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## Saint Maximus the Confessor's *Mystagogia* as a Complex Liturgical Commentary

### Abstract

In his *Mystagogy* Saint Maximus draws together in a unique liturgical context all the great themes of his thought: The Holy Liturgy is the cosmic movement and the universal dynamism which moves the entire universe towards its union with God. The Eucharistic Liturgy is the visible celebration of the eternal heavenly Liturgy, thus a foretaste of the happiness of the kingdom of heaven. It unites man with God and the other people, unveiling the eschatological meaning of human existence.



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### Keywords

Liturgy, Incarnation, Eucharistie, Spirituality, Eschatology

## 1 Introduction

The Church has always been concerned with the reception of the Eucharistic mystery and the initiation into its understanding. In this respect, patristic thought is a point of reference. All great Orthodox theologians and hierarchs have always referred to its worship texts, have reasoned, written, and spread its teachings using a liturgical language. They have done this in their struggle to initiate the faithful into the mystery of Jesus Christ's personal presence into the Church, in and through its sacramental work.

One such attempt of introduction into this unspeakable mystery is St. Maximus the Confessor's *Mystagogia*, one of the most beautiful and profound theological comments of the Holy Eucharist. Starting from the Eucharistic rite, the great holy father writes a summary of his entire theological thinking, presenting in an extremely dense and well-structured text a true treatise of ecclesiology, in which the author manages not only to provide a unique explanation of the acts of the Divine Liturgy but also to integrate the understanding of the mystery of God's presence within the Church in the framework of Chalcedonian theology. *The union of God and man in the divine-human Person of Christ is the creation's model, ultimate goal and reason of existence.*

Union without dissolution of personal identity is the way God chose to unite with His creation. Thus, for St. Maximus, the Divine Liturgy is essentially a diastole, a manifestation of God's love into the world, to attract through the systole of his love all creatures to the life of intratrinitarian communion. It is this universal dynamism which moves the entire universe towards its union with God. The Eucharistic Liturgy is the visible celebration of the eternal heavenly liturgy, thus a foretaste of the happiness of the kingdom of heaven. It unites man with God

and the other people, unveiling the eschatological meaning of human existence.

The uniqueness of St. Maximus' commentary lies in the fact that it is a genuine reference book of Christian initiation in which the mystery of God's presence in and among people is described and analyzed with all its dogmatic, liturgical and ecclesiastic implications. Nevertheless, it is not, as it may seem at first glance, a simple theological digression, a synthesis of his whole theology, that uses the commentary of the Eucharistic ritual as a pretext. *Mystagogia* is a successful expression and refinement of the ecclesiastic ever-lasting tradition that knew how to keep a perfect balance between liturgical life, dogmatic expression and ascetical experience of the Church. St. Maximus succeeds by means of his writing in giving monastic ascesis a liturgical connotation, by recommending the worship of the Church to the monks as a basis for mystical ascension, and in imposing the realism of the Chalcedonian definition on Dionysian sacramentalism. *Mystagogia* also provides a synthesis of evagriean Hesychasm and Dionysian sacramentalism, and St. Maximus' approach is an introduction to the mystery starting from the Liturgy rather than an initiation in the mystery of the Liturgy.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, to St. Maximus, the Eucharistic celebration, as accomplished eschatology, but still in an ongoing process of fulfillment, that can be experienced in all its depth only by those who had softened their senses through ascesis and transformed themselves into the image of Christ through grace. The Divine Liturgy is both spirituality and communion, meaning that only

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<sup>1</sup> R. Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins de la divine liturgie du VIIe au XVe siècle*, (Archives de l'Orient chrétien 9, Paris: Institut Français d'Études byzantines, 1966), p. 32.

by personal, plenary, sacramental and ascetic realization, can man open himself through love, the sum of all virtues, towards God and towards his neighbor, living in the Divine Liturgy the fulfillment of the purpose of his existence.

## **2 The Crisis of finding a Terminology in the Byzantine Empire: the social, political and theological context in which St. Maximus the Confessor's *Mystagogia* appeared**

St. Maximus the Confessor's *Mystagogia*, one of the finest liturgical commentaries of Eastern Orthodoxy, can be understood only within its social, political and theological framework, and within the context of the author's entire work.

The 7<sup>th</sup> century was a period of great turmoil in the history of the Great Eastern Roman empire. The Barbarian invasions, the rapid spread of Islamism, which led to the siege of Constantinople twice in 617 and 626 and the conquest of Jerusalem by the Persians in 614 and by the Muslims in 628 created an unstable political and social situation throughout the entire Byzantine Empire. This also affected clerical life, by maintaining a tense theological atmosphere caused by the great heresies of the previous centuries. Even if the Fathers gathered at the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451 wanted to end this crisis, the establishment of the dogmatic Trinitarian and Christological terminology did not bring the longed-for peace and tranquility in the Eastern Church. The historical opposition of Syria, occupied by Persians in 611, was unfortunately materialized in a theological and dogmatic revolt against the Byzantine policy, with the intent to break any link with the authoritarian Eastern Roman Empire.

Since prehistoric times, Syria has been a province of diverse cultures, religions and races, which no political system managed to unify for a long period of time.<sup>2</sup> The Seljuk kings of Antioch attempted to unify Syria, around 250-150 A.D., by introducing the Greek culture and language throughout the province, but they failed in their attempt, because of the persistence in keeping the old traditions and local practices of a great part of the population living in that region. This opposition of Semitic religions against the “unifying Hellenism” was not based on race differences, because the great majority of Greeks were not immigrants, but “Hellenized Syrians” and this opposition was not a “geographical” one, even if Antioch and the large cities were the centers of Greek culture, and the territories in this province were those of local tradition; this opposition was fundamentally the expression of cultural and ethos differences that were striving for dominance in the region.<sup>3</sup> Syria was a mixture of ancient traditions and cultures, on which a new mosaic was overlapped, that of Hellenism and of Semitic religions that had survived the Hellenization process. This is the context of the emergence and development of Christianity on this land. Since the inception of its existence, after its separation from Judaism, the Church of Antioch was

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<sup>2</sup> G. Dix, *The Shape of Liturgy*, (London: Westminster, 1974), p.173.

<sup>3</sup> A detailed description of the entire issue can be found in G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); C. Karalevskij, *Antioche*, Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique, III, col. 563-703; J. Kollwitz, *Antiochia am Orontes*, in: G. Schöllgen, F. J. Dölger, C. Colpe, Th. Klauser, E. Dassmann (Hgg.), *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum I*, (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2012), pp. 461-469.

placed under the influence of the “unifying Hellenism”, which caused strained relations with the Jewish world.<sup>4</sup>

Although the dominant influence in Church life was of a Greek nature, Christianity survived in the territories of the province, under a Syriac “non-Hellenized” form<sup>5</sup>, and the trends of keeping local traditions and that of opposition against the unifying policy of Byzantium were to take doctrinal forms later on, culminating in the separation from Orthodoxy<sup>6</sup>. Thus, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the great revolt of eastern Syria against Antioch broke under the banner of Nestorius’ heresy, and then, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the Western Syria used Monothelism as a dogmatic pretext to express the local “anti-Byzantine”, “anti-Hellenized” trends in a constant conflict with the Byzantine “Caesaropapism”.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, these tribulations reached their climax, while the Monophysites received the Persians’ support in spreading this heresy in the entire Byzantine Empire, precisely for weakening the internal cohesion of the Great Empire.

In order to stop the spreading of Monophysitism, Emperor Heraclius (610-641) with Patriarch Sergius (610-638) tried to develop a dogmatic formula of compromise, trying to end the perpetual dogmatic disputes. Thus they decided to appoint Cyrus of Phasis as Patriarch of Alexandria, who wrote in 633

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<sup>4</sup> The best study of Antiochian Judaism is that of C.H. Kraeling, *The Jewish Community at Antioch*, in: *Journal of Biblical Literature* LI (1932), pp.130-160.

<sup>5</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Ad populum Antiochenum*, XI, in: J. P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Patrologiae Graeca*, vol. 49, (Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), pp.187-197. He refers to the presence of some Christians, coming from a close province, in Antioch, who were ignorant of the Greek language, but simple and wise and zealous for the doctrines set by the Holy Scripture.

<sup>6</sup> G. Dix, *The Shape of Liturgy*, p.175.

the famous Union Pact<sup>7</sup>, which stated that in the single person of Christ there was only one theandric activity, trying therefore to find a common dogmatic formula between the Orthodox and Monophysites.

St. Sophronius, the next Patriarch of Jerusalem, was in Alexandria at the time this union document was proclaimed, and he strongly opposed this formula, accusing it of Apollinarianism.<sup>8</sup> At Cyrus' refusal to acknowledge this view, St. Sophronius returned to Constantinople and started a dogmatic fight for saving the truth of the Chalcedon dogma, by emphasizing that our Saviour's deeds belong to His two natures and they do not refer to His unique Person.<sup>9</sup>

Feeling the danger of a new dogmatic dispute, Patriarch Sergius published in great haste, in 633, a document entitled Psephos, which prohibited any discussion about the Savior's natures and work, confessing that "One and the Same, The Only Son, Our Savior Jesus Christ works what is divine and human, and all activity that belongs to God and all activity that belongs to man come from one and the same incarnate Word (...) and it are related to the one and the same person".<sup>10</sup> Sergius simulated faithfulness to Chalcedon, simultaneously drawing closer to the monophysite doctrine, by referring the Savior's work not to the two natures, but to the Unique Person.

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<sup>7</sup> The full text can be found in: J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, (Florentiae, 1764-1765), vol. XI, 565D.

<sup>8</sup> S. Maximi Confessoris, *Opuscula Theologica et Polemica*, in: J. P. Migne (ed.) *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Patrologiae Graeca*, vol. 91, (Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 143 BD.

<sup>9</sup> Ch. Schoenborn, *Sofronie al Ierusalimului. Viața monahală și mărturisire doctrinară*, trans. by M. and A. Alexandrescu, edited by O. Gh. Gordon, (București, Anastasia, 2007), p. 95.

<sup>10</sup> F. X. Murphy, P. Sherwood, *Constantinople II et III*, (*Histoire des conciles oecuméniques 3*, Paris: Ed. de l'Orante, 1973), pp. 306-308.

At the same time, Patriarch Sergius, hearing that St. Sophronius had been elected Patriarch of Jerusalem in 634, wrote a letter to Pope Honorius, in which he denounced St. Sophronius' rigorousness, that was posing a threat, in his opinion, to the fragile peace and unity of the Church:

“The people of Alexandria became one flock of Christ, our Lord, Patriarch Sergius wrote, and together with it almost all Egypt, Thebaid, Libya and the other eparchies of the dioceses of Egypt. In early times, they were divided into many heresies, but now, with God's help and owing to the eagerness of Most Holy Patriarch of Alexandria (Cyrus), they all confess the true teachings of the Church, in one voice, as if with one mouth and in the unity of the Spirit (...). When the Most Holy Pope Cyrus achieved the admirable union with those who had previously been heretics, St. Sophronius (the following Patriarch of Constantinople) came to him and they talked about the nine chapters. St. Sophronius contradicted him regarding the chapter of the sole work, arguing that they should always teach about two works in Christ, our Lord. Thus, the abovementioned Holy Pope brought him testimonies of the Holy Fathers, who had stated the (...) sole work in their writings. He also said that we often saw our Holy Fathers using a divine economy when such formulas appeared, in order to obtain the salvation of as many souls as possible, without undermining the accuracy of the true teachings of the Church. He also told him that at that time, when the salvation of thousands of people was at hand, there should be no disputes and arguments on a phrase formerly used by our Holy Fathers and by doing this, the right faith would not be broken. However, the abovementioned friend of God, Sophronius, did not accept such descent.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, 532B-533A.



Honorius, who could not see the artificiality of this compromise designed to achieve more of a political peace, and which ultimately satisfied neither the Orthodox people nor the Monophysites, answered Patriarch Sergius in the same terms, using the phrase “one work” of the Savior. This fact triggered St. Sophronius’ reaction, who published in his turn a Synodicon<sup>12</sup>, a synodal letter, addressed to Patriarch Sergius and to Pope Honorius, in which, respecting Sergius’ interdiction that the number of works in Christ should not be mentioned, he strongly asserted that these works belong to the natures, as the Chalcedon Fathers taught, preserving the integrity of the two natures, divine and human. St. Sophronius followed the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in his approach, first showing the doctrine of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, particularly emphasizing that the two natures are united without losing their own features and their works in the Unique Hypostasis of God, the Word Incarnate.<sup>13</sup>

Such concise and direct expression of the first ecumenical Councils Fathers’ faith was in total disagreement with the political situation of the time and was rejected by Patriarch Sergius, who excluded St. Sophronius from the community of the Church.

St. Maximus the Confessor, whose spiritual mentor was St. Sophronius, continued this fight to confess the faith of the Fathers of the first Ecumenical Councils, highlighting throughout his entire work the importance of understanding the compatibility between diversity and unity in all the acts of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, pp. 461-510.

<sup>13</sup> For the full text, see: Ch. Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem. Vie monastique et confession dogmatique*, (Paris: Beauchesne Éditeur, 1972), pp. 201-209.

divine economy. This is the general theme of his writings, summarized in his beautiful liturgical commentary, *Mystagogia*.

### **3 The Place of the Mystagogia in St. Maximus the Confessor's Life and Work**

*Mystagogia* is an original and traditional liturgical commentary, with resonance in St. Maximus' personal aspirations, literary work, and doctrinal reflections. It also emphasizes themes conveyed by the patristic tradition. St. Maximus' view of the world – masterfully synthesized in *Mystagogia* “reflects the climax and the mature completion of the Greek theological, mystical and philosophical thought”.<sup>14</sup>

St. Maximus' biographers point out that he was primarily a hesychast, who was focused on his dialogue with God rather than apologetic and polemic discourses, but the historical circumstances turned him into defender of Orthodoxy. Thus he relates the problems of the mystical union of the soul with God to the Christological issues: he argued that the union of the two natures and of the two wills in Christ was the perfect union of the soul with God. This was St. Maximus' merit of placing Christian mysticism on the mystery of Christ's Incarnation. Moreover, his using the Divine Liturgy as a framework in *Mystagogia* imposed a liturgical opening onto the ascetical and mystical tradition emerging from the solitude of the desert.

In *Mystagogia*, the great Holy Father presents systematically his vision about the ascension of man and of the universe towards God. He briefly describes the steps of this ascension and he does

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<sup>14</sup> H. U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie. Das Weltbild Maximus des Bekenners*, 2nd revised edition, (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961), p. 1.

not focus on how man can reach every spiritual level. This work contains St. Maximus' anthropological and cosmic vision, outlined in the most compressed. St. Maximus' gain is twofold: he gives monastic asceticism a liturgical opening,<sup>15</sup> by suggesting to the monks the worship of Church as the foundations of mystical ascension.

Chronologically, *Mystagogia*<sup>16</sup> was written in Africa, roughly between 628 and 630<sup>17</sup> and it is the result of the author's first maturity period: St. Maximus exhibit full command of the main ideas of his synthesis. At the time of writing this paper, the Christological disputes had not made him take a stand, for *Mystagogia* shows no opposition towards Monothelitism. This writing is divided into 24 chapters of unequal size and value,

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<sup>15</sup> About the liturgical practice of primitive monasticism, see: A. Mayer, J. Quaesten, B. Neunheuser (eds.), *Vom christlichen Mysterium. Gesammelte Arbeiten und Gedächtnis von Odo Casel*, (Dusseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1951), pp. 97-114.

<sup>16</sup> The text of *Mystagogia* from *Patrologiae Graeca* vol. 91, 657-718, was translated into French by M. Lot-Borodine, in: *Irenikon XIII, XIV, XV*, 1936-1938, into Romanian by Pr. Prof. D. Stăniloae in: *Theological Journal*, Sibiu 1944, no 3-4, p. 162-181 and no 7-8, p. 335-356, into German by H. U. von Balthasar, in: *Kosmische Liturgie*, Einsiedeln, 1961, p. 366-407. The critical text of *Mystagogia* was published in April 2011 by Chr. Baudignon in: *Maximi Confessoris Mystagogia una cum latina interpretatione Anastasii Bibliothecarii*, (Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca 69, Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011), pp. 3-74, (from here short citation: Baudignon). The first translation into Romanian after the critical text was done by I. Ică jr, *De la Dionisie Areopagitul la Simeon al Tesalonicului. Integrarea comentariilor liturgice bizantine*, (Sibiu: Deisis, 2011), pp. 203-239, (from here short citation: Ică).

<sup>17</sup> P. Sherwood, *An Annotated Date-list of the Works of Maximus the Confessor*, (Studia Anselmiana 30, Romae: Herder, 1952), p. 32.

preceded by an introductory letter addressed to a venerable confessor.<sup>18</sup> Using a literary artifice, which was not at all uncommon in his time, St. Maximus claims that he reproduced in written form what he had heard from an erudite old man “whose spirit was illuminated by the splendor of the divine”.<sup>19</sup>

The paper consists of two parts:

- The first part (Chapters 1-7) sets the symbolic significance of the Church, being a “theoria” of the worship place and of the analogies: universe-man-soul-Scripture-Church;

- The second part (Chapters 8-21) is a “theoria” of the main liturgical rites which culminates with chapters 22-24 which apply the whole liturgical “theory” to the contemplator’s soul, as an icon of his ascension on the ladder of virtues; it also describes the mysteries carried out by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the believers who contemplate the Eucharistic Synaxis.

Analyzing and questioning the authenticity of this last part, R. Bornert suggests that “the strict literary and thematic fidelity is about the servile art of a disciple rather than about the master’s creative genius”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> E. Braniște, *Biserică și Liturghie în opera Mystagogia Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, in: *Ortodoxia* 1 (1981), pp. 13-23, argues that this venerable old man’s name doesn’t even appear in *Patrologiae Graeca*. Some people have identified him with “the illustrious gentleman Theocharistos” in Epistle 44 of Saint Maximus, who spoke in favor of the saint when he was in exile. According to others, he is Saint Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, Saint Maximus’ friend and master.

<sup>19</sup> St. Maximi Confessoris, *Mystagogia*, in: J. P. Migne (ed.) *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Patrologiae Graeca*, vol. 91, (Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863, 661CD; Baudignon, p. 8; ICĂ, p. 205.

<sup>20</sup> R. Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins de la divine liturgie*, p. 90.

#### **4 Mystagogia – A Testimonial of the Eucharistic Liturgy in the Byzantine Rite in the Early Eighth Century<sup>21</sup>**

Contemplation or liturgical theory, *Mystagogia* is an important liturgical testimonial; although it does not contain the entire ceremonial of the Holy Synaxis of the Church, only the rituals which are a visible support of a certain spiritual significance, it is however an important testimonial on the celebration of the Divine Liturgy in the early seventh-century Constantinople.

St. Maximus' intention was not to write a liturgical commentary, but to point out synthetically the great themes of his doctrinal, ascetical and mystical writings using the liturgical ceremonies; his writings were based on the revelation of the Salvation economy within a large Christological context which - in St. Maximus' vision - the Divine Liturgy recalls and anticipates serves as a privileged instrument of revelation for it. However, *Mystagogia* has an "intrinsically liturgical" value, too, as it is the most important testimonial on the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy in the seventh century.

The great interest shown towards this writing also comes from the fact that the first text of a Divine Liturgy is the one in Codex Barberinus 336, from the late eighth century.<sup>22</sup> Thus, *Mystagogia* had been written about two centuries earlier. It seems that even if St. Maximus had left Constantinople, he kept

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<sup>21</sup> I. H. Dalmais, *Place de la Mystagogie de Saint Maxime le Confesseur dans la theologie liturgique byzantine*, in: "Studia Patristica", 1962, pp. 277-283.

<sup>22</sup> S. Parenti, E. Velkovska, *L'Euclologio Barberini Gr. 336*, Seconda edizione riveduta. Con traduzione in lingua italiana (BELS 80, Roma C.L.V.-Edizioni Liturgiche, 2000).

contact with the capital city and with its specific ceremonies during his stay in Africa.

Although the description of the Divine Liturgy is not detailed, the ritual of the Eucharistic Synaxis can be easily identified, as St. Maximus describes it, and the possible similarities between the content of *Mystagogia* and euchological formulas used in the Church worship nowadays can also be examined.

#### *4.1. The Eucharistic Synaxis*

The bishop chairs the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and his entering the Church marks the beginning of the service.<sup>23</sup> St. Maximus' commentary does not mention anything about the Trisagion. Then, the bishop sits in the Episcopal chair (ὁ θρόνος ὁ ἱερατικός) and the Biblical readings may begin: two readings from the Old Testament, one from the Law, another one from the Prophets, thus preceding the Apostle. Every reading is followed by a call for peace.<sup>24</sup> After reading the Gospel, the bishop steps down from the chair<sup>25</sup> and the men who serve the church invite the catechumens out of the church and then the doors are closed<sup>26</sup>.

The believers' Liturgy begins by the "entrance of the holy and venerable mysteries".<sup>27</sup> This ceremony has a great importance:

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<sup>23</sup> St. Maximi Confessoris, *Mystagogia* 8-9, PG 91, 688D; Baudignon, pp. 36-39; Ică, pp. 221-222.

<sup>24</sup> St. Maximi Confessoris, *Mystagogia* 12, PG 91, 689D; Baudignon, pp. 40-41; Ică, p. 223.

<sup>25</sup> St. Maximi Confessoris, *Mystagogia* 14, PG 91, 692D; Baudignon, p. 43; Ică, p. 224.

<sup>26</sup> St. Maximi Confessoris, *Mystagogia* 15, PG 91, 692C; Baudignon, pp. 44-45; Ică, p. 225.

<sup>27</sup> St. Maximi Confessoris, *Mystagogia* 16, PG 91, 693CD; Baudignon, p.

this is the second entrance, the first one taking place at the beginning of the catechumens' Liturgy, but *Mystagogia* does not bring any clue about the preparation of Gifts before the beginning of the Divine Liturgy. There is no reference about the Cherubic Hymn, the entrance of the Holy Sacraments is followed by the kiss of peace and by the Symbol of Faith<sup>28</sup>. Without the slightest allusion to the anaphora, *Mystagogia* passes over the thrice holy hymn to the Lord's Prayer. How should St. Maximus' silence about the most important part of the Liturgy be explained? This was viewed as a vestige of a certain discipline or a tendency, a desire of St. Maximus, to exclude the ceremonial and the anaphora prayers from any allegorical explanation. H. J. Schulz's opinion seems to be the most appropriate: on the one hand, St. Maximus did not want to repeat what was said in the Dionysius the Areopagite's "Ecclesiastical Hierarchy" and thus he indirectly made reference to Dionysius the Areopagite's explanation, and on the other hand, he detaches himself from the Dionysian thought. The anaphora is explained by the matching of all other liturgical acts, which are described in terms of the Holy Gifts and whose entrance reveals the beauty of the new Aeon. Even the art of symbolization can be understood exclusively from the Anaphora perspective; all the symbolized realities in the worship act ultimately lead to the Anaphora<sup>29</sup>. Then, St. Maximus mentions only the exclamation "One is holy!", by

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45; Ică, p. 225.

<sup>28</sup> St. Maximi Confessoris, *Mystagogia* 18-19, PG 91, 694D; Baudignon, p. 46-47; Ică, p. 226.

<sup>29</sup> H. J. Schultz, *Die byzantinische Liturgie. Von Werden ihrer Symbolgestalt* (Sophia, Quellen östlicher Theologie 5, Freiburg im Breisgau: Lambertus Verlag, 1964), p. 86.

which the believers respond to the priest's invitation: τὰ ἅγια τοῖς ἁγίοις.<sup>30</sup>

#### *4.2. The Relation between the Text of "Mystagogia" and the Euchological Formulas*

The unique vision of St. Maximus on the Divine Liturgy leaves few clues about the "external form", about the ritual; every act is, through anagogy, the expression of a higher reality. However, the researchers of the great Holy Father's work, analyzing the text of *Mystagogia* inferred that that this work was born from a deep liturgical and mystical spirituality brought to light by the academic and comprehensive expression of St. Maximus' language.

Chapter 8, interpreting the ceremonial of the First Entrance, expresses the same ideas as the Entrance prayer of St. John Chrysostom's Divine Liturgy. This prayer asks God to receive the Church, which is on its way to the Kingdom. This formula concords with the description made by St. Maximus to the First Entrance: the believers enter the church together with the bishop. *Mystagogia* assigns a double significance to the first Entrance: on the ontological level, this ceremonial reminds us of the Salvation economy of the Holy Incarnation, and on the moral and mystical level, it represents the returning from sin to virtue and the returning to the Kingdom grace. These are the ideas expressed by the priest during the Liturgy in which he asks God "to lead them all to perfection and to make them

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<sup>30</sup> St. Maximi Confessoris, *Mystagogia*, PG 91, 21; Baudignon, pp. 48-49; Ică, pp. 226-227.



worthy of the Kingdom grace through His Only Begotten Son's mercy and love".<sup>31</sup>

The entrance into the celestial places and the participation in the Celestial Liturgy is certified by the prayer of First Entrance, dating from the 8<sup>th</sup> century and which may have belonged ever since Justinian's times to the well-defined structure of the Divine Liturgy.<sup>32</sup>

Κύριε ὁ Θεός ἡμῶν, ὁ ὑποδείξας ἡμῖν ὁ ὁδὸς εἰς  
σωτηρίαν, ὁ χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν οὐρανίων  
μυστηρίων ἀποκάλυψιν.

Ἦ δε τῶν ἀγίων καὶ σεπτῶν Μυστηρίων εἴσοδος  
...έστιν ἀποκάλυψις τοῦ ἐν ἀδύτοις τῆς θείας  
κρυφίτητος ὄντος μυστηρίου τῆς ἡμῶν  
σωτηρίας.

A closer relation can be established between chapter 16 of the *Mystagogia*, which explains the significance of the entrance using the Holy Sacraments, and between the Prayer of Oblation (Εὐχή τῆς Προσκομιδῆς)<sup>33</sup> that precedes the anaphora of St. Basil the Great's Liturgy:

"Lord, our God, you have shown us the ways towards salvation and have bestowed upon us the Revelation of the heavenly

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<sup>31</sup> *The Orthodox Liturgy*, (Bucharest, 1974), p. 75.

<sup>32</sup> H. J. Schultz, *Die byzantinische Liturgie..*, p. 85.

<sup>33</sup> H. Engberding, *Die Εὐχή τῆς Προσκομιδῆς der byzantinischen Basiliusliturgie und ihre Geschichte*, Le Muséon 79 (1966), pp. 287-313; S. Verhelst, *La seconde partie de la deuxième prière de Saint Basile*, Le Muséon 111 (1998), pp. 157-172.

mysteries (the Prayer of Oblation of St. Basil the Great's Divine Liturgy)"<sup>34</sup>.

"The Entrance of the Holy and the precious Sacraments is (...) the revelation of the mystery of our salvation, which is in the impenetrable depths of God's mystery (*Mystagogia* 16,693C)"<sup>35</sup>. This thematic correspondence is neither unique nor accidental. St. Maximus theology, streaming from a mystical and spiritual understanding of the entire world, the result of ascetic life, inseparable from liturgical life, bears the mark of a liturgical vision on the entire existence, both in its language, and in its fundamental aspects. Everything is a Liturgy for St. Maximus; from the intratrinitarian communion to the hypostatic union, from the syntheses of the Saviour to the spiritual syntheses that man is called to perform; everything is a Liturgy, and the Eucharistic Synaxis brings about the updating of the entire economy, it is also the factor leading to the fulfillment and accomplishment of this economy.

The description of the Eucharistic Synaxis is schematic. Its analysis shows that at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the liturgical celebration was Byzantine and thus still close to the original. But within *Mystagogia*, St. Maximus does not seek to describe a liturgical ceremonial, but starting from the Synaxis ritual, he offers the liturgical gestures and acts an ontological and cosmological connotation within the general plan of our salvation economy. St. Maximus' *Weltanschauung* projects the Liturgy all over the universe, but at the same time, he restores the Eschatological value of the Eucharistic Synaxis. Thus,

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<sup>34</sup> F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, vol. 1, (Oxford: University of Oxford, 1896), p. 319-320.

<sup>35</sup> St. Maximi Confessoris, *Mystagogia* 16, PG 91, 693CD; Baudignon, p. 45; Ică, p. 225.

*Mystagogia* is valuable for the liturgical study not only as an old testimonial about the celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, but rather as the one that gives Liturgical Theology the recovery of meanings and initial understanding of the Divine Liturgy.

*Mystagogia* is a synthesis of St. Maximus' thought, presenting the theory developed throughout his work in a very condensed manner, by giving it a unitary liturgical and cosmic vision. Therefore, in order to make an analysis of the chapters of *Mystagogia* and to highlight the complexity of St. Maximus' world vision, seen within the framework of a great cosmic Liturgy, to emphasize the importance of *Mystagogia* for the "liturgical theology", and in order to understand the Divine Liturgy, we will try to briefly outline the main points of St. Maximus' thought.

## **5 Conclusions**

1. To St. Maximus, the love among Divine Beings is the Liturgy, in which all the believers take part through the seen acts of worship, is the breath of life which created the world, recreates and restores it in a new way as Church, preparing it for the mysteries of the life to come. The Eucharistic Synaxis is nothing but the ascension of the Church towards God and of accomplishing its unity in Him.
2. The Eucharistic Liturgy, as the celebration of the eternal celestial Liturgy in a seen form, as the material forms of this world, is the foretaste of the happiness of the heavenly Kingdom. It unites man with God, people with one another and it discovers the eschatological sense of human existence.
3. To St. Maximus the Confessor, the cosmos and man are Churches, following the model of the Church, arrangement that

urges them to ascend to God as to a shrine. A unique and perpetual Liturgy is celebrated inside these Churches. The Eucharistic Synaxis, in which all believers take part, is nothing else but an emphatic form of the Liturgy in cosmos and man and this is participation, in a special way, in the Liturgy of the Church Liturgy, namely the Liturgy in the Church.

4. By leading the entire community to a perfect union with God, who is above the world, the Liturgy reveals the eschatological meaning of world history, maintains the tension of history towards its end, in God, and it keeps the awareness of this tension alive in the believers' minds. Consequently, through this very fact, the Liturgy, in St. Maximus' vision, has a sense that applies to the whole world and discovers the sense of history, by presenting it as a movement towards God, similar to a Liturgy, even though many people participating in the history of mankind are unaware of this fact and do not follow their way towards the end as a way towards God, as an actual liturgical way.

5. In his *Mystagogia*, St. Maximus writes about a double understanding or reception of the Liturgy. To him, the Eucharistic Synaxis is primarily the anticipated experience of the Kingdom of Heaven. Secondly, by mystical explanation, St. Maximus states that each believer according to his own degree of love experiences the Liturgy.