrial manifestation.<sup>67</sup>

Creation is the fruit of Divine love, which flows from the essence of God and is depicted in the world as a desire for participation of every created being in the Divine likeness, in the desire of creatures for inexhaustible assimilation of the abundant goods of the Inexhaustible - love, but already reflected by the creation turns to the Creator.<sup>68</sup>

## **3. The knowledge of God**

Completely in the spirit of tradition, St. Maximus professes the absolute unknowability of the Divine essence, because it exceeds all thinking and extends beyond the limits of all knowable . The Holy Father, following St. Gregory the Theologian, teaches that we can know about God, only, that He is, i.e. that it exists, but we cannot know what it is, because it is one thing to know that a thing exists, and quite another to know what it is in its essence .<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Q.D173.

<sup>66</sup>Hristov, I. Πρόνοια and Σοφία in the discourse of energies according to the Greek scholia to the Areopagite corpus. [https://dveri.bg/component/com\\_content/Itemid,100521/catid,280/id,68303/view,article/\(23.08.2022\)](https://dveri.bg/component/com_content/Itemid,100521/catid,280/id,68303/view,article/(23.08.2022)).

<sup>67</sup>Myst. I.

<sup>68</sup>Car. III, 46.

<sup>69</sup>Amb. Io.PG 91, 1229 C.

No definitions are inapplicable to God, because even contradictory judgments about Him have the same degree of credibility, because affirmative judgments about the Superexistent are negations of the existent, and vice versa - affirmations about the existent are negations of the Supersubstantial, because He with equal degree of truth it can be designated both as being and as non-being, and yet neither of the two judgments can be applied, because it is incommensurable with anything that exists or is conceivable, surpasses all the properties and qualities of created being, its multiplicity, composition and mutability, all the categories of thought—beginning, middle, end, essence, and energy.<sup>70</sup>

However, by contemplating creation one can gain some knowledge of God.

In general, in harmony with the teaching of the holy father, we can describe natural, discursive knowledge as a search, although often suffering from its excessive attachment to the faculties of the mind in its final constructions, of regularity and order in the universe, or already from the higher position of natural contemplation, of the logos arrangement of the existing.

But the Confessor sees the value of this knowledge

as a door to the contemplation of the symbols of the Divine presence in the world. These symbols take us to another world of the essence of things, to their meaning in the plan of the economy.

Kataphatic theology has its specific place in the doctrine of the knowledge of God as a manifestation of the synergy between God and man under St. Maximus as an introduction to the higher degree of communion with the uncreated Divine energies, the expression of which is the negative, apophatic theology.

True knowledge is achieved in the heights of apophatic theology, when the mind is already "stripped", like the first-created Adam, of its inherent abilities that chained it to the changeable being and absolutely cut off from everything and collected in itself to lose itself in the Divine darkness and losing himself to find himself as he was designed before creation.

The highest degree of knowledge of God as a synergistic union is achieved in apophatic theology, and the words of Lossky are noteworthy in this connection, who does not consider it as knowledge, as the kataphatic could be interpreted, but above all as a union in which it is already

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<sup>70</sup>Prol. Myst.; Amb. Io., PG 91, 1081B, 1257D; Th.Oec. I,2.



absent as the object, and the subject of knowledge, and the two are one, because here the limits of the knowable are reached as a result of liberation, both from the visible and from the seer itself.<sup>71</sup>

#### **4. Bridging the divides.**

Through the act of the Incarnation, a complete renewal of not only human nature takes place, but the prerequisites for a new creation are created. In this connection, St. Maximus presents his teaching on overcoming the divisions in creation itself, reflecting on the words of St. Gregory the Theologian, "nature is renewed and God becomes man."<sup>72</sup>

In the words of St. Maximus, the Holy Fathers traditionally speak of five divisions that encompass the existing as such - the first expresses the fundamental difference between the Creator and the creation, it is the division of nature into uncreated and created, i.e., having a beginning of its being, the two natures are absolutely unrelated to each other.

The second division defines the two spheres of the existing – the intelligible and the sensible; the third refers to the sensuous nature itself and differentiates it into heaven and earth; the earth in turn is divided in the fourth into heaven and world (οἰκουμένην) and the fifth concerns man - he is divided into male and female.<sup>73</sup>

Man, created last and brought into creation as a link connecting natures (σύνδεσμός τις φυσικός), is called to accomplish the great mystery of the Divine purpose (σκοποῦ) by harmoniously uniting the opposites (ἄκρων) in an order ascending from near to farther and from - the imperfect to the perfect and, uniting them, to raise them to God as the cause of the unity.<sup>74</sup>

The first union must be accomplished by man himself, his goal being to regain the authentic logos of his nature, to cleanse it of fragmentation and express it in its original unity as the purest image of the Creator.<sup>75</sup>

This return to the original image of man is achieved through active free will, through the struggle with the passions that are the result of the fragmentation of human nature and the direction of the soul's forces towards everything that is different from its natural movement towards God.

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<sup>71</sup>Loski, W., *Mystical Theology* . p. 21 .

<sup>72</sup>St. Gregory the Theologian, Word 39 . p. 456 .

<sup>73</sup>Amb. Io. PG 91, 1305AB.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid. 1305BC.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 1305D.

Gathering together the fragments of his own nature and regaining his original dignity, man proceeds to overcome the second division, which is also a consequence of the fall of man.

God the Word through His incarnation brings human nature to unity by abolishing the gender division and making the logos of nature, which is the same in man and woman, free from the passionate element, He also unites the earth, overcoming the difference between the sensory paradise and the inhabited earth.<sup>76</sup>

The third division already raises man to the level of contemplation, if we associate it with ascetic practice. God the Word unites heaven and earth, amounting to heaven with a body such as man has, and which, as already said, St. Maximus wishes to regard as part of the general logos of human nature. Through this bodily ascension, Christ shows the unity of the sensuous nature as part of the common human logos, which embraces both the corporeal and the spiritual in one – thus removing the signs of division in Himself.<sup>77</sup>

Asceticism leads to the overcoming of gross corporeality, the ascetic is identical in virtues in everything ( παντι τρόπω), as far as this is possible for man, with the angels, he has made through dispassion one and perfectly inseparable in relation to himself the sensual nature, the spatial conventions are already overcome in the tropos of this transformed corporeality, and nothing now prevents the ascent to heaven, because the ascetic's very mind is directed only to God as the ultimate goal and support of his existence.<sup>78</sup>

If overcoming the third division required peace of mind and dispassion similar to that of the angels, then the fourth already places man on the same level of knowledge with the disembodied forces, it is in the form of knowledge that detaches man from natural determinism and directs him in search of God, as the Creator seen through the logos, through the principles of His creation. For this reason, this knowledge and the state it leads to can also be interpreted as co-ascension with the Word. The Incarnation of the Word is an event of a universal order, it affects both the sensible and the intelligible world, which are supported by the unity of their own logos in the One Divine Logos. Thus, spiritual ascension in contemplation is a following of Christ during

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<sup>76</sup>QTh. 48, PG90, 436A.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid. 1309C.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid. 1308A.

His ascension to the Father and the Divine condescension to man through the Incarnation of God - leads to human ascension to God.<sup>79</sup>

We come to the last division, which can only be overcome by grace, because it already affects the fundamental difference between natures - uncreated and created. Not that Divine grace as an uncreated energy does not work in synergy with human energies in overcoming the first four divisions, but the overcoming of the latter must be seen only in the light of the greatest gift in relation to man, for the deification of human nature and through her of the entire creation, this "all in all", this participation in the Divine nature, about which the Apostle speaks, is no longer the fruit of synergy - it is the supernatural walk of Divine love, which, penetrating the creation, deifies it.

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<sup>79</sup>Cf. Thunberg, L. op. cit., p.393-394

### **5. The synthesis of love**

St. Maximus considers the unity based on love in two planes. The first, conditionally we can define it as theoretical-ethical, puts love at the top of the hierarchy of virtues, and the second already considers it in the plan of man's relations with God and neighbor as the basis of this unity.

All the virtues rise to love, the Confessor defines it as the chief virtue, and it in turn is contained in each one of them.<sup>80</sup>

Love is the end of all virtues - if faith is the basis of hope and love, and hope is the power of faith and love, then love with its fullness embraces both. Love shows the god-like essence of human nature, and wisely subordinates the volitional aspirations to reason, and not the other way around, and makes it follow the natural movement of nature, and thus acquire one will both with God and with its fellows.<sup>81</sup>

Love also transforms and integrates the abilities of the mind, according to the Confessor, on a "lower", practical level, it is born from the fear of God, seen above all as the fear of punishment, and as a consequence of this fear comes the observance of the commandments, abstinence, patience, the trust in God and the dispassion from which love is born.<sup>82</sup>

Christian gnosis is always inseparable from love, it is above all moral and spiritual knowledge, which is based on pure and unhypocritical love for one's neighbor, which, according to St. Maximus, makes participation in Divine love and Divine knowledge possible. If the knowledge of the mind is true, it will produce the love of God, than which there is nothing more precious.<sup>83</sup>

### **6. The communion of grace.**

This communion takes place both on a universal level and in the soul of every single Christian. Because she is also an image of the First Image and as such performs the same saving actions similar to the Divine works. The Church is the Body of God, filling the upper and lower worlds and uniting its members with their Head.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Thal. 40, Ep. 2, PG91, 396A .

<sup>81</sup>Ep.2, PG91, 396C.

<sup>82</sup>Car. I, 81.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid. I, 9, 27.

<sup>84</sup>Amb. Io. PG 91, 1281A.

In the Church, as a holy Assembly, communion also takes place with the incorporeal ranks of angels, who, being in the hierarchy higher than man, also offer prayers for those present. And through the sacraments performed in the assembly, people are transformed and adored in proportion to their spiritual readiness and purity. And so, having overcome the legions of evil, they place themselves under the direct Divine leadership.<sup>85</sup>

Thus, for the Confessor, in the plan of the Divine economy, the purpose of the Church is in the unity of the faithful and their elevation to God - when it fulfills this, the end of the present world will also occur, "the great man-world will die, as the little one also dies, so that will arise renewed in the resurrection, then everything will be spiritualized, the corruptible will become imperishable, and nature will receive a curse for man's sake, and when over him and over all creation the grace of deification extends, God will be united in the closest possible way to the soul, and through it also with the body, and from there with all visible nature, and God will be "all things to all" (1 Cor. 15:28).<sup>86</sup>

### **7. Asceticism**

The ascetic practice of St. Maxim traditionally develops it in three dimensions, practical wisdom, natural contemplation and theology.

### **8. Active wisdom.**

Active wisdom, or as Saint Maximus calls it, practical philosophy (πρακτική φιλοσοφία), is an exercise in virtue, which is also the freedom of the soul - it is aimed at fighting the passions and separating the mind as the primary part of the soul from them.<sup>87</sup>

Practical philosophy must be carried out step by step - starting with the right attitude towards the things that give rise to passions, one should not strive for anything that does not form the subject of the Divine commands that lead to salvation, to these alone he should to direct his efforts entirely.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Myst . 24. PG 91, 689 D , 704 A .

<sup>86</sup>Epifanovich, S. cit. same p. 102.

<sup>87</sup>Car. II, 44.

<sup>88</sup>Ep. I, PG 91, 368A.

### **9. Natural contemplation**

At the first levels of this hierarchical arrangement, the treatment of the different groups of soul forces is also carried out - if in practical philosophy those related to the flesh or self-love are treated, natural contemplation already heals the mind from its ignorance.

This ignorance is the result of the transgression of the Divine commandments since the ancestors and has separated man from communion with God, and in order to reunite with Him, man, having already cleansed himself of passions and passionate thoughts, contemplates the whole variety of logos of creation through natural contemplation. But this contemplation is only a way to lead the mental energies to the attainment, as far as possible, of the Divine Logos, or, in other words, to the mysterious theology, in which the mind is already one with itself and thinks only of the Logos.<sup>89</sup>

### **10. Mystery theology**

For St. Maximus, mystery theology is the true theology, it is in the highest degree a theology of revelation, but a revelation in mystical ecstasy, when the soul, having passed through all the degrees of ascension and knowledge, guided by the Word, according to its capabilities, receives equal angelic knowledge.<sup>90</sup>

Synergy with God in human actions has led to a Christ-like state of man, which has transformed him again into the purest image of the Word.<sup>91</sup>

This Christ-likeness totally embraces human nature, experiencing the mysterious incarnations of the Word, the ascetic acquires the "mind of Christ" (1Cor.2:16) as a synergy.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Th.Oec. II, 8.

<sup>90</sup>Myst, 23, PG91, 701B.

<sup>91</sup>Amb . Io ., PG 91, 1285A.

<sup>92</sup>See Hristov, I. Divine guidance over the mind in the synergy of God and man according to St. Maximus the Confessor, the publication is available at: [https://dveri.bg/component/com\\_content/Itemid,100521/catid,280/id,23265/view,article/\(15.08.2022\)](https://dveri.bg/component/com_content/Itemid,100521/catid,280/id,23265/view,article/(15.08.2022)).

### **11. The Adoration of Human Nature.**

The venerable father developed his views on deification in connection with his understanding of man's step-by-step ascent to God, as it takes place in the three stages of spiritual life - praxis, contemplation and ecstasy of true theology.

The first condition for deification, which in its essence is deification on a moral level, is realized by rejecting attachment to the world and ceasing the struggle with God that man leads as a result of his passionate attachment, having become a slave to the passions, man is an accomplice and servant of the devil in his struggle against God. When man cleanses himself from the intoxication of passion and rejects the slavery of the devil, he will accept the peaceful and meek King Christ, Who will guide him according to the true laws, and man will give him as a gift the fruits of righteousness, ripened in him by keeping the virtues.<sup>93</sup>

The deification of the mind follows from the deification in the moral aspect, because the latter is essentially the deification of the active faculties of the soul, which are guided by reason.

The Devotion for St. Maximus, is God's Sabbath as a perfect end, as a complete cessation of the Divine actions in relation to the existing, says that it is possible for God to "rest" from his natural energies and in every created thing, which in proportion to its nature also determines its own natural energy towards God.<sup>94</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In the course of the present research, the set goal was achieved, namely to investigate the process of synergistic union of God and man in the anthropological teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor.

We have been able to study the overall scheme of development of this cooperation, considering first the grounds that make possible the synergy between man and God, starting from the level of ontology in the theology of the holy father, finding its expression in his teaching about the logos of the existent.

St. Maximus' understanding of the Logos nature of existence and the relationship between the individual Logos and the Divine Logos according to the One-Many , Many-One scheme, as

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<sup>93</sup>Ep.24, PG 91, 609 A .

<sup>94</sup>Th.Oec. I, 47.

has been shown, not only explains the unity of creation, but also defines the space of communion between the Creator and the creation. This community also has its eschatological dimensions, which the holy father develops from the point of view of a total synergy, between the Creator and the creation.

The natural movement of the created world towards God, embedded in its logos structure, makes possible and real the perspective of this "everything in everyone", which St. Ap. Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 15:28).

From the point of view of anthropology, the synergistic unity between God and man is possible only on the basis of the communion of the two natures in the Person of the God-man. Hence the anthropological concept of the Confessor is Christocentric.

The connection between Christology and anthropology in the thought system of St. Maximus was also shown through the analysis of the godlikeness of human nature, being the image of God, man is the image of the Christ Archetype. In the Person of the incarnate Word, human nature achieves the design of the "primordial counsel" regarding man's destiny.

Only in this context can the reverend's engagement with the Christological controversy be understood and the dimensions of his confessional feat understood. In order for the complete deification of human nature to take place, it must be in the Person of the Savior in all its fullness, to be penetrated by the Divine nature by means of the perichoresis, as the Fathers of Chalcedon have determined. With this dogmatic position, the holy father could not make a compromise dictated by the political aspirations of the palace in Constantinople and remained faithful to the end of church teaching.

In a purely anthropological aspect, although, as was mentioned in the entire patristic thinking, the Christological problematic is inextricably linked with anthropology, the foundations of the synergistic union not only between man and God, but between the Creator and the entire creation realized through man were outlined.

According to its logos, human nature is two-component - soul and body, this determines the unique place of man in the universe. He connects in himself the two spheres of being - the sensory and the mentally contemplative, it was emphasized that St. Maximus overcame the anthropological minimalism characteristic of some ecclesiastical writers before him. The reverend



places the emphasis on the godlikeness of the whole human nature, of soul and body, and in this connection regards man as a "universal workshop" for the perfection of creation.

In this connection, the likeness of God was also considered, if the image of God is rather the static component in human nature, by means of the likeness the dynamics of synergistic union is understood. Man is called, according to the words of St. Maximus, by grace to become what God is by His nature.

In this context, a defining relation of the theology of the Confessor between the logos of nature and the inherent tropos, i.e., the mode of its existence, was also examined. This pair, logos-tropos, is fundamental to the whole vision of St. Maximus and is one of the main methodological tools he uses. Through this dyad, the specificity of the Confessor's teaching can be understood, for example, related to the renewal of nature, it is extremely clear, it takes place in the tropos, any change in the logos of nature is unthinkable, because it leads to its destruction as a concrete, to becoming something else as well.

Finally, the various aspects of synergistic interaction were examined, focusing attention on the ascetic views of St. Maximus. This was dictated both by considerations related to the specific topic of the study, and by a more general reception of theology in general.

Regarding the first group, it can be said that precisely asceticism is the axis around which the Confessor develops all the other elements of the theological system. For him, asceticism is *par theology itself excellence*, only through it is possible a foretaste of the future blissful state of union with God right here on earth.

The second group of motives is primarily related to an aspiration, which is observed in modern Orthodox theology, to return to the patristic roots. This aspiration is also connected with a specific view of theology in general, completely in the spirit of the ancient fathers. It is already beginning to be seen as a therapeutic science, the purpose of which, in addition to the healing of the soul, is also living communion with God, and not just an abstract, academic pursuit.

In connection with the achievement of the objectives of the present study, we also solved the set tasks.

By solving **the first one**, relating to the justification of the synergistic union the grounds for the synergy in the teaching of St. Maximus about the logos of the existing and for the natural aspiration towards God embedded in them were shown. Thus, on the one hand, the unity of creation

in its original design was shown, and on the other hand, the consideration of movement as part of the problem of synergy showed its rootedness in the ontology of the Confessor.

Moreover, on the basis of the historical approach adopted as part of the research methodology, the conditioning of the views of St. Maximus from the patristic tradition of the East was also shown.

By solving the **second** task, specifically concerning the synergy between God and man, the problem of this synergistic unity was explored in the field of St. Maximus' anthropology, where its basis was outlined in the dynamic relationship between image and likeness, with special attention paid to godlikeness of the whole human nature, soul and body in the Theology of the Venerable, which is important for the interpretation of the relationship between them, in the whole logos of man, which he makes in his ascetic theology.

The work on **the third** task actually finalized the achievement of the goal of the study - to investigate the unfolding of the synergistic union in some of its aspects, with the emphasis being placed on the ascetic teaching of the reverend father for reasons that were pointed out a little above.

For this purpose, it was examined in the ascetic theology of St. Maximus, which fully reflects his vision of man's ascent to God.

It was carried out in the problematic fields of the virtues, mainly of love, of the knowledge of God, and the synergy with it was examined in its connection with the enlightenment of the mind in the contemplation of the logos of the existing and in its mystical union with God in the luminous darkness of the apophatic, already on communion level. Another problematic field was asceticism, and there the synergistic union was considered from the standpoint of its result, namely, the unfolding of human being, from purely physical existence, through well-being to eternal being.

### **Self-assessment of scientific contributions**

1. For the first time in our country, a complete specialized theological study of the ascetic teaching of St. Maximus was carried out in the context of his anthropology.
2. The stages of realizing the synergistic union leading to deification are examined - active wisdom, natural contemplation, knowledge of God and communion with God, and in this connection concepts from the ascetic practice of St. Maximus are drawn.

3. In the field of the anthropology of St. Maximus, as a contributing moment of the research, one can point out the study of the unfolding of the human being by means of asceticism from the purely physical mode of existence through welfare to eternal being.
4. In scientific and practical terms, elements of the dissertation are presented on the website of the Center for the Study of Patristic and Byzantine Spiritual Heritage and can serve students in connection with their studies.

### **Publications in connection with the dissertation**

1. The will in the perspective of the Christology of Rev. Maxim the Confessor. - In: *Archive for Medieval Philosophy and Culture* , Volume XXVII, Sofia: East-West, 2021, pp. 109-123, ISBN: 978-619-01-0946-4 .
2. Overcoming divisions according to Rev. Maxim the Confessor in Ambiguous to John. – In: *Philosophia , e - journal for philosophy & culture* , ISSN : 1314-5606, available at: [https://philosophia - bg . com / archive / philosophia -30-2023/ the - overcoming - of - the - divisions - according - to - st - maximus - the - confessor - in - ambigua - ad - ioannem /](https://philosophia-bg.com/archive/philosophia-30-2023/the-overcoming-of-the-divisions-according-to-st-maximus-the-confessor-in-ambigua-ad-ioannem/)
3. Asceticism as an ascent to God according to St. Maximus the Confessor. - In: *Svetodavets*, 5 ( 2023 ) , pp. 47-65, ISSN 2683-0655 .

### **Other publications**

Electronic publications online - articles on the specialized site *Thesaurus Theologiae Maximi Confessoris* : Sobriety, Self-control, Abstinence, Manhood, Prayer, Confession, Piety, Benevolence, Repentance, Image of God, Disposition, Likeness of God, Reason, Soul, Body, Pleasure, Man, Mind, Active Will, Passion, Inactivity, Evil, Passionlessness , Tendency. – [http://theol . uni - sofia . bg / caspbl / tmc / \( ISSN 2738-7747\) .](http://theol.uni-sofia.bg/caspbl/tmc/)