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ΣΤΟΧΑΖΟΜΕΝΟΣ, ΑΛΛ' ΟΥΚ  
ΑΠΟΦΑΙΝΟΜΕΝΟΣ: ST. MAXIMUS  
THE CONFESSOR AS AN INTERPRETER  
OF ST. GREGORY OF THE THEOLOGIAN

**Introduction**

This paper<sup>1</sup> surveys probably the most important historical *reception* of the theological thought of St. Gregory of Nazianzus and aims to illustrate its interpretation in the work of St. Maximus the Confessor. In the last few decades a great deal of scholarship has been published on Maximus's theology,<sup>2</sup> but little is dedicated to his understanding of Gregory Nazianzen. After G. Berthold's "Cappadocian roots of Maximus,"<sup>3</sup> Andrew Louth focused on Maximus and Gregory's shaping of Tradition, noting "the shift in interpretative framework between Gregory's time and Maximus,"<sup>4</sup> while Atanasije Yevtich,<sup>5</sup> Maximos Conostas,<sup>6</sup> Paul Blowers,<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Presented at the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Belgrade, 22-27 August 2016.

<sup>2</sup>Maximus' philosophy, in particular his views on the *logoi*, has received ample scholarly attention. See more in Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015).

<sup>3</sup>G. Berthold, "The Cappadocian Roots of Maximus," *Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur*, Fribourg, 2-5 septembre 1980, ed. Felix Heinzer and Christoph Schönborn, (Fribourg, 1982), pp. 51-59.

<sup>4</sup>A. Louth, "St Gregory the Theologian and St. Maximus the Confessor: The Shaping of Tradition", in: S. Coakley and D. A. Pailin (eds), *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993, pp. 117-130.

<sup>5</sup>A. Jevtic, *Saint Maximus the Confessor: Life and Selected Writings* (Vrnjci-Trebinje-Los Angeles 2012), and *Saint Gregory the Theologian: Festive Orations and Three Orations on the Bishops* (Vrnjci-Trebinje 1988-2013).

<sup>6</sup>In his edition of Maximus the Confessor's *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. I and II, translated by Nicholas Conostas, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>7</sup>Paul Blowers, "On the 'Play' of Divine Providence in Gregory Nazianzen and Maximus the Confessor," in Christopher Beeley, ed., *Re-Reading Gregory of Nazianzus: Essays on History, Theology, and Culture* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 199-217.

Doru Costache,<sup>8</sup> Joshua Lollar, George Parsenios, etc. make a special reference to Maximus' *magnum opus*, the *Ambigua*.

My proposal in this paper is to explore St. Maximus's approach to his great teacher with attention to his own words στοχαζόμενος, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀποφαινόμενος, in *Ambigua* 71, 11. The whole passage: "These, then, and to the best of my abilities, are my responses to those passages in the most divine orations of Gregory, our great father and teacher, that you, most blessed ones, found perplexing, and urged me to address. Yielding obediently to your wishes, as was only right, I have spoken *conjecturally and not by way of assertions*" [i.e., *with the conjecture, and not straightforward declaration*]."<sup>9</sup> I think it is safe to say that these words serve to remind us of a basic exegetical principle we must still identify before we can claim to have fully understood the nature of Patristic hermeneutics.

### Exegesis and Tradition

How are we to understand these two expressions: "*conjecturally*" (στοχαζόμενος) and "*not by way of assertions*" (ἀποφαινόμενος)? I raise this question as a way to navigate between two possible understandings of how St. Maximus interpreted Gregory the Theologian.

On the one hand, was this interpretation indeed done "*conjecturally*" (στοχαζόμενος), i.e., speculatively, hypothetically, presupposedly, tentatively (and, therefore, not by way of assertions)? One could justify this assessment by noting that Maximus recurrently reminds his readers that he offers, to the best of his abilities, simple *responses* to perplexing passages of the great Cappadocian.

On the other hand, maybe Maximus interprets the Cappadocian Saint indeed "*by way of assertions*" (ἀποφαινόμενος), meaning: giving a confident and forceful statement of Gregory's belief through a process of *disambiguation*?

Although St. Maximus repeatedly stressed that his commentaries on Nazianzen are just speculations or hypotheses, and *not* forceful state-

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<sup>8</sup> "Seeking Out the Antecedents of the Maximian Theory of Everything: St. Gregory the Theologian's *Oration 38*," *Phronema* 26 (2), 2011, 27-45.

<sup>9</sup> *Amb.* 71, 11, PG 91, 1417A. Regarding the Greek word ἀποφαινόμενος, it comes from the verb ἀποφαίνομαι, ἀποφαίνω (as in the phrase ἀποφαίνομαι γνώμην), means I officially formulate an opinion or decision (legal term), or I issue an official decision (similar words: ἀποφασίζω, καθορίζω, κρίνω.) In this sense, one should be reminded of the recent discussion on *autocephaly* in the Orthodox Church and on the way of signing it. The whole problem emerged when it was proposed that only the Patriarch of first-throned Church ἀποφαίνεται, i.e., decides, while the other primates συναποφαινόνται, decide with him.

ments, we can *forcefully assert* that they are not merely modest speculations. Maximus did not limit himself to “naked” comments but—in the manner of the Fathers of the Church—he did not hesitate to “coin” new terms for clarification, following Gregory’s recommendation.<sup>10</sup> The fruit of this insightful approach (and persistent involvement in Gregory’s thought) is the magnificent theological synthesis of the theology of Nazianzen and of the Cappadocian Fathers more generally in his *Ambigua*: two sets of *Ambigua* to Thomas and John, both conceptually and literally, are his most difficult writings.<sup>11</sup>

But their difficulty is not simply because he struggles with St. Gregory’s meaning for the fourth century, but because St. Maximus thinks “conjecturally” (στοχαζόμενος) in order to more deliberately be *free* of historical restraints as a means to excavate Gregory’s legacy by positing *how Gregory would have replied if he were asked a modern question* (i.e., a question of Maximus’ time). Maximus’ fluency in this legacy is striking, but he himself is not simply another Byzantine commentator on Nazianzen. At this stage, seeing no obvious difference between στοχαζόμενος and ἀποφαινόμενος, some people might take Maximus’s lead and be tempted to respond that there is no point in thinking about such issues. Yet, H.-G. Gadamer was right when categorically stated that understanding always includes histor-

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<sup>10</sup> εἰ δὲ τί καὶ καινοτομήσαι περὶ τὰ ὀνόματα σαφηνείας ἔνεκεν (if indeed one must make some innovation in words for the sake of clarity), *Oration 39*, 12 (PG 36, 348B).

<sup>11</sup> Following the recent research, here is offered an overview of Gregory Nazianzen’s works (without theme identified) from which Maximus explicitly takes his *ambigua* and examines them in his *Difficulties* to Thomas and John: ***Ambigua 1-5*** has as the theme the four difficult passages from Gregory’s opus: *Amb. 1-4*: two theological *Orationes* “On the Son,” *Orationes 29-30* (PG 91, 1033D-1045C) and one difficulty (*Amb. 5*) from the works of Dionysius Areopagite and belong to the period when Maximus was preoccupied with the disputed questions about the energies in Christ (1045D-1060D); ***Ambigua 6-8*** (1065B-1105B) for *Oration 14*, On the love of the poor; ***Ambigua 9-12*** (1105C-1208C) for *Oration 21*, on St. Athanasius; ***Ambigua 13-14*** (1208D-1213D) for *Oration 27*, (Against Eunomians); ***Ambigua 15-22*** (1216A-1257C) for *Oration 28*, (great theological oration) 23-26 (1257CD-1268B) for *Oration 29*, (first oration on the Son) 27-30 (1268C-1273D) for *Oration 30*, (second oration on the Son) 31-38 (1273D-1301A) for *Oration 38*, On the Theophany (i.e., Nativity of the Savior); ***Ambigua 39-41*** (1301B-1316A) for *Oration 39*, *On the Holy Lights* (i.e., *Baptism of Christ*); ***Ambigua 42-44*** (1316B-1352A) for *Oration 40*, On Holy Baptism; ***Ambigua 45-60*** (1352B-1385C) for *Oration 45*, On the Holy Pascha; ***Ambigua 61-64*** (1385CD-1389C) for *Oration 44*, On “New Sunday”, ***Ambigua 65-68*** (1389D-1405C) for *Oration 41*, On Holy Pentecost; ***Ambiguuum 69*** (1405C-D) for *Oration 25*, On Heron philosopher; ***Ambiguuum 70*** (1405D-1408C) for *Oration 43*, Funeral Oration for Saint Basil, ***Ambiguuum 71*** (1408CD-1417C), for *Carmina moralia 2* (*Instructions to Virgins*) (PG 37:624A-625A).

ical mediation.<sup>12</sup> I sometimes find that there is reluctance to accept the theoretical assertion that this *a posteriori* verification of past authorities—that is nearly forgotten in contemporary theology—is so *patristic*. It is also at the core of synodal/conciliar tradition of the Church: even though it is true that St. Maximus at the given time expressed the Church, we can say that it was so *de facto* only because the Sixth Ecumenical Council *a posteriori* occurred to proclaim it.<sup>13</sup> Gadamer, therefore, here enters with his hermeneutics and dramatically changes the character of the debate. He forcibly hit the concept of a locked and complete “fact,” and did not imply that the meaning is produced exclusively by the reader in his interaction with the text. As one modern scholar notes, thinking of Gregory’s difficulties, Maximus was “free to elaborate his theological vision on a vast canvas, to advance some of his most original formulations, and establish the philosophical foundations that would define his stance in the later christological controversy (epitomized in the *Ambigua to Thomas*).”<sup>14</sup>

This study on Gregory’s influence on Maximus does not deal exhaustively with all the theological views where the concurrence of the two Fathers is evident. Part of the difficulty in situating the work of Maximus in relation to Gregory is that he confronts “the reader with a surplus of meaning that likewise called for interpretation.”<sup>15</sup> From the vast amount of material provided by these two Fathers, much is abstracted, and the crucial is emphasized, in order to formulate a proposal on the nature of patristic interpretation.

Interpretations of and references to Gregory are dispersed not only in the *Ambigua* but also in other writings of the holy Confessor.<sup>16</sup> Although Maximus stresses in the *Ambigua* prologue that the words of Gregory (who received “all the outpouring of wisdom that can truly be attained by the saints”), have an inspirational and sacred character as much as the words of the Scriptures (cf. prologue to Thomas, *Amb.* 19.2, 21.2, 32.2), that does

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<sup>12</sup> See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Bloomsbury 2004), p. 165.

<sup>13</sup> The Council expresses the faith and the faith must also be expressed through the Council. St. Athanasius the Great spoke the truth, but had the First Ecumenical Council not come to justify it, how would we have known that he was speaking the truth? More about this in Bishop Maxim Vasiljevic, “Synodality: A Misinterpreted Vision,” in: *Synodality: A Forgotten and Misapprehended Vision — Reflections on the Holy and Great Council of 2016*, Edited by Maxim Vasiljević and Andrej Jeftić (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Pres, 2017), pp. 99-124.

<sup>14</sup> N. Conostas, *The Ambigua*, p. xi.

<sup>15</sup> N. Conostas, *The Ambigua*, p. xi.

<sup>16</sup> In *Πεύσεις και ἀποκρίσεις* (PG 90, 785-856) Gregory is mentioned seven times directly by name (5, 9, 48, 95, 104, 105 и 137), and eight times without mentioning his name (87, 96-103).

not prevent him to interpretatively “play” with Gregory’s words, images, analogies, and to offer—for his time—a very modern interpretation. A good example of this is *Amb.* 71, the only difficulty with which Maximus engages from Gregory’s *poetry* (where he eloquently admires the miracles of nature) is his *modern* example of *Word-in-play*.<sup>17</sup>

My task is not to establish how much the two Fathers coincide in certain subjects but to elucidate the nature of Gregory’s influence on Maximus. Maximus’ dealings with Gregory did not merely witness to the “phenomenon Gregory”—that reading and interpreting Gregory were crucial for the intellectual life of the Byzantine world. As the editor of the *Ambigua* notes, “the century that passed between Chalcedon and the birth of Maximus saw a growing number of commentaries on Gregory’s writings.”<sup>18</sup> Undoubtedly, interpreting (or recontextualization of) Nazianzen for Maximus’s time was an extraordinary challenge for Maximus. Our approach wants to serve as an indicator if Gregory’s theology finds its organic *continuation* in Maximus (who esteemed the great Cappadocian no less than the apostles and prophets), and also to measure the extent of Maximus’s *originality* in relation to the preceding theological tradition.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, I will try to trace, as best as space allows, both the historical and theological “congeniality” between the two Fathers, and the existing differences, with a conscience that no attempt to summarize their achievements can acknowledge them enough.

Although Maximus claims that Gregory is *the best interpreter of himself* (αὐτὸς οὖν ἑαυτοῦ καθέστηκεν ἐρμηνευτῆς<sup>20</sup>), it will be worth examining his approach in order to take a closer look at it. Let us start with several

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<sup>17</sup> Παιίζει γὰρ λόγος αἰπὺς ἐν εἶδεσι παντοδαποῖσι, / Κίρνας, ὡς ἐθέλει, κόσμον ἔδον ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα (“on high plays in all sorts of forms, mingling with his world here and there as he so desires”) (Gregory Nazianzen, *Carmina moralia* 2, PG 37:624A. Relying on Dionysius’ concept of the divine ἔρωσ and ecstasy, Maximus sees how the Logos, ...in the overflow of his passionate goodness (ἐρωτικῆς ἀγαθότητος) is drawn outside himself in his provident care for everything. Beguiled, as it were, by his own goodness, love, and sheer yearning (ἔρωτι), He is enticed away from his dwelling place above and beyond all things, condescending to penetrate all things according to an ecstatic and supernatural power wherewith He can still remain within himself. (Maximus Confessor, *Amb.* 71, PG 91, 1408CD).

<sup>18</sup> N. Constat, *The Ambigua*, p. xi.

<sup>19</sup> “Maximus’s own commentary is therefore preceded by an extensive tradition of reflection on Gregory’s work.” (N. Constat, *The Ambigua*, p. xi).

<sup>20</sup> Αὐτὸς οὖν ἑαυτοῦ καθέστηκεν ἐρμηνευτῆς ὁ διδάσκαλος τοῖς μὴ παρέργως ἐντυγχάνουσι τοῖς αὐτοῦ θεοφράστοις λόγοις (“to those who possess more than a merely superficial acquaintance with his divine orations, the teacher interprets himself”) (*Amb.* 40, PG 91, 1304C).

examples now to illustrate the way in which Maximus interprets Gregory. His important *Amb.* 45 will serve to appropriate a number of critical themes that will be useful for further discussion.

## 1) *Amb.* 45: *technê* and technology

This being was placed in paradise—whatever that paradise was then—honored with self-determination [τῶ αὐτεξουσίῳ] so that the good would belong to the one who chose it no less than to the one who provided its seeds. The human being was a cultivator of immortal plants, that is perhaps divine thoughts [ἐννοιῶν], both the simpler and the more complete. He was naked because of his simplicity and *life free from artifice* and far from any covering or screen, for such a condition befitted the one [Adam] who existed at the beginning.<sup>21</sup>

In *Amb.* 45, Maximus considers this Gregory's passage about Paradise in several ways (θεωρία). To keep the focus on modern way of thinking about these ideas, I am skipping over some other very interesting points. The whole context leads Maximus to the conclusions relevant for the use of technology. As Fr. Joshua Lollar points out, "it is this process of dissipation that made a life conditioned by *technê* to arise, for man now needed to cover his vulnerable body with clothing and shelter [...] Thus, *technê* is bound up with human necessity, vulnerability, dissipation, ultimately with pathos: *technê* is man's attempt to keep himself secure in the midst of his pathos."<sup>22</sup> An important hermeneutical lesson for theology can be learnt from Maximus: to be faithful to the patristic thought means to make explicit that which is implicit in the statements of the Fathers.<sup>23</sup> Simply put, in the *Ambigua* Maximus succeeded to offer not only "crystallization," but also the full sense of Gregory's insights.

## 2) *Amb.* 36 (PG 91, 1289BCD) and *Q.Thal.* 54: eschatology vs. protology

In Gregory's and Maximus' thought, ontology is based on and derived from the *Omega*, or the end. In other words, the truth is related to an

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<sup>21</sup> *Oration* 45, 8; PG 36, 632C. Cf. *Oration* 38, 12, SCh 358, 128, PG 36, 324B.

<sup>22</sup> J. Lollar, "Pathos and *Technê* in St. Maximus the Confessor," in: *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through the Resurrection: Proceedings of the Symposium on St. Maximus the Confessor*, Ed. Maxim Vasiljevic, (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Pres, 2013), p. 233.

<sup>23</sup> I agree with Conostas' remark that "Maximos's task is to unravel the skein of that language into an intelligible sequence of interlaced patterns, to break open the particle of dense matter and release a universe, explicating the implicate order contained in Gregory's words (*Amb* 46.2)." (N. Conostas, p. xii)

*eschatological* and not a *protological* reality. This is evident, firstly, in their treatment of the first state of man, which was not “perfect.” In their perspective, contrary to a fundamentally Neo-Platonic ontological framework, perfection of man and the world is not to be found in the “beginning” (ἀρχή), in the premordial state of beings, but at the end (τέλος), in the future Kingdom.<sup>24</sup> In his *Oration* on the Theophany, Gregory would stress (followed lexically later by Maximus) that the “second communion” (δευτέρα κοινωνία), which Christ established with his coming, is “far more marvelous than the first [at the creation]”;<sup>25</sup> i.e., he points to a proximity with God which goes beyond the first “likeness” given at the creation. In arguing for the priority of the future, Maximus draws extensively on Gregory’s *Orations*, but found especially helpful this phrase from the *Orations* 38 about the “second communion” (δευτέρα κοινωνία).

In ancient Greek thought, the beginning (ἀρχή) of beings is their final and sole truth, while history is a “fall” (πτώσις). However, very little remained of this “dogma” when the Fathers submitted it to biblical criteria. In this perspective, adopted by the Cappadocians and Maximus, the end (τὸ τέλος), the future event, i.e., the resurrection, *gives the meaning* and *determines* history (contrary to origenistic cosmism). For this reason, Maximus was able to say:

He who is initiated into the inexpressible power of the *Resurrection apprehends the purpose* for which God *first* established everything.<sup>26</sup>

Gregory indicates something similar:

For the light and the truth present in measure here bear me toward this end, to see and experience the radiance of God, which is worthy of the one who has bound me [to flesh] and will release me and hereafter will bind me in a higher manner [in the resurrection].<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Maximus’ concept of causality in *Σχόλια εἰς τὸ Περὶ τῆς ἐκκλησ. ἱεραρχίας*, PG 4:137. Cf. his phrase: οὐκ ἔτι γὰρ μετὰ τὴν παράβασιν δείκνυται τὸ τέλος ἐκ τῆς ἀρχῆς, ἀλλ’ ἡ ἀρχὴ ἐκ τοῦ τέλους (*Q.Thal.* PG 90, 616A).

<sup>25</sup> “He communicates a second communion (δευτέραν κοινωνεῖ κοινωνίαν), far more marvelous than the first (πολὺ τῆς προτέρας παραδοξοτέραν)”... This is more godlike than the first (τοῦτο τοῦ προτέρου θεοειδέστερον)”. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 38, 13; PG 36, 325D; Maximus the Confessor, *Amb.* 36, 1; PG 91, 1289B and *Q.Thal.* 54; PG 90, 520C.

<sup>26</sup> ὁ δὲ τῆς Ἀναστάσεως μνηθεὶς τὴν ἀπόρρητον δύναμιν, ἔγνω τὸν ἐφ’ ᾧ τὰ πάντα προηγουμένως ὁ Θεὸς ὑπεστήσατο σκοπὸν (*Centuries on Theology and Economy I*, 66, PG 90, 1108AB).

<sup>27</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 38, 11; PG 36, 324B.

Such an approach allows the two Fathers to include the whole anthropological problem into the Christological perspective.<sup>28</sup>

### 3) *Amb. 24 and 7: principle of epistemology*

When it comes to understanding the Gregorian “universe,” there was an insatiable urge in Maximus to pull back all curtains, open all doors, and expose completely the deep inner structure of his theology. To give but one example, let us examine how he develops Nazianzen’s “*thirsts to be thirsted for*,” into the principle of epistemology.

In God, there is a movement “outside himself,” an “ekstatic hyper-essential power”<sup>29</sup> and ascending, attracting movement<sup>30</sup> that creates relation of love and eros within created beings. The nature of knowledge of God provides Maximus with the opportunity for a more fruitful and creative engagement with the thought of Gregory. Referring to Nazianzen’s word that God “thirsts to be thirsted for” (διψῶν τὸ διψᾶσθαι),<sup>31</sup> Maximus says that the Divine moves and is moved, He desires to be desired, and loves to be loved (κινεῖ καὶ κινεῖται, ὡς “διψῶν τὸ διψᾶσθαι” καὶ ἐρῶν τὸ ἐρᾶσθαι καὶ ἀγαπῶν τὸ ἀγαπᾶσθαι).<sup>32</sup> It is exactly through this *willing activity*, that God “exteriorizes” His existence and life.

The thought of Gregory and Maximus is marked by par excellence *referential*, communal<sup>33</sup> mode of knowing God, which is more intrinsically biblical than Greek in approach. The influence of Gregory on Maximus is pervasive, and the obvious example is the one that follows. Gregory says:

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<sup>28</sup> A good example is Gregory Nazianzen’s *Oration* 38, 13-18 (PG 36, 325-333.) In *Amb.* 42 (PG 91, 1328B) Maximus speaks about the future as criterion of the past: “For all things that have come to exist substantially in any way whatever, or that will come into existence, have all been willed in advance by God, and have been conceived of in advance and foreknown by Him, and to each particular being He gives substance and subsistence at the fitting and appropriate time.”

<sup>29</sup> ἐκστατική ὑπερούσιος δύναμις (D. Areopagite, *On the Divine Names*, 4, 13; PG 3:712B).

<sup>30</sup> τῷ ἀνατατικῶς ἔλκοντι (Maximus the Confessor, *Amb.* 60, PG 91, 1385B).

<sup>31</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 40, 27, SCh 358, 260, PG 36, 397B.

<sup>32</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Amb.* 24, PG 91, 1260C.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. the expression ὡς οικείους προσομιλῆ which indicates a communal character of the relation between God and the world. Maximus also points that the angels τὸν μὲν Θεὸν μετοχῆ γινώσκουσιν (*On love* III, 22, PG 90, 1024α). For Gregory (*Oration* 21, 2; SCh 270, 114; PG 35, 1084C), and Maximus (*Amb.* 10, PG 91, 1193C), συγγένεια with God is possible only through the *oikonomia* of the Son, through a free filial adoption κατὰ χάριν, and not through an individual moral purification.

Yet one wonders at the ungraspable, and one desires more intensely the object of wonder, and being desired it purifies, and purifying it makes deiform, and with those who have become such he converses as with those close to him—I speak with vehement boldness—God is united with gods, and he is thus known, perhaps as much as he already knows those who are known to him.<sup>34</sup>

Maximus elaborates on this theme in *Amb. 7*:

If an intellective being is moved intellectually, that is, in a manner appropriate to itself, then it will necessarily become a knowing intellect. But if it knows, it surely loves that which it knows; and if it loves, it certainly suffers an ecstasy (πάσχει... τὴν... ἔκστασιν) towards it as an object of love. If it suffers this ecstasy, it obviously urges itself onward, and if it urges itself onward, it surely intensifies and greatly accelerates its motion. And if its motion is intensified in this way, it will not cease until it is wholly present in the whole beloved, and wholly encompassed by it, willingly receiving the whole saving circumscription by its own choice, so that it might be wholly qualified by the whole circumscriber, and, being wholly circumscribed.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4) *Q.Thal. P.G. 90, 253A: Evil does not have the future*

Very attuned to the preceding patristic tradition, to which Gregory belongs by excellence, Maximus insists on free self-determination as the source of evil. Gregory already pointed out:

Believe that evil has neither substance (μὴ οὐσίαν εἶναι τινα τοῦ κακοῦ) nor sovereignty, nor is it without beginning, nor does it have its own subsistence (ἢ παρ' ἑαυτῆς ὑποστᾶσαν), nor does it come from God. Rather, it is our work and that of the evil one (ἡμέτερον ἔργον εἶναι τοῦτο καὶ τοῦ πονηροῦ), and it was introduced by our *inattention*, not by that of the Creator (ἐκ τῆς ἀπροσεξίας ἐπειθὸν ἡμῖν, ἀλλ' οὐχὶ τοῦ κτίσαντος.)<sup>36</sup>

In his *Q.Thal.* Maximus repeats Nazianzen's point by adding a few more characteristics: "Evil is neither... substance, nor nature, or subsistence, or power, nor activity in the existing, nor quality, or quantity, nor relation, or place, not time, nor creation, nor movement, or habitus, nor

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<sup>34</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration 38, 7*; PG 36, 317D.

<sup>35</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Amb. 7*, PG 91, 1073C.

<sup>36</sup> *Oration 40, 45*; Sch 358, 304; PG 36, 424A.

passibility, seen naturally in some of the beings...<sup>37</sup> Yet, Maximus also contributes to a crucial understanding of evil's fundamental existencelessness.

Evil is a *lacking* of an activity *regarding the end* (πρὸς τὸ τέλος... ἔλλειψις) of the powers existing in nature.<sup>38</sup>

It is important to stress that—according to the Fathers—*evil does not have essence*, not because it does not possess it in the current historical existence (on the contrary, we see not only its “essentialization,” but also personification of evil in history), but because *it will not have the future*. That is the meaning of Maximus words: evil is deprivation of the power given to nature to realize the assigned *goal*. For, the *essence* (existence, being) possesses only that which will exist *eternally*. When Gregory said that God prevented “that evil might not be immortal” (ἵνα μὴ τὸ κακὸν ἀθάνατον γένηται),<sup>39</sup> he precisely pointed out that evil has no the future. Let us be reminded, Maximus will ask his oponents: “And how is it that God, being so forced by necessity, was led, contrary to His will, to call forth into being things marked for ultimate destruction?”<sup>40</sup> The Confessor's argument is empowered by an additional note in *y Q.Thal.* 59. [CCSG 22:63] where he explains that post-lapsarian humanity knows its true ἀρχή, which is *darkened* but sin, only through the anticipation of the eschatological τέλος.<sup>41</sup> Thus, both Fathers emphasize the paradoxical truth that the future decides about the past and that the element of *expectation* constitutes the basis of the Christian life.

### 5) *Opusculum* 3: Trinitarian Theology

As most creative theologians of the Church, Gregory and Maximus lived in thorny periods of Church history (Gregory in the fourth, and Maximus in the seventh century.) Gregory had to confront the heresy of his time, i.e., Arianism which received a specific form in the second generation after the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (325), while Maximus confronted monothelitism. Both heresies had more philosophical than theological pre-

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<sup>37</sup> *Q.Thal.*, PG 90, 253AB.

<sup>38</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Q.Thal.*, PG 90, 253AB. Also, Τὸ κακὸν τῆς πρὸς τὸ τέλος τῶν ἐγκειμένων τῇ φύσει δυνάμεων ἐνεργείας ἐστὶν ἔλλειψις, καὶ ἄλλο καθάπαξ οὐδέν.

<sup>39</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 38, 12; PG 36, 324D.

<sup>40</sup> *Amb.* 42, PG 91, 1332A.

<sup>41</sup> “Let each one simply walk on the way, and reach out for what is ahead (καὶ ἐφίεσθω τοῦ πρόσω), and let him follow the footsteps of the one who leads the way so clearly, who makes it straight and guides us (καὶ κατὰ πόδας ἐπέσθω τῷ καλῶς ὀδηγοῦντι, καὶ κατευθύνοντι) by the narrow path and gate to the broad plains of blessedness in the world to come.” (*Oration* 14, 5, PG 35, 864B.)

suppositions and both heresies needed a conciliar/synodal condemnation. Their significance moved G. Berthold to state:

With a sure instinct for orthodoxy, Gregory and Maximus, two great speculative minds, felt the need to profess the Church's Trinitarian belief in all its conceptual paradox. Deeply philosophical, they recognized the limits of philosophy and felt them keenly in human expression. Only a simple and direct confession of the Church's faith could correct the heterodox bent of the human mind. Maximus, of course, did not have to defend Trinitarian dogma as did the Cappadocians. Almost three centuries separated disciple from master. Yet he clearly sees the necessity of insisting on the full paradox of Unity/Trinity for it is only in so doing that one can avoid the twin errors of dilation (διαστολή) and contraction (συστολή) of the divinity. These are the errors of Greek and Jew.<sup>42</sup>

To embrace the challenges to which Gregory and Maximus responded we must understand the difference the Cappadocians make between nature and person, or λόγος τῆς φύσεως and τρόπος ὑπάρξεως. "Nature," as a term, refers to the simple fact of existence, to ὅτι ἔστι (that which is), while person refers to "how something is" (πῶς ἔστι). Now, this "how" the man is, i.e., his person, determines whether the limitations of nature will prevail or not.

The precise meaning of freedom in this context is critical to whether ontology is enslaved by necessity. Look at how Gregory Nazianzen treats the question of freedom in the generation of the Son; unlike Cyril of Alexandria, he does not refer it to the substance of God but to the Father. In his third *Theological Oration* (6-7), he refutes the Arian accusations that by denying the generation of the Son from the will of the Father the Orthodox introduce *necessity* into God's being. He puts forward this argument in support of personal freedom.

And yet I think that the Person who wills is distinct from the act of willing; He who begets from the act of begetting; the speaker from the speech, or else we are all stupid. On the one side we have the mover, and on the other that which is, so to speak, the motion. Thus, the thing willed is not the child of that will, for it does not always result therefrom; nor is that which is begotten the child of generation ... but of the Person who willed, or begot...<sup>43</sup>

God's freedom is not a matter of linking the freedom with the Divine essence but with the person of the Father. When Maximus dealt with the

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<sup>42</sup> G. Berthold, "The Cappadocian Roots of Maximus," *Actes*, p. 56.

<sup>43</sup> Third *Theological Oration*, 6.

distinction between the will and the willing one—always on the same track as our Cappadocian (whom he cites)—he used the same analogy with the language in order to define the natural *thelesis* only as possibility, as a capacity which is actualized (in aristotelian sense) by a concrete someone, the one who wills (ὁ θέλων):

For to be disposed by nature to will and to will are not the same thing (οὐ ταυτόν δέ τό πεφυκέναι θέλειν, καί θέλειν), as it is not the same thing to be disposed by nature to speak and to speak. For the capacity for speaking is always naturally there, but one does not always speak (Πέφυκε μὲν γάρ ἀεί τό λαλητικόν, λαλεῖ δέ οὐκ ἀεί), since what belongs to the essence is contained in the principle of the nature (ἐπειδή τό μὲν οὐσίας ἐστί λόγῳ φύσεως συνεχόμενον), while what belongs to the wish is shaped by the intention [*gnômê*] of the one who speaks (τὸ δὲ βουλήσ, τῆ τοῦ λαλοῦντος γνώμη τυπούμενον). So being able to speak always belongs to the nature (ὥστε φύσεως μὲν τό ἀεί πεφυκέναι λαλεῖν), but how you speak belongs to the *hypostasis* (ὑποστάσεως δέ, τό πῶς λαλεῖν). So, it is with being disposed by nature to will and willing (ὥσπερ καί τό πεφυκέναι θέλειν καί θέλειν.)<sup>44</sup>

We can observe this dynamic between the person who wills as distinct from the act of willing clearly in Maximus account of the place of “someone” and “something” within his wider examination of person and nature.

Each one of us does not act principally as being “someone (τις)” [person], but as being “something (τι ὄν),” that is to say as a human being [ὡς ἄνθρωπος, that is, according to one’s nature]. Yet, as “someone” like Peter or Paul (ὡς δέ τις, οἶον Παῦλος ἢ Πέτρος), he determines the mode (τρόπος) of his action (τὸν τῆς ἐνεργείας σχηματίζει τρόπον) giving it a (specific) configuration through decrease or growth, in one way or another according to its own faculty to judge (ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ κατὰ γνώμην τυπούμενος). Thus, with regard to the action, in the mode (τρόπος) the characteristic of the persons is recognized (ὅθεν ἐν μὲν τῷ τρόπῳ τὸ παρηλλαγμένον τῶν προσώπων κατὰ τὴν προᾶξιν γνωρίζεται), while in the principle (λόγος) the invariable that is characteristic of the natural act (ἐν δὲ τῷ λόγῳ, τὸ τῆς φυσικῆς ἀπαράλλακτον ἐνεργείας)<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> *Πρὸς Μαρίνον*, PG 91, 48A. [transl. A. Louth]. This brief text, known as *Opusculum* 3 and addressing Marinus (presbyter) around 645-6, is one of the latest preserved Maximus works, since little has remained after his last journey to Rome in 646.

<sup>45</sup> *Letter to Marinus*, 10, PG 91, 137A.

Based on these distinctions, Maximus was able to comment on Gregory's passage that "the laws of nature are abolished," by offering an innovative proposal: the mode of existence (τρόπος ύπάρξεως) is innovated, while the "law of nature" (λόγος τῆς φύσεως) remains intact/unchanged.<sup>46</sup>

## 6) *Amb. 41 and Oration 38: microcosmic reality and macrocosmic potentiality*

In my doctoral thesis on the notion of *participation* in Nazianzen and the Confessor,<sup>47</sup> I offered a first linking of *Amb. 41* with Gregory's *Oration 38* (something that Doru Costache also discovered).<sup>48</sup> Actually, Maximus' *Amb. 48* is also heavily dependent on Gregory. The key text here is *Oration 38, 11*, where Gregory speaks about the creation before the appearance of man.

But there was not yet a blending out of both, nor a mixing (μίξις) of opposites, which is the distinctive sign of a greater wisdom and of divine superabundance concerning created natures, nor was the full wealth of goodness yet made known. So then wishing to manifest this, the Creator Word also makes one animal [living creature] out of both (ζῶον ἐν ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων), I mean invisible and visible natures, that is the human being... The human being is a kind of second world, *great in smallness*, placed on the *earth*, another *angel*, a composite worshiper, a beholder of the *visible creation*, an initiate into the *intelligible*, king of things on *earth*, subject to what is above, *earthly and heavenly*, transitory and immortal, visible and intelligible, a mean between greatness and lowliness... He is an animal (ζῶον) trained here and transferred elsewhere, and, to complete the mystery, deified through inclination toward God (θεοούμενον).<sup>49</sup>

This unifying role of the man in the world—a holistic perspective of anthropology—will lead Maximus to elaborate it so exhaustively that his argument overshadowed his primary source. So, the fact that the man was created at the end of the creation of the world, as a link between the

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<sup>46</sup> *Amb. 42*. PG 91, 1340BC; 1341C.

<sup>47</sup> "Participation in God" in *The Theological Anthropology of St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Maximus the Confessor*, Athens 1999 (in Greek) and Belgrade 2015 (in Serbian).

<sup>48</sup> "Not claiming to be exhaustive, this paper explores one such possible track, ignored by scholarship, within two passages (11 and 17) in St. Gregory the Theologian's *Oration 38*" ("Seeking Out the Antecedents of the Maximian Theory of Everything: St. Gregory the Theologian's *Oration 38*," *Phronema* 26 (2), 2011, 27-45.)

<sup>49</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration 38, 11*; PG 36, 321C-324B. Maximus comments on this in *Amb. 7*, PG 91, 1093D-1096B.

material creation and God is τοῦ θεοῦ σκοποῦ τὸ μέγα μυστήριον.<sup>50</sup> As a “mixed worshiper,” man *participates* in both realities which become *one* in his personal “being”, composing a κόσμον δεύτερον. In his development of Gregory’s cosmological anthropology Maximus argues that man’s privilege to *unite*<sup>51</sup> the division and the whole world. In *Amb.* 41 he will develop the teaching on overcoming the divisions, relying especially on St. Gregory, and drawing from his festal *Orations*. I also think that in a brief but important and original Gregory’s phrase ἐν μικρῷ μέγας (macrocosmos in microcosmos),<sup>52</sup> Maximus reveals much of his own understanding of the *microcosmic reality* and *macrocosmic potentiality* of the human person. Being the βασιλεὺς τῆς ὅλης κτίσεως,<sup>53</sup> man has a liturgical function in the world.

So, I believe (together with Doru Costache) that Maximus in his *Amg.* 41 clarifies Gregory’s rhetoric with a philosophical preciseness: the five divisions are to be overcome and the world would be *offered* to God. This was “the great mystery of the divine plan”,<sup>54</sup> so that God be τὰ πάντα ἐν παῶσι.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, Maximus *Amb.* 41 is one of the most seductive proposals about the cosmos put forward during the patristic era. For this reason, his insights generated excitement among modern theologians because they raised the possibility of a new answer, one in which would bring theology and science into a dialogue. But this answer points back toward the macrocosmic conception of man advocated by St. Gregory Nazianzen.

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<sup>50</sup> “The great mystery of the divine plan” (Maximus Confessor, *Amb.* 41, PG 91, 1305BC).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Maximus Confessor, *Amb.* 41, PG 91, 1308B: κτιστὴν φύσιν τῆ ἀκτίστῳ δι’ ἀγάπης ἐνώσας (united created nature with the uncreated through love.)

<sup>52</sup> One could constate originality of Gregory Nazianzen in his words ἐν μικρῷ μέγας. Cf. M. Gatzemeier-H. Holzhey, „Makrokosmos/Mikrokosmos“, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 5 (1980) 640-649. On the term μικρόκοσμος in Greek philosophy see T. Špidlík, *St. Grégoire de Nazianze. Introduction à l’étude de sa doctrine spirituelle, Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 189, Roma 1971, 104. St. Gregory adds paradoxically “that man is not a microcosm in a macrocosm but rather a *macrocosm* in this microcosm (ἐν μικρῷ μέγαν). He calls the entire universe a *small world* in comparison to Man, who according to him is the *Big world*.” (Bishop Athanasius Yevtich, *Emmanuel: The Only Begotten and Firstborn among Many Brethren* (Sebastian Press: Alhambra 2008), pp. 76-77.

<sup>53</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 38, 11; PG 36, 324A.

<sup>54</sup> *Amb.* 41, PG 91, 1305BC.

<sup>55</sup> *Amb.* 41, PG 91, 1305-1308.

## Conclusion

In this introductory presentation—and the quoted passages are simply good illustrations—I have tried to present a synoptic outline of theological, historical, and critical problems of the important subject of hermeneutics. Naturally, it is not possible to give a complete picture of influences of Gregory on Maximus. Fr. Andrew Louth rightly suggests that there is no easy answer to the question of the nature of Gregory's influence on Maximus.<sup>56</sup>

The tempting uneasiness of puzzlement is what stimulated ordinary readers of St. Gregory to formulate odd conclusions.<sup>57</sup> From Maximus' writings, it is clear that nothing quite focuses his mind like dissonant details anticipating symphonic resolution. But *en route* to explanation—during his search for new frameworks to tackle unresolved difficulties in the midst of “rivalries of interpretation”—a theologian must walk with careful step, relying on intuitions, hints, signs, and *fronema* of the Fathers.<sup>58</sup>

One can ascertain that Sts Gregory of Nazianzus and Maximus the Confessor formulated a comprehensive teaching about communion, beginning with the communion which prevails between Persons of the Triune God and, reaching, by way of the dimensions of creation, the world, and the Church, to the very extent of human reality. In a unique way, Maximus combines Gregory's theological and ascetical tradition with his monastic experience. No doubt, he offered his best thoughts by interpreting Gregory of Nazianzus.

Our task was to see how faithfully St. Maximus expresses the Cappadocian and to indicate if St. Gregory's theology found its organic continuity in Maximus. This has demonstrated to what extent Maximus is original with regard to the theological tradition preceding him. From Maximus we learn an important hermeneutic lesson in theology: to be faithful to patristic thought means to make explicit what is implicitly said in the Fathers, and to ask what the fathers would have replied if they were asked modern questions (i.e., a questions of another time.)

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<sup>56</sup> A. Louth, “St Gregory the Theologian and St. Maximus the Confessor: The Shaping of Tradition”, pp. 117-130.

<sup>57</sup> “Given the extraordinary regard in which Gregory was held, and the widespread exposure his writings received, it is not surprising that various questions arose concerning the meaning of his thought and language. These questions were compounded by the fact that Gregory's orations are elaborate works of the highest rhetorical art and that—unlike his fellow Cappadocians, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa—he theologized in a more „literary” mode, delivering himself of charismatic, nearoracular utterances whose laconic obscurity and polysemic allusiveness were not easy to grasp—and likely to be misunderstood—without informed analysis and interpretation.” (N. Conostas, *The Ambigua*, p. xi)

<sup>58</sup> See on this N. Conostas, *The Ambigua*, p. xv-xvi.

## Summary

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### **Στοχαζόμενος, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀποφαινόμενος: St. Maximus the Confessor as an Interpreter of St. Gregory of the Theologian**

One can ascertain that Sts Gregory of the Theologian and Maximus the Confessor formulated a comprehensive teaching about communion, beginning with the communion which prevails between Persons of the Triune God and, reaching, by way of the dimensions of creation, the world and the Church, human reality. In a unique way Maximus combines Gregory's theological and ascetical tradition with his monastic experience. He offered his best thoughts by interpreting the Cappadocian father. This paper attempts to examine, through six textual examples of comparison, how faithfully Maximus expresses the Cappadocian and to indicate if Gregory's theology finds its organic continuity in Maximus, which will help us understand to what extent is Maximus original with regard the preceding theological tradition. From Maximus we learn an important hermeneutic lesson in theology: to be faithful to patristic thought means to make explicit what is implicitly said in the Fathers, and to ask what the fathers would have replied if they were asked a modern question (i.e., a question of another time.)

**Keywords:** exegesis, hermeneutics, interpretation, tradition, exchatology, epistemology, evil, Trinity, cosmology, Christ, participation.