

## dianoesis

Vol 14 (2023)

Issue 14 – The Byzantine world and its cultural surroundings



### Parallels between Maximus the Confessor and Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900)

*Paraskevi Zacharia*

doi: [10.12681/dia.37772](https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.37772)

## Parallels between Maximus the Confessor and Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900)

**Paraskevi Zacharia,**  
*PhD Candidate of Philosophy:*  
*Faculty of Philosophy,*  
*Theology and Religious Studies (Radboud*  
*University – Nijmegen*  
paraskevi.zacharia@ru.nl

### **Abstract**

The philosophical thought of Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900) does not appear to significantly abstain from the wholeness of humanity and the deification of human being that Maximus synthesises. In Maximus' writings Christology is strongly bounded to love, under the soteriological meaning of Christ's Incarnation. In Soloviev's philosophical thought love plays the role of the cosmic power which, by transcending the historical process, leads the humanity to the deification. This paper aims at the exegesis of the three-fold nature of love (love for one's brothers, and self-love) in Maximus' works, while discussing the points of convergence with Soloviev's ontology of love in *Smysl lyubvi (The Meaning of Love)* (1892-1894).

**Keywords:** love; self-love; apatheia; syzygy; deification

## Introduction

According to Church Fathers, divine (or philosophical in the case of Neoplatonism) love is a reductive power, which is activated only when the soul is totally pure, dispossessed of evil and passions. This kind of love, according to Neoplatonists, makes sense only between distinguishable beings; it makes sense only when it galvanises the soul to approach the Good. In this state, the soul is finally complete and in full ecstasy. Indeed, various metaphors and symbols, often expressing forms of communication between man and God, were merged at the crossroads between Neoplatonism and Christianity. For instance, the neoplatonic understanding of light symbolised not only gnosis but also the source of beings. At the final stage of the soul's ascension, when the soul itself is purified and full of light, it becomes light itself — or even god. This neoplatonic understanding of the soul's catharsis matches the Christian understanding of how God's grace works in terms of preparing human beings to accept the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, according to Christian doctrine, salvation is not merely a personal matter, because it is bound up with an individual's mutual—and lively—relationship with Christ, which bears comparison with the platonic philosopher's various efforts to ascend from the cave and save his prisoners.

But even though Neoplatonism and Christianity shared similar schemas, the differences between the two approaches were nonetheless striking. For instance, the former adopted the position that the One creates the world as a consequence of its emanating fullness, whereas the latter ascribes the act of creation as being attributable to God's love. Moreover, Christian doctrine, as opposed to Neoplatonism, does not understand creation as a process of emanation. This is because the free will given by God to humans is ultimately what moves them to return to His harmony. Even so, the Christian theologians appear to have developed the original neoplatonic schemes into several Christian concepts. For instance, Christian doctrine understands that the Christian God created man “in Our image after Our likeness” [κατ'εἰκόνα καὶ καθ'ὁμοίωσιν],<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:26.

giving human beings an opportunity to be like God, whereas Plato and his successors believed that the soul's reduction to good involved a kind of return because the soul's earlier existence in the world of ideas preceded its incorporation. In this respect, then, the soul's return can be considered the actualisation of its real nature.

These various similarities and differences between the two approaches led me to the figure of Maximus the Confessor (580–662), one of the Fathers of the Eastern Church, who not only combined philosophical (especially neoplatonic) principles with theological ones but, as a consequence, has since been considered a theologian connecting the East with the West using his work. In this paper I use extracts, which are related to love, from Maximus' *The Four Hundred Chapters on Love* [*Τετρακόσια Κεφάλαια Περί Αγάπης*]<sup>2</sup>, the *Ambigua to John* [*Πρός Ἰωάννην*],<sup>3</sup> *Letter 2: On Love* [*Επιστολή 2: Περί ἀγάπης*], *The Ascetic Life* [*Λόγος Ἀσκητικός*], *Ad Thalassium* [*Προς Θαλάσσιον τον ὀσιώτατον πρεσβύτερον και ἡγούμενον Περί Διαφόρων ἀπόρων τῆς θείας Γραφῆς*], and *Mystagogy* [*Μυσταγωγία*].

These extracts appear to be sufficient points of philosophical contact between the understandings of Maximus and the Russian philosopher, Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900). Indeed, despite the chronological, as well as the cultural, gaps between them, and despite the extent of the social changes that occurred during the intervening period, there are several parallels that are worth examining. The first part of the paper aims at the presentation of the aspects of love (love for God, the love for one's brothers, and self-love [φιλαυτία]) as they are elaborated

---

<sup>2</sup> All the references to *The Four Hundred Chapters on Love* are from: *Maximus Confessor - Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> All the references to the *Ambigua* are from: Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constatas, 2 vols. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014). For the rest of Maximus' works, the references are from Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* (PG), volumes 90–91. If translations are used, the details are given in the footnotes.

mainly in *The Four Hundred Chapters on Love*,<sup>4</sup> while the second part on the role of *apatheia* [ἀπάθεια] for these aspects of love. Then, I touch upon the concept of deification in Maximus' teaching and how it is connected to *apatheia*. The fourth part provides some general information about the history of Maximus' works in Russia both before and after Soloviev. Based on this information, I attempt to discuss the parallels between Soloviev's ontology of love as elaborated in his work *Smysl lyubvi* (*The Meaning of Love*) (1892-1894) in comparison to *agapē* in Maximus' theology (fifth part of the paper).

### 1.Aspects of Maximian love

There are several definitions of love in Maximus' work. Love is "a good willingness of the soul, which makes her prefer none of the beings more than the knowledge of God" and elsewhere he speaks of love as the most generic of the virtues,<sup>5</sup> which is distributed among the six types of sufferers.<sup>6</sup> At the end of *The Four Centuries on Love* [Τετρακόσια Κεφάλαια Περί Ἀγάπης] he says: "Many people have said much about love, but only in seeking it among Christ's

---

<sup>4</sup> *Letter 2: On Love*, one of the earliest surviving works of Maximus, and a second source of the Maximian understanding of love, provides even more thorough insights into the subject of love. This Letter, together with Letter 3, were addressed by Maximus to John the Cubicularius, a courtier in Constantinople, most probably when Maximus held the title of *Protoasecretis* (the first of the emperor's personal secretaries ) in the imperial court. In *The Ascetic Life*, meanwhile, the subject is presented and analysed by Maximus in relation to the Lord's life and passions. In particular, he approaches love when he refers to the true nature of the spiritual life: how it is possible to reach God through knowledge, how it is possible to truly live in accordance with nature as God intended us to, and, most importantly, how it is possible to live a mystic life. In *The Ascetic Life*, Maximus discusses the core of ascetical theology — how it is possible to come to know God through our experience. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 33, 81.

<sup>5</sup> In *Question 40*, in *Ad Thalassium*, Maximus presents love as virtue, Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium*, PG 91.

<sup>6</sup> In Matthew 25 the sufferers are: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned.

disciples will you find it, for only they have the true love, the Teacher of love [...] the one who possesses love possesses God Himself since God is love.”<sup>7</sup> Taking this definition of love as the basis of his theology, it seems that the matter of love in his work begins with the natural desire of man towards God. This desire is the mainspring of ascetic and mystical life, of which all people can become shareholders.<sup>8</sup> Man as an intellectual creature desires God, and when he reaches himself in his fall, this desire destroys all forms of self-love [φιλαυτία] by opening the way to *agapê* [ἀγάπη]. Through this love, human beings can consolidate their faith in this world,<sup>9</sup> and through the imitation of the divine and fulfilling love.

More importantly, for Maximus love is affinity, which unifies the divided parts of the human soul (by ensuring its stability). This unity comes through prayer (which, in turn, presupposes the absolute and complete purifying and emptiness of the mind).<sup>10</sup> In this regard, separating the mind from earthly pleasures, in conjunction with true prayer, leads the mind itself to the fulfilment of its natural energy, namely to deification (ascendance to God).<sup>11</sup> Here Maximus, by using the example of saints, speaks of the *eros* of divine love, which

---

<sup>7</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Love* (4:100)

<sup>8</sup> However, this desire can easily fall upon selfishness, that is why Maximus in the first part of *The Ascetic Life* marks the inner struggle of man with the devil.

<sup>9</sup> It is quite impressive how Maximus relates love to faith, which is identified with genuine affection and clear conscience: “Love and genuine affection—that is, faith and a clear conscience—are clearly the result of a hidden impulse of the heart; for the heart is fully able to generate without using external matter”, Maximus the Confessor, *Fourth Century of Various Texts* II.61.

<sup>10</sup> Maximus keeps the Platonic passionate states of the soul (‘desire’ [ἐπιθυμία] and ‘anger’ [θυμός] in *Phaedrus*) by attributing to them a transformative character. Thus, ‘desire’ could be transformed into ‘divine eros’, while ‘anger’ could be extended to the state of ‘wise ecstasy’, Question 40, *Ad Thalassium*, 55.

<sup>11</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* (introduction), PG 91. The connection between *apatheia* and prayer was indicated prior to Maximus by Evagrius: “Blessed is the soul, who at the time of prayer has achieved perfect insensibility.”

lifts the mind up and at the same time approaches God, by losing the sense of everything created and earthly.<sup>12</sup>

This unifying character of love is juxtaposed with the multiplicity of self-love [φιλαυτία], which (according to Maximus) is twofold: it has a positive and a negative aspect.<sup>13</sup> In the former, the object of love is the knowledge of the Creator (i.e., the true love of God), a kind of spiritual love, through which man cultivates a beautiful soul for himself and worships God, while in the latter the evil aspect of self-love is attached to the affections of the body as well as to earthly objects.<sup>14</sup> The direction of the human desire towards God ensures the reversion to him/herself (a positive aspect of self-love). Should one apply this aspect of self-love to humanity as a whole, he/she will arrive at the position to realise the eternal destination of humankind.

In this part, I examine these three aspects of Maximian love: love for God, love for our brothers, and self-love. Before stressing the main parts of his analysis on love, it should be clarified that Maximus was one of the main representatives of Orthodox Christian mysticism, originally founded in the New Testament and then developed until the 14th century, when it was fully clarified by Gregory Palamas (1296-1359). *Ascesis* [ἄσκησις] was the main characteristic of the Orthodox monastic tradition which Maximus followed in his life; it consisted the

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Question 10, PG 91. Moreover, Maximus in *The Four Centuries on Love* (PG 90, 1060D) says that the ultimate aim of commandments given by Christ is to guide us to love Him and the neighbour. Christos Giannaras pointed out that the commandments in Scripture aim to love and to the transcendence of egocentric nature in human beings, Christos Giannaras, *The rational and the irrational: the linguistic limits of realism and metaphysics* [Το ρητό και το ἄρρητο: τα γλωσσικά όρια ρεαλισμού και μεταφυσικῆς] (Athens: Ikaros, 1999), 214.

<sup>13</sup> For self-love's psychological interpretation as a mode of narcissistic love in Maximus' theology, see G.C. Tympas, *Carl Jung and Maximus the Confessor: On Psychic Development* (London: Routledge, 2014), 99-100.

<sup>14</sup> "And having exchanged evil self-love for the good, intellectual self-love separated from carnal delights, we shall not cease rendering cult to God for this beautiful self-love seeking from God the eternal composition of the soul. This is the true cult pleasing to God: the soul's acute diligence in virtue." Maximus the Confessor, Question 10, *Ad Thalassium*, PG 91.

basis of his spiritual writings.<sup>15</sup> The Holy Fathers, both in their ascetic teachings as well as in their associated theology, refer to the spiritual completion of the monk, which they nevertheless regard as the model of completion of every believer.<sup>16</sup> The stages of the upward course are the practice and the theory that contributed to the formation of two tendencies in the context of monasticism, theoretical and practical. I refer below to these parts of spiritual life when I will examine the relationship between love and *apatheia*. In addition, it should be noted that Maximus seems to adopt a pairing and complementarity of these two tendencies in order to show that these two paths lead man to perfection.

In Maximus' *The Four Centuries on Love*, love itself is approached either directly by means of aphorisms or indirectly by numbers associated with specific centuries (for example, the number "four" refers to the four Gospels, where the command of love is contained). These 'centuries', which as a number symbolised perfection,<sup>17</sup> are preoccupied with more topics than just love. However, as Maximus explained in the *Preface to Elpidius*, love is "a discourse on love [...] not the fruit of my own meditation, [rather] I went through the writings of the holy Fathers and selected from them [...] summarising many things in a few words."<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, for Maximus, this selection was not abstract, not even random. It was based on a kind of trinity that the Christian philosophy examines and analyses: the commandments, the dogmas, and the faith.<sup>19</sup> The second source about Maximian love, *Letter 2: On Love*, one of his earliest surviving works, provides an even more thorough

---

<sup>15</sup> Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St Maximus the Confessor* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 21-23.

<sup>16</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts* 11, PG 60, 97, and *Homilies on First Corinthians*, 6, 4, PG 61, 52-53; Basil the Great, *Ascetica* 18, 1-2, PG 31, 1381-1384; George Florovsky, *Byzantine Ascetic and Spritual Fathers [Οι Βυζαντινοί Ασκητικοί και Πνευματικοί Πατέρες]*, trans. P.Pallis (Thessaloniki: Pournara, 1992), 11-17.

<sup>17</sup> The way of writing in 'centuries' seemed familiar to Maximus, since Evagrius Ponticus, Diadochus of Photikê (400-500 A.D.), and John of Karpathos (unknown – 650 A.D.) composed 'centuries', Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 20.

<sup>18</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Love*, PG 90, 960 A.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, PG 90, 1057 C.



insight on the important subject of love.<sup>20</sup> As for *The Ascetic Life*, the subject of love is presented and analysed by Maximus based on Lord's life and passions. In particular, he speaks of love when he refers to the true nature of the spiritual life: how could we reach God through knowledge? How could we truly live in accordance with nature as God has intended for us? More importantly, how could we live a mystic life?<sup>21</sup> All these teachings were based on what he had learnt from the Elders (*gerontes* in Greek), i.e. the spiritual fathers.<sup>22</sup>

The most salient aspect of love in Maximus is the commandment of love which justifies it as the whole purpose of the Savior's commandments.<sup>23</sup> Through His command of love, He gives us the opportunity to free ourselves from passions and sins and therefore truly love God and our brothers. Thus, Maximus highlights the relational basis of love:<sup>24</sup> relation to God, to others, and indeed to ourselves. This aspect of love has the capacity to constitute men and women holy angels on earth.<sup>25</sup> The most important that comes from God's commandment of love is the calling of becoming a loving person on the inside, regardless of others' disposition of love. This unconditional giving to the other (and also to God) is quite obvious when Maximus says: "Even if in temptation

---

<sup>20</sup> This Letter together with Letter 3 were addressed by Maximus to John the Cubicularius, a courtier in Constantinople, most probably when Maximus was holding the title of *protoasecretis* (the first of the personal secretaries of the emperor) in the imperial court, Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 81.

<sup>21</sup> In *The Ascetic Life* Maximus speaks of the core of the ascetical theology, of how to come to know God through our experience, *ibid.*, 33.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>23</sup> "The whole purpose of the Savior's commandments is to free the mind from incontinence and hate and bring it to love of Him and of one's neighbour," Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Love*, PG 90, 1060 B-1061 A.

<sup>24</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Epistle 2*, PG 91, 401 D.

<sup>25</sup> "The unutterable peace of the holy angels is attained by these two dispositions: love for God and love for one another [which] holds true for all the saints...", Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Love*, PG 90, 1056 B.

your brother should insist on speaking ill of you, you should not be swept away from your charitable disposition.’’<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the disposition of love is directed toward two objects: God and our brothers. Love for God is a divine type of love. The wholeness of our existence should be directed to divine love in order to become a part of it. Once more in his theology, Maximus connects love for God with knowledge of Him: “The one who loves God prefers knowledge of Him to all things made by Him and is constantly devoted to it by desire.”<sup>27</sup> This kind of preference derives from the theological term *αὐτεξούσιον* (the self-determining power), which gives man the right to choose to “being attached to the Lord and become one spirit and of being attached to the prostitute and become one body.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, the freedom of men and women to choose the object of their love (God, earthly things, *et al.*) predetermines the gradation of their participation in divine love, and therefore their modes of living.<sup>29</sup> When human beings become exponents of this blessed passion of holy love, their actions will naturally directed to please God, through “love, temperance, contemplation, and prayer.”<sup>30</sup> As an object of our preference, God becomes a revelation to us through our acts, deeds, preferences, and thoughts.

---

<sup>26</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Love*, PG 90, 1053 C; “If you harbour resentment against anybody, pray for him and you will prevent the passion from being aroused; for by means of prayer you will separate your grief from the thought of the wrong he has done you. When you have become loving and

compassionate towards him, you will wipe the passion completely from your soul. If somebody regards you with resentment, be pleasant to him, be humble and agreeable in his company, and you will deliver him from his passion, PG 90, 1044 D.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, PG 90, 961 C.

<sup>28</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, PG 91, 1092 D and Dionysius the Areopagite, *Scholía*, PG 4, 308A. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-c.395) considers *αὐτεξούσιον* as the supreme good that has been given to man, *On the Making of Man* [*Περί κατασκευῆς ἀνθρώπου*], PG 44, 125-256.

<sup>29</sup> This way of living is equivalent to an angelic form of life on earth: “[...] leads an angelic life on earth, fasting and being watchful and singing psalms and praying and always thinking good of everyone”, Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Love*, PG 90, 968 D.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, PG 90, 13 D.

Concerning the second object of love, i.e., the love for our brothers or “the whole-hearted benevolence to the neighbor”, in terms borrowed by Maximus, it seems that it falls within the commandments of the Lord (the command “Love each other” means that we must first love God), and at the same time, it is connected with the perfect nature of God.<sup>31</sup> God is good and without passions; therefore, God loves all people alike.<sup>32</sup> By transferring our love to the neighbour, that is, by changing or adapting our mood according to our neighbour’s mood, we do not substantiate the existence of perfect love. Maximus conveys here the equal distribution of love between human persons. And because human nature is one and common for all human beings, therefore love must be equally the same to all fellow human beings.<sup>33</sup>

This equality in love that is highlighted by Maximus in *The Four Centuries on Love*, is even more extended when he speaks of the divine will that leads all human beings to the truth and (consequently) to their salvation. This love can be expressed in many different ways through which both good and evil can be loved equally. What should also be pointed out is that the peace which derives from the achievement of *apatheia* [ἀπάθεια] is considered necessary for this kind of love (as I will further explain later on). However, only love itself can lead to the imitation of divine love.<sup>34</sup> For Maximus,

<sup>31</sup> “Love for one another makes firm the love for God,” Maximus the Confessor, *The Ascetic Life*, PG 90, 917 A.

<sup>32</sup> “[We do] not divisively [assign] one form of love to God and another to human beings, for it is one and the same and universal: owed to God and attaching human beings to each other”, Maximus the Confessor, *Letter 2: On Love*, PG 91, 401 D.

<sup>33</sup> “Blessed is the man who has learned to love all men equally”, and elsewhere “Perfect love does not split up the one nature of men on the basis of their various dispositions but ever looking steadfastly at it loves all men equally [...] It ever manifests the fruits of love equally for all men [...]”, Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Love*, PG 90, 964 D, 976 B.

<sup>34</sup> For Maximus, the root in the connection between *apatheia* and love for the neighbour is freedom . The detachment from earthly desires and the unconditional love for the neighbour liberates us from any kind of passion (“Ο τοῖς τοῦ κόσμου πράγμασι γνησίως ἀποταξάμενος καὶ τῷ πλησίον διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης ἀνυποκρίτως δουλεύων παντὸς πάθους ταχέως

the love for the neighbour is perfect not only because it is an imitation of God's love, but also because it contains the dynamic of loving our enemies.<sup>35</sup> In *The Ascetic Life*, he calls us to live an ascetic, truly Christian, spiritual life which will be based on love. To the question of how it would be possible to love our enemies, he explains in the same work) that so long as it is a commandment, it could be performed by men and women. Everyone is free to follow or reject this commandment.

The 'fallen' state of love for the neighbour creates the passion of self-love [φιλαυτία] which keeps man away from loving God and his brothers. It is noteworthy here that Maximus speaks neither of selfishness nor hypocrisy, nor of arrogance or conceit, but of the catastrophic aspect of our ego which can move us away from heaven. In fact, love is just the beginning of passions; it is something that begins from the intellect as thought, desire or opinion and creates the corresponding passions. Every passion and every man who falls in it are the outcome of the one who created the man's fall, i.e., the devil. As long as human intellect attempts to approach the love of God, Satan intervenes, to control us internally, elevating earthly desires.<sup>36</sup>

This catastrophic aspect of love, *philautia*, keeps the mind attached to material life, unable to know God and, thus, to reach *theōsis*. This "mother of the passions", as he calls self-love,<sup>37</sup> which contains all the other passions, is the irrational love for the body.<sup>38</sup> However, Maximus in his theology does not separate the body from the soul, as this separation would have nothing to do with the meaning of self-love since it seems

---

ἐλευθεροῦται,") ibid., PG 90, 965C. Moreover, he connects *apatheia* not only with love but also with prayer. The undistracted prayer is the first step to be within the realm of apathy (ibid., 1013 B, 984 B).

<sup>35</sup> "Why did the Lord command [this; i.e. to love your enemies]? So that He might free you from hate, sadness, anger, and grudges, and might grant you the greatest possession of all, perfect love, which is impossible to possess except by the one who loves all men equally in imitation of God," Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Love*, PG 90, 973 A.

<sup>36</sup> Archimandrite Emilianos Simonopetritis, *About Love: Interpretation on Saint Maximus [Περί Αγάπης: Ερμηνεία στον Άγιο Μάξιμο]* (Athens: Indiktos, 2015), 102.

<sup>37</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Letter 2: On Love*, PG 91, 397 D.

<sup>38</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Love*, PG 90, 985 C.

to be more a result of the soul itself, rather than a bodily fruit. Maybe this explains the fact that Maximus does not suggest a virtue as a counterpoint for self-love. The only antidote, he claims, is the power of love and self-mastery.<sup>39</sup>

Taking into consideration all the above aspects of love (as a commandment, our disposition of love, love for God and for the others), we arrive at the following conclusion: Maximus connects love itself with our ascension to God; that is, to deification.<sup>40</sup> Love unites us with God and makes us gods through participation in His divine love, through purification from passions and desires for earthly objects. Then, the more we ascend to God, the more we love Him and others. This requires a deifying power of love, which lies in the mystery of love and its glorified manifestation.<sup>41</sup>

## 2. The relationship between Maximian love and *apatheia* [ἀπάθεια]

As it has been already mentioned, Christianity and, more particularly, early Christianity, shared several Neoplatonic concepts. Maximus followed the same way with his predecessors; he borrowed Greek ideas to make passages from the Scripture more comprehensible to the believers of the new faith.<sup>42</sup> One of the Ancient Greek ideas that he incorporated into his theology was the notion of ‘*apatheia*’ [ἀπάθεια]. Etymologically speaking, ‘*apatheia*’ derives from the prefix *a-* (which implies ‘without’) and the noun *pathos* [πάθος] which

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., PG 90, 1029 B, and in *Letter 2: On Love*, PG 91, 396 B.

<sup>40</sup> The eschatological approach of love by Maximus is quite obvious in this extract: “Love is [...] in a definition: the inward universal relationship to the first good connected with the universal purpose of our natural kind [...] there is nothing that can make the human being who loves God ascend any higher”, Maximus the Confessor, *Letter 2: On Love*, PG 91, 401 C.

<sup>41</sup> “The mystery of love [is that] out of human beings [it] makes us gods”, *ibid.*, PG 91, 393 B.

<sup>42</sup> The process of the entry of philosophical ideas into the Christian discourse are described by Andrew J. Summerson as ‘exegetical discernment’. Andrew J. Summerson, *Divine Scripture and Human Emotion in Maximus the Confessor: Exegesis of the Human Heart* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 17.

means ‘passion’.<sup>43</sup> This notion has preoccupied the mind of several Stoic thinkers, for whom the word ‘apatheia’ had not much to do with the ‘absence of passion’; instead, it referred to the interstice between between ‘*empathia*’ [ἐμπάθεια] and ‘*eupatheia*’ [εὐπάθεια].<sup>44</sup> It is quite uncertain if Maximus’s approach to *apatheia* derives directly from the Stoics. One could assume that Maximus himself had indirectly adopted this definition by studying other Christian authors, such as Evagrius Ponticus.<sup>45</sup> From Evagrius, Maximus seems to get the three stages of spiritual life: *praktikê* [πρακτικὴ], *physikê* [φυσικὴ], and *theologia* [θεολογία]. The first stage corresponds to the ascetic struggle against passions (including desires and the so-called *logismoi*, i.e. a series of thoughts that impedes the transition to the next stage), and the second is related to the purification of the mind in order to become God (in the

---

<sup>43</sup> When researchers on Maximus refer to the notion of *apatheia*, quite often they convey ‘dispassion’, ‘impassibility’, ‘detachment’, ‘apathy’. In my view, the English word that best describes the meaning of the Greek word *apatheia* is ‘equanimity’ rather than ‘apathy’. While ‘apathy’ has a distinctly negative connotation, ‘equanimity’ refers to the golden mean between ‘*empathia*’ (intense aggression) [ἐμπάθεια] and ‘*eupatheia*’ (intense and uncontrolled passivity) [εὐπάθεια] according to the Stoics. The usual misreading of *apatheia* is that of loss of feeling or total disengagement from the world. However, for the Stoics, it seemed to be the best rational response to the world and its external circumstances that cannot be controlled. See: Michael Fournier, “Seneca on Platonic *Apatheia*,” *Classica et Mediaevalia* 60 (2009): 218.

<sup>44</sup> “En mettant au premier plan cette restauration de la gnose et de l’*apatheia*, le Confesseur est bien dans la plus authentique tradition hellénique : celle de ce «néo-platonisme» où viennent se rencontrer l’intellectualisme platonicien et les doctrines stoïciennes de la domination de l’homme sur la nature et de la maîtrise sur ses passions,” I.H.Dalmaï, “La doctrine ascétique de S. Maxime le Confesseur d’après le Liber Asceticus,” *Irenikon* XXVI (Belgique, 1953): 22.

<sup>45</sup> It seems that Maximus in his work *Ambigua 10* [Περὶ διαφόρων ἀποριῶν τῶν ἁγίων Διονυσίου καὶ Γρηγορίου πρὸς Θωμάν τον Ἠγιασμένον] (PG 91, 277C, 1031-1418), employed verbatim quotations from Nemesius of Emesa’s *De natura hominis* (*On the Nature of Man*) where the latter discusses the Stoic perception of passions and in particular the passionate part of the soul, Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 44.

last stage).<sup>46</sup> In Maximus' thought, his ascetic life is echoed in the way he interprets the term *apatheia*. *He employs this term using exegesis* to light on the meaning of several difficult scriptural passages. *Apatheia* is a form of grace, which leads to the revelation of God.<sup>47</sup>

In his work *Ad Thalassium* [Προς Θαλάσσιον τον ὀσιώτατον πρεσβύτερον και ἡγούμενον Περί Διαφόρων ἀπόρων τῆς θείας Γραφῆς] an abbot, named Thalassius, poses several questions about passions and their origins.<sup>48</sup> Herein, Maximus builds his theological discourse by combining philosophical doctrines (Neoplatonism) with biblical exegesis to highlight the importance of *apatheia*.<sup>49</sup> By starting with the apophatic way of defining 'evil' as deficiency or failure [ἔλλειψις], he moves to the interpretation of *Genesis*, making references to Adam's failure to exercise his natural powers, as a result of the influence by the 'evil one' [τοῦ πονηροῦ], i.e., another name of Satan according to Orthodoxy.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 35-36.

<sup>47</sup> "Such a man will see the salvation of God, the one who is pure of heart, with this heart, through virtues and pious thoughts he will see God at the end of his struggles, for it is written, "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God." For, having exchanged their struggles for virtue with the grace of *apatheia*, nothing greater reveals God for those who possess this grace." Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium*, PG 90, .

<sup>48</sup> This theological treatise and the *Ascetic Life* were written by Maximus based on the classical tradition of *scholia*. This means that either they had a form of question-answer (*erōtapokriseis* in Greek) between the spiritual father and his disciples, a method which belonged to the tradition of monastic catechesis, or they had comments on passages from the Scriptures or from the Fathers (this was the case of *Ambigua*). A striking exception was his work *Mystagogy* which was written with the form of commentaries, Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 20-21.

<sup>49</sup> Maximus' exegetical method seems to create a wholistic approach of the world, where he alternates philosophical doctrines with biblical revelation, Andrew J. Summerson, *Divine Scripture and Human Emotion in Maximus the Confessor: Exegesis of the Human Heart* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 40.

<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere in *Ad Thalassium* Maximus gives the eschatological aspect of the natural power that each created being has. This is the movement to its proper end, i.e., God, Maximus the Confessor, PG 91.

While this deficiency of ‘evil’ appears as important for the birth of passions, Maximus praises the ignorance of God [ἄγνοια περί Θεοῦ] as the main cause of humanity’s mistaken perception of the world.<sup>51</sup> By abandoning God’s quest for immaterial purity, and remaining attached to the sensual perception of the world, human beings divinise [την κτίσιν ἐθεοποίησεν] and love God’s creation instead of God Himself.<sup>52</sup> It is quite clear here that Maximus rejects pantheism in all of its forms. Man understands, loves and worships something because of its similar form to him (with the sense that we are all creatures of the sensual world).<sup>53</sup> In this respect, humanity identifies creation with God and interprets the material world in a carnal way instead of the spiritual one that is suggested by Maximus.

According to Maximus, this misinterpretation in the relationship between creation and God leads to a chain of reactions, which finally leads to the correlation between pleasure [ἡδονή] and pain [ὀδύνη]<sup>54</sup> and finally to self-love [φιλαυτία].<sup>55</sup> Humanity seems here to be a victim of this

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>52</sup> “And man’s own body, which has a natural propensity to consider creation to be God, loves creation because of its form and with all his zeal “worships the creature instead of the creator” through his dedication and concentration toward only the body,” *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> This mistaken perception by man is inherited as a result of man’s fall.

<sup>54</sup> Aristotle first spoke about this pair in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII, 8-15, and Book X, 1-5. Here Maximus follows the Church Fathers by considering ‘pleasure’ as something against nature [παρά φύσιν] while ‘pain’, as given by God to humans, as balanced power in order to protect them from their personal catastrophe, Nicholaos Matsoukas, *World, Man, Communion according to Maximus the Confessor* [Κόσμος, Άνθρωπος, Κοινωνία κατά τον Μάξιμο τον Ομολογητή] (Athens: Grigoris, 1980), 115-116. In particular, for Maximus ‘pleasure’ is an unfair power which separates reason from its cohesive processes, *ibid.*, PG 90, 628D.

<sup>55</sup> “Inasmuch as he sated himself with sensual pleasure, in the same measure, he attached himself to the desire of self-love wrought by it; inasmuch as he carefully guarded his desire, in the same measure he guarded pleasure, it being the beginning and end of self-love,” *ibid.* For a thorough analysis of pleasure and pain in Maximus’ work, see Christoph Schönborn, “Plaisir et douleur dans l’analyse de S. Maxime, d’après les Quaestiones Ad Thalassium,” in *Maximus Confessor: Actes du Symposium*



dialectical juxtaposition between pleasure and pain, which leads to the detachment from God, and consequently to the detachment from the idea of man created according to God's own image and likeness.<sup>56</sup> However, the goal for humanity should remain the same: to have knowledge of the Creator, rather than of the creation.

This idea possibly derives from Maximus' thoughts on the relationships between the divine and the earthly existence of men and women. Maximus considers the unity of body and soul. This refers to a certain passage in the Book of *Genesis*, which speaks about communion in both God and human, through God's image and likeness.<sup>57</sup> Human being, for Maximus, as undivided being (under the view of male/female division),<sup>58</sup> has potentially the power to unite all the other divisions in the universe and reach to *theōsis*.<sup>59</sup> In *Ambigua 41*, he elaborates with more detail on the five divisions of being (uncreated and created nature, mind and senses, heaven and earth, paradise and inhabited world, male and female), and the

---

sur Maxime le Confesseur (Fribourg, 2-5 septembre 1980), eds. Felix Heinzer et Christoph Schönborn, *Paradosis- Etudes littérature et de théologie anciennes* (Saint-Paul Fribourg Suisse: Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse): 273-284.

<sup>56</sup> It seems that for Maximus man as 'person' is disintegrated by pleasure and pain. On the contrary, Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948) in *Essaie d' autobiographie spirituelle* claimed that the 'person' does not lose its integrity due to pleasure and pain, Nikolai Berdyaev, *Essaie d' autobiographie spirituelle* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1992), 66, 78.

<sup>57</sup> *Genesis*, 1, 26: "God said: let us make man in our image, after our likeness"; *Genesis* 2, 7: "man became as a living being", 1, 27: "so God created man in His own image, male and female He created them."

<sup>58</sup> It has been argued that Maximus' position about the double creation of the human person (transcendence of sexual difference while keeping the sexual duality) should be attributed to Gregory's of Nyssa influence, Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 27.

<sup>59</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua 41*, PG 91, 1305 B; Panayotis Christou, "Maximos Confessor: On the Infinity of Man," in Maximus Confessor: Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur (Fribourg, 2-5 septembre 1980), eds. Felix Heinzer et Christoph Schönborn, *Paradosis- Etudes littérature et de théologie anciennes* (Saint-Paul Fribourg Suisse: Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse): 262.

way that man is related to each of them.<sup>60</sup> It should be clarified here that the division of the sexes is integrated by Maximus into the belief of the double creation: the transcendent creation (considered as the original) where there are no sexual differences, and the embracing creation where sexual division is present.<sup>61</sup> Maximus concludes that the human being is able not only to participate in each of the extremes (uncreated and created nature, mind and senses, heaven and earth, paradise and inhabited world, male and female), but most importantly to reconcile them.<sup>62</sup> However, it is only through Christ's Incarnation that man can overcome all the above divisions as Christ did: "Thus he divinely recapitulates the universe in himself, showing that the whole creation exists as one, like another human being."<sup>63</sup> In this way, Maximus places Christ in the centre of his theology to show that Himself and man are paradigms of one another.<sup>64</sup>

This position brings Maximus back to *apatheia*, which suggests that human beings must first know the Creator and then His creations. In particular, he speaks of four types of *apatheia*: the total abstention of evil actions, the total rejection of evil thoughts, the total immobility of desire regarding passions, the total purification of the simple representation of the passions."<sup>65</sup> It seems that these types are gradations in the

---

<sup>60</sup> For each of these divisions Maximus suggests a different way of reconciliation. So, for the first division, only love unites uncreated and created nature, while with the perception of *logoi* the human being achieves to bring together the intelligible and the sensible. The third division is abolished through the imitation of angelic life, while paradise and *oikoumenê* [οἰκουμένη] are united through the imitation of Saints' living, Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 41, PG 91, 1305 A-D.

<sup>61</sup> Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 70.

<sup>62</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 41, PG 91, 1305 B.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, PG 91, 1315 A.

<sup>64</sup> "God is humanized to man through love for mankind, so much is man able to be deified to God through love," Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 10, PG 91, 1113 B; Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor*, eds. Gillian Clark and Andrew Louth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 65, 218.

<sup>65</sup> "Πρώτη γάρ ἐστὶν ἀπάθεια ἢ παντελῆς ἀποχὴ τῶν κατ' ἐνέργειαν κακῶν, ἐν τοῖς εἰσαγομένοις θεωρουμένη, δευτέρα δὲ ἡ παντελῆς κατὰ διάνοιαν περὶ τὴν τῶν κακῶν συγκατάθεσιν ἀποβολὴ λογισμῶν, ἐν τοῖς

ascendance to God, a kind of virtue and habitual [καθ' ἕξι] state of the soul.<sup>66</sup> This means that *apatheia* for Maximus is related to *theōsis* and to love (as a pathway to *theōsis*). As he writes, “[...] becoming like God through *theōsis*, so that man might examine God’s creation with God’s help, without harming his freedom so that man might appropriate knowledge of these things as God does, not as man.”<sup>67</sup> Through this way, Maximus approaches divinization from the aspect of asceticism where God becomes an exegete for man to understand the material world.<sup>68</sup>

According to Maximus, his ultimate virtue, i.e., *apatheia*, is related to these virtues: temperance, differentiation, faith, knowledge, and love. Focusing here on love, *apatheia* is a state of emotional redemption for human beings. We have to keep in mind that for Maximus, love is not only the core of Christianity but mainly an *ascesis*.<sup>69</sup> He mostly uses the Greek word *agapē* [ἀγάπη] when he speaks of love. However, quite often he employs the word *erōs* [ἔρω] as a synonym of *agapē*.<sup>70</sup> Both words are employed by Maximus to express the

---

μετὰ λόγου τὴν ἀρετὴν μειοῦσι γινομένη, τρίτη ἢ κατ’ ἐπιθυμίαν περὶ τὰ πάθη παντελῆς ἀκίνησις ἐν τοῖς διὰ τῶν σχημάτων τοὺς λόγους νοητῶς θεωμένοις τῶν ὀρωμένων, τετάρτη ἀπάθεια ἢ καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς ψιλῆς τῶν παθῶν φαντασίας παντελῆς κάθαρσις, ἐν τοῖς διὰ γνώσεως καὶ θεωρίας καθαρὸν καὶ διειδῆς ἔσοπτρον τοῦ θεοῦ ποιησαμένοις τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν συνισταμένη.” *ibid.* 55; In the *Four Centuries on Love* (PG 90, 968B), Maximus considers *apatheia* as the synthesis between ethics and anthropology: “a peaceful condition of soul according to which soul becomes stiff to any kind of evil.”

<sup>66</sup> Paul Blowers, “The Gentiles of the Soul: Maximus the Confessor on the Substructure and Transformation of the Human Person,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4, 1 (1996): 77.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Maximus’ exegetical method provides a holistic view of the world; it alternates philosophical doctrines with biblical revelation. See: Andrew J. Summerson, *Divine Scripture and Human Emotion in Maximus the Confessor: Exegesis of the Human Heart* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 46-47.

<sup>69</sup> Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 38.

<sup>70</sup> It should be clarified that *eros* in Maximus’ theology does not mean desire in a general sense, but Christian *eros*, i.e., cultivation of some kind of virtue, Andrew J. Summerson, *Divine Scripture and Human Emotion in*

impulse of the Creation toward its perfection by moving in two directions: love for God and love for man.<sup>71</sup>

Concerning the second direction, Maximus uses the Greek word *philanthropia* [φιλανθρωπία] (*love for human beings*). In the classical world, this virtue was considered a characteristic of God, transmigrated to mortals.<sup>72</sup> In general, the Hellenistic perception of God's *philanthropia*, as expressed by Plato and the Stoics, lies in the providential care of God himself about the entire cosmos. This pagan perception of *philanthropia* contradicts the Christian *philanthropia*, which reached its sublime degree with Christ's Incarnation, i.e., the supreme expression of God's providence and love for humanity as a whole. While early Christian authors (such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen) spoke of this quality of God, which was incarnated in the Scripture as Divine Logos and in Christ's Incarnation, theological schools of thought in the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> century became more concrete by connecting God's love for humanity with His *philanthropia*.<sup>73</sup>

Maximus follows in general this tendency in his work by focusing, however, on the suffering and death of Christ on the Cross, as the ultimate expression of God's *philanthropia* [φιλανθρωπία]. In *Epistle 11* he connects *philanthropia* with divine love, which was realised through the Incarnation of Christ.<sup>74</sup> Herein, the philosopher integrates *philanthropia* and love for the neighbour as the only way through which human beings can reach God 'in likeness'. Mutual love was initially

---

*Maximus the Confessor: Exegesis of the Human Heart* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 110, 117.

<sup>71</sup> "The divine as being eros and agape, is moved, while as an object of eros and agape, it moves towards itself those who are capable of receiving eros and agape. To state it clearer, it is moved with the aim of causing an inward relation of eros and agape in those who are capable of receiving this activity and moves as naturally attracting the desire of those who are moved for this reason", Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* Io 23; PG 91, 1260C.

<sup>72</sup> Catherine Osborne, *Eros Unveiled* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 164-200.

<sup>73</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in *Divine Names* (592A) presents the ecstatic eros of God to the humanity as the main characteristic of his divine *philanthropia*.

<sup>74</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Epistle 11*, PG 91, 453 B-C.

expressed by Christ towards humanity. The same love should be expressed between human beings. More precisely, Maximus speaks of Christ's philanthropic habitude. He refers to a repetitive action [κατά την φιλόανθρωπον ἔξιν], which human beings must express towards their fellow neighbours.<sup>75</sup> This supreme virtue liberates human beings from passions, reaching the stage of *apatheia*.<sup>76</sup> In Maximus' work, this Christological character of *philanthropia* (which leads to *apatheia*) constitutes a divine type of love, through which Christ encourages human beings to follow his example. In addition, Christ incites the same desire (for philanthropia) in others, prompting men and women to follow his path. Moreover, due to God's *philanthropia*, Christ's pain on Cross and, consequently, his death, grants human beings a new life, detached from passions and his vices. This points to a perfect love, which inspires and guides human beings so that they can love each other.

What Maximus conveys here is that the mimetic attitude of human beings towards the nature of God leads them to an equal distribution of love directed towards their fellows. To the question of why love for God and simultaneous love for human beings are so salient, Maximus responds by arguing that these two loving commands, to which all laws, prophets and angels are based, give with this a supra-dimensional aspect of the concept of love. Therefore, Maximus' works suggest to all Christians a pathway towards deification, through love: just as Christ loved and died for Man, so every man should be willing even to die for his fellow man.

Concerning the relationship between love and *apatheia*, it seems that knowledge [γνώσις], as an extension of our intellect,

---

<sup>75</sup> For the connection between ἔξις (habitude) and love in Maximus, see Philipp Gabriel Renczes, *Agir de Dieu et Liberté de l'Homme: Recherches sur l'anthropologie théologique de saint Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2003), 311-313.

<sup>76</sup> "For this reason, the Logos of God, who is fully divine by nature became fully human, is composed of an intellectual soul and a passible body, just like us, only without sin. His birth from a woman within time was not preconditioned in any way by the pleasure derived from the transgression, but, in his love for mankind, he willingly appropriated the pain that is the end of human nature, the pain resulting from unrighteous pleasure." Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium*, PG 90-91.

plays a salient role in reaching divine love. The human person who is in a state of knowledge of God does not assent to anything false, and subsequently, the evaluations upon which the *pathē* [πάθη] depend seem to be false. For Maximus knowledge has mainly a mystic meaning, i.e., it means experience which aims at the deification of human life.<sup>77</sup> According to this mystical perception, the main purpose of human intellect is to turn us to God, and that is its physical trait. Its non-physical characteristic, which is the root cause of evil, is the sensual knowledge and experience of things. He/she, who truly loves God, is a person whose worship is not interrupted; he/she controls his/her intellect. Human beings really love God when their intellect can entangle both body and soul within this love, which becomes ecstatic.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, knowledge gives birth to the love of God, while human beings, through knowledge, defy the Intellect, and point to the Lord.<sup>79</sup> The intellect then returns to the original Intellect, to God, because it is his familiar and he is God's own. This ascent of the intellect is an outpouring of the God of man because the spirit of man is the man who ascends to God. Thus, he is invaded by himself in his everyday life, and constantly approaches God temporally and eschatologically.

Another aspect of intellect that Maximus involves in his analysis of passions is contempt [περιφρόνησις], which can heal the passions. As he says "the active contempt for visible phenomena exercised by the true Christian gnostic must extend

---

<sup>77</sup> Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 25.

<sup>78</sup> As Maximus says in the *Fourth Century on Love* (II, 70): "If, as St. Paul says, Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Ephesians 3:17), and all the treasures of wisdom and spiritual knowledge are hidden in him (Colossians 2:3), then all the treasures of wisdom and spiritual knowledge are hidden in our hearts. They are revealed to the heart in proportion to our purification by means of the commandments". For the 'ecstatic love' in Maximus and its correlation to Dionysius the Areopagite, see Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 42.

<sup>79</sup> Knowledge of God by man and disposition of love are connected in *The Four Centuries on Love* (1:1): "Love is a good disposition of the soul by which one prefers nothing to the knowledge of God", Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Love* (1:1), PG

even [to] his own body.’<sup>80</sup> ‘Contempt’ [περιφρονῶ] in ancient Greek means changing, modifying the intellect, and simultaneously going out of its former thinking.<sup>81</sup> Although it has been argued that this is an example of “excessive spiritualization”,<sup>82</sup> I think that at this point Maximus introduces a less anxious way of life by not focusing on the fear that there is a passion that needs to be dealt with. Instead, he seems to highlight the free energy of the soul, which, precisely because it is rotated within it, finds more easily any passion. Therefore, the cleansing of the human soul is not only meant in a negative way (cleansing of the passions) but also positively, that is, the pure purification of the soul. That is, the practical virtue achieved through imitation of the virtues of Christ.<sup>83</sup>

From the above, it follows that knowledge of God is based on mystical theology, since mystical theology itself refers to the personal relationship between God and human, and is founded on empirical experience through which knowledge is obtained. However, this particular knowledge seems to have another quality, so long as it stems from direct supervision, while it is not the result of a reasoning process. Moreover, it seems that it is not a result of human wisdom, that is, a product of mental processing and philosophical thought, but it goes beyond mind and intellect.<sup>84</sup> According to Maximus, the mystical experience

<sup>80</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Love*, 1.6., PG 90

<sup>81</sup> In Aristophanes’ *Clouds* (225, 1503) [Νεφέλαι] *periphronô* [περιφρονῶ] means I examine something thoroughly. The negative connotation of contempt is found in Plato’s *Axiochus* [Ἀξιόχος] 372B.

<sup>82</sup> Polycarp Sherwood, “Exposition and Use of Scripture in St Maximus as manifest in the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*,” *OCP* 24 (1958): 207.

<sup>83</sup> “It is for this reason that the Savior says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8): for he is hidden in the hearts of those who believe in him. They shall see him and the riches that are in him when they have purified themselves through love and self-control; and the greater their purity, the more they will See”, Maximus the Confessor, *Fourth Century on Love*, II. 72.

<sup>84</sup> Philip McCosker, “*Enhypostasia Mystica*: Contributions from Mystical Christology for a Tired Debate in Historical and Systematic Theology,” in *Christian Mysticism and Incarnational Theology: Between Transcendence and Immanence*, eds. Louise Nelstrop and Simon D. Podmore (U.K.: Ashgate, 2013), 69-70.

is revealed to human beings only by divine wisdom and is not a method of exploring philosophical-theological problems. This means that God with His own initiative reveals part of his infinite glory.<sup>85</sup>

There is a theoretical and a practical mystical way, which leads man towards God's divine love. The former is consistent with monastic life; it refers to a life of reading, whereby reading means the cultivation of spiritual meanings, the human effort of knowledge and the recognition of God. Essentially, the theoretical life is a life absolutely mystical because it presupposes divine energy. The practical way concerns the Lord's "practice of commandments", namely the appropriation of divine promise.<sup>86</sup> On a practical level, observance of His commandments has the following moral consequence: human beings in everyday life live as God lives and expresses Himself. However, the practical way is not sufficient for Maximus, for two reasons: first, it frees the intellect only from the lack of temperance and hatred; second, reason is what incites "fear of God" and the good hope that may be necessary for the salvation of man. Nevertheless, it does not lead to divine love.

Maximus advances the theoretical way of life not only because unites intellect with God. This union is empirical knowledge, that is, an understanding of God, which is an integral part of the existence of men and women. This type of union could be traced to Maximus' theological position for the 'unconfused union' in Christ, first proclaimed by the Council of Chalcedon (451). To explain further his position, Maximus employs the metaphor of "whole and parts" in chapters one and two of his *Mystagogy*, particularly when he speaks of the cosmic unity between spirit and matter.<sup>87</sup> A whole, even

---

<sup>85</sup> Frederick D. Aquino, "Maximus the Confessor" in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, eds. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 104-120.

<sup>86</sup> Archimandrite Emilianos Simonopetritis, *About Love: Interpretation on Saint Maximus* [Περί Αγάπης: Ερμηνεία στον Άγιο Μάξιμο] (Athens: Indiktos, 2015), 68.

<sup>87</sup> "Once again, there is but one world and it is not divided by its parts. On the contrary, it encloses the differences of the parts arising from their natural properties by their relationship to what is one and indivisible in



though it consists of parts, is not divided by them. On the other hand, a whole encloses the differences of its parts within itself, by encircling them due to the relationship that parts bear to the whole. The parts that Maximus refers to are the spiritual and matter parts, which not only make up the whole but also constitute individually the whole in an unconfused way.

It follows that each of the parts is keeping its wholeness by filling the whole, while the whole in turn fills wholly each part. This theory between whole and parts is further advanced by Maximus at the beginning of the second chapter of his *Mystagogy*, where he connects the relationship between them with the notion of *hypostasis*.<sup>88</sup> It seems that Maximus prioritises the whole over the parts, as he explains not only in his *Mystagogy* (“the parts are brought forth from the whole”)<sup>89</sup> but also in the *Theological and Economic Centuries*, where he speaks of God as the unity of the whole, undivided, while connected to the three hypostases.<sup>90</sup> However, in the realm of Trinitarian theology, as discussed in the second chapter of his *Mystagogy*, Maximus prioritises the parts over the whole; in Maximus’ thought, the parts hypostasise the whole. Without extending my analysis on God as a monad and a triad, or even on Christ as a whole, constituted from divinity and humanity,<sup>91</sup> I will attempt to clarify that for Maximus divine nature exists with hypostatic manners in the hypostases and as hypostases.

---

itself. Moreover, it shows that both [the spiritual and material parts] are the same thing with it and alternately with each other in an unconfused way and that the whole of one enters into the whole of the other, and both fill the same whole as parts fill a unit and, in this way, the parts are uniformly and entirely filled as a whole”, Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy* 2, PG 91.669B9-14.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., PG 91.668C10-69A3.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., PG 91.665B3.

<sup>90</sup> “For the divinity is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the divinity is in Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” Maximus the Confessor, *Theological and Economic Centuries*, PG 90.1125A5-7.

<sup>91</sup> Concerning the relationship between Christ’s two different natures and hypostasis Maximus states the following: “[B]y reason of the essential communion of the parts from which he is composed, united naturally to the Father and to the Mother, he is showing preserving the difference of the parts from which he is composed,” Maximus the Confessor, *Epistle 15*, PG 91.556A1-B10.

The above relationship between whole and parts is expressed by Maximus also when he refers to the hierarchy of the Church under the three degrees of the priesthood: the deacon, the priest and the bishop.<sup>92</sup> Deacons are those who “anoint the intellect”; their actual role is to assist our intellect to detach itself from worldly affairs, while the priests belong to those who acquire the knowledge of beings; the priest knows that beings spring from God; he is aware of the relationship between beings and the economy of God, i.e., the divine economy. Finally, the bishop acquires the perfect knowledge and is drowned with the holy myrrh of God’s revelation.

### 3. Seeking perfection in love

By following Maximus’ teachings, the perfect man sees behind the man and the woman, he sees the image of God, behind the differences between the slave and the free, the Greek and the barbarian, since they all eventually become God’s children.<sup>93</sup> Maximus begins the thirteenth chapter of *The Four Centuries on Love* with the following phrase: “The perfect [man] in love reaches the edge of apatheia”, because he wants to open in front of our eyes all the breadth of love, embracing the wholeness of human being. This breadth is related to the prerequisites that are needed to have love. One condition, as already mentioned, is *apatheia*.<sup>94</sup> No one can love unless he has not detached his intellect from earthly desires and consequently has not reached the stage of perfect *apatheia*

---

<sup>92</sup> “He who anoints his mind for the sacred contests and drives bad thoughts from it (ὁ πρὸς τοὺς ἱεροὺς ἀγῶνας ἀλείφων τὸν νοῦν καὶ τοὺς ἐμπαθεῖς λογισμοὺς ἀπελαύνων ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ) has the characteristics of a deacon (διακόνου λόγον ἐπέχει); of a priest, however, if he illuminates it with knowledge of beings and utterly destroys counterfeit knowledge (ὁ εἰς τὴν γνῶσιν τῶν ὄντων φωτίζων καὶ τὴν ψευδώνυμον γνῶσιν ἐξαφανίζων); and of a bishop, finally, if he perfects it with the sacred myrrh of knowledge of the worshipful and Holy Trinity (ὁ τῷ ἁγίῳ μύρῳ τελειῶν τῆς γνώσεως τῆς προσκυνητῆς καὶ ἁγίας Τριάδος),” Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Love*, 2:21, PG 90,

<sup>93</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Love*, PG 90, 993 A.

<sup>94</sup> “Ἀγάπη μὲν τίκτει ἀπάθεια”, Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Love*, PG 90, 961.

[τελεία ἀπάθεια].<sup>95</sup> Perfect *apatheia*, therefore, is the complete cleansing of the heart and, above all, when a man does not see any difference between what is his own and what belongs to others.

In addition, *apatheia* extends to every being and creature of God. The perfect man in love understands that all God's creatures are united to Him.<sup>96</sup> A human being in perfect love treats both the slave and the free man. He can also live within a state of freedom, that is *apatheia*, with the free and with the slave, with the Greek and the Jew, with the male and the female. He no longer sees all of them as separate beings, but as members of Christ, because everything and in all is Christ.<sup>97</sup> This does not imply that Christ is within all, but that all these are Christ since all of them find their identity and their substance only in the community of the body of Christ.<sup>98</sup>

The perfect man, therefore, is in control of his passions by managing them through his daily practice [ἄσκησις], and eventually by defeating them with *apatheia*. So, Maximus speaks of a new man, who reminds Adam before the Fall, and loves God because he has again become His image, regaining what he has lost.<sup>99</sup> Part of this deification is wisdom, which is given as a gift from the Holy Spirit to those who deserve deification and who are distinguished for characteristics that are consistent with the qualities of the deity.

It is worth mentioning that for Maximus deification presupposes the transfiguration of body and soul through the presence of the Spirit. As he says in the *First Century on Theology*: “Circumcision of the heart in the spirit signifies the utter stripping away from the senses and the intellect of their

<sup>95</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium*, PG 90, 628A.

<sup>96</sup> Archimandrite Emilianos Simonpétritis, *About Love: Interpretation on Saint Maximus* [Περί Αγάπης: Ερμηνεία στον Άγιο Μάξιμο] (Athens: Indiktos, 2015), 155-156.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>98</sup> Lossky sees in this communion the “wholesome diversity of love”, Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 69.

<sup>99</sup> Archimandrite Emilianos Simonpétritis, *About Love: Interpretation on Saint Maximus* [Περί Αγάπης: Ερμηνεία στον Άγιο Μάξιμο] (Athens: Indiktos, 2015), 158.

natural activities connected with sensible and intelligible things. This stripping away is accomplished by the Spirit's immediate presence, which completely transfigures body and soul and makes them more divine.''<sup>100</sup> The message he attempts to convey in this passage is that body and soul are potentially divine. Therefore, with the inspiration by the Spirit, they reach to *theōsis*. After all, transfiguration (in Orthodoxy) is the destiny of every creation, i.e., the entire universe will be transfigured with the glory of God.<sup>101</sup>

Maximus also introduces another aspect of the love for God. He claims that man, to love God, must also be a theologian with the sense that he needs to follow also the theoretical part of monasticism.<sup>102</sup> With the assistance of *apatheia* and with the grace of God, man understands his unity in one nature. So, man should understand the unity of human nature and that God created them to be united with Him. As soon as man will understand and reach the unity of human nature, then he will understand the unity that lies in divinity. In this respect, love in Maximus orientates eschatologically man 'in likeness' [καθ' ὁμοίωσιν].

Maximus completes his thought by referring to the ultimate union with God achieved through the coupling of practice with knowledge, i.e., the practical and theoretical path. Perfection and the power of man are a combination of his constant struggle through practice, unceasing prayer [ἀδιάλειπτος προσευχή] and theory through the revelation of God and the penetration of the intellect into divine mysteries.<sup>103</sup> Maximus speaks of two types of pure prayer, both mystic: the first is engendered by the fear of God and the sign of its achievement is that the intellect prays as the God is there during the prayer.

---

<sup>100</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *First Century on Theology*, II. 46.

<sup>101</sup> The Transfiguration of Christ in the Orthodox spiritual tradition symbolizes the transfiguration of all humanity, Allyne Smith, *Philokalia : the Eastern Christian spiritual texts : annotated & explained*, trans. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (U.S.A.: SkyLight Illuminations, 2006), 63.

<sup>102</sup> Archimandrite Emilianos Simonpētritis, *About Love: Interpretation on Saint Maximus [Περί Αγάπης: Ερμηνεία στον Άγιο Μάξιμο]* (Athens: Indiktos, 2015), 24-27.

<sup>103</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Centuries on Love*, PG 90, II.61.

While, in the second kind of prayer, the intellect is longing for God's love and is captured by all His qualities.<sup>104</sup> Without explaining which kind of prayer could reach the highest state, we assume that this will be the second one due to the infusion of God into the intellect.

#### 4. Maximus the Confessor in Russia

Starting from the fact that “the Russian philosophical culture had no antiquity of its own”,<sup>105</sup> we may understand how important was the role of Patristics for the development of Russian philosophy and theology.<sup>106</sup> In this section, I will examine only the case of Maximus the Confessor with relation to Russian philosophy, and in particular with relation to Vladimir Soloviev. Maximus the Confessor, already from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, was known in Slavonic Church circles through the liturgical books and after the 14<sup>th</sup> century through the translations of his works (especially *The Ascetic Life* and his comments on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite). His writings (especially the *Disputations with Pyrrhus*) were used extensively by the Old Believers in their struggle against the Church in Russia. Several translations of Maximian theology followed during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, reaching their peak between 1853 - 1855, the period when Soloviev was born, when there was a tendency in Russia to translate the mystical

---

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., II.6.

<sup>105</sup> Aleksandr I. Abramov, “Philosophy at Theological Academies: Traditions of Platonism in Philosophizing at Russian Theological Academies,” trans. Stephen D. Shenfield, *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 42, no. 2 (2003): 24.

<sup>106</sup> For the development of the Russian religious and its relationship to Patristics it has been argued that Greek patristics should be considered, without any doubt, as the basis of different tendencies in Russian Orthodoxy, Arzhanukhin, Vladislav, “Greek Patristics in Russia of the 17th-18th Centuries”, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 44/1-4 (1999): 565-574.

works of Maximus: *Mystagogy, Theological and Economic Centuries*, and *Interpretation of the Lord's Prayer*.<sup>107</sup>

However, it seems that due to the positivist approach that prevailed in the Theological Academies of that time, Maximus' exegetical works seemed to be underestimated. The only remarkable study of Maximus' work was conducted at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by Aleksandr Brilliantov in his dissertation: *Vliyaniye vostochnogo bogosloviya na zapadnoye v proizvedeniyakh Ioanna Skota Erigeny* [*The Influence of Eastern Theology to the West in the Writings of John Scotus Erigena*] (1893). As for Theophan the Recluse (1815-1894), who translated *Philokalia* from Church Slavonic into Russian, it should be mentioned that in the third volume of *Philokalia* (published in 1889),<sup>108</sup> which contained Maximus' writings, he included only the most understandable parts of his ascetic writings by skipping the complex ones.<sup>109</sup> So, it seems that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian philosophers knew few things from Maximus' works, most probably in a simplified way. With the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Maximus in pre-revolutionary Russia was studied more extensively, especially by S. L. Epifanovich (1886-1918) who deeply and accurately managed to interpret the synthesis of the thought of Maximus, emphasising its features and discovering its origins in Byzantine theology.<sup>110</sup>

However, it is quite uncertain which sources Soloviev read to understand Maximus's teachings. Presumably, Soloviev had

---

<sup>107</sup> Gregory Benevich, "Maximus' Heritage in Russia and Ukraine," in Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 460.

<sup>108</sup> *Philokalia* is a Greek collection of writings by Eastern Church Fathers (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), which was published initially in Russia in 1782, while in 1793 was published as *Dobrotoliubie* (Lovers of the Good). The final version of *Philokalia* in Russian appeared after the 1880s, which may lead to the hypothesis that Soloviev read it. Under the hesychast tradition, these texts concerned the ways of reaching God with a mystic and ascetic way, Hughes, Michael, "Mysticism and Knowledge in the Philosophical thought of Ivan Kireevsky," *Mystics Quarterly* 30, no. 1/2 (2004): 16.

<sup>109</sup> Gregory Benevich, "Maximus' Heritage in Russia and Ukraine," in Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 462.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 464.

read *Philokalia* as it is confirmed by his article on *Mysticism* in the *Brockhaus and Ephron Encyclopedia*.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, taking into consideration that Soloviev was a Slavophile during the early period of his life, this implies and to some extent confirms his embracement of the Patristic and mystico-ascetical texts.<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, it is quite doubtful to which mysticism (Orthodox or Western) Soloviev belongs. In Orthodox mysticism, mystics experience the union with the divine (God) psychosomatically, while Catholic mystics experience the *unio mystica*, a kind of short (it may happen once in the whole life) mystical union or instant enlightenment, where the human being does not emerge from its human condition.<sup>113</sup>

However, according to B. P. Vysheslavitsev, “Vladimir Soloviev is a typical representative of Eastern Christianity, which he has adopted from the Greeks. This is expressed in his theology, his philosophy, his mysticism, and even in his attitude to other confessions: it is impossible to understand his practical attitude towards Catholicism unless we bear in mind that he is obsessed with the idea of total unity and the Orthodox idea of universal conciliation.”<sup>114</sup> This statement can

<sup>111</sup> *Filosofskiy slovar' Vladimira Solov'yeva*, Rostov n/D: Izd-vo Feniks, BBK 87.3 (4G), 1997, 289.

<sup>112</sup> In the first half of the 19th century in Russia, positivism and a recovery of monastic tradition were in a way united. The Slavophile movement embraced the writings from the Church Fathers, while Slavophiles tried to employ that tradition with an intellectual way, almost similar to the Western intellectual tradition, Teresa Obolevitch, *Faith and Science in Russian Religious Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 48-49.

<sup>113</sup> Konstantinos Tsopanis, *Mysticism in the religions of the world (Ancient Greece, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Shintoism)* [*Ο Μυστικισμός στις Θρησκείες του Κόσμου: Αρχαία Ελλάδα-Χριστιανισμός-Ισλαμισμός-Βουδισμός-Ζωροαστρισμός-Κουμφουκιανισμός-Σιντοϊσμός*] (Athens: Iamblichus, 2005), 50; For Soloviev's disconnected parts between mysticism and asceticism, see S.S.Khoruzhiy, “Vladimir Solov'ev i Mistiko-Asketicheskaya Traditsiya Pravoslaviya” [Vladimir Soloviev and the Mystical-Ascetic Tradition of Orthodoxy], *Bogoslovskiye trudy* 33 (1997): 233-245.

<sup>114</sup> Publichnoye zasedaniye Religiozno-filosofskoy akademii, posvyashchennoye pamyati Vladimira Solovyeva [Public meeting of the Religious and Philosophical Academy dedicated to the memory of Vladimir Soloviev], no. 2. (1926): 219-221.

be confirmed only indirectly, since Soloviev, as a mystic, never revealed his sources in his writings. The only thing that can be supported with certainty is that regarding Eastern Christianity and in particular the Christian Neoplatonists,<sup>115</sup> Soloviev analysed extensively their teachings in his entries in the *Brockhaus and Ephron Encyclopedia*.<sup>116</sup>

However, in his entry on Maximus the Confessor, the Russian thinker seems to be humble. He does not refer to Maximus' teachings (especially those concerning love as we might expect), but he prefers to stress Maximus' fight against Monothelitism.<sup>117</sup> In total, he refers three times to Maximus in the *Brockhaus and Ephron Encyclopedia*: the first reference is in Origen's article, where Soloviev sees Maximus as a theologian who imparted Origen's and Pseudo-Dionysius' teachings to the West;<sup>118</sup> the second concerns *Mysticism* where Maximus has the place of the interpreter of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite;<sup>119</sup> and the third speaks about Maximus' participation, together with the monk named Sophronius of Jerusalem (c.560-638), in the Council of 633 against Monothelitism.<sup>120</sup>

By all means, Soloviev through these references to Maximus attempted to underlie Maximus' contribution to the great theologian struggles of his time. Maybe the Russian philosopher saw in Maximus the last, and most true, representative of Patristics, who ended Christological disputes.<sup>121</sup> Taking into consideration these limitations,

---

<sup>115</sup> I mean here mainly Origen and the Greeks representatives of the Christian Neoplatonism between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.: Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor.

<sup>116</sup> For Origen, see *Filosofskiy slovar' Vladimira Solov'yeva*, Rostov n/D: Izd-vo Feniks, BBK 87.3 (4G), 1997, 332-343.

<sup>117</sup> Maximus suggested two aspects of the will, desire [θέλημα] and choice [ἄρρασις], in order to solve the problem with Monothelitism. Will as desire belongs to nature, while will as choice belongs to hypostasis. The two wills of Christ are wills at the level of desire; the choice remains the same, *ibid.*, 263-264.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>121</sup> Sergey Sergeyevich Averintsev, «Nasha filosofiya» (vostochnaya patristika IV–XI vv.) [Our Philosophy: Eastern Patristics of 4th-11th



together with Maximus' unique style of writing which seemed to speak to himself without any need to be understandable, I will attempt to draw parallels between Soloviev and Maximus regarding the active role of man, through love, in the fulfilment of God's plan.

## 5. Discussing Soloviev's ontology of Love with Maximian love

At the centre of Maximus' philosophy seems to be the problem of man and his high destiny as a part of God's divine plan. The core of this problem is the wholeness of humanity, which lies in the multitude of human souls of all times.<sup>122</sup> Adam was the first person who expressed this wholeness, unsuccessfully though due to his Fall. To restore Adam's fall, Christ came to save this whole, so that all sinners can be saved. For Maximus, this is a mystery that must be "honored with silence."<sup>123</sup> In the centre of the history of the world Maximus places the Incarnation of God and then the preparation for the deification of man. When a person accomplishes his task by overcoming in himself the split into spiritual and flesh (body and soul), even when he overcomes the opposite that lies between male and female, then the entire cosmos will be saved and creation will be reunited with the Creator. Hence, it could be argued that Maximus does not develop a theory of salvation; instead, he speaks about an active way of salvation, where man is acting as the saviour of all creation, as Christ acted as the saviour of man himself. He speaks of the behaviour of the Orthodox man, a behaviour that lies in the sphere of ascetic practice, i.e., the core of Orthodox religiosity. In this respect, the whole New Testament should be

---

century], in S.S. Averintsev, *Sobraniye Sochineniy: Sofiya-Logos Slovar'*, pod red. N.P. Averintsevoy i K.B. Sigova (Kiiv.: Dukh i litera, 2006), 610-639.

<sup>122</sup> Gregory of Nyssa in his work *On the Making of Man* (PG 44, 125-256), he refers to the full number of souls as the *pleroma*, or fullness, of humanity.

<sup>123</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Theological and Economic Centuries*, PG 90, 1172 D.

understood not only as a factual, moral and mystical event in the history of humankind but also as a symbol of the cosmic process.<sup>124</sup>

Soloviev's philosophical thought does not seem to abstain significantly from Maximus' synthesis of the wholeness of humanity and man's deification.<sup>125</sup> Through 'All-Unity' (*vseedinstvo*) Soloviev sought to combine everything, to embrace in a synthesis the opposing principles of the Russian spirit. In *Dukhovnyye osnovy zhizni* [*Spiritual Foundations of Life*] (1882-1884) he gives a basic outline of ascetic themes, such as the doctrine of prayer, the relation between sins and passions, and the process of spiritual ascent to union with God. In particular, Soloviev (in the same work) adds in All-Unity the "concept of justice" (*ponyatiye o spravedlivosti*), as he calls it.<sup>126</sup> According to this principle, man must descend to the world and engage in the work of building up a Christian society.<sup>127</sup> Under these terms, prayer, charity, and fasting are not considered as individual spiritual achievements, which could lead to his deification, but as three basic activities of personal religious life, which also constitute the basic actions for achieving a kind of "spiritual collectivism."<sup>128</sup> It is

---

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., PG 90, 1108 A-B.

<sup>125</sup> All the references to Soloviev's works are from: Vladimir Soloviev, *Sobranie Sochinenii (Collected Works)*, eds. S. M. Solov'ev and E. L. Radlov, 12 vols. (St.Petersburg: 1901-1903; reprint, Bruxelles: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1966). If translations are used, the details are given in the footnotes.

<sup>126</sup> *Dukhovnyye osnovy zhizni*, SS III: 335-345.

<sup>127</sup> "By this sense of justice, we stand not only for ourselves, but also for others, not only for our own, but also for someone else's right; and only then it really turns out that for us the very right - justice itself, matters. Standing up for your own even indisputable right may be wrong, for this can come from egoism and addiction, while standing up for *any* right, and in any case as your own, this is a matter of direct justice." Ibid., 340.

<sup>128</sup> This kind of spiritual collectivism is quite obvious when he speaks of the prayer. His position here presents a kind of balance between Maximus' ascetic approach of the inner concentration of man, gathering and striving himself to God, and to social activity as a Christian: "He who does not pray to God, does not help people and does not correct his nature by abstinence, is alien to any religion, even if he thought, spoke and wrote about religious subjects all his life." *ibid.*, 348; For the "spiritual

necessary to add here that in the last decade of his life, especially in his work *Tri razgovora o voyne, progresse i kontse vsemirnoy istorii* [*Three conversations about war, progress and the end of world history*] (1900), Soloviev seems to give to the concept of justice an eschatological dimension. Herein, he presents the Antichrist as being responsible for a new Christian society, totally transformed by him. In this regard, Soloviev completes his philosophy by proposing to us to a new spiritual age, full of spiritual and mystical experience.

During the last decade of his life (in the 1890s), Soloviev criticised the social passivity of Orthodoxy. In his essay *Ob upadke srednevekovogo mirosozertsaniya* (*On the Decline of the Medieval Worldview*), which he read at his speech in Moscow on 19<sup>th</sup> of October 1891, he calls into question the social positions of Christianity, as well as its role in public life in all periods of history, except from the early Christian period, before Constantine the Great (272-337).<sup>129</sup> His criticism against this problematic part of Orthodoxy, turns to be polemical, especially when he asserts that Christian asceticism is not more than an “one-sided individualism” or even sharply a “pseudo-Christian individualism”, which limits the work of salvation to one individual life.<sup>130</sup> Besides, for Soloviev, the meaning of Christianity is “to transform the life of mankind according to the truths of faith.”<sup>131</sup> Nonetheless, he acknowledges the social activity of Saint John Chrysostom (c.347-407) by referring implicitly to the theological concepts of the fourth century, when the emergence of Christianity in social life was taking its first steps.

Apart from the above polemic position, I think that this transformative strategy of our Christian experience (from internal to external and vice versa) that Soloviev introduces in his philosophy, is based on the Patristic thesis of the inseparable unity and identity of love to God, to neighbour and

---

collectivism” in Russian religious thought, see S.S.Khoruzhiy, “Vladimir Solov’ev i Mistiko-Asketicheskaya Traditsiya Pravoslaviya” [Vladimir Soloviev and the Mystical-Ascetic Tradition of Orthodoxy], *Bogoslovskiye trudy* 33 (1997): 233-245.

<sup>129</sup> *Ob upadke srednevekovogo mirosozertsaniya*, SS VI: 383-384.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 389-390.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 381-382.

especially to other (eternal union as marriage). This might originate to some degree from Soloviev's personality. As a person, he had ascetic tendencies, without excluding his participation in social life according to some of his closest friends.<sup>132</sup> Maybe he was close to what Greeks call *cosmokalogeros* [κοσμοκαλόγερος], meaning a 'monk in the world'.

It could also indicate a connection with the Maximian concept of a unified love, fully detached from passions and earthly matters. Here, I will not compare love for God in Maximus and Soloviev's *Smysl lyubvi*, but I will focus only on their interesting insights, through love, into genders (male and female) and marriage. Several researchers have underlined Maximus' contribution to the possibility for a married couple to reach perfection (through love) now and forever.<sup>133</sup> Here, I examine love between genders as elaborated by Maximus in his work *Ambigua* (especially 10 and 41).<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> Alexander Blok gave him the nickname "the knight-monk" ('Rytsar'-monakh'), Samuel D. Cioran, *Vladimir Solov'ev and the Knighthood of the Divine Sophia* (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977), 93. One of his closest friends, V. L. Velichko, wrote that "Vladimir Sergeevich loved both people and life, experienced its joys with particular intensity, but deliberately removed himself from all earthly bonds, deliberately set limits to his own heart, even in manifestations of love for family and friends." He was "an ascetic both in his convictions and in his vocation" V. L. Velichko, "Vladimir Solov'yev: Zhizn' i tvoreniya" [Vladimir Soloviev: Life and Works] in *VI. Solov'yev: Pro et contra, Lichnost' i tvorchestvo Vladimira Solov'yeva v otsenke russkikh mysliteley i issledovateley* [Vladimir Soloviev: Pro et contra, Personality and creativity of Vladimir Solov'ev assessed by Russian thinkers and researchers] Antologiya, I (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo Khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 2000), 34.

<sup>133</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian E. Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 196-205; Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1965), 157-159, 376-377; Adam G. Cooper, *The Body in St Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified*, *The Oxford Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 213, 218-227.

<sup>134</sup> The *Ambigua ad Iohannem* are a collection of more than 60 chapters devoted to the explanation of a selection of passages from Gregory of Nazianzus.

In *Ambigua* 10, Maximus touches upon the spiritual failure of the first couple (Adam and Eve) to show the ways of a sanctified life.<sup>135</sup> I discern here the word that he is using for Eve, *σύννοικος*, which means the ‘cohabitant’. While this word does not sound so sacramentally Christian in comparison to the word *syzygos* that Soloviev employs, maybe it shows Maximus’ intention to speak of the role of the wife with domestic terms, implying that both, under one house that they had in paradise, are sharing (or should have shared) the responsibility for their fall.<sup>136</sup>

Soloviev, however, in *Smysl lyubvi*,<sup>137</sup> does not examine man and wife as a couple when he speaks of the responsibility that lies behind our choice to eliminate our ego. On the contrary, Soloviev focuses first on the person as a monad, and then he sees union between genders (*syzygy*) not as a condition of tests as Maximus does, but as the realisation of sexual love to incarnate the idea of All-Unity in material reality and human existence.<sup>138</sup> We cannot say with certainty that Soloviev when he referred to the person as a monad, he meant a not married person with the sense of a virgin. If this was the case, then Soloviev might validate the two ways (marriage and celibacy) that lead to perfection. In any case, it seems that what for Maximus was considered the beginning of a spiritual life (after the fall), for Soloviev seemed to be the end of a spiritual process.

The conclusion in *Ambigua* 10 is quite indicative of Maximus’ intentions to integrate love between genders into his broad project of humanity’s holiness. He says that “...death lives throughout the whole of this temporal span and we are

---

<sup>135</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua Io.* 10, PG 91, 1156D-1157A.

<sup>136</sup> With Maximus’ references to Moses as an example of a married man who “became a lover of divine glory” Maximus acknowledges married life as a pathway to holiness, Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua Io.* 10, PG 91, 1161D.

<sup>137</sup> According to Georgios D. Panagopoulos, in *Smysl lyubvi* the theocracy, which characterizes his period of 1880s, is replaced by an erotic utopia. Georgios D. Panagopoulos *Russische Sophiologie zwischen orthodoxer Tradition und moderner Philosophie (V. Soloviev, S. Bulgakov, G. Florovsky)*. Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2021, 45.

<sup>138</sup> *Smysl lyubvi*, SS VII:58-59.

the food eaten by him’’, which probably means that what happened to the first couple (as a whole) had a great impact on the general experience of humankind. So, he seems to mean that the loss of immortality by Adam and Eve dragged humanity to death. Here, Soloviev’s position about immortality could be added supplementarily to Maximus’ insight: Soloviev proposes that true love (sexual love) is revealing a new way of being a self by overcoming death.<sup>139</sup>

In *Ambigua* 41, Maximus speaks of the five divisions of being (uncreated and created nature, mind and senses, heaven and earth, paradise and inhabited world, male and female) and the way that man is related to each of them.<sup>140</sup> Each of these divisions indicates five syntheses, which all constitute a holistic framework. Regarding the last division, between male and female, seems to be the necessary prerequisite for humankind naturally engendered: “And so, in accordance with the divine purpose, it [i.e. the human being] should be shown as – and [truly] become – a human being exclusively undivided because of the designation as male and female.”<sup>141</sup> I think that here Maximus does not speak of a kind of desexualization, but rather a purification which will raise humanity in a mode of existence which will not be characterised by gender. There will be a human, unified with the Divine Nature, since “in Jesus Christ, there is neither male nor female.”<sup>142</sup> Besides, the division into genders was something out of nature, says Maximus.<sup>143</sup> So, it seems that Maximus does not speak of a kind of *androgyny* as we know it in Plato, but of something above even *androgyny* which may touch an angelic form. The striking difference with Soloviev’s *androgyny* in *Smysl lyubvi* is that in the latter the androgynous human being is the absolute and perfect incarnation of Sophia. While for Maximus, it is Christ into whom the perfect man [τέλειος ἄνθρωπος] is incarnated.<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> *Smysl lyubvi*, SS VII:30-31.

<sup>140</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 41, PG 91, 1305 A-D.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, PG 91, 1305 C-D.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, PG 91, 1309A-B.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, PG 91, 1309A.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, PG 91, 1309A.

Although he does not mention it here explicitly, I think that the purification that Maximus is talking about can be accomplished with *apatheia*, an ascetic virtue that belongs equally to both genders. This virtue in its highest form, becomes love [ἀγάπη] i.e., how human beings commune with God. Here, Maximus stays consistent with his monastic perception of holiness (and wholeness) by providing the trinity of virtue (asceticism), knowledge (contemplation) and love (union).<sup>145</sup>

A similar pattern of spiritual triad is used by Soloviev in *Smysl lyubvi* with several differentiations though. Soloviev seems to apply in *Smysl lyubvi* his own triad of ‘integral life’, i.e., a synthesis of features that define human nature (integral knowledge-integral creativity, integral society). Integral knowledge is based on ‘thought’, integral society on ‘will’ and integral creativity on ‘feeling.’ Love comes only through the ‘sexual love’ between male and female, while knowledge for Soloviev acts simultaneously as asceticism (elimination of the catastrophic aspect of ego) and as contemplation through the mystic knowledge of the ‘other’, i.e., accomplishment of self-knowledge.<sup>146</sup> Regarding wholeness above division, Soloviev in the fourth article of *Smysl lyubvi*, overcomes the division between body and soul, by pointing it out as hypocritical for sexual relationships because it separates physical body from the whole of the human essence.<sup>147</sup>

Another concept that may reveal some kind of connection between Maximus and Soloviev is the notion of ‘otherness’. The dialectic of the One and the Other especially in *Smysl lyubvi*, was considered organic and necessary for understanding the revelation for man itself as being-for-other. If Soloviev employed in *Smysl lyubvi* the notion of ‘other’ with the terms of Christian asceticism, as Maximus did, this might mean that he intended to create a kind of dialectic of otherness,

---

<sup>145</sup> Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1965), 332-368.

<sup>146</sup> *Smysl lyubvi*, SS VII:15.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 37, 39.

which reveals itself in numerous combinations of opposites between individual and the ultimate universal.<sup>148</sup>

This intention was already posed by him in his early work *La Sophia* (1875-1876) through a pagan approach though: it is Sophia, as a Gnostic principle, who tends to unite the human souls to the All-Unity and unify all the opposites. On the contrary in *Smysl lyubvi*, the above intention is coloured by Christian terms (i.e., *syzygy*) when Soloviev speaks of the realisation of divine-human unity in a mystical way, through the experience of faith.<sup>149</sup> He wants to show that man may completely realise his existential purpose (through his loving relationship with the ‘other’), which in Orthodoxy is firmly believed to be deification. His references on how to overcome death and being immortal are related to the eternal union (*syzygy*) between a man and a woman. However, he does not sound to be in favour of a strictly individual path, full of silence and solitude as the Hesychasts proclaimed,<sup>150</sup> that a Christian should follow. Not even he is speaking about an unconditional love for the ‘other’ as Maximus does.<sup>151</sup> Contrariwise, he expands the *syzygy* relationally in social terms, by seeing an analogy of the relations between individuals and some of society’s parts (family, nation, Church, humanity as a whole).<sup>152</sup> Undoubtedly, it cannot be argued that in *Smysl lyubvi* Soloviev speaks of a complete inner connection between true religion and politics as he does in

---

<sup>148</sup> S.S.Khoruzhiy, “Vladimir Solov’ev i Mistiko-Asketicheskaya Traditsiya Pravoslaviya” [Vladimir Soloviev and the Mystical-Ascetic Tradition of Orthodoxy], *Bogoslovskiye trudy* 33 (1997): 233-245.

<sup>149</sup> *Smysl lyubvi*, SS VII:49.

<sup>150</sup> At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Hesychasm obtained two directions in Russia: the first finds its realisation in the synthesis between Hesychasm and pilgrimage, while the second is flourished by Slavophiles, who connect the Hesychasmic practice with secular life. The strategy of such a connection gets the name ‘monastery in the world’ (‘monastyr’ v miru’), S.S.Khoruzhiy, “Vladimir Solov’ev i Mistiko-Asketicheskaya Traditsiya Pravoslaviya” [Vladimir Soloviev and the Mystical-Ascetic Tradition of Orthodoxy], *Bogoslovskiye trudy* 33 (1997): 233-245.

<sup>151</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *The Four Hundred Centuries on Love*, PG 90, 1044 D.

<sup>152</sup> *Smysl lyubvi*, SS VII:58.



*Opravdaniye dobra* [*The Justification of the Good*] (1897).<sup>153</sup> In this work, by posing first the ascetic principles of ‘pity’ and ‘altruism’, he raises *Good* as the moral path through which the relationship between individual and society is being developed.<sup>154</sup>

It could be suggested that Soloviev tries to avoid, especially during the last decade of his life, a kind of extreme individualism, where man would completely ignore the whole sphere of social life. Instead, he seeks a balance between ascetic and social activity.<sup>155</sup> It seems that he intends to achieve a kind of synthesis between a horizontal catharsis for a man (when he speaks of the relationship between the individual and the social consciousness during history)<sup>156</sup> and a vertical catharsis for a man when he speaks of the man’s struggle with his ego.<sup>157</sup>

## Conclusions

In *The Four Hundred Chapters on Love* and *Letter 2: On Love* Maximus repeats in a quite simple way the commands to love spoken by Christ, expanding them to the love of ourselves

---

<sup>153</sup> In the preface of the second edition of *Opravdaniye dobra* (8<sup>th</sup> December 1898), Soloviev says that “the chief claim of my theory is to establish in and through the unconditional principle of morality the complete inner connection between religion and sound politics”, Vladimir Soloviev, *The Justification of the Good: an essay on moral philosophy*, trans. Nathalie A. Duddington (London: Constable, 1918), xiii.

<sup>154</sup> In the preface of the second edition of *Opravdaniye dobra* (8<sup>th</sup> December 1898), Soloviev says that “the chief claim of my theory is to establish in and through the unconditional principle of morality the complete inner connection between religion and sound politics”, Vladimir Soloviev, *The Justification of the Good: an essay on moral philosophy*, trans. Nathalie A. Duddington (London: Constable, 1918), xiii.

<sup>155</sup> This balance was underlined before Soloviev from F. Dostoevsky, S.S.Khoruzhiy, “Vladimir Solov’ev i Mistiko-Asketicheskaya Traditsiya Pravoslaviya” [Vladimir Soloviev and the Mystical-Ascetic Tradition of Orthodoxy], *Bogoslovskiye Trudy* 33 (1997): 233-245.

<sup>156</sup> Vladimir Soloviev, *La Sophia et les autres écrits français*, ed. et présentés par François Rouleau (Lausanne: La Cite- L’Age d’Homme, 1978), 68-69.

<sup>157</sup> *Smysl lyubvi*, SS VII: 15-17.

(‘good’ self-love). In the *Ambigua to John* (especially in *Ambigua* 41), Maximus touches upon love between the two genders, while in *Ad Thalassium* he presents a love for God correcting the narcissistic view of love, self-love, by unifying the powers of the soul, turning them towards God and one’s neighbor. However, Maximus highlights the ontological consequences both for the subject and the other of the ‘evil’ self-love. The ‘other’ is existentially murdered by self-directed passions, leading to a violation of nature’s principle itself. But if, indeed, self-love is the fragmentation of nature, then for Maximus love itself transforms nature, leading the human being to consubstantial unity. Lord’s commandments of love, as Maximus discusses them in *The Ascetic Life*, project Christ as an ethical and ascetic paradigm through which His command to love is manifested, while in *Mystagogy* Maximus emphasises the soul’s upward movement towards divine love.

By comparing the above aspects of Maximian love to Soloviev’s view of love, it is noteworthy to proceed to the following remarks. The texts that were written by Maximus before the Monothelite crisis and constitute the core of my analysis here, were based on the triad of *practical (or ethical) philosophy, natural contemplation* and *theological mystagogy*. This triad, in *Ad Thalassium* (Questions 3 and 52), is eliminated by Maximus into the dyadic system of ‘practical philosophy’ and ‘contemplative mystagogy’. Indeed, as we have already analysed his approach to love, it seems that love for Maximus cannot be experienced outside of the ultimate value of *apatheia*. The latter is not only an inevitable moral value, but, mainly, it leads to the revelation of God. In this respect, love ultimately becomes an action which enhances the well-being of ourselves and of our neighbor.<sup>158</sup> This moral goal is transformed into the Christian concept of *agapē* which is employed by Soloviev in *Smysl lyubvi* not only when he speaks of one’s love for God and one’s love for one’s neighbour, but

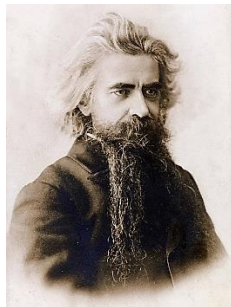
---

<sup>158</sup> This will be expanded later by Solov’yev to love other nations: “the demand to love other nations as your own does not at all imply a *psychological identity* of feeling, but only an *ethical identity* of conduct”, because “I must desire the true good for all nations as much as that of my own.” Soloviev, *The Justification of the Good*, 298.

also when he speaks for one's love for others, incarnated as the eternal union via marriage.

Moreover, I suggest that each pair of the five divisions of being that Maximus elaborates on in *Ambigua* 41 (uncreated and created nature, intelligible and sensible, heaven and earth, paradise and inhabited world, male and female) and the ways that man is related to each of them, should be examined under the model of practical and theological mystagogy. The question of whether there might be any connection between this triad (or dyad afterwards) model of Maximus of Christian philosophy and Soloviev's system of 'integral life' (integral knowledge, integral creativity, and integral society) when examining love, cannot be answered with certainty. It is more likely that Soloviev was influenced by the brilliant concept of integral knowledge by Ivan Kireevskii,<sup>159</sup> while Maximus was most probably by Origen's model of *ethics*, *physics*, and *epoptics* (metaphysics).<sup>160</sup>

However, this philosophical triad that both are using implicitly, is interesting when discussing the love between genders. In my interpretation, for Maximus, the situation of marriage (the couple of *syzygoi*) reflects the practical mystagogy in contrast to the monk's life which reflects the theological mystagogy. Both ways may lead to man's perfection, through love according to Maximus. Soloviev by setting the elimination of a person's ego as the precondition of spiritual life, may have indicated as well two ways (marriage and celibacy) leading to man's perfection.



<sup>159</sup> Oravec, *God as Love*, 42.

<sup>160</sup> Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 74.