

# The Movement of Agape in Maximus the Confessor

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*The article explores Maximus the Confessor's view on love as a natural movement towards God, transformed eschatologically into participation in Trinitarian love. Maximus distinguishes between movements "according to nature," drawing creatures closer to God, and "contrary to nature," leading them away. He critiques Origen's association of movement with the fall, proposing a return to God culminating in ontological stability through deification. This process is characterized by an "ever-moving repose," where divinized souls eternally move towards God without the risk of falling anew from union with God.*

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## Introduction

The 7th century monk and philosopher Maximus the Confessor (580-662)<sup>1</sup> offers particularly deep resources for a reflection on the movement of love. I will attempt to offer a very broad overview of the question, attempting to show how the movement of creatures, and especially of human beings, if it is “according to nature”, is “love”, and how this movement is thought to be transformed eschatologically when the creature comes to participate in the incomprehensible movement of love in the Trinity.

Most of what Maximus has to say about the movement of *agape* or *eros* pertains the movement of creatures, reading this in the light of a fiercely Chalcedonian approach to the hypostatic union. Nevertheless, I will begin with the question of movement in the Trinity itself.

## Movement in the Trinity?

There are relatively few texts where Maximus engages with the question of the Trinity directly, and when he does so, he manifests great intellectual austerity<sup>2</sup>: in

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1 - It is perhaps more accurate to describe Maximus as a “monk” and a “philosopher” than to call him a “theologian”. The term “theologian” had not yet acquired its contemporary meaning in the patristic age. On patristic thought as Christian philosophy, see J. Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics: Patristic Philosophy from the Cappadocian Fathers to John of Damascus*, Oxford University Press 2020, pp. 1-9. For an overview of patristic philosophy up the century preceding Maximus see M. Edwards, *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Philosophy*, Routledge 2021. On the relation between patristic and modern understandings of “theology” see J. Zachhuber, *What is theology? Historical and systematic reflections*, in «International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church», 21, no. 3-4/2021. On the monastic background to Maximus see M. Plested, *The Ascetic Tradition*, in P. Allen - B. Neil (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford University Press 2015, pp. 164-176. On Maximus as synthesizer of the monastic tradition, see Andrew Louth’s chapter in N. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 235-295. For an important introduction to Maximus’ thought attentive to its monastic context see P.M. Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World*, Oxford University Press, 2016.

2 - Perhaps one of the densest treatments of the Oneness and Threeness of God is the one found in Chapter 23 of the *Mystagogia*. I cite this text as an illustration of the apophatic tone that Maximus displays when speaking of the Trinity: rather than attempting to make the mystery of the Trinity more comprehensible, he constructs a statement that denies all satisfaction to the “grasping” intelligence: «it will comprehend the one God, one nature and three Persons, unity of essence in three persons and consubstantial trinity, of persons; trinity in unity and unity in trinity; not one and the other, or one without the other, or one through the other, or one in the other, or one from the other, but the same in itself and by itself and next to itself, the same with itself. The same unity and trinity has a unity without composition or confusion and a distinction without separation or division. It is unity by reason of essence or of being, but not by any composition or joining together or confusion; it is trinity by reason of its mode of existence and subsisten-

*Centuries on Love* he cautions against “rushing in” when speaking about the Trinity, and notes that when one does speak of the Trinity one is surrounded by “cliffs”. His approach is decidedly apophatic. A simple reading of *Ambiguum* 23, in fact, would suggest that Maximus flatly denies that there is any movement in God. In this writing, Maximus is responding to a request for clarification on what is taken to be a difficult text from Gregory of Nazianzus. Gregory had written:

For this reason the Monad from the beginning moved toward a dyad and at the Trinity came to a halt<sup>3</sup>.

The reason that this text is taken to be ambiguous is that it appears to attribute movement to the Trinity itself. Maximus shares the concern, and writes:

For that which does not have a cause of being is not moved at all. If, then, the uncaused is necessarily also unmoved, it follows that the Divine is unmoved, insofar as it does not owe its being to a cause, being itself the cause of all beings. How, then, someone perhaps might ask, does this marvelous teacher, in the passage cited above, introduce a Divinity in motion?<sup>4</sup>.

Maximus states «that the teacher knew far better than anyone else that the Divine is unmoved»<sup>5</sup>. He argues that Gregory is aware that the unmoved cause cannot be moved, and that if there is movement, it is the movement produced in creatures by God. The Divine is by essence and nature «completely unmoved» because it is «boundless, unconditioned, and infinite»<sup>6</sup>.

The reader familiar with modern appropriation of the idea of trinitarian perichoresis as an eternal movement should not be quickly discouraged, however. Maximus is not so much denying that there is “movement” in God, as much as de-

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ce, but not by any separation or diversity or division. For the unity is not divided into the persons nor does it exist in such a way that it can be considered in an external relationship to them. Nor are the persons put together to form a unity nor do they make it up by contraction but it is by itself the same reality, sometimes to be thought of in one way, sometimes in the other. For the holy trinity of persons is an unconfused unity in essence and in its simple nature; and the holy unity is a trinity of persons and in its mode of existence. We are to think of both of these distinctly, as was said, first one way, then the other: one, single, undivided, unconfused, simple, undiminished, and unchangeable divinity, completely one in essence and completely three in persons, and sole ray shining in the single form of one triple-splendored light».

**3** - He is commenting on a text from Gregory’s First Oration on the Son. Translation from 1057C Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: Ambigua to John, 23-71*, Harvard University Press, 2014, p. 3.

**4** - 1260A Translation from *ibid.*, p. 5.

**5** - 1260A Translation from *ibidem*.

**6** - 1260B Translation from *ibidem*.

nying that there is in God the kind of movement that we as creatures know<sup>7</sup>. We are in contact here with the kind of thoroughgoing apophaticism<sup>8</sup> that denies that we can use human words and concepts – including movement and rest – to exhaust divine mysteries. In reality, Maximus denies not only that there is in God movement as we know it, but also *stasis* as we know it. Just as Maximus states in a remarkable text from the *Mystagogy* that God is both beyond being and beyond non-being<sup>9</sup>, he also states that God is *beyond* movement and beyond fixity (διὰ τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν εἶναι κίνησιν τε καὶ στάσιν)<sup>10</sup>.

If we speak of movement in the Trinity, we should do so in such a way as to eliminate change or temporality from our understanding of movement, even though those are essential features of creaturely movement. In another writing the Confessor is willing to speak of a kind of atemporal movement within the Trinity itself: God «has moved atemporally and out of love in order to arrive at the distinction of hypostases»<sup>11</sup>, and to state that the divine nature, always existing in an

7 - Törönen appears to miss this point and takes Maximus to be simply denying all movement in the Trinity. See M. Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford University Press, London 2007, pp. 69-71.

8 - Mitralaxis thinks that apophatism is a basic feature of the Eastern Christian tradition, and should not be hastily regarded as equivalent to negative theology. S. Mitralaxis, *Ever-Moving Repose: A Contemporary Reading of Maximus the Confessor's Theory of Time*, Veritas 2018.

9 - In the introduction to the *Mystagogy*, Maximus writes this dense presentation of his position. «But let God be the guide of our words and our concepts, the sole intelligence of intelligent beings and intelligible things, the meaning behind those who speak and of what is spoken, the life of those who live and those who receive life, who is and who becomes all for all beings, through whom everything is and becomes but who by himself never is nor becomes in any way anything that ever is or becomes in any manner. In this way he can in no way be associated by nature with any being and thus because of his superbeing is more fittingly referred to as nonbeing. For since it is necessary that we understand correctly the difference between God and creatures, then the affirmation of superbeing must be the negation of beings, and the affirmation of beings must be the negation of superbeing. In fact both names, being and nonbeing, are to be reverently applied to him although not at all properly. In one sense they are both proper to him, one affirming the being of God as cause of beings, the other completely denying in him the being which all beings have, based on his preeminence as cause. On the other hand, neither is proper to him because neither represents in any way an affirmation of the essence of the being under discussion as to its substance or nature. For nothing whatsoever, whether being or nonbeing, is linked to him as a cause, no being or what is called being, no nonbeing, or what is called nonbeing, is properly close to him. He has in fact a simple existence, unknowable and inaccessible to all and altogether beyond understanding which transcends all affirmation and negation» (in Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, trans. G.C. Berthold, SPCK, London 1985, pp. 185-186).

10 - S. Mitralaxis, *Ever-Moving Repose: A Contemporary Reading of Maximus the Confessor's Theory of Time*, cit., p. 115.

11 - Scholia in *De Divinis Nominibus*, CD4.1 221A: «ὁ Θεὸς καὶ Πατήρ, κινήθεις ἀχρόνως καὶ ἀγαθοπρεπῶς καὶ ἀγαπητικῶς προήλθεν εἰς διάκρισιν ὑποστάσεων» (cited in *ibid.*, p. 116).

immovable abode, seems to move in the mutual interpenetration of the divine persons<sup>12</sup>. In brief, if we want to say that there is movement in God, Maximus would want us to say that it is a “stationary movement” (στάσιμος ταυτοκινησία), and if we want to say that there is *stasis*, he would want us to say that it is an “ever-moving repose” (στάσις ἀεικίνητος).

## Creation and the Movement of Creatures

As I have noted, however, the great majority of Maximus’ writings deal not with the Trinity *in se*, but with a trinitarian treatment of the economy. This economy, as we will see, concludes eschatologically in a divinizing participation in this mode of divine movement, which is in the final analysis love. The economy unfolds temporally towards this end. It begins when the “internal motion”, so to speak, of the Trinity is expressed in a kind of “external motion” that grants existence to created beings, drawing them from non-being. Creation is said to be expression of God’s “goodness”<sup>13</sup> and “love”. The qualifications that we saw Maximus apply to movement within the Trinity do not apply to created beings. Maximus consistently builds his understanding of creation from his Chalcedonian Christology, according to which the divine is not “confused” with the created<sup>14</sup>. Instead of this movement being “stationary movement” or “ever-moving repose” creatures are set in a motion of return towards God. God’s creative external motion is an ongoing activity sustaining all things in their motion.

All created beings are in motion due to their relation to one another and to God. They are both stable and unstable. The stability is given in the *logoi* by which they are created, since all *logoi* are one in the *Logos* whose mode of existence is that of the Trinity, where movement is stationary and *stasis* is ever-moving. They are also

12 - Scholia in *De Mystica Theologia*, PG4 425A: «Φησὶν οὖν ὅτι καὶ ἐν μονῇ ἀκινήτῳ ἀεὶ οὐσα ἡ θεία φύσις, δοκεῖ κινεῖσθαι ἐν τῇ ἀλλήλοις χωρήσει» (cited in *ibidem*).

13 - «Eternally existing as Creator, God creates when he wishes by his consubstantial Word and Spirit out of infinite goodness. But do not object: For what reason did he create at this time, since he was always good? Because, I say in turn, the inscrutable wisdom of the infinite nature is not subject to human knowledge» (Maximus Confessor, *Chapters on Charity*, 4.3, in *Selected Writings*, cit., p. 75).

14 - Thunberg writes that «his view of creation is in fact best understood in relation to the central dogma of Chalcedonian Christology: the definition of the union of the two natures in Christ as without confusion, change, division and separation but in mutual communication. This implies that the Christological combination of inseparable unity and preserved identity is, in Maximus’ view, equally characteristic both of the relationship of God to creation and of the different entities of creation in relation to one another» (L. Thunberg - A. Macdonald Allchin, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, Open Court Publishing Company 1995, p. 49).

unstable because as creatures they only have stability in when their return to the Trinity is completed. Thus, in *Ambiguum* 15, Maximus writes:

all beings are absolutely stable and motionless according to the principle by which they were given subsistence and by which they exist, but by virtue of the principle of what is contemplated around them, they are all in motion and unstable, and it is on this level that God's dispensation of the universe wisely unfolds and is played out to the end<sup>15</sup>.

The stability that is given in the *logoi* is given through the dispensation or economy, which means that it plays out through a motion of the creatures. The natures of beings are defined by their *logoi*. Therefore, the motion "according to nature" is motion towards fulfillment of the creature's *logos* and its *telos*, which is to say the fullness that God intended for that being. The motion of creatures is conceived by Maximus as directional, with two possibilities. On the one hand there is motion "according to nature" (κατὰ φύσιν) which is the returning motion towards fuller communion with God, the source of creation. This motion can be described as an intense longing (*eros*) for union with God. The other direction that motion can take is that "contrary to nature" (παρὰ φύσιν), this is a movement away from God and towards an individual existence which ultimately leads to corruption, death and a return to the non-being from which the creature was created, and to which it returns if it seeks its ontological stability in itself.

### **Rereading Origen and Maximus' Notion of *Epektasis***

Maximus develops these positions on creaturely motion in the context of his attempt to develop an alternative to the Origenist framework that connected movement with the Fall away from God. Origen had imagined souls who were originally, prior to creation, in a state of rest, and had fallen away from God due to "satiety" (κόρος). By "satiety" the Alexandrian intended a state of spiritual and moral complacency, a cooling off of desire for union with God, that had led to a decline in spiritual fervour. This then led to God's creation of this world as part of his plan to bring souls back to the original union. Maximus understands that this meant attributing a negative meaning to creaturely movement, as well as opening up the possibility that the same process might not repeat itself any number of times when souls who reunite with God again fall prey to satiety. Thus, Origen allows for a kind of hellenistically toned cyclical understanding of time, since «he left the end of his-

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15 - PG 1217A-B. Translation from Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: Ambigua to Thomas; Ambigua to John*, 1-22, Harvard University Press 2014, p. 367.

torical linearity open, not fixed into an irreversible finality, and therefore possibly leading to a cycle of new beginnings and ends»<sup>16</sup>.

Maximus' solution involves positing God's will to create from non-being (*ex nihilo*) at the beginning, setting creatures in a movement towards a final union with him that represents a kind of ontological stability from which the creature can no longer fall at the end. Thus, Maximus' triad is origination-motion-fixity (γένεσις-κίνησις-στάσις)<sup>17</sup>. When God creates from non-being he places in them the principles (*logoi*) that govern their movement. Having come into existence, created beings commence their movement, and this movement can be, as stated previously according to, or contrary to their *logoi*. If the creature achieves its final end, by aligning its freedom in accordance with the *logoi* of their nature, they will in the end come to share in the mode of existence of the Trinity, which is the state of ever-moving repose that is proper to the Trinity. Beings originate in motion from God, but their *telos* and purpose is the divine mode of *stasis*, namely the "ever-moving repose" of perfect communion with God. Thus, Maximus suggests two kinds of creaturely motion, (1) that given by God in creation as the mode of creaturely existence by which they return to God and (2) the eternally moving repose towards which their motion was oriented and in which it finds the kind of ontological stability that they were striving for.

In the first sense, which is the one in which we are immersed in the course of our personal history, motion exists precisely because creatures have not yet achieved repose. In *Ambiguum* 7, Maximus writes:

If, in the first place, we accept that the Divine is immovable (since it fills all things), whereas everything that has received its being *ex nihilo* is in motion (since all things are necessarily carried along toward some cause), then nothing that moves has yet come to rest, because its capacity for appetitive movement has not yet come to repose in what it ultimately desires, for nothing but the ap-

16 - A. Andreopoulos, *Eschatology in Maximus the Confessor*, in P. Allen - B. Neil (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, cit., p. 324.

17 - Von Balthasar writes: «The basic structure of creaturely ontology [...] consists in a fundamental non-identity of the existing thing within its own being, in an extension or distancing (διάστημα, διάστασις) that finds its expression in momentum (φορά), and more specifically in the triad of coming to be, movement, and coming to rest (γένεσις, κίνησις, στάσις). The middle concept of these three, movement, expresses the insight that although the origin and goal, the coming to be and the coming to rest, of finite being are – in themselves – identical, they are not identical for finite being; its extension, its becoming, forces it to achieve this identity through a process of transition» (H.U. von Balthasar, *Cosmic liturgy: the universe according to Maximus the Confessor*, Ignatius Press 2003, p. 137). This is only one of Maximus' triads. Loudovikos lists 11 triads in N. Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press Brookline, MA 2010, pp. 76-84.

pearance of the ultimate object of desire can bring to rest that which is carried along by the power of its own nature. It follows, then, that nothing that is in motion has come to rest, since it has not yet attained its ultimate desire end, because that which can arrest the motion of whatever is moved in relation to it has not yet appeared<sup>18</sup>.

Movement is toward the creature's true end, and does indeed have a point of arrival, when divinization, and the second form of movement is achieved.

It is in relation to this second form of movement that Maximus proposes a slightly different notion of ἐπέκτασις compared to that of Gregory of Nyssa. Both authors argue that the soul's desire for God is insatiable and its progress towards divine union is without limit or end. Both also connect the need for this progress to be infinite to the infinity of God and the incapacity of finite beings to attain full knowledge of God, as well as the need to affirm an understanding of deification that means that the process never comes to an end. Maximus, however, takes Gregory's polemical stance against the Origenistic notion that one might fall from fullness because of *satiety* (κόρος) to another level, considering the need to avoid the possibility of *satiety* in the eschatological state. If that is not avoided, what could ensure that the infinite movement towards God might not suffer from the effects of *satiety*? What Maximus is arguing for is a kind of ontological stability given with deification that would prevent creatures from a new fall. The infinite movement of the divinized soul continues towards God, but now without the risk of a new fall. In this state movement is united with *stasis*. As Paul Blowers explains, Maximus wishes to establish that a "certain immutability and stability" is already available to human beings prior to reaching the final end, and involves living in accordance with the *logoi* of one's nature. On this level, however, the possibility of maintaining the movement is a question of moral responsibility of the human being to align one's actions with one's nature. Final deification, instead, is a graced new ontological state where no return towards non-being is possible. Blowers summarizes Maximus' position thus:

[...] in its own contemporary debate with Origenism, particularly with his eschatology as caricatured in the famous anathemas of the 553 Council of Constantinople, Maximus sought to establish that there was indeed a final stasis, or repose, of the moral movement of souls to be achieved, but that it must be an

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18 - 1069B in Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: Ambigua to Thomas; Ambigua to John*, 1-22, cit., pp. 77-79.



authentic, imperturbable fixity in God [...]. How could the eternal movement of creatures thus be reconciled with final and “real” stasis?<sup>19</sup>.

It is here that the union of the divine and human in Christ is decisive. Divinization is precisely the union of what would otherwise be contradictory. Divinization in Christ is the graced overcoming of to this dichotomy, where movement is united with *stasis*. This indeed is the “whole mystery of Christ”:

And this is because it is for the sake of Christ – that is, for the whole mystery of Christ – that all the ages and the beings existing within those ages received their beginning and end in Christ. For the union of the limit of the age and limitlessness, of measure and immeasurability, of finitude and infinity, of Creator and creation, and of rest and motion, was conceived before the ages. This union has been manifested in Christ at the end of time, and through itself bestows the fulfillment of God’s foreknowledge, so that creatures in motion by nature might find rest around that which is absolutely immovable by essence, departing completely from their movement toward themselves and each other, so that they might acquire, by experience, an active knowledge of Him in whom they were made worthy to find their stability, a knowledge which is unalterable and always the same, and which bestows upon them the enjoyment of the One they have come to know<sup>20</sup>.

In Christ, creatures attain new ontological stability in the very movement that is proper to the creature. If Gregory’s notion of *epektasis* serves to head off the implications of Origen’s doctrine of protological satiety, Maximus’ version aims also at heading off the implications of an instability in the eschatological state that might lead to eschatological satiety. Or, to put it more simply, if for Gregory, *epektasis* seems to result in a kind of eternal progress without final arrival or *stasis*, for Maximus, it represents an “ever-moving repose” (στάσις ἀεικίνητος) as the culmination of *epektasis*, a new eschatological mode of being that is that of the Trinity itself. In Maximus, all of this is integrated into the collective cosmic movement towards God, where the human being operates as microcosm in God’s plan for the unification of all things.

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**19** - Andreas Andreopoulos summarizes the outcome of Maximus’ position «The final rest then includes eternal movement, but it is nevertheless a permanent condition, where it is possible to move only towards God, and not away. The brilliant paradoxical expression, ‘ever-moving rest’, describes precisely this dynamic permanence which allows the creatures to continue their movement towards the infinity of God, without ever exhausting it» (A. Andreopoulos, *Eschatology in Maximus the Confessor*, cit., p. 328).

**20** - *Ad Thalassium* 60,4 in Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in Sacred Scripture*, trans. Maximos Constas, CUA Press, Washington D.C. 2018, p. 429.

Another triad that Maximus uses is worth recalling here: namely the triad of being (εἶναι), well-being (εὖ εἶναι), and eternal well-being (ἀεὶ εὖ εἶναι), each of which represent ontologically different steps in the motion of creatures towards God. The first is “being” (εἶναι) and refers to the beginning state of beings who are by nature oriented towards God and represents the change that God brings about in passing from non-being to being. The ball is then passed, so to speak, to human creature, who freely choose to live in accordance with, or against, the *logoi* of their nature. Living in accordance with nature brings one into what is a second stage: “well-being” (εὖ εἶναι). The expression of free adhesion to God’s will, the development of the virtues brings about a state of moral and spiritual health, where love of God is inseparable from love of neighbour. Prior to the eschatological state of arrival, however, there is always the possibility of an inversion of the direction and a movement toward non-being. The ultimate state of deification is called “eternal well-being” (ἀεὶ εὖ εἶναι) where the mode of trinitarian life becomes the permanent reality of the creature, a state of “ever-moving repose” which is the perfection of love in the creature.

## Conclusion: On Love

I am fully aware, as I draw this communication to a close, that I have barely scratched the surface of Maximus’ thought on these themes. I am especially aware that I have not spoken at all about what is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Maximus’ thought, namely the way in which he draws an entire cosmology from this reflection on the Chalcedonian approach to the hypostatic union<sup>21</sup>, and what this means for an understanding of the movement of love<sup>22</sup>. To remedy this failure, and to conclude my contribution, I draw attention to a striking passage from

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**21** - For an introduction to Maximus’ thought in the broad context of the Christological debate, see D. Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ: person, nature, and will in the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford University Press, 2004 and B. Daley, *God Visible: Patristic Christology Reconsidered*, Oxford University Press 2018. For a brief introduction to how his Christology informs his cosmology see T.T. Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, in P. Allen - B. Neil (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, cit. For a longer treatment see T.T. Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford University Press, 2008.

**22** - For treatments of the theme of “love” in Maximus, see F. Ivanovic, *Desiring the Beautiful: The Erotic-Aesthetic Dimension of Deification in Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor*, CUA Press 2019, pp. 115-143. Wessel treats the theme of the love in Maximus with specific attention to the dynamics of love of neighbour and especially love of everyone in S. Wessel, *The Theology of Agape in Maximus the Confessor*, in «St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly» (2011).

*Ambiguum* 7 that speaks of the «perichoretic embrace»<sup>23</sup> of the divine and human in Christ that makes the deification spoken above into a cosmic event. He speaks of God's «divinizing man through his love for God», and the «humanization of God though his love for man» as a «beautiful exchange» that «renders God man by reason of the divinization of man, and man God by reason of the Incarnation of God. For the *Logos* of God (who is God) wills always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of His embodiment»<sup>24</sup>. The purpose of the movement of love that results in creation is brought to fulfillment in the incarnation where the divine mode of life is communicated to human beings.

Maximus' *Epistle 2 "On Love"* draws this dynamic sense of the communication of divine life to human beings into a general comment and definition of love with which I can conclude my brief comments:

Love is therefore a great good, and of goods the first and most excellent good, since through it God and man are drawn together in a single embrace, and the creator of humankind appears as human, through the undeviating likeness of the deified to God in the good so far as is possible to humankind. And the interpretation of love is: to love the Lord God with all the heart and soul and power, and the neighbour as oneself. Which is, if I might express it in a definition, the inward universal relationship to the first good connected with the universal purpose of our natural kind. Other than this there is nothing that can make the human being who loves God ascend any higher, for all other ways of true religion are subordinate to it. This we know as love and so we call it, not divisively assigning 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 one to another. For the activity and clear proof of perfect love towards God is a genuine disposition of voluntary goodwill towards one's neighbour. For he who does not love his brother

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**23** - For this expression, see E. Vishnevskaya, *Divinization as Perichoretic Embrace in Maximus the Confessor*, in M.J. Christensen - J.A. Wittung (eds.), *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI 2008, pp. 132-45.

**24** - *Amb* 7 1084CD Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: Ambigua to John*, 23-71, cit., p. 107. Jordan Daniel Wood has dedicated an entire book to arguing that Maximus must be taken to be speaking entirely literally here. See J.D. Wood, *The Whole Mystery of Christ*, University of Notre Dame Press, South Bend, IL 2022. In *Amb* 10, Maximus writes: «they say that God and man are paradigms of each other, so that as much as man, enabled by love, has divinized himself for God, to that same extent God is humanized for man by His love for mankind; and as much as man has manifested God who is invisible by nature through the virtues, to that same extent man is rapt by God in mind to the unknowable» (1113B-C, translation from Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: Ambigua to John*, 23-71, cit., p. 165).

whom he has seen, says the divine Apostle John, cannot love God whom he has not seen (1John 4:20)<sup>25</sup>.

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