

# Eschatology in Maximus the Confessor

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Maximus struggled with the question of apocatastasis as it was known since the time of Origen, but did not address the concept of the time of God, or time beyond time, or the eighth day, only in a linear way. Instead, he reframed the question and examined it in a different context. Rather than place the dwelling of the soul in God at the end of linear time, he placed the end of time at the union of the soul and God. Maximus approached eschatology in relation to personal and ecclesial salvation and union with God, connecting it with protology, the time before time, and also exploring it in a mystagogical way. Although he considered the eschaton, the Second Coming of Christ and the time of God from many points of view, it is perhaps in his liturgical writings that we can find the clearest exposition of his eschatology.

The expectation of an imminent second coming of Christ, which we often find in early Christianity, was gradually replaced by a different eschatological discourse. In the thought of Maximus the Confessor we find a much more mature perspective on eschatology. In several of the works of the Confessor we see a particular interest in the eschaton. Maximus does not address the issue of the time of God, or time beyond time, or the eighth day, in a linear way, but reframes the question and examines it in a different context. Rather than place the dwelling of the soul in God at the end of linear time, he places the end of time at the union of the soul and God. Maximus approaches eschatology in relation to personal and ecclesial salvation, and union with God; he connects it with protology, the time before time, and also explores it in a mystagogical way. Although he considers the end of time and the time of God from many points of view, it is perhaps in his liturgical writings that we can find the clearest exposition of his eschatology, in the form of a realized eschatology.

As a particular topic in eschatological questions, Maximus reflected on the theological strand of the apokatastasis hypothesis. The idea of universal salvation, part of the legacy of Origen, is a scandal if it is approached as inevitability. Nevertheless, the 'honourable silence' with which Maximus treated such questions suggests that he distanced himself from a simplistic approach and recognized the contentious issue as a meaningful mystery. Finally, the way he approaches Pentecost demonstrates that the visitation of the Holy Spirit allows us to transcend historical time and pass from the existence that is limited by our created nature to the time of God.

## Introduction—the Background

The question of the last things and the end of time has been part of the Christian tradition from the beginning. Already in the generation of the apostles, in the Pauline epistles, and in the Gospels we come across the anticipation of the Second Coming of Jesus and the end of time. The earliest sources express both fear and longing. This is expressed in images of destruction, desolation, and suffering, as we find in the ‘Little Apocalypse’ of the synoptics (Mark 13; Matt. 24; and Luke 21), or the separation of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25), but also the way St. Paul speaks about it in 1 Corinthians 4: 2, 1 Thessalonians 4–5, and several other passages, which allude to the nature of the judgement of God.

The apostolic Fathers likewise held on to the idea of the imminence of the kingdom of God (for a comprehensive study, see Daley 2003). Nevertheless, it is difficult to tell exactly how this eschatological imagery was understood. Most scholars (Adrahtas 2005; Zoumboulakis 2011; Daley 2007; Rowland 2007; Kalaitzidis 2013) agree that such passages reflect an almost imminent anticipation of the Second Coming. Yet St. Paul, who is one of the greatest and most influential sources for Christian eschatology, discourages this attitude when he writes to the Thessalonians for a second time, even if it certainly seems that he had excited their anticipation previously. First it will be useful to look into the early writings that express this anticipation and query whether the meaning of this very real and very imminent second coming of God is the same as we usually attach to it now.

**Early Writings on the Second Coming**  
**The Book of Revelation is the most influential source for all modern forms of millenarianism, and yet its influence among the Fathers is surprisingly slight—after all it was not read liturgically, and many of the Fathers who wrote extensive exegetical works, such as John Chrysostom, ignored it completely. That said, although it can be said to reflect the eschatological views of the first generation of Christians, the various methodologies that can be used to read it lead to very different conclusions as to how it could be interpreted and when or how the end of days is understood there—whether in a literal, historical sense, or in a liturgically symbolic way, or, most likely, in both.**

Although the end of days was discussed in several ancient sources, it is not clear whether the eschatological narrative was understood as the *linear* end of *all* history or in any other way. The question becomes clearer when we consider how time, in general, is understood in biblical sources. Unlike several ancient cultures with a cyclical idea of time (such as we find in Herodotus, Thucydides, and Polybius, for instance, even if it can be argued that cyclical time was only one component of their historiography), in the Hebrew tradition we find a very definite past, a moment of creation, and a point of no return—the expulsion from Paradise, which did not come with a hope for a return to it someday, despite the Protevangelion of Genesis 3: 15. Time in the Hebrew tradition, therefore, is linear, and it flows in one direction only (for a discussion of the Greek and Hebrew views of cyclical and linear time, see Boman 1970: 123–83).

When the Christian tradition introduced the idea of the kingdom of Heaven and the return to God—even if this did not mean a return to the naivety of the pre-lapsarian condition—the sense of the return to an earlier ontological state challenged this idea: the linearity of time was not as clearly dominant as before. It is true that history was still defined by a distinct past and a distinct

future (made known to us through divine revelation), but the hope of returning to God and the idea of an existence after the end of history introduced a different understanding of time. If there is an existence after the ‘last days’, after the cosmic clock has stopped as it were, then perhaps we can think of an existence that is not bound to time or space, and for this reason it does not need to exist ‘before’ or ‘after’ linear history. Nevertheless, Christianity never challenged completely the linearity of time: while the kingdom of God may be beyond time, and therefore is not defined by linearity and progression (which Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus tried to express by the paradoxical image of the ever-moving rest, ἐπέκτασις),<sup>1</sup> the struggle towards it, the trajectory from our fallen state of sinfulness to the kingdom, may usually be understood as a linear quest. We start from a certain ontological condition, defined by the limitations of time and space, and through participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we hope to escape these limitations. This scheme, put in this way, has a distinct origin and a distinct destination.

Origen was among the first theologians to attempt to articulate clear answers, responding to several difficult theological questions that challenged Christianity from within and without. His speculative theology set the scene and the vocabulary for many generations of intellectual theologians after him. Origen brought into Christianity a certain idea about time which was not easily going to be compromised with the biblical tradition. In *On First Principles*, he shared the belief in a distinct origin in the past (consistent with the narrative of Creation), but he left the end of historical linearity open, not fixed into an irreversible finality, and therefore possibly leading to a cycle of new beginnings and ends. This idea did not appear in a vacuum: we can find the cyclical idea of time in ancient Greek culture, even if the question of the linearity of time did not play a great role in the life of most people. This question had to do with a long-term view that exceeded even the plane of the gods, rather than with everyday life. When we come across it, it either echoes much older ideas, or the views of eastern cultures that passed into Greek thought. Hesiod however, in his *Works and Days*, describes the successive ages of humans, the ages of gold, silver, bronze, the age of heroes, and the iron age, the one in which he thought he lived (Hesiod, *Op.*, Solmsen 1990: 109–201). This in itself does not say anything about cyclical time or linearity, and yet, after he deplors the condition of humanity in the iron age, he writes that he wishes he had died before it, or that he had been born after it. The expectation of a better age after the present one is often taken as a reflection of cyclical time, since what we see in the past is a gradual decline, and every age is worse than the one that preceded it.

Plato’s theory of the cyclical relationship between the body and the soul, which he developed in *Phaedo*, may more accurately reflect the beliefs of the ancient Greek world, being much more influential on the theological categories of nascent Christianity than the views of Hesiod. In this dialogue, Socrates describes the cycle of birth, life, death, the state of the disembodied and all-knowing soul, and then again new birth, life, and so forth. Nevertheless, what he posits here is not necessarily an eternally repeating cyclical pattern. In *Phaedo*, as well as in other dialogues, Plato also describes the movement of the soul towards God. The combination of the two movements of the soul would be more appropriately described as an ascending spiral. At any rate, while this dialogue does not assume the cosmological dimensions of the ages of Hesiod or even Plato’s own *Timaeus*, it discusses the cyclical pattern at the level of the soul, which would also become a challenge for Christian theology. The *Phaedo* is perhaps the first attempt to combine linear and cyclical time, and it is only much later that we find similar attempts. Maximus, likewise, combines cyclical and linear time, albeit in a different way.

To return to Origen, his cosmological model tried to combine the biblical narrative of the distinct origin of the universe, the distinct (yet not necessarily final) direction towards the kingdom of God, the Platonic division between the sensible and the ideal, and the different steps and states of the soul on its way towards God. Of course, as very few of the original writings of Origen have survived, we cannot be completely sure about his spiritual and theological system, although we can safely assume that some of his more difficult ideas (the ones more difficult to reconcile with mainstream Christianity) were influential for centuries after his death.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, his speculative theology and his spirit of intellectual exploration allowed many of the ideas of the Greek world to enter the Christian tradition. Although he was preceded by Philo in the convergence of the Greek and the biblical strand, Philo, as a writer in the Hebrew tradition, has no interest in eschatology (at least in the biblical sense) and therefore the introduction of these themes can be rightfully attributed to Origen (Wolfson 1982: 115–38).

### **Maximus on Restoration**

By the time of Maximus, the experiential context of the average Christian lay person, as well as of the monk, had changed significantly since the time of Origen. The Christian life was more specific, more crystallized in its doctrines and its practices, both in the monastery and in the parish, after the consolidation of the christological and trinitarian doctrines in the first four ecumenical councils, and after the consolidation of the power of the bishops since the fourth century. Naturally, this also prompted theologians to explore the depth of the Christian life, its rituals, its worship, and its sacramental practices more thoroughly. It can be argued that the liturgical tradition was formed as a response to the great heresies of the fourth century — and it is true that many of the texts that are still in use today bear the signs of such controversies. The connection between liturgy and doctrine is very strong, especially when we remember that many of the people who were involved in the theological disputes of the time were also involved in the shaping of common worship, such as Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom. The liturgical expansion in the fourth century, in turn, urged people such as Ps-Dionysius to connect the theology of the ascent of the soul towards God with the imagery of the ascent of the priest to the altar, or the ranks of the angelic world with the rites and the sacraments of the church (Golitzin 1994). Maximus inherited this liturgical, theological language from Ps-Dionysius, and he developed it further, most famously in his *Mystagogy* (Louth 1993, 2004), but also elsewhere in his work.

It has been necessary here to examine some of the early Christian views on eschatology and linearity to show that the thought and contribution of Maximus did not appear in a vacuum, but followed and developed further many of these views. Although the church as an institution had changed significantly since the third century, and although the christological concerns of the seventh century had, likewise, moved on to nuance differently the balance between the human and the divine in Christ, the categories of theological thought that were essentially defined by Origen were still relevant. However, while we may look to such intellectual strands as one of the contributing factors in the formation of Maximus' theological views, other factors, such as the ascetic tradition and its influence, or the liturgical experience, are also important. Both of them had also developed significantly by the time Maximus was forming his theological views.

The thought of Maximus moves, unsurprisingly, through all these strands. Nevertheless, what makes his analyses interesting is that, whether he is discussing Origenist philosophy, Old Testament typology, or Ps-Dionysian liturgical theology, his thought is not carried away by the force that is particular to them. Instead, he reaches beyond the language or the particular symbolism in order to find its deeper spiritual significance. In other words, his thought does not depend on and is not generated by the particular wisdom that may be associated with any one of the theological fields. This is something that we can see, for example, in the way he discusses the significance of Pentecost.

The basic cosmological model of Origen in *On First Principles*, which discusses the creation and fall of the *logikoi* and the creation of the universe as events that are connected with each other, dominated Christian theology — even if indirectly — for centuries. Origen echoing both Greek thought and the Hebrew tradition, for both of which the perfect age could only be found in the distant past (in the age of the Gods or in paradise before the Fall), visualizes the beginning as a time of balance, perfection, and rest (see Andreopoulos 2004). Then, there is a first creation: God creates the *logikoi*, rational creatures that participate in God through the Logos. However, there comes a time when the *logikoi* are satiated, turn their attention away from God, and start moving away from God. As they move away, they undergo an ontological change: by ‘cooling off’, they become souls (here Origen follows the kind of creative etymology that is usual in Greek thought, ancient and modern, by connecting the words ψῦχος and ψυχή), and fall. God creates the universe in order to stop their fall away from God. The created world operates as a place of repentance (a cosmological boot camp, as it were), so that the souls will once again turn their attention to, and return to, God.

The whole scheme is given in the triad rest–movement–creation, referring to rest (the initial condition of balance), movement (away from God), and creation (of the world). Origen, like many neo-Platonists, likes to use triads, and he chooses to summarize the whole thing in three steps. A more detailed outline of his cosmological drama, however, would consist of six steps: rest (the initial balance), first creation (of the *logikoi*), movement (away from God), second creation (of the world), movement (away from physical creation and towards God), and second rest (equal to the first one). In a typically neo-Platonic manner, Origen thinks that the purpose of the created world is the return of all the souls to God. The triad rest–movement–creation is the opening act, and it shows his interest in the transition between life in paradise and life in the fallen world. The scheme follows the trajectory of the soul, while the body and the created world are not included in the first or in the last rest. In addition, the descent of the soul to matter, or rather its capture by matter, echoes strongly the Platonist view of the body as a limitation or, rather, as the tomb of the soul. The universe is something external to God and to the creatures whom God wants to love. Origen’s eschatology therefore remains unambiguously dualistic, and the only way to resolve the tension between body and soul is the destruction of the body (Louth 2007: 51–72).

Maximus inherits this cosmological narrative as a template from the past that allows him to develop his own insights. Nevertheless, he approaches this narrative differently from Origen: here we can see a shift of interest in the history of Christian theology. To begin with, he is not satisfied with the open-ended Origenist scheme, and with the weak understanding of the second ‘rest’, which allows for the possibility of the whole process happening all over again. For

Maximus, the end is not the same as the beginning, at least when we speak about this particular end and beginning. He criticizes Origen's idea of rest in *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1081A, C, 1084B; see Blowers 1992) while he tries to explore what this rest might mean and how it could be understood.

For Christianity, the future (the kingdom of God) is more important than the past. It is in the eschatological future when things will be revealed (more completely than in the garden of paradise), and in a paradoxical manner it is the future that gives meaning to things of this age. This was a revolution within religious thought, because for the first time perfection became something anticipated rather than something remembered. Therefore, the destination becomes more important than the origin. The challenge is how to describe that end in such a way that the timelessness and the freedom of God are not reduced to a point in time. The problem Maximus faces here is that the eschaton cannot be an inert finality, an end in the return towards God—not if the way to understand this leads to a balance which includes the possibility of satiety, as was the case with the first condition of rest according to Origen. In this he follows Gregory of Nyssa and his doctrine of the eternal progression (ἐπέκτασις), the continuous ascent towards God, although the initial idea is habitually ascribed to St. Paul's 'from glory to glory' (2 Cor. 3: 18).

Therefore, the first concern of Maximus was to understand the dynamic, yet permanent, state of the final return to God. One of the problems in the Origenist view of the initial rest is that the *logikoi* were satiated from sharing in the life of God, and turned their attention away from God. This implies that in the first rest there was a certain potential for expansion, which could not be fulfilled within God—as if God's ability to keep the interest of the *logikoi* was finite and exhaustible. This is indeed a strange way to interpret the narrative of the Fall, but this is perhaps inevitable since Origen starts with a(n almost) perfect state in the beginning. What solves the problem for Maximus is that the final condition of rest, as he understands it, is not the same as the first rest, but it includes and it accommodates continuous movement. This movement, which is symptomatic of the created nature, as it reflects a trajectory of desire (to acquire what it does not have or to become what it is not), is a cause of the Fall in Origen, but a cause of ascent in Maximus. The final rest then includes eternal movement, but it is nevertheless a permanent condition, where it is possible to move only toward God, and not away. The brilliant paradoxical expression, 'ever-moving rest',<sup>3</sup> describes precisely this dynamic permanence which allows the creatures to continue their movement towards the infinity of God, without ever exhausting it.

The triad that Maximus uses instead of the Origenist rest–movement–creation is actually the reverse, creation–movement–rest. For Maximus, the stage of creation is not completed until the completion of the world, even if it includes other stages within it. Therefore, the first stage does not reflect the perfection of the past, as it does with Origen, but merely the endowment of the divine ἔσως to the creatures that God created, so that they may wish to move toward God. On the other hand, the final rest is not leading to a disembodied, abstract realm, but it includes created nature. Likewise, the eternal movement towards God involves the entire human being—not just soul or body, but the human being as the union of the two. The anthropology of Maximus, which is strongly non-dualist, is not annulled by his eschatology (Loudovikos 2013).

Movement, as we see, exists in some way from the beginning to the end. The universe has included movement, from its beginning. The end also includes movement, in the ever-moving

rest. However, unlike the movement away from God which, in Origen's system, could bring about an ontological change (from rational beings [*logikoi*] to souls [*ψυχαί*]), movement is a positive force within created nature, essentially synonymous with ascetic ascent. This paradoxical combination of movement and rest removes the danger of another yet fall at the end of time.

Here we see a difficulty with this scheme. Is the fate of the blissful, eternal, and irreversible ascent towards God, common to all beings? Are all fallen beings, corporeal and incorporeal, proceeding towards their salvation, their reconciliation with God, and their eventual inclusion in the rest of God? If we read the great triad of creation–movement–rest as a description of the way created nature behaves (in other words, if the ascent towards God is a mechanical characteristic of created nature), then salvation is automatic, and all fallen beings, including fallen angels, will be saved simply by following their nature. Yet, for Maximus neither salvation nor sin is determined by nature. Instead, he offers a much more sophisticated view, by connecting salvation and sin with the concept that cost him his freedom and eventually his life: the will.

Maximus argued that the Fall brought about a change in the way human nature existed, which used to be simple and then became composite, in disunity with itself. Therefore, while some parts of the human being retained the memory of God and the orientation towards God (the *logos* of existence), human will was turned to an inclination away from God. The natural will with which humans were initially endowed, which guided them towards what their nature really wished, in accordance with the knowledge of the Holy Spirit, was now broken. Instead, human beings had to proceed using their subjective opinions, and with continuous deliberation, known as gnostic will.

In much of the modern literature (a good collection of which can be found in Vasiljević 2013) one can discern a negative attitude towards gnostic will, as if it is not merely one of the consequences of the Fall, but as if it is almost identified with sin itself. The implication is, presumably, that the exercise of human free will led to the Fall, and certainly that will was not natural. Nevertheless, if by gnostic will we mean the will that was transformed as a result of the Fall, at the same time as other ontological changes, such as death, also became part of the human condition, we have to acknowledge that it is a result rather than a cause of the Fall. This negative outlook, however, is not the attitude we find in Maximus, or in the ascetic literature before him. The gnostic condition of human will is a reflection of the ontological change of the Fall, and yet also of the ascetic struggle towards God. For Maximus the existence of evil is defined by the distance between gnostic and divine will, but it is precisely at the level of (gnostic) will that the spiritual struggle is fought, since this is where will is exercised.

The movement between creation and rest, therefore, corresponds to the ascetic ascent of the soul towards God. Despite the connection between nature and will (Maximus' main argument against the monothelites), this ascent is not determined by nature, but by the orientation of the will towards God, and by free choice. It is up to the individual, in the end, to follow 'the way of death' or 'the way of life', to use the expressions of the *Didache*. The deliberation that is inherent in gnostic will makes struggle and asceticism, and ultimately the way towards salvation, possible.

In *Questions and Doubts* 19, commenting on the concept of apokatastasis in Gregory of Nyssa,<sup>4</sup> Maximus writes that the church knows or recognizes three kinds of restoration: the first kind has to do with the restoration of a person through the *logos* of virtue. Although Maximus does not explain this further here, this restoration sounds more ontological than moral in nature, because the operative agent of change is the *logos*, which can restore the mode (τρόπος) of being. In other words, this restoration is the beginning of the change of the mode of nature. Also, since Maximus connects it with the *logos* of virtue, this restoration is not automatic for all but is only a result of the exercise of virtue, of ascetic ascent. It is not clear, however, whether this restoration is an eschatological one; there is nothing in the text to suggest that it is reserved for the end of time and could not happen during this lifetime. The ascetic character of this change, however, makes it seem important, perhaps with a role to play in the eschaton.

The second kind of restoration has to do with the restoration of the whole nature of the human being, which we usually refer to as the resurrection of the dead, at the end of time. The human being will be restored in its fullness, no more in the state of separated soul and body. By preferring the expression ‘restoration of the whole nature’ in the aforementioned passage, Maximus shows how strong is his belief in the view of the participation of the human being in the last things, both in body and in soul. This restoration applies to all people, but somewhat passively since it is associated with nature, and is, of course, part and parcel of the last things.

The third kind of restoration, which Maximus takes from Gregory of Nyssa (*Life of Moses* 2, Musurillo 1991: 110–20) has to do with the restoration of the powers of the soul to the state they had when they were created, before they were altered by sin. Although Maximus does not follow this up in this particular passage, it is clear that for him this restoration is the healing of the fragmentation of the human being, the fall of the will, and its distortion from natural to gnostic. Therefore, he interprets the concept of restoration as he finds it in Gregory of Nyssa, as the restoration of human natural will. Maximus says this more clearly in his commentary on Psalm 59 (Van Deun 1991: 3. 7–17).

In addition to this passage, which refers directly to the apokatastasis, there are three passages from the *Questions Addressed to Thalassius* which reflect the views of Maximus on the final restoration of the world and the forgiveness of all (*Q.Thal.* prol., Laga-Steel 1980: 39–40; *Q.Thal.* 21, Laga-Steel 1980: 131, 133; *Q.Thal.* 43, Laga-Steel 1980: 293–7). Two of those comments touch on the issue of the two trees in the Garden of Eden, a theme that had been connected to the concept of the apokatastasis since Origen. The third passage refers to the victory of Christ over evil through his crucifixion. In these passages Maximus states that there is a ‘better and more secret explanation, which is kept in the minds of the mystics, but we, as well, will honour by silence’.

Several modern commentators see this honourable silence as an implicit support of the idea of apokatastasis, which remained secret, mostly for pastoral reasons. Nevertheless, Maximus never gives his clear support to the idea, and, with the exception of the writings cited above, he never engages with it at length. Writers such as Sherwood (Sherwood 1955a: 9) have noted that although Maximus criticized in detail many other of the ideas of Origen, in this way, by trying to correct and absorb several of them, he developed his own system. On the other hand, there are several passages in his work that discuss the situation after the final judgement and speak of

eternal punishment for the ones who freely used the *logos* of their being contrary to nature (*Amb.Io.* 42, PG 91. 1329A1–B7; *Amb.Io.* 65, PG 91. 1392C9–D13; *Q.Thal.* 59, Laga–Steel 1990: 55, 57). What is this eternal punishment? At a first level we can discern a certain ambivalence here. Although it is clear that Maximus believes that there cannot be an automatic, universal salvation for everyone, we can suspect that he finds something interesting in the idea of the restoration of the world. Because of this ambivalence, modern scholarship (cf. Vasiljević 2013) has mined the thought of Maximus in pursuit of direct or implied support of the concept of apokatastasis, but most of the thought on this subject has to do with whether he supports or denies the idea of the restoration of all in the way we find it in Origen. While this is clearly not the case, there is obviously more than meets the eye here. Perhaps the area of our inquiry is the distance between the certainty of a universal restoration and the hope and possibility for all souls to be saved.

As we saw above, when Maximus discussed the three kinds of restoration known by the church, he examined more closely the restoration of the powers of the soul to the state they had before the Fall. It is interesting that he sees this restoration as something that will happen to all people at the end of time, just like the resurrection of the body. Maximus sees the resurrection of the dead as a restoration of the entire human being to its state before the Fall: not only the body, but the soul and its relationship with the body will be restored. This can be understood through the prism of his anthropology, which is not comfortable with the separation between the two. Nevertheless, the point here is that the restoration of will from its gnostic to its natural state (as we can also see in the aforementioned passage from his commentary on Psalm 59) will be common to all people, just like the resurrection of the body. However, this topic demonstrates the difference between Origen and Maximus at a different level: the two restorations that are granted to everyone at the end of time return the human being to its state before the Fall (although this time the human being consists of a soul and a body), but this is not enough to guarantee salvation. An additional step needs to be taken. Maximus does not presume that the next step will be automatic, or likewise common to all. On the contrary, he makes a sharp differentiation between a lesser knowledge of God (ἐπίγνωσις), which implies an intellectual understanding of the causality of evil, and full participation in God, which is a condition to which one proceeds by exercising one's natural (restored) yet always free will (*QD* 19, in *Philokalia* 14A, Meretakis 1992: 38).

Nevertheless, this may be the boldest statement in support of the apokatastasis of all beings that we can find in the writings of Maximus, although he certainly keeps a safe distance from any bold and sweeping arguments about it. Yet, since we often think of sin as a result of the distance between us and God, and of the war inside us between what we want and what we do (what St. Paul describes in Rom. 7: 23 as 'another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members'), it is hard for us to think that even when these two obstacles are removed, we may still choose to be apart from God and under sin. What makes this difficult to visualize is that elsewhere we find images of hell and damnation, along the lines of the penance that corresponds to a certain transgression, and of God as the ultimate judge. Although such images may be found in the Gospels and in some Fathers, it is generally not the approach we find in the Greek Fathers—certainly not in the writings of Maximus, who writes much about sin, yet virtually nothing about hell. However, even the modern mind cannot fathom what kind of sin could deserve an eternity of torment, if the measure of the justice of God is suffering for like sin, if not more. To return to the image of the restoration, there is a similar

paradox. How could it be possible not to repent and not to beg for the forgiveness of God, once our will has been restored to its natural state? One might be tempted to read the restoration of the powers of the soul as a return to the fresh state of creation, with the added benefit of the experience of sin and its effects, which makes it very difficult for us to see how anyone would then consciously choose to be away from God. And yet Maximus does not follow this argument.

The Confessor distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge, only one of which implies participation, whereas the other is a disembodied, distant knowledge, which is not relevant in the context of salvation. Effectively, the difference between these two states reflects the two possible meanings of *gnosis*, the first according to the biblical-apostolic tradition, and the second according to philosophy—we could also say knowledge by participation vs. the possession of information. This distinction is helpful in our comprehension of the riddle of the last things. What this distinction means in the context of the restoration, as considered by Maximus, is that the argumentative, calculating part of the restoration (the one that will show that God is not responsible for sin) may bring about a cognitive acceptance of the word of God, and may also demonstrate to everyone what sin is, what grace is, what forgiveness is—but this is not enough. It is not enough to have the tools: it is necessary to use them. To use the patristic expression, a movement of the soul is also necessary, in a way that allows one to use one's *logos* according to one's (restored) nature. Keeping in mind the Christocentric and cosmic significance Maximus attaches to the *logos/logoi*, this harmonization between *logos* and nature is worth exploring further. The *logoi* that exist in every being are a reflection of the touch of the original Logos of creation. This suggests that, although we cannot find a systematic exposition of the eschatological expectation in Maximus, Christ has a central place in it.

At any rate, it is difficult to understand the extent of the restoration of natural will in the human being, with everything this entails about the passions and the soul. First, is it restricted to humans only? And is it possible for this movement of the soul to take place then? Does this restoration allow for the possibility for human, angelic, and even demonic souls to repent (if they choose so), to be forgiven, and to be subsequently accepted in the kingdom of God, after their deliberative, gnostic will is restored to natural will, and after they are able to see the difference between good and evil? Is it possible to repent after death, or is forgiveness restricted to the ones who repented during their life on earth? Following the distinction between disembodied knowledge and knowledge by participation, Maximus describes the restoration which is common to all as a disembodied, objective event, which is not necessarily accompanied by a 'movement of the soul'. Although the way Maximus approaches the question of the final restoration allows us to hope and pray for the repentance, forgiveness, and salvation of all, a salvation that is automatically and mechanically common for all would deny the freedom of the soul and would transform the kingdom of God into a cruel menagerie.

There are additional problems with this interpretation of apokatastasis. An argument from the point of view of ethics is that, if the ontological restoration of the body and the soul were to lead everyone into the kingdom, there is no point in trying to follow the path of God. There can be no judgement, nor real forgiveness, if the compassion of God is forced on everyone as an automatic, mechanical forgiveness.

Second, if free will, gnostic or natural, is preserved after the second judgement, is there a danger of a second Fall, starting a new cycle of events? We can see something like that in the unstable rest of Origen. Maximus modified Origenist cosmology emphatically, changing the Origenist triad of becoming–rest–movement, into becoming–movement–rest, indicating precisely that the final situation has to be a cosmic balance, a stable conclusion. In *Amb.Io.* 65 (PG 91. 1392) he writes about the ὀγδοάς, the eighth day or the age to come, the ‘better and endless day’, which comes after ‘things in motion have come to rest’, and he makes a clear distinction between the fate of the righteous and the fate of the wicked. It is possible, then, that the restoration of the natural will is not sufficient to guarantee that there will be no second fall. It is no surprise that the discourse on the apokatastasis is traditionally connected to the original fall in the Garden of Eden, and the Greek Fathers saw original sin not so much as an ontological fall but as an illness that will nevertheless be concluded in a condition better, and therefore more stable, than the beginning.

How can this be accommodated with the restoration of all? On the one hand, Maximus foresees the restoration of the natural will and speaks of the purifying fire of the Second Coming, something that implies an end to the purification process, but, on the other hand, he emphasizes the final rest. Perhaps the answer can be found in a comment from the *Q.Thal.* 22 (Laga–Steel 1980: 139. 66–141. 80) where Maximus draws a distinction between the present age, the ‘age of the flesh’, which is characterized by doing, and the age of the Spirit that will be characterized by ‘undergoing’. This suggests that the final rest will not be a static rest, but that some kind of activity is conceivable. In addition, it is not specified if the activity of that age is limited to the righteous only: the analogy to the age of doing suggests the opposite. Is it possible, then, that with the mysterious phrase ‘ever-moving rest’ (ἀεικίνητος στάσις), the Confessor envisioned a rest similar to the unification of the soul with God, as described by Gregory of Nyssa, where the soul moves infinitely towards God without ever being able to reach the end of infinity, but experiencing and participating increasingly in the divine energies? The ‘undergoing’ of the sinful souls might then be translated into the contrition and repentance they never had in life, which could perhaps even then bring them closer to God, while the righteous advance in their blissful participation of the divine. Something like that would be consistent with the possibility of a final restoration of all and with Maximus’ views on the rest. This active rest would have to be understood as an unchangeable condition, in spite of the movement or undergoing of the souls, something that would satisfy its position at the end of the Maximian cosmological triad as the conclusion. It would also mean that it is not necessary to envision an ontological difference between the righteous and the wicked, as there is not one now.

### ***Mystagogy—the Lord’s Prayer***

Beyond the passages where Maximus directly discusses restoration and apokatastasis, he expresses his views on eschatology in different ways as well. One of the most interesting passages is his commentary on the Lord’s Prayer, and, specifically, his analysis of the reference to the bread (ἐπιούσιος).

There is a difficulty in the way the word ἐπιούσιος may be interpreted. Grammatically, it may be understood as consisting of ἐπί and οὐσία, in which case it can refer to what is substantial for our life; or it may be understood as consisting of ἐπί and ἔναι, which suggests what is coming, a

combination that gives us the word ἐπιούσια as the day of tomorrow. Latin translations are confusing at this point because, while the earlier version of the Vulgate translated ἐπιούσιος as ‘quotidian’ (from which the English version has kept the reference to the ‘daily’ bread), Jerome tried to go a little deeper. For some reason he was not familiar with the word ἐπιούσια, although it was not uncommon at the time, and therefore he missed the reference to the day of tomorrow. Strangely, although Jerome saved an Aramaic version of the Lord’s Prayer that included the word *mahar* (*Comm. in Matt.* 6.11, Scheck 2008: 88), which means the day of tomorrow, he never considered the Greek text in this context. Instead, he translated ἐπιούσιος as ‘supersubstantial’ in the Matthean version of the Lord’s Prayer (in the sense that it is above substance), while he maintained the earlier word ‘quotidian’ in the Lukan version.

Nevertheless, most of the patristic tradition accepted as normative the interpretation of John Chrysostom who read ἐπιούσιος as the bread that is necessary for life (*Matt., hom. 19*, PG 57. 280), thus discounting the eschatological reading of the Lord’s Prayer. Maximus, on the other hand, interprets the reference to the bread as a symbol of Christ, who offers himself to everyone who asks him, although he is received according to each person’s spiritual capacity. It is interesting that he sees this bread coming to us from beyond history, a phenomenon which he sees symbolized by the contrast with the word ‘today’.

In his discussion of the Lord’s Prayer, Maximus offers a layered exegetical analysis, touching upon the transcendence of history through sharing in the eucharistic bread of life. He then explains how the bread of life is Christ, who was prepared before time (connecting, as he also does in the passages where he discusses the restoration of all, the origins and the plan of God for the union of humanity with him, with the last things), and who can become present in the historical time that is denoted by ‘today’ (‘I think in fact, that “this day” means in present history’). Finally, he repeats the imagery of John Chrysostom (‘we are also charged in the prayer to ask for this day’s bread, which sustains the present life’), although he gives it a slightly different meaning. Rather than simply a plea for only what is necessary, he reads it as a defiance of necessity for material things (Zizioulas 2006).

However, it is not fair to say that Maximus gives a straightforward eschatological interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer, at least not in the sense we find this eschatological message in Origen’s influential commentary on the Lord’s Prayer, for instance. In fact, what makes the analysis of Maximus particularly interesting is that he treats history and the time beyond history (the time of God) in such a way that they do not seem to be in opposition. Instead they seem to flow into each other. Nevertheless, although in these passages Maximus does not make an explicit mention of the end of time and eschatology, it is clear that when he speaks about the time of God (in contrast to the time of history), this is precisely what he has in mind.

Maximus offers a mature and original interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer, in contrast to the very literal meaning given in Tertullian’s *On Prayer*, or to the highly symbolic readings of Origen (Nodes 2010: 82–3). Instead, we could speak of a *realized eschatology*,<sup>5</sup> a way in which the boundlessness of God interjects itself in human history and is shared by many people in the church (Blowers 1997). Maximus finds the eucharistic act a good way to demonstrate the two different directions combined into one.

In the thought of the Confessor, we see that the limits between an eschatological expectation of the end of linear history and a realized liturgical eschatology are not always very clear. We can see this in the *Mystagogy*, which places the eucharistic act in the centre of a cosmic network of connections (Louth 2004). The whole *Mystagogy* is written as a series of concentric circles, each of which says something about God, the cosmos, the human being, the church building, and finally the divine liturgy (although the centre of these concentric circles, the anaphora, is passed over in silence). The central part of the *Mystagogy* is dedicated to the analysis of the divine liturgy, and here we have a very clear view of the realized eschatology of Maximus: whereas the first part of the liturgy, up to and including the reading of the Gospel, corresponds with human history (including Christology), the second part has no historical counterpart. Rather it is a foretaste of the kingdom of God, as it is coming to us through the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit, from the end of time. In a very real, not simply symbolic way, the end of time is made present within historical time. This is as strongly formative on the thought of Maximus as anything else.

The way the *Mystagogy* is written draws attention not only to the views of its author, but also to its structure. This suggests that the Confessor attempts an inversion of the Dionysian hierarchy, another work whose significance lay largely in its structure. Whereas the hierarchies of Ps-Dionysius were developed along a vertical axis, at least in terms of their imagery, and ultimately had the Godhead in their centre and at their top, the *Mystagogy* places the eucharistic chalice in the centre. Yet by the time he gets to the discussion of the divine liturgy, he has made very clear that he sees it as a reflection and fulfilment of the cosmic, the anthropological, and the ecclesiological strands. It is in this context that we can speak about his realized liturgical eschatology.

### **Transfiguration**

Many of the teachings and views of Maximus are strongly informed by his views on eschatology, although it sometimes seems that he is not particularly eager to talk directly about the last things. An examination of his mystagogical texts, as well as an examination of his theology of the *logoi*, tell us much about his eschatological views. In the case of the *logoi*, we see something very similar to what we see in the *Or.dom.*: the language that implies the end of time often gives place to the beginning of time (protology instead of eschatology), and yet the contrast between the present, historical time, and the time when the *logoi* will reveal the face of Jesus Christ is unmistakably connected with what we usually associate with a deeper study and understanding of eschatology (cf. Louth 1996: 70–2).

Similarly, the foretaste of the kingdom of God, as it was given to Peter, John, and James during the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ, or the significance of the eighth day, also touch on eschatological themes, in the way Maximus discussed this unique biblical event. Maximus discussed the Transfiguration in detail in *QD* 191–2 (in *Philokalia* 14A, Meretakis 1992: 255–72) and *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91. 1125D–1128D). He followed earlier Fathers such as Irenaeus and John Chrysostom, who read the Transfiguration as a partial revelation of the kingdom of God to the three disciples, but he also considered the very event of the Transfiguration as a sign that needs to be opened, as an entry into the mystery of the kingdom. Therefore, his analysis of the Transfiguration of Christ includes elements that we do not find in other Fathers, which reveal

something about the way towards Christ. The Gospel book is identified with the body of Jesus Christ (Louth 1996: 70) and its meaning becomes clear through the divine light of the Transfiguration or of the kingdom. The Gospel is put forth as a door or path that leads to the kingdom.

Maximus interprets the white garments of Christ in two ways: building on an idea initially put forth by Origen (Louth 1996: 70), he writes that they symbolize the words of scripture, and at the same time they symbolize the entire creation. Both scripture and creation consist of *logoi*, a word which means both ‘words’ (the words of scripture) and the meaning of the created order, the principles in accordance with which everything in the cosmos was created through the Word of God, the Logos. The *logoi* are fundamental to the cosmic theology of Maximus, and are discussed in many of his works. Simply put, every part of creation bears the *logos* on it, as a seal of the original Logos, Christ. This *logos* is something like the memory of the original creation (or perhaps the anticipation of the restored creation) and the harmony of everything inside it, when everything will exist according to its natural order.

Continuing with *Amb.Io.* 10, Maximus writes that the splendour of the garments of Christ shows that the words of the Gospel and the *logoi* of the universe became clear to the apostles. It is a model of eschatological revelation (the literal meaning of ἀποκάλυψις), when the words of God and the meaning of the universe will become clear, when we will be able to see God ‘face-to-face’. For Maximus, this is a foretaste of what will happen on a cosmic scale, a revelation of how the entire universe will become clear at the end of time.

The eschatological dimension of the Transfiguration for the Confessor is completed by the way he considers Moses and Elijah as representing different conditions of the human being that nevertheless converge around Christ. Moses and Elijah symbolize the legal and the prophetic word, wisdom and kindness, knowledge and education, activity and contemplation, marriage and celibacy, life and death, life in God and death of the passions, the fulfilment in the Logos and the illumination of the prophetic and the legal word, time and nature, the *logos* of the world perceived through the senses and the intelligible *logos*. This unlikely list of oppositions shows that Christ draws into himself all possibilities of the human condition, all the accidentals of human nature.

This image combines eschatological, cosmic, christological, and eucharistic elements. The way all of these themes are used and combined by Maximus shows us something else: that he is not interested in demonstrating a static universe, nor is he interested in a triumphalism that is completely removed from pastoral concerns. Instead, he tries to connect the vision with the practice, the descriptive doctrine with the ascetic ascent. Although he often uses the format of exegetical hermeneutics (on scripture, on Gregory the Theologian, or on Ps-Dionysius) in order to articulate his thought, his hermeneutics is the hermeneutics of dynamic salvation. It is not enough to connect the vision of the fallen apostles on Tabor with the light of the kingdom of God: he feels it is necessary to connect the vision of the eschaton with the present, and to study what can lead us to it.

## Pentecost

Maximus sometimes displays an unusual interest on the symbolism of numbers (cf. *Q.Thal.* 40, Laga–Steel 1980: 267–75; *Q.Thal.* 55, Laga–Steel 1980: 481–513, as examples), an interest that can be traced all the way back to Origen. And yet, he does not waste any time and energy trying to uncover the secret and hidden meanings that would be revealed only to initiates. Instead, he often used numbers in order to elaborate a theological view, assuming that the meaning would be evident.

Maximus approaches the symbolism of Pentecost in an interesting way, which is based on the sermon of Gregory the Theologian on the feast of Pentecost (*QD* 5, in *Philokalia* 14A, Meretakis 1992: 14). When he discusses Gregory’s sermon, he starts by pointing to the eschatological character of the eighth day of the week, which is given to us ‘from the future age’. The number seven symbolizes everything that is appropriate to the limited created nature (‘time, age, ages, movement, area, measure, terms, providence, and many others’), and the eighth day is a symbol of the transcendence of creation. It is on the eighth day that he sees the rest of the souls, the ever-moving rest.

But then, elsewhere, in his fifth *Century on Theology* (*Th.oec.* 5. 46, PG 90. 1365; and *Th.oec.* 5. 49, PG 90. 1369), he discusses the day of Sabbath, Easter, and Pentecost in an ascending order of importance: Sabbath (which combines features of Saturday and of Sunday) is a symbol of the end of the difficulties and the injustices of this life (in other words, this is the rest that death brings). Easter is the liberator of those who had been captive by sin. Pentecost is the beginning and the end, and the reason or *logos* for all creation.

When he talks about Pentecost, Maximus thinks at a different level, beyond the ritual renewal of the eighth day. What Pentecost represents is at a level above history, or rather one of the events that allow Maximus to say that the human limitations have been lifted by this act of God, the transformation of human existence through the visitation of the Holy Spirit.

In his explanation of Pentecost to Thalassius, Maximus develops further the relationship between the days of the week and Pentecost (*Q.Thal.* 65, in *Philokalia* 14C, Meretakis 1992: 394–432). If the monad multiplies itself by seven in order to form the week, then the week multiplies itself by seven, and adds to itself the original monad once again, giving us the fifty days of Pentecost. In addition, the number five represents the five senses and also all sorts of human knowledge and science, but when it is multiplied by the number of commandments God chose to give us the first time, the result is also the fifty days of Pentecost. Maximus reads this also as the relationship of the created nature (which is defined by the number five) with the deification through the grace of God (which was the reason God gave the Ten Commandments). All this strengthens further the image of the realized liturgical eschatology, since Pentecost is not only regarded as a historical event in the life of the church, but in many respects as the way to enter the community of grace. With this in mind, we can understand more clearly how, for Maximus, the divine liturgy after the reading of the Gospel does not correspond to human history, but only to the kingdom of God: Pentecost doubles here as the second coming of Christ, which is remembered in the anaphora, as if it has taken place.

In the end, the sense we get from the writings of Maximus on eschatology, including several passages where eschatology and the presence of the kingdom of God in the here-and-now is alluded to but not fully articulated, is that this state is fully expressed in the liturgical dimension, and that, even in its fullness, it does not annihilate the human condition, but includes it fully and dynamically within the presence of God.

## Suggested Reading

A very useful discussion of the *logoi* and their use by Maximus may be found in Tollefsen 2008: 64–138. For an extensive analysis of will in Maximus, see Bathrellos 2004: 117–47. Louth 1996: 70–2 includes a discussion of the Transfiguration, and a more visual development of the theme of the Transfiguration in Maximus may be found in Andreopoulos 2005: 153–4. A discussion of the theme of apokatastasis in Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus can be found in Andreopoulos 2004.

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## Notes:

(<sup>1</sup>) Gregory of Nyssa, *De perfectione*, Jaeger–Cavarnos–Callahan 1986: 214; *In Cant.* 6, Langerbeck 1960: 174–5; *In Cant.* 8, Langerbeck 1960: 245–6; *Vita Moysis* 2, Musurillo 1991: 110–20. See Begzos 1992; Blowers 1992.

(<sup>2</sup>) There is a wealth of literature on this. For a recent view of the more securely Christian aspect of Origen, see Edwards 2002.

(<sup>3</sup>) ἀεικίνητος στάσις is used in several texts of Maximus, such as *Q.Thal.* 59, Laga–Steel 1990: 53. 131–2; *Q.Thal.* 65, Laga–Steel 1990: 285. 545–6; *Q.Thal.* 65, Laga–Steel 1990: 319. 193.

(<sup>4</sup>) In *Philokalia* 14A, Meretakis 1992: 38; or *QD* 19 in Declerck 1982: 18.

(<sup>5</sup>) The term *realized eschatology* is certainly problematic, if it is read as referring to a concluded and completed event. The eschaton is certainly not fully present. On the other hand, other possible terms, such as *inaugurated eschatology*, do not convey the fullness of the sacramental and liturgical weight of this idea. As it can be argued, sacramentally, liturgically, but also in relation to the theology of the saints and the relics, in certain cases it is possible to consider eschatology as something that has taken place: The eschaton is made present in history.

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