

MAXIMUS AND ECOLOGY: THE RELEVANCE OF
MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR'S THEOLOGY OF
CREATION FOR THE PRESENT ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

by

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RELIGIOUS communities all over the world are presenting the relevance of their traditions to the contemporary ecological crisis in one of the most commendable accomplishments of inter-religious dialogue: common concern for the environment.¹ Surprisingly, some contemporary theologians consider that the Christian patristic tradition does not have the proper resources to offer a solution in this context and might even be a significant cause of today's situation. They criticize Christianity for allegedly separating human beings from the rest of creation, being anthropocentric, and allowing the abuse of creation. They propose a wide range of solutions, including turning towards animist religions or adopting an attitude towards creation that tends toward pantheism, which would in turn bring humanity closer to creation.²

In response, I suggest that it is both possible and imperative for Christianity to actualize its traditional theology of creation and make it instrumental in opposing today's ecocide. Christian Tradition, as represented in the works of Maximus the Confessor, condemns the attitudes that perpetuate the present environmental crisis, and offers spiritual solutions to solve it, based on the understanding of the human person as the centre of creation. Despite its immediate etymological implication, this position cannot be labelled as anthropocentric, since the human being is ascribed a priestly role, of gathering the *logoi* of creation and offering them eucharistically to the Logos. Ultimately, Maximus's theology of creation and anthropology are theocentric.

After some biographical and bibliographical information about Maximus, I present his theology of creation and its relevance to the present ecological crisis. I concentrate on his account of the divine Logos and *logoi* in creation; *tropos*; movement and stability; the fall into sin (with three aspects: the way it impacted the entire creation, creation seen as a purpose in itself and theocentrism, as well as the spiritual value of creation); and then I conclude with Maximus's soteriology, related to the role of human persons as priests of creation.

The Life and Work of Maximus the Confessor

Maximus, now revered as saint confessor in the Orthodox and Catholic traditions, was exposed to Palestinian, Byzantine, and Roman Christianity. Consequently, his theology has been influenced by numerous Church Fathers, especially the Cappadocians, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Evagrian spirituality.³ Maximus played a crucial role in the final refutation of Origenism as well as in the rejection of the Monothelite and Monoergist positions. Still, he was a simple monk who was never ordained, even though he was offered the see of Constantinople on condition that he renounce his orthodox position against Monothelitism. His monasticism certainly irradiates in his writings, especially in his proposal of an ascetical attitude towards creation. He was persecuted with much cruelty, since, unfortunately, it was customary to punish those judged to be enemies of imperial policy in the seventh century: besides being exiled, his tongue and right hand were cut off, so that he could not preach or write against Monothelitism. He died in 662, at the age of eighty-two.

Maximus directed his early works mainly against Origenism, while his later writings were especially concerned with Christological controversies,⁴ although there are significant exceptions to this rule. In the present article, I concentrate on the first category, in which his theology of creation is best articulated. These works include *Mystagogia*,⁵ *Ad Thalassium*,⁶ and especially *Ambigua*.⁷

The Ecological Relevance of Logoi and Tropos

One of the issues often discussed in ecological circles today is the relationship between God and creation, with opinions ranging from deism (according to which God is isolated in transcendence)

to pantheism (that regards creation as divine, identifying the Creator in creation). Attempting to safeguard both God's transcendence and the sanctity of creation, I now address Maximus's theology of the *logoi* (λόγοι). According to Adam Cooper,

In Maximus's cosmology the *logoi* are God's original ideas or intentions for creation: the unifying, ordering, determinative and defining principles in accordance with which God institutes created natures. A thing's being—what it is—is determined by its *logos*, by what God intends it to be. As constitutive of relation and definition, the *logoi* define the essential qualities and purpose of creaturely being and at the same time disclose the divine Word and Wisdom operative within the cosmic economy.⁸

Maximus contends that the *logoi* 'pre-exist in God, in accordance with which all things are and have become and abide, ever drawing near through natural motion to their purposed *logoi*'.⁹ Additionally, he writes that the divine Logos 'held together in himself the *logoi* before they came to be',¹⁰ or, as Dumitru Staniloae—a Romanian Orthodox theologian who has translated and commented on Maximus extensively—translates it, 'the Logos contains the *logoi* of creation subsisting in him before the ages'.¹¹ Staniloae then concludes that the *logoi* do not exist in a proper sense, but subsist as potencies in God,¹² meaning that the *logoi* do not introduce multiplicity in God, but are contained in the divine Logos as ideas that will receive concrete form at creation. In this sense, Maximus borrows the Areopagite's expression and calls the *logoi* 'predeterminations' and 'divine wills' according to which God has created things.¹³ The translation of *logoi* has so many possibilities (ideas, words, reasons, prototypes, paradigms, archetypes, principles, etc.), that I do not translate it.

According to Maximus, God created the world the following way: the *logoi* subsisted in God from eternity, as ideas. In the beginning, God first created what Staniloae calls 'plasticized *logoi*', in conformity with the eternal *logoi*.¹⁴ If the eternal *logoi* only subsist from eternity as ideas, they exist concretely in creation as plasticized *logoi*. When Staniloae identifies them as 'plasticized', he refers to plastic as an adjective,¹⁵ meaning that these plasticized *logoi* are able to be moulded or shaped. The plasticized *logoi* represent the basic form of a certain individual thing. Why is this distinction (eternal-plasticized *logoi*) important for Staniloae? Because—unlike the pre-existing eternal *logoi*—the plasticized *logoi*

can be corrupted by human will,¹⁶ which thus gives a new identity to created beings. By his sin, Adam corrupted the plasticized *logoi* of the entire universe and transformed it into a fallen world, marked by imbalances. Conversely, by leading a spiritual life, humans have the capacity to restore these plasticized *logoi* to conformity with the eternal *logoi*, and thus restore order in creation.

Maximus also writes about *tropos* (τρόπος), which could be translated as ‘mode’ (of existence of each element of creation), and represents the way in which a certain individual reality moves: progressively or regressively.¹⁷ Similar to the plasticized *logoi*, the *tropos* can also be corrupted, so it allows us to change while not changing what we essentially are. In other words, we are what we do: our *tropos* is positive (i.e. ‘of salvation’ or ‘filial’¹⁸) if we act in accordance with the *logoi*, or, vice versa, our *tropos* is negative if we conduct ourselves contrary to the divine intention planted within us in the form of the plasticized *logoi*. Still, despite all these changes caused by positive or negative behaviour, we remain essentially unchanged in our basic substance: human beings. In fact, because Adam ‘has abused the natural power given to him through creation, to unite those that were divided’,¹⁹ his mode of existence was changed into what Alain Riou calls a ‘*tropos* of abuse’.²⁰ In relation to the ecological crisis, Maximus would say that although our natures remain what God created, our mode of existence after the fall inherently implies the abuse of creation!

How are these Maximian concepts valuable for today’s ecological discussion? First, the relationship between the divine Logos and the *logoi* both safeguards God’s transcendence without falling into deism, and asserts the sanctity of creation (in which the divine *logoi* are present) without affirming pantheism. The affirmation of the sanctity of creation is especially important for maintaining the relevance of non-pantheistic religions such as Christianity, Judaism, or Islam, for the present ecological crisis, and patristic Christian tradition as represented by Maximus accomplishes this task by affirming the presence of the Logos in creation through the *logoi*.

Second, Maximus responds indirectly to several contemporary theologians who accuse Christianity of disrespect for creation, a disrespect that is allegedly based on the distinction between God and creation. These theologians propose pantheistic elements or

religions as the most suitable solution to today's environmental imbalances. For example, 'Deep Ecology'—whose most distinguished representative is the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess—argues for a spirituality rooted in 'biocentric equality', affirming the unity of all beings and their equal right to live. This position is based on the teachings of Gandhi, process philosophy, Buddhism, and ancient religions of the Earth.²¹ There are many other theologians who would prefer pantheist ideas to Christianity as a solution to the present ecological crisis, but it is not the moment to review them here.

Third, God has willed each element of creation from eternity, according to a specific plan; for us to change the natural order through our lack of spirituality and create an environmental disaster is in opposition to God's eternal plan. We have the power to change the *tropos* and the plasticized *logoi* of things, but how are we going to use it? Are we going to continue according to our *tropos* of abuse, according to our fallen, abusive nature, or are we going to have a positive impact upon our own nature first, and then upon the entire universe? Our calling is to restore the plasticized *logoi* to conformity with the divine *logoi*, or to make manifest the *tropos* of adoption and of salvation that the Son has given us.

Movement – Stability

Maximus rejects the Origenist idea that movement in creation has a negative character. Origen considered that all the spirits in the *henad* (ἐνάδα) moved because of boredom and, consequently, were punished by being created at different levels, according to their differentiated rebellion. In response, Maximus affirms that God first created the spiritual and material world good out of love (not as punishment), then creation began its movement from God, in God, and towards God. He writes:

If then rational beings come into being, surely they are also moved, since they move from a natural beginning in 'being' toward a voluntary end in 'well-being'. For the end of the movement of those who are moved is 'eternal well-being' itself, just as its beginning is being itself which is God who is the giver of being as well as of well-being. For God is the beginning and the end. From him come both our moving in whatever way from a beginning and our moving in a certain way toward him as an end.²²

Thus, Maximus proposes the triad of ‘being’, ‘well-being’, and ‘eternal well-being’. In this triad, ‘being’ corresponds to our existence, ‘well-being’ refers to our movement within God and according to the directions traced by the eternal *logoi* in us, while ‘eternal well-being’ represents the purpose of our movement, which is eternal rest in God.²³ This does not mean complete stillness, since progress in God will continue for eternity²⁴ (here Maximus is similar to Gregory of Nyssa’s ἐπέκτασις).²⁵ Rather, our movement will end in stability in the sense that we will be fixed or unmoved in good. In other words, while our freedom will not be abolished, we will not have the possibility to fall away from good, to choose evil, but will progress eternally in communion with the infinite God.²⁶ In fact, even if both stability in good and divinization²⁷ will be perfected in ‘eternal well-being’, they begin in the ‘well-being’ phase, as Maximus writes:

I have no intention of denying free will. Rather I am speaking of a firm and steadfast disposition, a willing surrender, so that from the one from whom we have received being we long to receive being moved as well. It is like the relation between an image and its archetype. A seal conforms to the stamp against which it was pressed, and has neither desire nor capability to receive an impression from something else, or to put it forthrightly, it does not want to [... since it] becomes God²⁸ by divinization.²⁹

Maximus then relates ‘well-being’, ‘eternal well-being’, stability, and divinization in his commentary on Acts 17:28, ‘In him we live and move and have our being’, where he writes about the divinized human person:

On the one hand, insofar as he is already irrevocably one with himself in his disposition, he is free of unruly passions. But in the future age when graced with divinization, he will affectionately love and cleave to the *logoi* already mentioned that pre-existed in God ... In this way he becomes a ‘portion of God’... He places himself wholly in God alone, wholly imprinting and forming God alone in himself, so that by grace he himself ‘is God and is called God’.³⁰

This kind of movement, in and towards our origin, is rational movement, in accordance with our *logoi*. Because of sin, however, we move away from God, in the direction of created things, which are not capable of giving us stability, but instead lead to

immorality. In Maximus's words, human beings who display such an attitude are 'said to have "slipped down from above" [since they do] not move towards [their] own beginning and cause according to which and for which and through which [they] came to be. [They enter] a condition of unstable gyrations and fearful disorder of soul and body.'³¹ This sort of movement, towards creation as its final purpose, is 'unnatural and irrational'.³²

Furthermore, a disorderly kind of movement is perpetuated in the entire universe. Why in the entire universe? Because, according to Maximus, created beings are 'not free of relationship';³³ they are inter-related, so that the movement of Adam determines the direction in which the rest of creation moves (in this case, away from God). A rational movement, on the other hand, re-gathers the entire creation and focusses its movement in the right direction, towards God. We have the capacity to restore the proper direction of movement, which is equivalent to cosmic salvation.

These concepts are very important for today's ecological context. First, they reinforce the idea that the entire universe originates with God, and belongs to God, who created it out of his loving kindness. Therefore, it is only natural that it should move towards God, who represents the purpose of all movement. Implicitly, this is a response to the accusation that Christianity proposes an anthropocentric theology. The American historian Lynn White is the most often quoted author to have made this accusation. He argues that, 'especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen'. In antiquity, however, every tree had its protecting spirit; so, by destroying Animism, Christianity opened up the way for destruction. Moreover, he argues that 'Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt' and that 'we shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man'. However, White does not necessarily argue that Christianity is absolutely and irreparably irrelevant for the ecological crisis. He gives St Francis of Assisi as a positive example and questions the efficacy of Buddhism in a Western culture, because of its pronounced Eastern character.³⁴

Given his tireless support of the relevance of patristic tradition to today's ecological crisis, it is surprising to read that the Greek Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas writes along the same lines:

The American historian Lynn White was right to attribute the causes of the problem to Christian theology, particularly of the Western Church, which exploited the verses of Genesis containing God's order to the first human beings to 'dominate the earth' in order to encourage them, as Descartes bluntly put it, to be 'masters and possessors of nature'.³⁵

Although affirming the same basic principle of (Western) Christianity's culpability for the present ecological crisis, Jürgen Moltmann has a more nuanced position in this regard. He considers that

we cannot ignore the historical effects of the... *misunderstood and misused* [emphasis mine] biblical belief in creation... The Christian belief in creation as it has been maintained in the European and American Christianity of the Western churches is therefore not guiltless of the crisis in the world today... How must the Christian belief in creation be interpreted and reformulated, if it is no longer to be itself one factor in the ecological crisis and the destruction of nature, but is instead to become a ferment working towards the peace with nature which we seek?³⁶

Elizabeth Johnson³⁷ and Sallie McFague³⁸ both challenge White's description of Christianity on historical grounds. They argue that White's affirmations are true in regard to the last five centuries of Western Christian theology, but the same cannot be said about biblical and patristic writings, which need to be reinterpreted to present the relevance of Christian theology to the present ecological crisis. If one is able to identify notable instances of biblical scholars who have presented an ecologically friendly interpretation of the Bible,³⁹ this is more challenging in regard to patristic writings. The call of Moltmann, Johnson, and McFague to reinterpret correctly and to reformulate the Christian tradition is yet another reason why it is important to study the theology of Maximus the Confessor, an Eastern Father of the Early Church, in order to present the relevance of Christian Tradition to the present ecological crisis.

Maximus would reject the accusations of anthropocentrism based on his view that the entire universe is supposed to move from God, in God, and towards God, according to the triad of 'being', 'well-being', 'eternal well-being'. It is because of human sinfulness that creation does not move that way. Adam wanted to be god without God; he thought that all material realities were

meant to satisfy his passions and that they should move towards him. Maximus condemns such a consumerist attitude as sinful. Consequently, instead of placing the human being at the centre of the universe as the target of all movement, Christian Tradition—as represented in this instance by Maximus—faults humans with the movement away from God, away from stability. The instability that we have created in the world is manifested concretely in the ecological crisis that we face so acutely today. Thus, Maximus implicitly responds to the accusations that Christianity is an anthropocentric religion, causing the present ecological crisis.⁴⁰

Yet, while rejecting anthropocentrism, Maximus still affirms that God has placed the human being at the centre of creation. However, Adam was not a replacement for God, but he was God's agent, created with a mixed nature of spirit and body, thus being capable of uniting the spiritual and material realms. According to both Gregory of Nazianzen and Maximus, Adam was created at the end of creation as a 'mixed worshipper':⁴¹ 'the Creator-Word, wishing to display this mingling and to produce a single living being with both intellect and sensation, invisible and visible, made man'.⁴² In the same passage, Maximus refers to Ps. 19:1-3 and affirms that, before the creation of humankind, all creation praised God silently. According to Staniloae's commentary, the material world praised God in silence because it did not have discursive reason. This is also the case in the spiritual realm: angels do not have discursive reason, either, but intuitive reason, which does not use words.⁴³ Moreover, only because of Adam's position as 'mixed worshipper' could he infuse material creation with his spirituality.⁴⁴ If Adam were not at the centre of creation, creation could not be saved; it could not move towards God, so Adam's central position within creation is a soteriological necessity for Maximus.

Thus, humanity is at the centre of creation and, indeed, etymologically this is the meaning of anthropocentrism. Nevertheless, since our contemporary definition of anthropocentrism is a power-term and implies that humanity is in the centre *without* God, one cannot use this term for Maximus's theology, which clearly sees humankind as God's agent in creation in the sense of a servant or priest, as I will argue shortly. Consequently, Maximus proposes the abandonment of anthropocentrism in favour of theocentrism, while also maintaining the central role of

humanity for the sanctification of creation. Maximus's theocentric anthropology is important for ecotheology because it presents the calling of the human being, as 'mixed worshipper', to sanctify creation. Moreover, these affirmations emphasize the responsibility that humans have by virtue of their central place in creation. Instead of being at the centre of the universe without God and thus abusing creation—as Lynn White would contend—humanity was called to act as God's agent in the world from the centre.

The Fall into Sin

According to Maximus, given the relatively easy way in which Adam and Eve fell into the rather unsubtle temptation of the serpent, the fall occurred shortly after the creation of humanity. Adam did not have time to anchor his will in good, and he fell easily to the delusion of pride.⁴⁵ He wanted to be god, to replace God who created him, and thus disobeyed God's commandment or, in Maximian terms, Adam moved away from his origin, and so further and further from eternal well-being. Adam wanted to be the centre of creation without God. This is anthropocentrism and Maximus condemns it as sinful.

According to Maximus, the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9,17) represents the cosmos, which addresses both the higher intellect and the lower passions. Contemplated spiritually, the world offers the knowledge of good; conversely, seen through the prism of our bodily passions, nature offers knowledge of evil. It was Adam's responsibility to look at creation spiritually, in order to discover the divine *logoi* in it. God had forbidden this fruit only temporarily, until Adam would have become steadfast in good and thus capable of regarding creation from a spiritual perspective.⁴⁶ Yet, instead of contemplating the world spiritually, Adam chose to look at nature with passion, as stated in Gen. 3:6: 'the tree was *good for food*, and it was a *delight to the eyes*'. In Maximus's words, due to 'the irrational movement of [his] intellectual faculty', Adam 'was deceived and chose to cut himself off voluntarily from God's happy end for him, preferring by his own free choice to be *drawn down to the earth* [emphasis mine] (cf. Gen. 2:17) than to become God by grace'.⁴⁷ Thus, Adam lowered himself and the rest of creation to the level of his passions, regarding it as means of satisfying his sinful desires. This caused the fall of creation, which

was now reduced simply to materiality, without being transparent to God's glory, without revealing the divine *logoi* according to which it was created.

Maximus's insight is relevant to ecology because he specifies what happens when we look at the environment from the perspective of our selfish passions. Humans see it simply as a material reality, without any trace of the divine *logoi* in it. Moreover, they try to find pleasure in something limited, something that cannot offer them stability. Human persons exhaust natural resources only to realize that they did not find the satisfaction they were looking for in them, but that they have instead caused more damage to the environment. More and more they fall under the illusion that they will find the fulfilment of their passions in the universe, and thus they only worsen today's ecological crisis by persisting in Adam's sin. Maximus does not endorse such attitudes that led to the fall and perpetuate its consequences, but condemns them as sinful.

The Impact of the Fall on the Entire Creation

The fall of Adam and Eve had a negative impact on the rest of the visible world. I have referred to the interrelationship between the primordial sin and the cosmos from four different perspectives thus far: first, Adam's sin has corrupted the plasticized *logoi* of creation; second, it has introduced a chaotic movement away from God; third, it has affected the rest of the universe because the entire creation is interconnected; and fourth, it has caused humankind to tend to view the cosmos simply as a material reality meant to satisfy its passions. A fifth way in which Maximus explains the fall of creation as a consequence of our fall is to affirm the place of the human being within creation. Because we are created at the intersection of the spiritual and material realms, having both soul and body, we are related to both of these worlds. Thus, Maximus writes about the 'instability (*το ἄστατον*) and ...proneness for undergoing change'²⁴⁸ introduced in creation by the fall of Adam. Maximus continues:

[God] *blended [creation] together with our body* [emphasis mine] on account of the transgression, and endowed [creation] with the capacity to undergo change, just as he gave the body the capacity to suffer,

undergo corruption, and be wholly dissolved—as was evinced when God covered the body with the garments of skins (Gen. 3:21). This explanation accords with the text of Scripture: ‘And the creature was made subject to corruption, not willingly, but for the sake of him who subjected it in hope’ (Rom. 8:20).⁴⁹

In a certain sense, Maximus affirms that we encompass the entire visible universe in our bodies and, when we fall, the entire visible universe falls with us. This happens because, in line with previous philosophical and religious opinions, Maximus believes that the human being is a microcosm (μικρὸς κόσμος).⁵⁰ At the same time, he also calls the cosmos an enlarged human being, *makranthropos* (μακρ-ἄνθρωπος),⁵¹ or another human being.⁵² Similarly, in *Mystagogia* 7, he represents the universe as a large human being, constituted of both visible and invisible realities.⁵³ In a certain sense, one can equate the destiny of humankind with that of the universe: both are part of the same creation. Thus, as a sixth ‘mechanism’ describing the relationship between the fall of humankind and that of creation, Maximus considers that, when humanity falls into sin, so does the *makranthropos*, just as when Christ saves human nature, he also saves the *makranthropos*. And when we, human beings, are saved, we also lead to salvation ‘the large human being’ that is the cosmos.

These considerations are important because, while many theologians agree that our spirituality influences the environment, they rarely provide a solid theological explanation of the ‘mechanisms’ of our influence, such as in these six instances from Maximus. Thus Maximus’s theology is both a response to those who deny the relevance of Christianity for ecology, and a supplement to the theologians who affirm Christianity’s contribution in helping to solve the present ecological crisis, but do not explain how our spirituality, especially the ascetic spirit of monasticism, can have a positive impact on the environment.⁵⁴

Creation Seen as Purpose in Itself and Theocentrism

As previously noted, Adam wrongly saw creation as a means to satisfy his passions. He moved towards creation as towards a final point in which he would find stability. In other words, he saw creation as a purpose in itself, and not as a milieu for his spiritual growth, or as a means to find eternal well-being in God. On the

other hand, contemporary theologians such as Thomas Berry propose, as a solution to the ecological crisis, following the direction of biocentrism or geocentrism. Berry considers that the created world does not fit into Christology and, even though he tries not to dismiss Christianity completely, his sources range from Buddhist and Hindu traditions to modern physics, while he seems not to consider the Judaeo-Christian tradition as a resource. He even contends that 'Christians are alienated people in relationship to the present world' and that we should put the Bible and the dictionary (i.e. contemporary Christian religious and social mentalities) on the shelf for about twenty years, since they are not relevant to the present ecological crisis. Instead, we should truly listen to creation before looking at Christ. After a rather short discussion of the cosmic Christ in Johannine and Pauline literature, Berry asserts that 'we are now in the period of the "third mediation"'. We are accustomed to mediation in terms of divine-human relations and inter-human relations. We have never understood mediation as regards human-nature relations.⁵⁵

Maximus would respond that biocentrism and geocentrism cannot be the solutions to the ecological crisis; on the contrary, they are precisely the cause, or at least part of the cause of today's environmental destruction, since Adam looked for stability in creation and thus regarded it as the purpose of his movement, when in fact only God can offer stability and purpose.⁵⁶ Moreover, Maximus's account of the impact of human spirituality on the environment, the interconnectedness between humanity and nature, as well as the cosmic salvific role of Christ and of graced human beings proves that, contrary to Berry's affirmation, Christianity did in fact understand mediation as regards human-nature relations.

Had he lived today, Maximus would condemn both biocentrism and geocentrism, proposing another 'centrism' as the solution to the environmental crisis, namely theocentrism: God is the centre of creation. He writes: 'Nothing that came into being is perfect [or purpose, or completion, ἀντοτελές] in itself.'⁵⁷ In other words, no creature is a purpose in itself, and to put anything other than God at the centre of creation represents a perpetuation of Adam's fall. Having said this, Maximus does not see the universe as a hindrance to our salvation, but as the environment of our spiritual growth, which I discuss next.

The Spiritual Value of Creation

If the tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden was actually a symbol for the entire Cosmos, which could be regarded either passionately or dispassionately, and Adam's salvation depended on it, then creation is the environment for our spiritual growth. Thus, the relationship between humanity and the world is mutual: humans sanctify creation, and creation helps us in our salvation. To show that our salvation depends on creation (which is another way to respond to the accusation of anthropocentrism and to Berry's concerns regarding the mediating humans-nature relationship, discussed earlier), one needs to consider three aspects of Maximus's theology. First, because no created reality can be a purpose in itself, material realities teach us to look for stability only in God, and not in creation. In Maximus's words,

it belongs to God alone to be the end and the completion [of all movement] and the impassible. God is unmoved and complete and impassible. It belongs to creatures to be moved toward that end which is without beginning, and to come to rest in the perfect end that is without end, and to experience that which is without definition, but not to *be* such or to *become* such in essence.⁵⁸

The dialectic of God's transcendence and immanence that Maximus displays here is certainly not a novelty, since many other Greek patristic writers affirm that God is wholly other than creation, even while being its source and goal.⁵⁹

Second, we ought to see how all creation reveals God. When we contemplate the universe, we should look beyond the corrupted plasticized *logoi* or *tropoi* that are the result of sin, and instead observe nature with pure eyes, to see God's eternal intentions within creation. As Maximus writes, 'All of God's beings... herald mysteriously the *logoi* according to which they were made and reveal through these *logoi* the purpose embedded by God in each creature.'⁶⁰ Moreover, these *logoi* are compared to some letters that, read dispassionately, reveal God.⁶¹ Thus, contemplating the *logoi* of creation offers an uncorrupted image of the universe as God intended it; that is, when we fully realize the sanctity of creation, not in the sense that creation is holy as in pantheism, but that God is transparent through, and present in it, as its creator and purpose.

Third, we need to listen to creation, learn from it, and join in its praise of God as it celebrates a 'cosmic liturgy', as the title of

Hans Urs von Balthasar's book indicates.⁶² Maximus wrote that the entire cosmos praises and glorifies God 'with silent voices', and that praise is not heard until we give it a voice, until we praise God in and with creation.⁶³ When creation and humankind praise God together, they both experience their integral state, as opposed to the 'less than fully natural' state in which they are found now, so the universe is indeed the environment of our salvation.⁶⁴

How is this relevant for ecology? First, it brings humanity closer to creation in an age when we are drifting further and further apart from nature.⁶⁵ Second, to think that our salvation is related to the environment makes us more responsible toward it. We should care for it just as Adam was working in the Garden of Eden before the fall. This is not only an interdiction against abusing nature, but it is also a positive call to contemplate its rationality, to see its uncorrupted *logoi* and to mould the plasticized *logoi* in conformity with God's eternal intentions, as opposed to our selfish, utilitarian, consumerist, fallen passions. This call to contemplate God in nature and to offer it to God was our initial task as priests of creation.

Human Persons as Priests of Creation

Maximus considers that Adam was unfaithful to his call to be the priest of creation, and, as a result of his fall, the world became split by the tension between five divisions: uncreated and created, intelligible and sensible, heaven and earth, paradise and the inhabited world, male and female.⁶⁶ Under the influence of Nemesius of Emesa (among others in this long-standing tradition),⁶⁷ Maximus affirms that, as both microcosm and priest of creation, Adam was called to mediate and overcome these divisions. 'Humanity', he writes,

clearly has the power of naturally uniting at the mean point of each division since it is related to the extremities of each division in its own parts...For this very reason the human being was introduced last among beings as a kind of natural bond (σύνδεσμός τις φυσικός) mediating between the extremities of universals through their proper parts, and leading into unity in itself those things that are naturally set apart from one another by a great interval.⁶⁸

Sin, however, rendered Adam incapable of fulfilling this mediating task. The role of humanity as priests of creation was restored only by Christ who mediated between each of the aforementioned five

divisions at the time of his ascension into heaven, when, according to Maximus, ‘this world truly ascended to heaven together with God the Logos’.⁶⁹ Thus, Christ has become the priest of creation *par excellence* and has restored the role of humanity as priests of creation. It is up to each human being to assume and share in the priestly work of Christ to overcome these divisions.⁷⁰ In this sense, Zizioulas contends that

a human being is the priest of creation as he or she freely turns it into a vehicle of communion with God and fellow human beings. This means that material creation is not treated as means of obtaining pleasure and happiness for the individual, but as a sacred gift from God which is meant to foster and promote communion with God and with others. Such a ‘liturgical’ use of nature by human beings leads to forms of culture which are deeply respectful of material world while keeping the human person at the center.⁷¹

Humans need to act in opposition to Adam, who caused the fall of creation, and go even further: they must accomplish what Adam was supposed to do. As Maximus writes, all creation belongs to God and must be offered back to God as a gift. The one who offers creation back to God is precisely the human person who, liberated from passions, contemplates creation spiritually (here Maximus gives many concrete examples of realities that lead our thinking to God) ‘after he has received in his soul—through the contemplation of nature—the visible world, which offers through him the divine *logoi* present in it, as “gifts” to the Lord’.⁷² This kind of attitude towards creation is eucharistic: we lift up to God what already belongs to him. And since Maximus comes from the Eastern tradition, which celebrates the Liturgy of John Chrysostom, it is worth pointing out that, during the Liturgy, the priest lifts up the gifts of bread and wine saying, ‘we offer to you these gifts from your own gifts, in all and for all’.⁷³ Then the *epiclesis*, or invocation of the Holy Spirit, follows, when the bread and the wine are understood by Orthodox eucharistic theology to be changed into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Although Maximus does not comment on this specific liturgical instance,⁷⁴ I suggest that it summarizes very well Maximus’s understanding of what our attitude should be toward creation: all the universe belongs to God, as the source of this gift, and we humans, as priests of creation, are called to lift it up and offer it

back to God. The world thus becomes transparent to God's presence in it. God becomes all in all, even if not with the same sacramental fullness as in the Eucharist. However, our attitude towards creation should be as towards the Eucharist, to which we show much attention and care, so that no minuscule crumb will fall and be trampled upon or wasted. We should have the same care for all the fragments of creation and thus put a stop to our wasteful, careless, abusive, and consumerist attitudes, which have caused and perpetuate the present ecological crisis. Of course, the retrieval of a eucharistic attitude to creation, characteristic of Maximus the Confessor and the early Christian Tradition, is not sufficient: a structural change is also needed. These two aspects, however, cannot be separated, since the present economic and political structures reflect a consumerist mentality that goes counter to the principles outlined by Maximus.

Conclusion

I have attempted to demonstrate the ecological relevance of Maximus the Confessor's theology of creation, hoping to raise the awareness of the richness of his thought, despite the fact that many of his works are difficult and are not available in English translation. My arguments are meant to respond to the accusation that Christian Tradition is the cause of the present ecological crisis and that it does not offer a viable solution to it because of its allegedly anthropocentric character. If some advocate geocentrism and biocentrism as a solution, I have argued that Maximus proposes theocentrism and sees the human being as priestly mediator between God and creation.

Thus, Maximus's theology of creation and redemption offers a set of categories capable of inspiring contemporary Christians towards a deeper reverence for the environment, as the place in which we encounter and worship God. He ties together the classic patristic theme of salvation as divinization with a sense of the unity and coherence of the created world, and the role creation plays in the christian's attempt to follow the way of Christ, which is essential in the context of the contemporary ecological crisis. Like many patristic writings, Maximus's theological works are not simply forgotten pages of history, without applicability to the present, but living treasures that still respond to our contemporary concerns.

NOTES

¹ Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, founders of the Forum on Religion and Ecology, professors of religion and ecology at Yale University, argue that 'a many-faceted alliance of religion and ecology is emerging around the planet, with attitudes and behaviors being re-examined with attention toward the future of the whole community of life, not just humans. This is a new moment for the world's religions, and they have a vital role to play in the development of a more comprehensive environmental ethics. The urgency of this process cannot be underestimated. Indeed, the flourishing of the earth community may depend on it.' For many concrete examples of the relevance of different religions to the present ecological crisis, see Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, 'The Greening of the World's Religions', *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 53, no. 23 (2007), B9.

² In this article, I do not intend to offer a detailed analysis of contemporary theologians who challenge the relevance of the Christian Tradition to ecology. Occasionally, I refer briefly to 'Deep Ecology' and to the positions of respected authors such as Lynn White or Thomas Berry simply to illustrate the need to engage these thinkers in a constructive dialogue with traditional Christian theology, especially patristic writings.

³ See, among many other studies on this topic, Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St Maximus the Confessor* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985); Enzo Bellini, 'Maxime interprète de Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite: Analyse de l'Ambiguum ad Thomam 5', in *Maximus Confessor: Actes du symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur, Fribourg, 2-5 septembre, 1980*, ed. Felix Heinzer and Christoph Schönborn, *Paradosis* 27 (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg, 1982); George C. Berthold, 'The Cappadocian Roots of Maximus the Confessor', in *Maximus Confessor: Actes du symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur*; Alain Riou, *Le Monde et l'Église selon Maxime le Confesseur, Théologie Historique* 22 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1973); Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Origenism, Studia Anselmiana, Philosophica, Theologica*, 36 (Rome: Orbis, 1955); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor, Communio Books* (Fort Collins, CO: Ignatius Press, 2003).

⁴ See some spiritual writings from both categories in Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Four Hundred Texts on Love; Two Hundred Texts on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation of the Son of God; Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, Virtue and Vice; On the Lord's Prayer*, trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, vol. 2, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text Compiled by St Nikodemus of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990).

⁵ Two English translations are available: Saint Maximus the Confessor, *The Church, the Liturgy and the Soul of Man: The Mystagogy of St Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Dom Julian Stead OSB (Still River, Massachusetts: St Bede's Publications, 1982); Saint Maximus the Confessor, 'The Church's Mystagogy in Which Are Explained the Symbolism of Certain Rites Performed in the Divine Synaxis', in

Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings, ed. George C. Berthold, *Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

⁶ Fragments of this work are available in English in Saint Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert L. Wilken, *Popular Patristic Series* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003). I also use the translation of the complete text into Romanian: Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Raspunsuri catre Talasie*, trans. Dumitru Staniloae, 2nd ed., 12 vols., vol. 3, *Filocalia sau culegere din scrierile Sfantilor Parinti care arata cum se poate omul curati, lumina si desavarsi* (Bucharest: Harisma, 1994).

⁷ Fragments of this work are available in English in Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*. See the French translation with ample commentaries: Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, trans. Jean-Claude Larchet, Emmanuel Ponsoy and Dumitru Staniloae, *Collection L'Arbre de Jessé* (Suresnes: Editions de l'Ancre, 1994). I also use the translation of the complete text into Romanian and many of the translator's notes: Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua: Tilcuiri ale unor locuri cu multe si adinci intelesuri din Sfantii Dionisie Areopagitul si Grigorie Teologul*, trans. Dumitru Staniloae, *Parinti si scriitori bisericesti 80* (Bucuresti: EIBMBOR, 1983).

⁸ Adam G. Cooper, *The Body in St Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified, The Oxford Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 93.

⁹ *Ambigua 42*. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 60, note 42.

¹⁰ *Ambigua 7*. Ibid., 55.

¹¹ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua (Romanian)*, 80.

¹² Staniloae, note 42 in *ibid.*, 80-81.

¹³ *Ambigua 7*. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 61. See Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 5:8.

¹⁴ Staniloae, 'Preface' to Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua (Romanian)*, 30.

¹⁵ As in 'plastic surgery', for example.

¹⁶ Staniloae, note 60 to Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua (Romanian)*, 89-90.

¹⁷ *Ambigua 77*. Ibid., 196.

¹⁸ After the Fall, we could not have a positive *tropos* based solely on our own capacities, so the divine Logos (the Son of God) became incarnate to impart to us the *tropos* of salvation or the filial *tropos*. *Ambigua 101*. Ibid., 250. Juan Miguel Garrigues, *Maxime le Confesseur: La charité, avenir divin de l'homme, Théologie Historique 38* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1976), 118-19.

¹⁹ *Ambigua 106a*. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua (Romanian)*, 263. Concerning the expression, 'to unite those that were divided', see below on the five divisions in creation.

²⁰ Riou, *Le Monde et l'Église*, 70.

²¹ For a description and critical analysis of 'Deep Ecology' see Drew Christiansen, 'Ecology, Justice, and Development', *Theological Studies* 51, no. 1 (1990), 77-81.

²² *Ambigua* 7. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 50-51. See also *Ambigua* 11.

²³ In *Ambigua* 111, Maximus also relates this triad to our birth, baptism, and resurrection at the end of times. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua (Romanian)*, 278. See also Riou, *Le Monde et l'Église*, 89.

²⁴ *Ambigua* 7. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 50-51. In these passages there are numerous references to the human person as continually accepting to be indwelt by God and of becoming god in the third stage, that of 'eternal well-being'. These images suggest eternal progress in union with God. See below for other even more explicit references.

²⁵ See for example Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 30, or Gregory's Sixth Homily, PG 44, 888A. For more, see Louis Bouyer, *The Christian Mystery: From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 175-7.

²⁶ *Ambigua* 157. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua (Romanian)*, 332. See also *Ambigua* PG 91, 1077AB and Staniloae, Preface to Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua (Romanian)*, 34.

²⁷ In line with a long-standing Eastern tradition, Maximus writes about the utmost union between God and the human person (now become god by grace) in terms of divinization, or *theosis* (θέωσις), even though he prefers to use other Greek variations of this term. Maximus writes, 'through desire and intense love [the soul] holds fast to God and participates in the divine life. The soul becomes godlike through divinization.' Then he explains the role of the body in divinization, as the one who 'gains familiarity with God' by practising the virtues. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 66. Thus, it is incorrect to assume that this understanding of divinization of both body and soul originated in the fourteenth century with Gregory Palamas. For an excellent study of even earlier writers who upheld the possibility of divinization (e.g. Irenaeus, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, etc.), see Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition, Oxford Early Christian Studies* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁸ Later Orthodox theologians would prefer not to capitalize 'God', since divinized human persons are not God according to essence, but god according to energies.

²⁹ *Ambigua* 7. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 52.

³⁰ *Ambigua* 7. Ibid., 59-60.

³¹ *Ambigua* 7. Ibid., 61.

³² *Ambigua* 106a. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua (Romanian)*, 263.

³³ *Ambigua* 7a, 106b. Ibid., 73, 267.

³⁴ Lynn White, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', *Science* 155, 10 March 1967, 1203-07.

³⁵ John D. Zizioulas, 'Ecological Asceticism: A Cultural Revolution', *Sourotz* 67, (February 1997), 22. Recently, Zizioulas has twice reiterated his agreement with

White in the former's *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, ed. Paul McPartlan (New York: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2006), 94, 211.

³⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 20-21.

³⁷ Elizabeth A. Johnson, 'Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition', in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 3-21.

³⁸ Sallie McFague, 'An Ecological Christology: Does Christianity Have It?', in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, 29-45.

³⁹ I find very useful Theodore Hiebert's interpretation of the first chapters of Genesis to refer to the human being as priest set apart from and over creation, as well as humans as farmers sharing a common substance as 'earth creatures' and the divine spirit, which—Hiebert contends—is the real sense of 'dominion'. He also offers a brief analysis of the reception of these concepts in early and contemporary Christian theology. Theodore Hiebert, 'The Human Vocation: Origins and Transformations in Christian Traditions', in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, 135-54.

⁴⁰ Moltmann rightly observes that this alleged anthropocentrism is more than 3000 years old, whereas the insistence of the Enlightenment on the idea that since God's pre-eminent characteristic is power, so the human being (created in the image of God) must strive for power, coincides chronologically better with the ecological crisis. Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, 26.

⁴¹ This expression does not appear in the English version, but Staniloae uses it in his Romanian translation. See Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua (Romanian)*, 95-6.

⁴² Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration on the Nativity* 38:11, quoted in *Ambigua* 7. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 68.

⁴³ Staniloae, note 71 to Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua (Romanian)*, 95-6.

⁴⁴ Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God: The World - Creation and Deification*, trans. Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), 51. Original Romanian: Dumitru Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica Ortodoxa [Orthodox Dogmatic Theology] I*, 2nd ed., 3 vols., vol. 1 (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1996), 251.

⁴⁵ For more on this, see *Ambigua* 8 and Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 59-60.

⁴⁶ *Ad Thalassium*, 'Introduction'. Maximus the Confessor, *Raspunsuri catre Talasie*, 35.

⁴⁷ *Ambigua* 7. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 67.

⁴⁸ *Ambigua* 8. *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* I have altered the translation to be more akin to Staniloae's rendering into Romanian because Staniloae is generally closer to the Greek text and, in this specific case, the English translation does not fit into the context of the passage.

⁵⁰ Cooper writes: ‘The drawing of an analogous correspondence between the ordered universe and the human body was commonplace throughout Greek antiquity. In the Platonic philosophical tradition, in which Plato’s speculation about the mythical construction of the universe by the embodiment of a living creature endowed with soul and reason fuelled the intellectual imagination [*Timaeus* 30b], “the relation between body and soul was a microcosm of the vexed problem of the relation between God and the universe” [Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, 74]. Far from representing a perspective alien to Christian thought, Käsemann has shown how in the New Testament “the cosmos is primarily viewed by Paul under an anthropological aspect, because the fate of the world is in fact decided in the human sphere” [‘On Paul’s Anthropology’, 23]. Later, St Athanasius cites the “Greek philosophers” who speak of the cosmos as “a great body” (σῶμα μέγα), and, he adds, “rightly so” [Ath. *Inc.* 41.5 (SD 199.412)]. In adopting this analogy, St Maximus therefore stands within a long intellectual and religious tradition common to East and West in which to think of the human body “is to think of something that is... a key to understanding the cosmos itself” [Andrew Louth, ‘The Body in Western Catholic Christianity’, in Coakley, *Religion and the Body*, 112]. Concurrently, Maximus—like Paul and Athanasius—differs from Plato in his discernment that the “mystery” of bodily existence is inextricably linked to the “mystery” of Christ, God the embodied Word.’ Cooper, *The Body in St Maximus*, 65-6, 102. On the influence of Nemesius of Emesa, see Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St Maximus the Confessor*, 73.

⁵¹ For more on this theme, see Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St Maximus the Confessor*, 74, 122-3. In both cases, Thunberg affirms that Maximus designates the cosmos or the Church as *makranthropos* but Maximus does not use this term in the texts of PG 91, 685A and PG 91, 672B. However, given the widespread use of this term in classical Greek philosophy with which Maximus was well acquainted, it is proper to use it in this context.

⁵² *Ambigua* 106a. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua (Romanian)*, 266.

⁵³ Maximus the Confessor, ‘The Church’s Mystagogy in Which Are Explained the Symbolism of Certain Rites Performed in the Divine Synaxis’, 196-7.

⁵⁴ In this dialogue with theologians who consider Christianity irrelevant for today’s ecological crisis, I do not want to give the impression that there are no valuable responses to this accusation. However, I consider that Maximus has an important contribution concerning the ‘mechanisms’ of our interaction with the environment, which are missing from other theologians who affirm Christianity’s role in putting an end to today’s ecocide. In this later category, I see documents issued by different Churches or Church organizations, e.g. the call to adopt a ‘eucharistic and ascetic spirit’ towards creation and the declaration of 1 September—for Orthodox Christians, the beginning of the Church year—as ‘a day to offer prayers and services on behalf of the whole of creation’ in Patriarch of Constantinople Dimitrios I, ‘Message on Environmental Protection Day [Encyclical 9/1/1989]’, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 35, no. 1 (1990), 1-3. In the same category, one might also include theologians such as Drew Christiansen, John B. Cobb Jr., James Nash, to name only a few.

⁵⁵ Thomas Berry and Thomas Clarke, *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation Between Humans and the Earth* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991), 65-73.

⁵⁶ Even more specifically, Maximus considers that Christ is the purpose of all creation: 'Because of Christ—or rather, the whole mystery of Christ—all the ages of time and the beings within those ages have received their beginning and end in Christ.' *Ad Thalassium* 60. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 125.

⁵⁷ *Ambigua* 7. *Ibid.*, 49. Modified translation based on PG 91, 1072C.

⁵⁸ *Ambigua* 7. *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁵⁹ See for example an excellent analysis of several patristic authors, especially Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzen, in Anna N. Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 115-18.

⁶⁰ *Ad Thalassium* 13. Maximus the Confessor, *Raspunsuri catre Talasie*, 65.

⁶¹ *Ambigua* 83a. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua (Romanian)*, 218.

⁶² Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*.

⁶³ *Ad Thalassium* 51. Maximus the Confessor, *Raspunsuri catre Talasie*, 221.

⁶⁴ For more on this issue see Stanley Harakas, 'The Integrity of Creation: Ethical Issues', in *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: Insights from Orthodoxy*, ed. Gennadios Limouris (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990), 70-82.

⁶⁵ This is especially important in an age in which we drive about 20 minutes to work and see a lot of cement all along the way. Having a plant in an office does not qualify as being close to nature: we need to get our hands dirty. Francis Bacon wrote, 'God Almighty first planted a garden. And indeed, it is the purest of human pleasures', even if—I would add—this involves a mower and a leaf blower.

⁶⁶ *Ambigua* 106a. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua (Romanian)*, 266. See also *Ambigua* 41. See Cooper, *The Body in St Maximus*, 104.

⁶⁷ Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St Maximus the Confessor*, 73.

⁶⁸ *Ambigua* 41. Translated in Cooper, *The Body in St Maximus*, 104.

⁶⁹ *Ambigua* 149. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua (Romanian)*, 328.

⁷⁰ David S. Yeago, 'Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption: The Relevance of St Maximus the Confessor', *Modern Theology* 12, no. 2 (1996), 186-7. In the same article, see many considerations about the doxological (rather than speculative) value of contemplation, and Yeago's conclusion that the last of the five mediations that Maximus proposes is 'the mediation of God and creation in the final realization of *theosis*, in loving union with God. This suggests that for Maximus, natural contemplation can never be abstracted from the question of our *practical* relation to created things, in the context of a peaceful life ordered to union with God in Christ.'

⁷¹ Zizioulas, 'Ecological Asceticism: A Cultural Revolution', 23. See also John Habgood, 'A Sacramental Approach to Environmental Issues', in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches in Ecological Theology*, ed. Charles Birch, William Eakin and

Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 46-53.

⁷² *Ad Thalassium* 51. Maximus the Confessor, *Raspunsuri catre Talasie*, 216, 20. See also *Mystagogia* 3, where Maximus sees the church building as a symbol of the visible world: 'Likewise the world is a church since it possesses heaven corresponding to a sanctuary, and for a nave it has the adornment of the earth.' Maximus the Confessor, 'The Church's Mystagogy...', 189. Here Maximus is in continuity with a long-standing tradition that regards the Universe as a temple. For example, see Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7:44.

⁷³ Saint John Chrysostom, *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, trans. Members of the Faculty of Hellenic College/Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, 3rd ed. (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1985), 22.

⁷⁴ When writing his *Mystagogia*—his main work on the Liturgy—Maximus does not intend to write a commentary on every prayer in the Liturgy, since several such commentaries were circulating in his times. He actually sets out to give a spiritual interpretation of the entire Liturgy taken as a whole. Irénée-Henri Dalmais, 'Place de la Mystagogie de saint Maxime le Confesseur dans la Théologie Liturgique Byzantine', in *Studia Patristica V* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962), 277, 282.