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**TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD,
MAN AND THE WORLD THROUGH
THE GAME ACCORDING TO SAINT
MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR.
A READING OF THE *AMBIGUUM* 71**

Catch only what you've thrown yourself, all is
mere skill and little gain;
but when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball
thrown by an eternal partner
with accurate and measured swing
towards you, to your center, in an arch
from the great bridgebuilding of God:
why catching then becomes a power –
not yours, a world's.

– Rainer Maria Rilke

Modern man, since the Enlightenment in particular, is not ready to operate with the notion of transcendence, but regards everything as explicable in terms of immanence. The temptation is very strong for theologians wanting to be relevant to try to show the importance of Christian understanding of God, man and the world by making it an indispensable part of human experience. Even if we cannot go back and think exactly as Christian theologians of the first millennium once did – many of the changes in thinking that have occurred since are irreversible (but not all intellectual changes are for the better, and some can and should be reversed) – we especially need to understand the Christian Tradition (eschatological approach), and consequently Christian traditions (historical approach)¹⁵⁵, if we are to un-

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Y. Congar's historical synthesis of notion of tradition: *La Tradition et les traditions*, Cerf, Paris 2010.

derstand the modern conception of the cognition and escape the intellectual trap it imposes.

Thereby comprehension, experience and interpretation of realities that are around us are not only the matter of sciences, but of wither, general experience that we have of it. According to Fr. Georges Florovsky every worldview is “a description of the treasures that man loves, that he has perceived, transformed and appropriated”¹⁵⁶. If we allow God to enter into our reality we should be aware that it will provoke radical changes, which would not be anymore dependent of our own will and our own desire. Therefore what will occur in our understanding would no longer be attributed to the activity of an autonomous, egological consciousness¹⁵⁷. What will be understood would be something completely different from a subsisting object, and someone who will be able to understand what befalls him would no longer be presented as a purely impartial spectator. Thus becoming “the catchers of a ball thrown by an eternal partner” we do not only enter into the game but become already possessed and challenged by the disclosure of a reality of that game that infinitely surpasses us.

These preliminaries were necessary in order to approach St. Maximus’s understanding of the appropriation of knowledge of God, man and the world through the game of God and man according to his interpretation of the difficult passage from St. Gregory Nazianzus’ poem from *Carmina moralia*¹⁵⁸. We do not hold it indispensable to present here the person and work of Saint Maximus the Confessor – to consult classical studies of the abundant secondary literature will suffice to do this¹⁵⁹ – and so we move directly to his interpretation of the difficulty presented in his *Ambiguum* 71.

Maximian comment gravitates around St. Gregory’s term of “play” or “game”¹⁶⁰: “The sublime Word plays in all kinds of forms, judging His world as He wishes, on this side and on that”. Thus the crucial question arises: in which way do we have to understand this term of “play” or “game”? To be able to understand this term and the importance of St. Maximus’

¹⁵⁶ G. Florovsky, “The Metaphysical Premises of Utopianism”, CW 12, p. 76.

¹⁵⁷ The very notion of “consciousness” implies at least two different subjects, because it implies the knowledge acquired with someone else: *con* meaning “with” and *scire* “to know”.

¹⁵⁸ St. Gregory Nazianzus, *Carmina moralia* 2 (*Praecepta ad virignis*; PG 37, 624A-625A) and *Carmina quaespectant ad alios* (PG 37, 1454A).

¹⁵⁹ Cf. M. Knezevic, *Maximus the Confessor (580-662). Bibliography*, “Bibliografija srpske teologije” 6, Belgrade 2012.

¹⁶⁰ “Play” renders the Greek *paizin*, but in what follows Maximus uses this word only when directly quoting from Gregory’s poem (which he does 4 times); otherwise he uses the word *paignion* (8 times in all), which denotes, not ‘play’, but a game, a toy, a plaything, or child’s play, as well as a comic performance or a cheating trick. The shift is undoubtedly promoted by Gregory’s own use of *paignion* in *Or.* 7,19”.

contribution, we need to say few words about the philosophical concept of the game.

Philosophical notion of the game

To the classical age, the game is not really regarded as an activity worthy of the attention of the wise. The few texts from Antiquity or the Middle Ages that speak of the game do so to give it a double minor status: 1) an activity of little importance, reserved for children, for those who are low in the order of activities of the soul, or 2) to those who have raised their minds to the theory and should relax it from this activity¹⁶¹. Therefore, in *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle doesn't seem to consider the game as an activity but as a recreation. In perfect continuity of this ancient heritage Aquinas writes: "The very actions that are done playing, considered in themselves are not ordered to an end. But the pleasure found in such action is directed to the recreation and the repose of the soul."¹⁶²

The discovery of the interest of mathematical problems related to gambling and money at the end of the sixteenth century, the place of play in society and new questions about the child's education, especially in the eighteenth century, make the game an important topic of philosophical anthropology¹⁶³. Though Leibniz believed that the human mind seemed better in games than in more serious matters¹⁶⁴, the real conceptual shift ended with Schiller. From a reading of the *Critique of Judgment* by Kant, he presented the tendency to play as a properly human characteristic: "man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and *he is only completely a man when he plays*"¹⁶⁵. That is to say that we do not play by default, because we are a child unable to rise to more substantial activities or because of our weak soul incapable of rising to the theory, activity of the scientist, but we play mainly due to our human nature.

It is only at the second half of the twentieth century that we have begun, in philosophy, to take a serious interest in the game. Research on the game seems animated by two somewhat contradictory goals: 1) to produce a definition of the game and make the game a thinking model for all human activities¹⁶⁶, and 2) to abandon the preliminary project to establish the game

¹⁶¹ "Jeu", in P.-H. Castel and M. Blay, *Grand Dictionnaire de la Philosophie*, CNRS, Larousse, Paris 2003, p. 579.

¹⁶² Thomas Aquinas, Qu. 168, art. 2.

¹⁶³ Cf. C. Duflo, "Approche philosophique du jeu", dans F. Bigel, *La performance humaine: art de jouer, art de vivre*, CREPS, Aquitaine, 2006, 61-76.

¹⁶⁴ G. W. Leibnitz, *Nouveaux essais sut l'entendement humain*, livre IV, chap. 16, Flammarion, Paris 2011, p. 368.

¹⁶⁵ F. Schiller, *Lettres sur l'éducation esthétique de l'homme*, Aubier, Paris 1998, p. 221.

¹⁶⁶ It is not the purpose of this study, but it would be interesting to analyze the importance of the game, especially video games in the educational system of our days.

as a paradigm trying to define its specificity. The definition of the game that in our days serves as a model is that of J. Huizinga. According to him: "play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life'"¹⁶⁷. C. Duflo criticizes this definition for the „lack of focus which leaves decipher the specificity of the game which can be deduced from its various properties"¹⁶⁸. Thus, he demonstrates that unlike other human activities where rules organize the coexistence of freedoms and conduct activities that will last (the rules of the road are for drivers), in the game there are the rules that produce freedoms of players and their activity itself. The game can be defined in its specificity as „invention of freedom *in* and *through* legality"¹⁶⁹.

In this interrogation of reports of the freedom and legality, which both philosophers and theologians are interested in, the game offers a paradoxical field of study that invites a renewed outlook. What has been said, allows us to consider St. Maximus' understanding of this relation in his *Ambiguum* 71.

St Maximus' understanding of the game

Let us ask our first set of questions: Does the subject who comes to understand more and more of what world has bequeathed to it have nothing that properly belongs to it? Over and above its experience of life, such a subject also engages in a questioning of the store of meanings, which precedes its birth. Is the subject only the interim site where the event of the uncovering of truth happens, or is it rather a person who, in the course of his empirical experience, makes strides in understanding the world around him and sets about envisioning other worlds? Or is it possible to make a different approach by including God as Participant in this event of disclosure of the world and truth? Obviously these questions are not new, but this does not mean that they are no longer of any interest to us.

The first thing we note is that neither St. Gregory nor St. Maximus, in his comment, consider the game as a matter of rest and relaxation, but as being connected with the very activity of God and man. Maximus the Confessor firstly contextualizes St. Gregory's sentence by saying that after he had spoken about natures of various animals and minerals, and many other things that are observed among beings more generally, St. Gregory writes that: "The sublime Word plays in all kinds of forms, judging His

¹⁶⁷ J. Huizinga, *Homo ludens. Essai sur la fonction social du jeu*, Tel, Paris 1988, p. 58.

¹⁶⁸ C. Duflo, "Approche philosophique du jeu", p. 65.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

world as He wishes, on this side and on that." After that, wanting to give a proper interpretation of this difficult passage, Maximus makes a use of two other quotations, one again from St. Gregory and the other from Dionysios the Areopagite.

First, let us consider the quotation from St. Gregory's oration "On Holy Pentecost" which will introduce us in the very heart of the event of the game between God and man. "As long as each nature remains in its proper domain, the one atop its lofty height, the other in its lowliness, God's goodness remains unmixed, and His love for mankind is not communicated, and there is a *great chasm in the middle that cannot be crossed*, which not only separates the rich man from Lazarus and the longed-for bosom of Abraham, but also separates the whole of nature that has come into being and is in a state of flux from that which is uncreated and at rest"¹⁷⁰.

As we can see God's love for mankind remains non-communicated because of the great chasm separating the created world from that of God. According to Maximus the Confessor, five great divisions cut through the nature of all things and the first of them is the division between uncreated and created nature.¹⁷¹ Man was introduced into creation last, "as a sort of natural bond mediating between the extremes," but he wields the "power to unify" the five rifts and, instead of uniting things divided, he used the power given to him for the purpose of deepening the division, which risked him relapsing into non-being. Thus the salvation of man is identified with removing the divisions in nature, and that this, in turn, becomes the "recapitulation of all things in Christ". Therefore, it would be possible to say, according to the quotation of St. Gregory and according to the subject of the present study, that the unbridgeable gulf between God and man as participants of the one and the same game of appropriation of true knowledge of God, man and the world, can only be overcome by the power of the Transcendent Truth, which in response to the powerlessness of man, crosses this gulf and arrives at the side of the creature and reveals Itself in the Person of Christ, the God-man. "Christ, as the truth of existent things, is their 'unification wisdom,' the 'peaceable friendship among all things,' the 'concord without division of things in heaven and things on earth,' the mystagogue of communion as well as that communion itself, in other words 'our life,' as the Apostle says: 'When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory' (Colossians 3:4)"¹⁷². In this game, God as our eternal partner, not only throws us the ball from

¹⁷⁰ Or 41.12; SC 358:342.

¹⁷¹ Amb. 42, PG 91, 1304D.

¹⁷² N. Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology. Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Massachusetts 2012, p. 139.

the outside staying at a safe distance, but he bodily enters into this game of life and death. Thus it becomes clear that this game cannot be conceived only through reason only, because our mind remains petrified before such a paradox, but demands to be experienced with each part of our being by that Life that He is: "In Him was life, and that life was the light of man" (John 1:4) or according to His own testimony: "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:16). He is Himself the Truth, and in Him, Being and Truth are one. Thus, by entering into the game with God, His own presence becomes a challenge for our entire understanding of the truth and meaning of our earthly existence, not only intellectually but existentially.

Being Truth, He does not only shows and defines it, but He also shows us the way to it: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Consequently, man's understanding is not overthrown, it is renewed, deepened and divinized and made capable of grasping the truth in the light of the God-made-man. Even if that may sound like a paradox, the ruination of sin and death, which are the opposite of truly life or of life that we are made for, is felt only when man has a foretaste of the new life in Christ. As noticed by Bishop Athanasius (Yevtic), "the knowledge of our current condition – knowledge of our fallen, sinful condition, of alienation, of the distance of the human personality and human nature from God – is not truly possible except in the light from the Face of the Lord, that is reinstating communion with God, by which the primeval Godlikeness given to man is illuminated and manifested in its true, authentically human (=the-anthropic) dimensions"¹⁷³. Maximus will express the same thought in other words by saying that: "The one who has come to understand the weakness of human nature has had experience of divine power"¹⁷⁴.

However, the problem we are confronting right now consists of the way in which we will be able to reconcile the movement entailed by this relationship between God and creation with the immobility proper to God as Uncreated? The main contribution on this subject comes from the Areopagite, and it becomes understandable why St. Maximus evokes the help of his thought by quoting him. According to Dionysios the Areopagite: "One must make bold to say even this, on behalf of truth, that the very Author of all things, through the beauty, goodness, and overflow of His intense love for all things, goes out of Himself in His providences for all beings, and is, as it were, spell-bound by goodness, love, and longing, and is led down

¹⁷³ Cf. A. Yevtic, "A prolegomenon to the Gnoseology of Hesychasm", in *Emmanuel. The Only Begotten and Firstborn among Many Brethren*, Sebastian Press, Los Angeles 2008, p. 175.

¹⁷⁴ *Centuries on Love* 2.39 in St. Maximus the Confessor, *The Ascetic Life and the Four Centuries on Charity*, tran. Polycarp Sherwood, "Ancient Christian Writers" n° 21, New York 1995, p. 161.

from His position above all and beyond all, to be in all according to an ecstatic and supraessential power which is yet inseparable from Himself¹⁷⁵.

The idea of *ekstasis* signifies that God is love, and as such He creates an immanent relationship of love outside Himself. It is worth to remind that love, alongside with freedom, is one of the most important components of game. We do not truly play with someone we do not love. What we have said about truth the same is applicable to love. Being Love, God by His own presence challenges our understanding of love and the way we love. Love is not to be considered here as an affection or emotion but as one of which depends our own existence depends on. The emphasis placed on the words "outside Himself" is particularly important, since it signifies that love as *ekstasis* gives rise to an otherness of being which is seen as responding and returning to its original cause. "In the Person of Jesus-Christ, Who is the Alfa and Omega of all and everything, history was ponderously set in motion and all the creation was invited to emerge from division and fragmentation and to enter into a *true existence*, which He Himself embodies: the *true life* and the *true communion of love*"¹⁷⁶.

Therefore it is only through this experience of freely accepted participation in the game of God and man, which is, as we have seen, a *new life in Christ*, that darkness of man's rational, cognitive faculties and abilities, darkened by the sin, is experienced not only as a moral "transgression" or a juridical violation of "law", but above all as an existential failure, as an internal, spiritual catastrophe¹⁷⁷. The failure is then felt not as something which was inevitable or unavoidable but as something that happened merely because the wrong choice was made and the wrong viewpoint was chosen out by our free will¹⁷⁸. This also means that to become conscious of one's sinfulness and in general of one's human weakness and slow-wittedness is not, and should not be, a feeling or an experience that instigates depression and passivity. This is the critical point where we clearly recognize the real and the authentic player. If experienced sincerely, through living faith and love, it moves man away from that unnatural and abnormal condition and leaves him to the firm and solid foundation of loving and merciful God.

All that we have said until now leads us to our first conclusion on St. Maximus' understanding of the nature of knowledge that we access by

¹⁷⁵ DN 4.13 (159; 712AB. This passage has been excerpted in DC 5.86 (PG 90, 1384D-1385A).

¹⁷⁶ Cf. M. Vasiljevic, "Truth and History. Implications in Theology and Science", in *History, Truth, Holiness. Studies in Theological Ontology and Epistemology*, Sebastian Press, Los Angeles 2011, p. 24.

¹⁷⁷ It would be helpful to remind that in its original, authentically biblical and Christian meaning, the term "sin" means primarily "to miss the target", that is to say, "failure" or "non-accomplishment."

¹⁷⁸ Cf. A. Yevtic, "A prolegomenon to the Gnoseology of Hesychasm", p. 170.

playing with God. God plays with us by means of the mutability of the world leading us to what is genuinely real and can never be shaken, in other words to the *eternal life*, which can be understood as an eternal, joyful play by God and man. Maximus writes: "God plays through the mutability of the material objects which we hold in our hands, which shift things around and are themselves shifted around in various ways, having no solid foundation, save for the first intelligible principle, in accordance with which they are carried along wisely and providentially, and carry us along with them – and whereas it might be thought that they can be controlled by us, they slip through our fingers far more frequently than we control them, and they rather almost repel the desire of those among us who insist on clinging to them, and so they neither maintain their hold over us nor are they held by us since the only stable characteristic their nature possesses is their state of flux and their instability. So God leads us through these things to what is really real and can never be shaken"¹⁷⁹.

This citation of Confessor's *Ambiguum* introduces us to another important point, where we clearly recognize the genius of St. Maximus. He was the first in history of Christian thought to work out an answer to the question of the relation between the ontological truth and creation when the letter is approached not as a static thing but as a movement in time and as a decay. Pushed by the Origen's mythology of the fall, he courageously assumes the concept of *logos* from its long period of disuse due to the dangers accompanying it, and composes his Christological synthesis: Christ is the *logos* of creation and one must find in Him all the *logoi* of created beings.¹⁸⁰ This means that since God knows created beings as the realizations of His will, it is not being itself but the ultimate will of God's love which unifies beings and points to the meaning of being. So we can read in Maximus' *Ambiguum* 71: "What is this that has been brought into being? It is the same as that which will come into being. And what is this that has been created? It is the same as that which will be created. He (the Ecclesiastes) had in mind the first and the last things, inasmuch as they are the same things and truly exist, but of the things in the middle, which pass away, he makes no mention here whatsoever"¹⁸¹. In other words, *logoi* of things are not any more identified with nature or being itself, but with the *loving will of God*. Thus "the Incarnate Christ is so identical to the ultimate will of God's love, that the meaning of created being and the purpose of history are simply the incarnate Christ"¹⁸². Therefore, the mystery of Christ is the Alfa and Omega,

¹⁷⁹ *Amb.* 71, PG 91, 1416B.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. I.-H. Dalmais, "La théologie des *logoi* des creatures chez S. Maxime le Confesseur", *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* (1952), 244-249.

¹⁸¹ *Amb.* 71, PG 91, 1412D.

¹⁸² Cf. J. Zizioulas, "Truth and Communion" in *Being As Communion: Studies*

Protology and Eschatology and the Truth of all our worldly and heavenly existence, which considerably enlarge our comprehension of whole reality acquired through our playing with Him. This leads us to the second section of our study in which we will discuss various stages of the game.

Stages of the game

Commenting the verse of the Psalm 42: "Abyss calls to abyss at the sound of Your cataracts", St Maximus in his *Ambiguuum* 71 notes that: "Every intellect in state of contemplation, on account of its invisible nature and the depth and multitude of its thought, is like an abyss, for it has passed through the whole orderly arrangement of visible things and finds itself in the region of intelligible realities, and when, again by faith, it transcends even the majesty of these things by means of a forceful motion, so that it comes to stand still in itself, utterly fixed and immobile (on account of its passage beyond all things), it is then that, as is fitting, it calls to the Divine abyss – and asks that it might be given, not of course the divine cataracts themselves, but their sound, which means that it asks to receive a certain cognitive mark of faith concerning the modes and principles of divine providence governing the universe"¹⁸³.

From this passage we can clearly deduce several important conclusions about the different stages of the knowledge that we acquired by playing with God. We can perceive what we have already said in the previous section about the relation of *Logos* and *logoi*, and the fact that the *ecstatic* love of God, in principle, involves a transformation of man's natural incisive power and desire. Considering the way in which God moves, Maximus wrote: "God moves in such a way that He installs an inner relationship of *eros* and *love* in those who are able to receive it. He moves naturally, attracting the desire of those who are turned toward Him"¹⁸⁴. By entering into a game with God, we are not only challenged by His own presence, but we are profoundly changed in our own being without changing our own human nature¹⁸⁵. It is worthy to notice that according to Maximus' distinction

in Personhood and the Church, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood-New York, 1985, p. 96.

¹⁸³ *Amb.* 71, PG 91, 1408D.

¹⁸⁴ *Amb.* PG 91, 1260C.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. "Generally speaking, any innovation has to do with the mode of thing innovated, not the principle of its nature. For when the principle is the subject of innovation, that destroys the nature, because the latter no longer retains the principle of its being unimpaired; but when the mode is the subject of innovation, its natural principle being of course preserved, it shows the power of the miracle, demonstrating how the nature is acted upon and acts clearly beyond its normal scope." (*Amb.* 42, PG 91, 1341D)

of *logos* (essential principle of human nature) and *tropos* (mode of existence) the inner principles of entities attains substantive existence only as concrete mode of existence, manifesting personal otherness: "Hence in the mode, the varied character of persons is made known by their action; but in the *logos*, the invariable element of the natural energy"¹⁸⁶. In other words, this means that personal otherness is the only possible way that inner principles of entities can be existentially manifested. Furthermore, they are made known in the relationship that constitutes the person as otherness, which is first and foremost a relationship between man and God. However, according to Maximus' *logos* of our being signals a journey toward eternal being. This course may go in accordance with nature, in which case it leads to eternal well-being; or it may go contrary to nature, in which case it leads to eternal woe-being. The principles of providence and judgment help us to move dialogically in accordance with nature and to avoid deteriorating into a state contrary to nature. The ways and levels of our involvement in this game are various, but one of them is presented by St. Maximus in his well known triad of: practical philosophy, natural contemplation and theological mystagogy.

We can find different studies on St. Maximus anthropology where this triadic ascension in the appropriation of knowledge is explained in details¹⁸⁷, but we should notice here that a specific point which is relevant for the present study. Maximus is a real synthesizer of Christian thought. It becomes evident when we look inside this triad, which can be understood as a triad of Judaic, Hellenic and Christian gnoseology¹⁸⁸. For the Judaic religious-spiritual tradition, knowledge is obtained through *praxis*, through active participation in history, and so the apprehension of truth is much more than the intellectual "knowledge" the act of God, the act of His revelation, but also the fruit of man's ascetic struggle. For the Greek philosophical tradition, the true knowledge is acquired through true reasoning about true being. The classical Greek knowledge is therefore to be identified with "thinking", that is, an expressly intellectual process, and the product of syllogizing and collecting of the mind, until it returns to its true being escaping changing processes of the world itself and of the history. For Eastern

¹⁸⁶ *Op.* 10, PG 91, 137A.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. M. Knezevic, *Maximus the Confessor (580-662). Bibliography*, 186-190.

¹⁸⁸ M. Vasiljevic notes that "The term *gnoseology* refers to the experiential way of acquiring spiritual knowledge, and is used by Fathers like St. Isaac the Syrian and contemporaries like St. Justin Popovic of Chelie (see *Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ*); it can be contrasted with the epistemology, which refers to the study of more conventional, intellectual, and often scientific means of attaining knowledge. *Gnoseology* tends to emphasize ecclesial asceticism and the acquisition of the virtues and is, therefore, more communal in character." (Cf. "Truth and History", p. 32, n. 36).

Christian theological-philosophy it is a *living person* that has the main role in the process of the acquisition and appropriation of knowledge: 1) God's Person revealed in Christ, and 2) the human person who participates in an encounter and dynamic relationship with Him¹⁸⁹. In other words, the very event of this game played by God and man is a *Living Person* of God-man Jesus-Christ experienced and participated here and now, known in His own Body, His Church, understood as Playground where decay and death do not exist, because He is "the Land of the Living"¹⁹⁰.

Therefore, Christ not only shows us and defines to us the meaning of this game to which He incites us to enter and shows us the profound meanings of His rules which are nothing else than freedom and love, but He also shows us that by respecting them we will be led to the acquisition not only of true knowledge but of the eternal life, which are one and the same thing in the context of this game. Consequently, Maximus will note: "The end of the mystery concerning this motion that affects them is that through their inclination to God they will certainly be divinized by grace"¹⁹¹. As entities incline toward God as cause, they are unified – this is an inclination toward God as cause, beginning, and end. "The result of this providential 'binding together' of entities produced by the 'force of relationship' is that they progress toward an identity of existence and movement which is on the one hand indissoluble but also preserves otherness; it is 'without confusion'. This identity transcends all differentiations of essence and movement thanks to an 'indissoluble relationship' so profound as to be ultimately a 'growing together', albeit 'without mingling'"¹⁹². In other words, with the entrance of Christ into both space and time of the world, He, as the Eschatological Reality establishes the last days and as the ultimate truth of the world in history He frees and heals it¹⁹³. Therefore, true knowledge cannot be considered as the fruit of our individual achievements and cannot be our possession since it is not of this world, but it is "grace" – a gift of revelation. To be able to receive this gift of true knowledge, however, we have to be real players and not just merely imitators, because imitation does not involve any change, while game does.

We should be able to bring now the second conclusion about Maximus' understanding of knowledge of Truth through the game of God and man. Compared to the future realities that are not visible but will without fail come to be around man – "realities that have properly and truly been

¹⁸⁹ Cf. A. Yevtic, "A prolegomenon to the Gnoseology of Hesychasm", p. 146.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. M. Vasiljevic, "Neopatristic Christology in Postmodern Culture: Presuppositions and Criteria for a Contextual Theology", in *History, Truth, Holiness. Studies in Theological Ontology and Epistemology*, Sebastian Press, Los Angeles, 2011, p. 162.

¹⁹¹ *Amb.* 71, PG 91, 1412C.

¹⁹² N. Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology*, p. 130.

¹⁹³ Cf. M. Vasiljevic, "Truth and History", p. 30.

created and have come into being in accordance with the ineffable and primal purpose and rational of the divine goodness” – our current reality is to be perceived like a childish play. “When things that are present and visible are compared and considered alongside things that properly and truly exist, and which will be manifested at a later stage, the former seem to be but a child’s game and even something rather less than that. For when the arrangement of present, visible things is compared to the truth of what in fact are divine and archetypical realities, it will not even be reckoned to exist in the eyes of those who have been made worthy to behold (as far as possible) all the splendour of divine beauty – in the same way, when a child’s plaything is compared to anything true and real, it is not reckoned as having an actual existence”¹⁹⁴.

That this childish play is not to be understood in a naïve way will be shown in the following and the last section of this brief study on Maximus’ understanding of the game of God and man.

Subjective participation in the game of truth

We can, for the moment, try to suppose that there can be different positions taken by different players in the event of the truth. In his *Ambiguuum* 71 considering the event of the Incarnation of the God, which as we have seen utterly transcends the whole order and power of nature and still in our days represents a real paradox. Maximus referring to the Psalm 66:3: *Because of the multitude of Your power, Your enemies shall lie to You*, explains its meaning by claiming that “for every man is surely God’s enemy and obviously a liar who ignorantly and impiously confines God within the law of nature, and who cannot bear to believe that God, while remaining impassibly beyond nature, essentially came to be among things subject to nature, and worked things according to nature, since *He is able to do all things*”¹⁹⁵.

According to what was already said, it becomes obvious that: a) God in Christian tradition, revealed in the Person of Jesus-Christ, the God-Man, is not a totalitarian truth that everyone must unconditionally accept and Who imposes conditions upon us that are projections of His eternal being. In that case, the event of His Ascension would never have taken place; instead He would remain among us as a convincing testimony, if not as imposed evidence of the truth. b) The truth of creation is revealed as a *dependent* truth – dependent upon something else, in which it participates. So, the idea of truth leads us ultimately not to the “nature” of things but to life and communion of beings.

¹⁹⁴ *Amb.* 71, PG 91, 1413D-1416A.

¹⁹⁵ *Amb.* 71, PG 91, 1409D.

In other words, God “comes as a Person extending and conferring the option to freely believe in Him, to freely adopt Him in a *communion* of love, and to freely recognize Him as our own truth within our *historical* circumstances”¹⁹⁶. Christ does not impose His truth and life as some objective reality, as a principle of ‘value’, or as an impersonal and moral imperative. Rather, historically speaking, His truth is ‘powerless’ to impose itself. To this world, His truth will always remain *foolishness* and *weakness* and as such will be considered like a childish game. Maximus will therefore notes: “For the one says that the *foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men* (apostle Paul)¹⁹⁷, and the other (St. Gregory the Nazianzen) that *the sublime Word plays in all kinds of forms, judging His world as He wishes, on this side and on that*. Each one indicates a divine possession by the privation of what among us are the greatest affirmations; and each by the negations of our realities, makes a positive affirmation of divine realities. For among us foolishness, weakness, and childish play are privations – the first of wisdom, the second of power, and the latter of prudence – but when they are predicated on God they clearly imply His surpassing excess of wisdom, power, and prudence”¹⁹⁸.

God’s Truth will and must always remain a paradox, in other case it will be a real treat for our freedom and our love, and consequently it remains a paradox for our intellect, even without being illogical. In other words, the way in which God acts is infinitely beyond the highest degree of human wisdom, and those works of God which appear to superficial observers as weak and contemptible, surpass all the efforts of human power. The means that God has appointed for salvation of men are so wisely imagined and so energetically powerful, that all who properly use them shall be infallibly brought to the end, which He promised to those who believe and obey. Thus He leaves us free to respond to His call in the way we want to and participate in His truth and life realizing inside the Church as His own Body.

Instead of a conclusion

Instead of a conclusion, we would like to bear an opening to an important point considering our freely approach to the divine event of truth. This is especially important when we bare in mind the specific topic of this study which is the game of truth and in the same time the circumstances in which we live, which can be defined as secular¹⁹⁹.

¹⁹⁶ M. Vasiljevic, “Truth and History”, 31-32.

¹⁹⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:25.

¹⁹⁸ *Amb.* 71, PG 91, 1409BC.

¹⁹⁹ It is interesting to remind here Fr. Alexander Schmemmann understanding of the secularism as a Christian heresy: “Secularism is above all a negation of worship.

This free approach of divine event of truth can be realized in, at least, two different ways. We can imagine a good football player who plays the game without mental states and without the least ambition of putting his personal qualities on display. A good football player wholly conforms to the exigencies of the game. At each moment, he does what must be done so that the game may continue unfurling all its possibilities. His comportment is opportunistic rather than individualistic. Being a good football player means wanting to share the individual enjoyment he gets from it with other participants in order to enhance the splendour of the game. If the good player is not so concerned with what happens to him, this is not so much because there is nothing to understand, but rather because, from the outset, he has already understood what a particular situation of the game requires him to do. The meaning of the situation presented to him is so self-evident that it does not require any endeavor of understanding on his part. In immediately understanding a situation, the meaning of which is already familiar to him, the player has already turned away from the possible truth-value of that situation.

For matters to change radically, it suffices to be a bad player than a good one. As soon as one poses the question of what one must do, which is to say as soon as the meaning and the exigencies of a game situation are no longer self-evident, the player's understanding is able to enter the regime of truth. Thus, the disclosure of a truth, which is at least partially incomprehensible, is what gives birth to a hermeneutic subject. This is because incomprehension begets the need of understanding. Moreover, this incomprehension is often due to the experience of a vacillation or a loss of familiar meaning. Someone remaining insensitive to such enigmatic disclosures and insensitive to such destabilizing experiences has no reason to give up the comfort of his position as a good player. On the other hand, the discomfort of the hermeneutic subject will be the greater when his understanding is recognized as being fragmentary and as being undermined by the explosion of the unity of the metaphysical order occurred, as we saw, with the Incarnation of the Truth. The event of a truth that provokes the incomprehension of the subject thus reveals stakes, which infinitely surpass the finite capacities of understanding of this subject. But it would be more to the point to say that every hermeneutic subject is at bottom a clumsy player. Nothing prevents this hermeneutic subject, feeling his skill in understanding to be strong, from becoming once more a player who only flexes the muscles of his intelligence.

Not of God's existence, not of some kind of transcendence and therefore of some kind of religion. If secularism in theological terms is a heresy, it is primarily a heresy about man. It is the negation of man as a worshipping being, as *homo adorans*: the one for whom worship is the essential act, which 'posits' his humanity and fulfills it'. ("Worship in a Secular Age", *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 16/1 (1972), p. 4).

The disclosure of a truth is also historical event. Thus, in trying to understand that event, it forces us to quit the closed circle in which our habitual life unfolds. Every crisis or loss of meaning is thus already an event of truth, even when its meaning remains incomprehensible for us. In the case of the life of the Church, this break with the habitual functioning of natural life is constitutive of its normal functioning. The worship of the Church can appear as a worship of the Church only by being distinguished, from the start, from the objects and instruments of the world of everyday life. Whenever the worship of the Church is taken solely as being prestigious because of any of its components (beauty of the chant, icons, movements, etc.), it is degraded, and just as with every understanding which does not break out of the closed circle of the conventional meanings and the canonical rules of an aesthetic game, irremediably undermines the existential truth of the worship of the Church. Thus the worship of the Church is in the same time the event of the truth, which demands a new manner of understanding. By trying to understand the meaning of the worship of the Church, participating in the event of the truth, the subject sees itself gratified by a new understanding of the meaning of the entire world of human life and of its own existence within that world. Thus, by occupying a place on the margins of the world of natural life and by forcing us to break with the habitual schemas of the understanding, the worship of the Church reveals hidden meanings of this world and of the existence of the subject.

In contrast to worship of the Church, "intrawordly" objects and instruments belonging to the world of everyday life do not involve, in their normal functioning, any sort of event of truth. This is because the normal functioning of natural life is that of the game which seeks only to prolong itself by following the same, established rules. In other words, those of Bishop Athanasius, "the reality of sin and death in human existence, the real existential *alienation* of man and society, is in the Orthodox spiritual experience not only a 'theological' or 'moral' postulate of some 'dogma' or 'law', prescribed by man or even by God, but also a living, perceivable truth that can be experienced. That truth, however, can be truly experienced in its fullness only through a personal encounter with the Living and True God, through deep *repentance*, which is the *renovation* of man in Christ – that is to say, through man's rational transformation of his whole person and the beginning of his new, meaningful ('with logos'), salvific and grace-filled life in Christ the God-man"²⁰⁰.

²⁰⁰ A. Yevtic, „A prolegomenon to the Gnoseology of Hesychasm“, p. 170.