

THE COSMOLOGY OF ST MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR AS A BASIS FOR ECOLOGICAL AND HUMANITARIAN ETHICS

Like many patristic writings, Maximus's theological works are not simply forgotten pages of history, without applicability to the present, but living treasures that still respond to our contemporary concerns.¹

St Maximus the Confessor's thought has received much attention recently. In particular his work has been identified as an ancient source that has much to offer contemporary concerns like that of human treatment of the environment.² Two papers, one by Bordeianu and the other by Munteanu,³ directly address the accusation that Christian attitudes maybe worsening or causing the current ecological crisis. They each do this by seeking to retrieve an Orthodox spirituality found in Maximus the Confessor. Their papers explore Maximus' cosmology in order to draw out a theological response to the environmental problems of today. First and foremost, my paper builds on the good work done in these papers and all they do to draw attention to the sanctity of creation in Maximus' thought. I do, however, feel that in isolating their arguments to talk exclusively about the environmental crisis, both these theologians end up understating the radical implications

¹ R. Bordeianu, 'Maximus and Ecology: The Relevance of Maximus the Confessor's Theology of Creation for the Present Ecological Crisis'. *The Downside Review* 127 (2009): 103-126, 119.

² E. Theokritoff, *Living in Gods Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology*. (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009), 50-90; T. Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 225-30; T. Grdzeldze, 'Creation and Ecology: How Does the Orthodox Church Respond to Ecological Problems?' *The Ecumenical Review*. 54, 3 (2002): 211-218; G. Popa, 'Theology and Ecology: Hermeneutical Insights for Christian Eco-Theology'. *Journal for Interdisciplinary Research on Religion and Science*. 2 (2008): 97-128; E. Zelensky, 'Nature as Living Icon: Ecological Ethos of Eastern Orthodoxy'. *Religions: Vol. Environment*, 11 (2012): 167-179. See also numerous papers in the collection *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature and Creation*. J. Chrysavgis & B.V. Foltz (eds.) (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

³ D. Munteanu, 'Cosmic Liturgy: The Theological Dignity of Creation as a Basis of an Orthodox Ecotheology'. *International Journal of Public Theology*. 4, 3 (2010): 332-44.

of Maximus' cosmology for *all* creation, which includes humanity. As a consequence of this they also end up overlooking some crucial contributions to the ecological debate present in Maximus' writings.

In his paper, Bordeianu sets out „to demonstrate the ecological relevance of Maximus the Confessor's theology of creation” in response to „the accusation that Christian Tradition is the cause of the present ecological crisis and that it does not offer a viable solution to it”.⁴ He primarily draws on Maximus' doctrine of the *logoi* to underline the way in which Maximus' cosmology is *theocentric* rather than *anthropocentric*. I do not contest this main point of Bordeianu's, so much as wish to point out places where greater attention to the relationship between humanity and the rest of creation might strengthen his arguments considerably. In Munteanu's paper, there is expressed the belief that Maximus „hides in his cosmic theology a way of addressing contemporary problems associated with the ecological crisis.”⁵ His paper again draws heavily on Maximus' *logoi* theology and sets this within a wider cosmology that points to *theosis*. The primary point Munteanu makes in his paper is that the presence of the *logoi* in creation affirms the sanctity of every created being. Again, I build on this reception of the *logoi* in Munteanu's paper, but challenge the utility of language that describes the way Maximus „hides” answers to contemporary problems in his cosmology. In talking of the way in which Maximus „hides” answers to contemporary problems, one implies that the cosmology itself is about something other than the unification and restoration of creation and the timeless relevance of ethical human behaviour toward all creation. Munteanu is correct to argue that our care for the environment is affirmed in Maximus' thought, but I wish to demonstrate that it is precisely our treatment of the world about us that is central to this cosmology, rather than concealed in it.

Both Munteanu and Bordeianu confine their arguments to the sphere of environmental responsibility or 'eco-theology'. Whilst this is a perfectly valid way of addressing a particular topic, I feel that limiting discussion purely to an environmental dimension causes further problems. To talk of an 'ecological' relevance of Maximus' thought is to underplay the fact that the 'ecological crisis' is in fact a *human* crisis that has been caused by humans and can only really be altered by a change in human attitude.⁶ One of the key benefits of Maximus the Confessor's theology in this context is, as we will see, the great onus it places upon the human as mediator who, when failing in responsibilities, causes the destruction of those about them, and who,

⁴Bordeianu, 'Maximus and Ecology', 119.

⁵Munteanu, 'Cosmic Liturgy', 333.

⁶The term 'eco-theology' is in Munteanu, 'Cosmic Liturgy', 333; 'ecological crisis' is used both by Bordeianu, 'Maximus and Ecology', 119, and Munteanu, 'Cosmic Liturgy', 333.

when loving after the example of Christ, is capable of uniting those about them in love. Environmental theology or eco-theology are areas of thought that at heart deal with human attitudes toward the world around them. The problems within the human that Maximus' thought deals with have consequences for all ethics – that is for all areas of human activity. To separate the 'ecological' from the problems humans cause within human societies is to neglect to see that the root problem is the same and that Maximus' thought is equally radical across all ethical spheres in the challenges it poses to human activity. The unity of the spheres of ecological and humanitarian ethics will therefore be the main focus of this paper. Whilst illustrating Maximus' cosmological vision I will indicate its relevance for both the ecological and the humanitarian and demonstrate how closely interrelated these ethical spheres are. My intention by the end of this paper is to have strengthened the arguments made by both Bordeianu and Munteanu by suggesting that Maximus' has an even more radical ethical relevance in the challenge his theology poses to *all* human behaviour. It is my belief that this conclusion will be particularly important to a theologian interested in presenting Maximus' thought as of relevance to the current 'ecological crisis'. The structure of this paper will therefore be to outline Maximus' cosmological vision and, in doing so, to illustrate the radical nature of its call to environmental responsibility and to equity and love within human societies. I shall do this whilst remaining in conversation with the papers by Bordeianu and Munteanu in the hope that my contribution will both critique and strengthen their position on the relevance of Maximus' thought for contemporary environmental ethics.

There is a difficulty when it comes to outlining Maximus' cosmology. He is never systematic in his thought and his work almost always takes the form of an exploration of a difficulty or contemplation on a state of affairs. I will present his ideas as a comprehensive picture, hopefully without losing the lateral or tentative element of his thinking. In this paper I will move through Maximus' thought according to his own cosmological formula of *creation – movement – rest* (γένεσις – κίνησις – στάσις).⁷ Within *creation* I shall treat with his doctrine of *logoi*; under *movement* I shall consider humanity both in its microcosmic role in the fall and in the unification and restoration of creation; when considering *rest* I shall look at the promise of deification. The main works that contain Maximus' cosmology are the *Mystagogia*, *Ambiguum 41* and *Ambiguum 7* and it is from these that I shall draw most material.

⁷ Cf. Maximus, *Amb. 7*, PG 91 1073B [P. Blowers & R. Wilken, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ.*, (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 50]; also P. Sherwood, 'The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and his Refutation of Origenism' in *Studia Anselmiana XXXVI*. (Rome: Orbis Catholicus, 1955), 92-3.

Firstly then, we turn to creation. In Maximus' thought, creation is brought forth out of nothing, but the idea of creation and what it is intended to be reside within God. The doctrine of the *logoi* for Maximus is a resolution of a problem posed by a section in Gregory Nazianzus' Theological Orations (how can we be said to be 'parts of God' (μοῖρα θεοῦ)?)⁸. This resolution is reached through Scripture: Maximus identifies God as the efficient cause of beings, the final cause and the one *through* whom all things come to be.⁹ This leads him to his doctrine of the *logoi*.

Maximus borrows the words of Dionysius the Areopagite to term these *logoi* 'predeterminations' (προορισμούς) and 'products of the divine will' (θεῖα θελήματα).¹⁰ We do not exist as *beings* prior to our creation, „For the maker is always existent Being, but they [the *logoi*] exist in potentiality before they exist in actuality. It is impossible for the infinite to exist on the same level of being as finite things”.¹¹ Louth proposes that „these *logoi*, according to which we are created, are precisely God's will and predetermination for each creature. They are not 'things', ontic realities; they are what God intends for each of his creatures.”¹² The *logoi* do *not* represent or imply our preexistence as non-physical beings. Sherwood precisely maintains that *Ambiguum 7* is written to combat Origenism and any sense that we preexist as divinities or uncreated souls.¹³ Louth's emphasis that the *logoi* are the *intended* existence of creatures is thus a helpful summary. There is no point when any *creature* can be considered identical with God's essence. There is, however, an instance when only God's will that creatures exist existed. That is the point where the *plan* of what creatures are to become can be identified with God, and hence we may be considered a part of Him. Just as the centre-point of a circle is the source of and brings together a circle's radii, so does the Logos bring together and issue forth all our *logoi*.¹⁴ Not only are *logoi* from this point, but they also *are* this point:

“Although he is beyond being and nothing can participate in him in any way, nor is he any of the totality of things that can be known in relation to other things, nevertheless we affirm that the one Logos is many *logoi* and the many *logoi* are One. Because the One goes forth out of goodness into individual being, creating and preserving them, the One is many. Moreover

⁸ Maximus, *Amb. 7*, PG 91 1068D [Wilken, 45].

⁹ T. Tollefsen, 'Causality and Movement in St Maximus' *Ambiguum 7*' in *Studia Patristica XLVIII*. Leuven: Peeters Publishers (2010): 85-93, 88. Tollefsen identifies the passages Maximus uses as *Col* 1:15-7 and *Rom.* 11:36.

¹⁰ Maximus, *Amb. 7*, PG 91 1085A [Wilken, 61].

¹¹ Maximus, *Amb. 7*, PG 91 1081AB [Wilken, 57].

¹² A. Louth, 'St Maximus' Doctrine of the *logoi* of Creation' in *Studia Patristica XLVIII*. Leuven: Peeters Publishers (2010): 77-84, 82.

¹³ Sherwood, 'Earlier Ambigua', 92-3.

¹⁴ Maximus, *Amb. 7*, PG 91 1081, [Wilken, 57].

the many are directed toward the One and are providentially guided in that direction".¹⁵

Maximus affirms that the *logoi* are the Logos and that the Logos is the *logoi*, and yet it is not as if the Logos were composite. For Törönen this is best explained as another instance of simultaneous union and distinction, a common theme that runs throughout Maximus' thought.¹⁶ While this is so, it seems a little inadequate to leave the relationship between the Logos and the *logoi* at that, since no real commonality or difference has been articulated. Rather, we might consider that who the Logos is, is somehow understood to be every single *logoi*. He is expressed in the principle of each of the *logoi*, even though we understand each of the *logoi* to be a blueprint of a different particular being. Who we are intended to be is reflected in who He is. This is so for every being within creation. The Logos is not some myriad-faced totality of all the bits of creation. Rather, the perfect plan for one united creation is an expression of Him. As such, every instance of particular being has its source in Him and remains in relation to Him and will eventually be gathered to Him. Maximus understands that in the Logos' preservation of each, He has become many, and as the many move toward Him, so are they guided to become One again.

Not only are the *logoi* divine plans for the creation of each being, but they are also a surety that there is an end vision for each and a preservation and relationality that may persist throughout the existence of each being. The connectivity between God and *all* of his creation in the past, present and future (as far as we are concerned), should very much inform the way in which we act toward all of that creation. The existence of the *logoi* are the affirmation of God in His creation. For Bordeianu they are a statement of the sanctity of creation a sure sign that „environmental disaster is in opposition to God's eternal plan".¹⁷ Resolving the *logoi* into a clear ethical statement within ecotheology has its uses, but a more interesting *conclusion* can be had if one keeps the doctrine within the context of Maximus' whole cosmology. In affirming that the *logoi* are also the one Logos, we recognise that the *logoi* are bound up in the person of the Logos so that all of creation is an expression of the divine. The Logos is at the centre of *every* principle of created being. Human activity that treats *any* being as anything less, runs contrary to its own *logoi* and nature and is ultimately in rebellion against the divine – for God has willed creation into being and dishonouring one *logos* is to dishonour *the* Logos:

Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me... Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me. (Mat 25:40, 45)

¹⁵ Maximus, *Amb.* 7, PG 91 1081BC [Wilken, 59].

¹⁶ M. Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 135.

¹⁷ Bordeianu, 'Maximus and Ecology', 107.

It becomes nonsensical to justify an assumption that we may perpetuate our own existence at the expense of some other aspect of the created order, since, as Munteanu aptly describes it, „One who destroys the world is guilty of sin against the inherent divine rationality of creation. The theological dignity of the world and all creatures is based on the presence of the *Logos* in the *logoi* of the created beings”.¹⁸ We may see the doctrine of the *logoi* as an assurance that the human perpetuation of environmental destruction runs counter to the divine will,¹⁹ in the sense that it both disrupts God’s end plan for creation, and in that we are actively causing created beings to stray from movement with their *logoi* in our destructive habits. However, it also becomes important to see the way in which humans are bound up within this cosmological statement of relation.

Humans too are affirmed within this doctrine of the *logoi*. Indeed, Christopher Brenna makes the claim that whole the doctrine of *logoi* „forms an interpretive conduit for creating and defending human and environmental rights”.²⁰ Whilst ‘rights’ language is a contentious topic I wish to steer away from at present, the understanding that the *logoi* of creation are both a contribution to ecological and humanitarian concerns remains well represented. It is precisely the consideration that humanity is something apart from the rest of creation that has caused so many of the ecological problems that need to be addressed today. Munteanu’s work does not show a strong enough awareness of this problem, and Bordeianu’s paper might also benefit from not distinguishing between environmental responsibility and responsibility to humanitarian ethics. Maximus’ doctrine of the *logoi* is an affirmation of the importance of every living being and in failing to discuss its implications for ecological and humanitarian ethics, one risks simply reinforcing a mindset that alienates human and non-human creation from one another. Maximus’ doctrine of the *logoi* is about care for every created being, but also, as we will see increasingly in the rest of his cosmology, the unity or fragmentation of all creation arises *from* the decisions that humanity must make.

Concerning the movement of beings, Maximus writes:

“Everything that comes into existence is subject to movement, since it is not self-moved or self-powered. If then rational beings come into being, surely they are also moved, since they move from a natural beginning in ‘being’ toward a voluntary end in ‘well-being’. For the end of the movement of those who are moved is ‘eternal well-being’ itself, just as its beginning is

¹⁸ Munteanu, ‘Cosmic Liturgy’, 342.

¹⁹ Bordeianu, ‘Maximus and Ecology’, 106; Munteanu, ‘Cosmic Liturgy’, 336.

²⁰ C. Brenna, ‘Orthodox Cosmology and Modern Rights Theories: A Proposal for Political Dialogue and Change.’ (2012), conference paper delivered to the Orthodox Theological Society of America 2012 Annual Meeting, available on request, 1.

being itself which is God who is the giver of being as well as of well-being. For God is the beginning and the end. From him come both our moving in whatever way from a beginning and our moving in a certain way toward him as an end".²¹

It is in the nature of created beings that they move. The beginning of their movement starts from God in the act of creation. Maximus writes that created beings are able to move towards a „voluntary end in ‘well-being’".²² Despite having this ability however, he writes that „we are said ‘to have slipped down from above’ because we do not move in accord with the Logos (who preexisted in God) through whom we came to be.”²³ Since humankind chose to move in accordance with the world and its self desire, it has fallen away from movement in accordance with the Logos and no longer moves toward ‘well-being’ and ‘eternal well-being’. All beings move towards God but it is only of humanity that we speak of ‘slipping down’ and choosing to turn towards ‘well-being’ and ‘eternal well-being’. Does that then mean that the rest of creation is absent from this part of Maximus’ cosmology? We read in Maximus that humanity is a „laboratory in which everything is concentrated and in itself naturally mediates between the extremities of each division”.²⁴ The nature of humanity is that it mediates between all parts of heaven and earth. Union may occur through human nature so that even those beings which do not possess rationality can come into communion with God:

“For humanity clearly has the power of naturally uniting at the mean point of each division since it is related to the extremities of each division in its own parts. Through that capacity it can come to be the way of fulfilment of what is divided and be openly instituted in itself as the great mystery of the divine purpose. It proceeds harmoniously to each of the extremities in the things that are, from what is close at hand to what is remote, from what is worse to what is better, lifting up to God and fully accomplishing union. For this reason the human person was introduced last among beings, as a kind of natural bond mediating between the universal poles through their proper parts, and leading into unity in itself those things that are naturally set apart from one another by a great interval”.²⁵

The human person shares aspects of its nature with many extremities in creation, such as the sensibility of non-rational creatures and the ration-

²¹ Maximus, *Amb. 7*, PG 91 1073C [Wilken, 50-1].

²² See Maximus, *Amb. 7*, PG 91 1073C [Wilken, 50].

²³ Maximus, *Amb. 7*, PG 91 1081C [Wilken, 58].

²⁴ Maximus, *Amb. 41*, PG 91 1305AB, [A. Louth *Maximus the Confessor*. (London: Routledge, 1996), 157].

²⁵ Maximus, *Amb. 41*, PG 91 1305BC, [Louth, 157].

ality of the immaterial angels.²⁶ As such it is possible for the human to unite all creation and overcome divisions that set creatures at enmity with one another and God. The nature of such a bond however is that just as humanity may unite all in itself, so may it cause a division in creation so great that all is rent apart in separation from its Creator.²⁷ Not only are the *logoi* of humanity affected by their slip from movement with the Logos, but the created *logoi* of every being. The sacred within creation has always existed – it is only in the fall of humanity that beings have moved from closeness with their Creator. There is a real sense in which all creation is groaning at the separation caused by humanity.²⁸ When Christ comes to unite the divisions that have torn apart creation from God, it is as a human that he comes, and all of creation that is affected:

“... God becomes a human being, in order to save lost humanity. Through himself he has, in accordance with nature, united the fragments of the universal nature of the all, manifesting the universal *logoi* that have come forth for the particulars, by which the union of the divided naturally comes about, and thus he fulfils the great purpose of God the Father, to *recapitulate everything both in heaven and earth in himself* (Eph. 1:10), *in whom everything has been created* (Col. 1:16). Indeed being in himself the universal union of all, he has started with our division and become the perfect human being...”²⁹

This is the heart of Maximus’ cosmology – Christ reunites all creation. He heals the fractures between humanity and the rest of creation and consummates *all* creation, bringing it to God. The movement of beings towards God is once more enabled because Christ has „recapitulate[d] everything both in heaven and earth in himself”. All created *logoi* may once more move toward their creator, mediated by humanity, which is in turn mediated by Christ, the original mediator and redeemer. Christ is enabling creatures to move once more in the direction God intended for them. Christ has brought together the material and the spiritual that was split apart when humanity, the microcosm, fell and chose to move in spheres entirely material. In His incarnation, life, death and resurrection Christ has overcome these divisions,³⁰ „showing that the whole creation exists as one”.³¹ Thus creation is sanctified and may become a vessel for the holy. The created world comes from God and shows forth the divine workings that made it, so that, as Max-

²⁶ Maximus, *Amb. 41*, PG 91 1305D-1308A [Louth, 158].

²⁷ On this see especially A. Louth, ‘Man and Cosmos in St Maximus the Confessor’ in *Toward an Ecology*. 59-71, 68.

²⁸ Romans, 8:19-23; see also Theokritoff, *Living in God’s Creation*, 165.

²⁹ Maximus, *Amb. 41*, PG 91 1308D [Louth, 159].

³⁰ For full list of ways in which Christ’s life brings together divisions caused by the Fall, see Maximus, *Amb. 41*, PG 91 1309AC [Louth, 159].

³¹ Maximus, *Amb. 41*, PG 91 1312AB [Louth, 160].

imus writes in the *Mystagogia*, „the whole spiritual world seems mystically imprinted on the whole sensible world in symbolic forms”.³² Maximus identifies the Church as similar to Christ in the way it continues to bring humanity and all creation together into union as an offering before God.³³ Though the possibility of *theosis* and constant movement towards it is promised to human kind, by virtue of our microcosmic role, the movement of the rest of creation toward unity with its Creator is also possible:

Finally, beyond all these, the human person unites the created nature with the uncreated through love (O the wonder of God’s love for us human beings!), showing them to be one and the same through the possession of grace, the whole [of creation] wholly interpenetrated [*perichoresis*] by God, and become completely whatever God is, save at the level of being, and receiving to itself the whole of God himself, and acquiring as a kind of prize for its ascent to God the most unique God himself, as the end of the movement of everything that is carried towards it...³⁴

In this way the eucharistic liturgy becomes a microcosm of the cosmological union occurring in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.³⁵ Humanity is not the end point of salvation but the centre point, who, in receptivity of the divine, may bring about the unity of the created world in love. Bringing together creation in love becomes the teleological focus of the human person, restored to them by the activity of Christ. What we are seeing here is not some kind of ‘hidden’ solution that may be abstracted to suit an ecological agenda, as Munteanu and Bordeianu end up implying, but an entire cosmology that outlines the failure, redemption and promise of reunion within the fractured relationships of the whole created order. In very real terms, Maximus’ understanding of movement and the role of a united creation relates to the way we treat the earth and all the creatures upon it every day. To read this cosmology and *not* to appropriate an attitude condemning ecocide or human injustice is to fail to comprehend the realisation of this theology into actuality.

We move from here to the final stage that creation anticipates:

It belongs to creatures to be moved toward that end which is without beginning, and to come to rest in the perfect end that is without end, and to experience that which is without definition, but not to *be* such or to *become* such in essence.³⁶

³² Maximus, *Myst.* Ch. 2 [G. Berthold, *Maximus the Confessor, Selected Writings*. (London: SPCK, 1985), 189].

³³ Maximus, *Myst.* Ch. 2 [Berthold, 188].

³⁴ Maximus, *Amb.* 41, PG 91 1308BC, [Louth, 158].

³⁵ Maximus, *Myst.* Ch. 24 [Berthold, 207].

³⁶ Maximus, *Amb.* 7, PG 91 1073B [Wilken, 50].

Creation will find its final rest in its Creator. Maximus writes that no creature has ever stopped moving towards this end, nor yet reached it,³⁷ and that this promise is yet to be fulfilled. Eventually all things will be united to Him, but not so that they are compromised in uniqueness.³⁸ All created beings come from God and, when moving according to their nature (that is, according to what was originally intended for their nature), they move towards Him to be eventually gathered up by Him so that they are one but not so that their personal identity is lost. It is in God that all things find their final rest. The promise of rest is to a united creation which, in its sanctified totality as well as particularity, is a perfect expression of the Logos Himself. Part of human completion and *telos* is to be united in one distinct and personal creation. It is in our nature to be mediators and never alone, but always conjoining the heavenly and the earthly as made possible in the perfect union and sacrifice of Christ and sanctification by the Holy Spirit. This is not just a contribution to the ecotheology debate but a statement about the relation of love as it is necessitated in the life of the human – the one tasked to mediate through love. In so far as Maximus' theology is about how humans act, it is about ethics. The attitude we take towards those about us and the fact that we have a capacity to love mean that humanity is unique in its ability to choose for the better, and to choose to love. It is loving as Christ loved that commends us to God, and it is in the act of loving that all creation begins to draw near and to come close to its Creator.

We have seen within Maximus' cosmology that the human is uniquely placed to make choices that fracture or heal the divisions between creation and God. To become like Christ and to learn to love like him is to challenge human activity to love in a way so radical that it confronts any present day institution or idea that would propagate the destruction of any part of creation, human or non-human. God's relation to His creation is effected through humanity so that the intimacy of the incarnation and God's becoming man is also the beginning of the restoration that all creation has been waiting for. The story of humanity is the story of all creation. It was humanity as the cause of the Fall, as the one who turned from movement alongside their *logoi*, that caused all of creation to move away from God. It was humanity, the mediator of the cosmos and the voice of creation's intended worship towards God, that chose to sin. Christ's restoration through uniting the fragments of the universe grants humans the potential to realign themselves towards their *logoi* – to live a life of love that gathers up all divisions in order to bring them before God that all might be consummated. Creation in its every particularity, diversity, unity and totality has originality, direction, intent and completion in the *logoi* that are from, of, to and for the Logos. Maximus'

³⁷ Maximus, *Amb.* 7, PG 91 1073B [Wilken, 50].

³⁸ Maximus, *Myst.* Ch. 1 [Berthold, 186].

cosmology is fundamentally about the relationship between *all* creation and its Creator. This relationship centres around the role of the human person, making human relations (between fellow humans, between the rest of creation, *and* between all creation and God) the heart of the cosmos and the point of unity or fragmentation between all beings. To say, as Munteanu does, that Maximus „hides in his cosmic theology a way of addressing contemporary problems associated with the ecological crisis,”³⁹ is really to understate the radical nature of Maximus’ cosmology. Maximus is quite explicit about what our relationship with the rest of creation should be, and that is one of mediating love.

It is also abundantly clear that Maximus’ cosmology calls the human person to account in their exercising of love. This account requires equally an attitude of love towards every human person, rendering this topic also immediately relevant to all other spheres we have categorised as separate within ethics. ‘Creation’ does not exclude humans. We may be the mediators between the created and the divine, made in the image of God and tasked with an important role, but we are no less a part of the created order. Indeed it could well be argued that it is precisely separating an area off into such a topic as ‘ecological’ as opposed to ‘human’ that has caused so much damage to non-human creation thus far. Conversely, we must also not forget that our ‘eco-theology’ requires in the same measure a radical humanitarian ethics. The importance of every *human* is also affirmed in the doctrine of the *logoi*. The gathering together of creation that Maximus talks of is also a gathering together of humanity. Indeed, we might well ask how humanity can begin to alter its societal activity in order to embrace non-human creation when the foundations of its most economically wealthy societies are built upon the subjugation and perpetual economic enslavement of more than half of the world’s human population. Maximus’ cosmology of union and distinction in love reaches into every aspect of our lives. His words that we are a people of mediation and a people called to unite in love call into question the very foundations of our societies: there is certainly no place for any system that legitimises the exploitation of creation, human or otherwise. This is why in a very real way, Kallistos Ware is absolutely right when he says „the crisis is not first and foremost an ecological crisis. The fundamental difficulty lies not outside but inside ourselves, not in the ecosystems but in the human heart. The present-day crisis, that is to say, is primarily a crisis not concerning the environment but concerning the way we ourselves think”.⁴⁰ To take this message truly to heart we might also add to this the words of Anestis Keselopoulos:

³⁹ Munteanu, ‘Cosmic Liturgy’, 333.

⁴⁰ K. Ware, ‘Through Creation to the Creator’ in *Toward an Ecology*. 86-105, 102.

The ecological crisis cannot be understood on its own as an isolated event because it is linked with the totality of man's personal and communal life. It manifests a broader crisis in man's mindset and ethics, science and technology, economy, politics, culture, jurisprudence, and religion. It is the ultimate expression of man's inner crisis... Above all, however, it presupposes a radical change of ethos, of behaviour, of mindset, and way of thinking...⁴¹

To take seriously the ethical implications of the cosmology of Maximus the Confessor, we must not only change our attitudes toward non-human creation, but must also consider anew the radical call to love as Christ loved and to become in the likeness of the original mediator; the original microcosm who brought the makrocosm together inside Himself. Keselopoulos' accusation is that neither our mindsets, ethics, economics, politics or any part of the societies in which we live, reflect that kind of love which we have been called to manifest in this world. One of the questions this cosmology poses to humans everywhere and in all times is, what does it look like to love and what does real human community that loves look like? I can not think of a more radical question one could ask of a political society, or a human heart.

To conclude, I am in agreement with the papers by Munteanu and Bordeianu that Maximus' cosmic theology is of ecological relevance. In making this statement however, I wish to impress that the relevance comes primarily from a calling to account of human behaviour, which is required to love all creation. As Bordeianu and Munteanu both point out, all creation has an integrity of its own and conceals a little immanence of the divine transcendence in its *logoi* which point to the Logos Himself. We must not forget however, that it is in loving *all logoi* found in creation that we most truly love *the* Logos. This means that Maximus' cosmology calls to account all human activity and demands that unifying love become the basis of all our actions. This scope includes but is not limited to ecology, social justice, and the very structures of our political and economic systems. If we are serious about retrieving the significance of this rich cosmology, then it will challenge our environmental perspectives and everything else that runs contrary to a belief that it is in human nature to follow Christ in becoming mediators of love.

⁴¹ A. Keselopoulos, 'The Prophetic Charisma in Pastoral Theology: Asceticism, Fasting, and the Ecological Crisis', in *Toward and Ecology*. 356-364, 363.

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Summary

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The Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor as a Basis for Ecological and Humanitarian Ethics

This paper explores the cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor and its relevance for contemporary ethics. It takes as its starting point two papers on Maximus' cosmology and environmental ethics (Bordeianu, 2009; Munteanu, 2010) and from there argues that we can not consider environmental ethics in isolation from other ethical issues. This, as both Ware and Keselopoulos have also pointed out, is because the environmental crisis is actually a crisis in the human heart and in human attitudes toward everything about us. The paper goes through some key areas in Maximus' cosmology according to his own formula of creation – movement – rest and considers at each stage the implications of this theology for the way the human should be living and treating other beings. The main sources for this exploration are *Ambiguum* 7, *Ambiguum* 41, and *The Mystagogia* with especial focus on the doctrine of the logoi and the divisions of nature. The paper concludes that Bordeianu and Munteanu are right to consider Maximus' theology to be of ecological relevance, but that this relevance comes from the radical ethical statement being made about human activity. Maximus' theology points the human toward becoming in the likeness of Christ who unites heaven and earth through love. The love of Christ when considered in an ethical context stands as a formidable challenge to current attitudes and institutions that advocate the exploitation and destruction of human or non-human creation.

Keywords: Maximus the Confessor; cosmology; cosmic theology; environmental ethics; contemporary ethics; logoi theology; *Ambiguum* 7.