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## **St. Maximus the Confessor's *Mystagogy* and Its Interpretative Emphasis in the Thinking of the Theologians Dumitru Stăniloae and Hans Urs von Balthasar**

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### **Abstract**

St. Maximus the Confessor's *Mystagogy* was translated and commented on by two leading theologians of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church, respectively: Hans Urs von Balthasar and Dumitru Stăniloae. This study presents a comparative view on the interpretation given by the two theologians to the *Mystagogy*. It comes out that with regard to the central aspects of *Mystagogy* of Saint Maximus the Confessor there is a common thought of the two theologians. There are only interpretative nuances and differences of approach and theological style inherent in some aspects of the content of St. Maximus' work, as well as some accents that Hans Urs von Balthasar and Dumitru Stăniloae developed specifically. The interpretative effort of the two theologians is part of the common effort of Christian theology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to discover and deepen the mysterious meanings of St. Maximus the Confessor's thought by enrolling them in the life and experience of the Church and the present world.

### **Keywords**

St. Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, Dumitru Stăniloae, Hans Urs von Balthasar

## I. Two theologians and their times

The 20<sup>th</sup> century records multiple embarrassments, fractures and repositions within Christianity, generated either by the expansion of the philosophies of modernity, technology and science, or by the social and economic mutations, the proselytism of the sects or the wounds of the two world wars, and the establishment of totalitarianism. On the other hand, it is the century of the renewal of theology, provoked by its representatives, to a different approach and method, able to overcome the abstraction of the concepts and methodological divisions, to open up to the ecumenical dialogue and respond to the new agenda of the world.

If there was a need for a new theological approach in the West in order to overcome the medieval scholarship clichés, in the East it felt the need to renew theology by delimiting it from the Western, Roman Catholic and Protestant influences, and by re-assuming the spirit, experience and method of the Church Fathers that is faithful to the Apostolic Tradition and to the spiritual experience of the Church. Nearly at the same time we signal a desire for the renewal of theology both in the West and in the East. If in the thirties of the last century there is the beginning of a theological renewal within the Roman Catholic Church - „Nouvelle Théologie”<sup>1</sup> - which will prepare the Vatican II Council (1962-1965) for decades, through theologians like Henri de Lubac (1896-1991), Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), Jean Daniélou (1905-1974), Odo Casel (1886-1948), Yves Congar (1904-1995), also in the thirties of the last century, we can speak of the beginning of a real renewal in Orthodox theology, not only through the Congress of the Faculties of Orthodox Theology from Athens (1936) where *the return to the Fathers* was affirmed, but also by the contributions of some theologians like: Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993), Justin Popovici (1894-1979), Georges Florovsky (1893-1979), Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958).

But what do Orthodox theologians mean by *returning to the Fathers*? *Return to the Spirit, Experience and Method of the Fathers!* The neo-patristic

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel FYN, Paul D. MURRAY, *Ressourcement. A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, Oxford 2012; Jürgen METTEPENNINGEN, *Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology. Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II*, London-New York 2010; Hans BOERSMA, *Nouvelle Theologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery*, Oxford: OUP, 2009.

outlook on Orthodox Dogmatics refers in particular to the rediscovery of the *spirit, method, experience and unity* of thought and ecclesial life of the Fathers of the Church. This is accomplished through an interrelation of the dogmas and life, through a paradoxical, personal-communitarian, ascetic-mystical and experimental-ecclesial vision of the theology and its exigencies, and not simply by the massive exposure of patristic texts to the argumentation of some ideas structured very often under the influence of medieval scholasticism or by the individual exegesis of the Bible, exposed in a secular language, dependent on various philosophical trends. The complex context of the 20<sup>th</sup> century required this paradigm shift in theology. The offensive of the autonomous Enlightenment philosophy, atheism and totalitarianism that ideologically generated the sources of the two world conflagrations and millions of crimes, puts European Christianity in the face of a major challenge: the answer to the human problem, its value, meaning and destiny.

However, why did I remember Father Dumitru Stăniloae first? Because in the thirties of the last century he not only denounced the necessity of removing Orthodox theology from the juridical form and abstraction of the Western influences, but reconnected its content to the spirit and life of the Church. Before the Congress in Athens, Father Staniloae discovered the Palamite theology and hence a new method of theological approach, going beyond the historical, philosophical or symbolic method used in the Dogmatic Theology textbooks<sup>2</sup>. The work of Father Dumitru Stăniloae on the life and teaching of Saint Gregory Palamas (1938)<sup>3</sup>, preceded by translations from the work of Saint Gregory Palamas, which - through the teaching of uncreated divine energies - was an almost unprecedented approach in the landscape of Orthodox theology, expresses the commitment of the renewal of Orthodox theology before and after the Congress of Athens of 1936.

The rediscovery of the Palamite theology and Patristic theology in general was not achieved in Romania without “contact” with Western theology and philosophy<sup>4</sup>. Western theology has given some theologians who have overcome

<sup>2</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Calea spre lumina dumnezeiască la Sfântul Grigorie Palama”, in: *Anuarul Academiei Teologice Andreiene* 6 (1929-1930), pp. 55-57, and și Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Doua tratate ale Sfântului Grigorie Palama (Triada I, 2 și 3)”, in: *Anuarul Academiei Teologice Andreiene* 9, (1932-1933), pp. 5-70.

<sup>3</sup> See: *Viața și învățătura Sfântului Grigorie Palama*, Sibiu, 1938.

<sup>4</sup> Pr. Prof. Ioan Ică, Diac. Ioan I ICĂ JR., “Înnoirea în teologia ortodoxă contemporană:

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confessional barriers and have bent in a remarkable way on Patristic thinking. Here, primarily and in consensus with the topic approached we consider Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988). The two theologians interpreted, without having personally met, Saint Maximus' work, and so we can speak of a dialogue of ideas. Balthasar's thinking on St. Maximus influenced much of Father Stăniloae's early interpretations of Saint Maximus' texts. In this study, we will only stop at the interpretative nuances of the two theologians regarding the Mystagogy of Saint Maximus the Confessor.

**II. St. Maximus the Confessor: Balthasar and Stăniloae****a) The translation of Mystagogy**

After the contributions to the thinking of Saint Gregory Palamas, Father Stăniloae paid special attention to the theological thought of Saint Maximus the Confessor. This explains why, since the early 1940s, he translated and published the *Mystagogy* of Saint Maximus the Confessor in *Revista Teologică* from Sibiu<sup>5</sup>. This translation is preceded by a brief introduction to St. Maximus' thinking that let us see like in a mirror the selective mode Father Stăniloae used for the Western theological literature concerning St. Maximus – V. Grumel, Hans Urs von Balthasar, H. Straubinger - and the tendency towards immediate creativity and applicability of St. Maximus' vision on man and world, putting it besides the ballad *Miorița*, Nicolae Cusanus' thinking (1401-1464), Simon Frank (1877-1950) or the concrete social and ecclesial reality.

“At Maximus the Confessor we have the communal spirit of the true Church indicated in germ, and preserved by Orthodoxy, the

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sens, probleme, dimensiuni”, in: Karl Christian Felmy, *Dogmatica experienței ecle-siale*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1999, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, “Mystagogia, cosmosul și sufletul, chipuri ale Bisericii”, in: *Revista Teologică*, XXXIV (1944) 3-4, pp. 162-181; an XXXIV (1944) 7-8, pp. 335-356. In 1944, when publishing the translation of *Mystagogy*, Father Stăniloae had already translated other texts of St. Maximus', which revealed his commitment to his work: *Răspunsuri către Talasie* (PG 90, 243-786), *Tâlcuirea pe scurt la Tatăl Nostru* (PG, 90, 871-910), *Cuvântul ascetic* (PG 90, 911-956), *Cele 400 de capete despre dragoste* (PG 90, 654-1080), *Cele 200 de capete despre teologie și întrupare* (PG 90, 1083-1176), *Epistola despre dragoste* (PG 91, 392-408).

spirit called to give the times that come the superior solution of the social problems. Also in *Mystagogy* there is a psychology and mysticism, which we will try to show them, as far as they correspond, as a genial anticipation, with the newer and more righteous views on man, such as the character of totality that any soul state represents (Granzheitstruktur) or the transcendent and again, communitarian meaning of the spiritual life”<sup>6</sup>.

It was about “the presence of everything in parts” and from here about a paradoxical vision on creation, man and cosmos, a vision based and centred on the dogma of Chalcedon and the subsequent deepening in which St. Maximus occupies a decisive place. By translating *Mystagogy*, Fr. Stăniloae wanted to highlight the community spirit of the Church preserved and manifested in Orthodoxy<sup>7</sup>. As we can see, St. Maximus’ *Mystagogy* concerns Father Stăniloae as it responds to the concrete problems of interwar society as well as to the new discoveries in science and psychology. Father Staniloae’s approach has not only theological and ecclesial reasons, but also apologetic ones, highlighting the forgotten depths of Patristic thinking in connection with the latest cosmological discoveries of the sciences of our time.

During this time, we can identify the first theological “dialogue” between Father Staniloae and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Balthasar’s texts on Saint Maximus are one of the sources which Father Stăniloae used to approach Saint Maximus’ complex work in the translation of *Mystagogy*. Thus, Balthasar’s first bibliographic reference by Father Stăniloae took place in 1944 when he published St. Maximus’ *Mystagogy* in Romanian translation in *Revista Teologică* from Sibiu. Using the first edition of the

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<sup>6</sup> Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, “*Mystagogia, cosmosul și sufletul, chipuri ale Bisericii*”, in: *Revista Teologică*, XXXIV (1944) 3-4, p. 166.

<sup>7</sup> On these issues see also Calinic BERGER, “A Contemporary Synthesis of St. Maximus’ Theology: The Work of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae” in: Maxim Vasiljević (ed.), *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through the Resurrection*, Alhambra: Sebastian Press, 2013, p. 394. Starting from some of the aspects that St. Maximus presents in *Mystagogy*, Father Staniloae will write some studies on the church building. To be seen: “Locașul bisericesc propriu-zis, cerul pe pământ sau centrul liturgic al creației”, in: *Mitropolia Banatului*, XXXI (1981) 4-6, p. 277-307; “Biserica în sens de locaș și de largă comuniune în Hristos”, in: *Ortodoxia*, XXXIV (1982) 3, pp. 336-346.

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*Cosmic Liturgy*, published by Balthasar in 1941, Father Staniloae shares the conclusions of the Roman Catholic theologian who believed the thinking and writing of Saint Maximus is the personal synthesis of the great philosophical currents of Antiquity and Patristic thinking<sup>8</sup>. Consistent with Balthasar and in opposition to P. Viller and I. Hauserr, Father Stăniloae points out that Saint Maximus offered a grandiose theological-philosophical synthesis that he performed and exposed in a personal and original way. Starting from *Kosmische Liturgie* of Balthasar, Father Stăniloae highlights the original synthesis made by Saint Maximus between Evagrius and Dionysius the Areopagite. In Introduction to Philokalia 2 Father Staniloae resumes this idea<sup>9</sup>.

By translating *Mystagogy*, Father Stăniloae did not intend to express “an analysis and interpretation of St. Maximus’ ideas on the Church and the Divine Liturgy”. In his opinion, this can only be achieved “in connection with the whole theological and mystical system” of St. Maximus’ thought spread throughout his work<sup>10</sup>. The purpose of the translation of *Mystagogy* by Father Staniloae was to highlight the ecclesial character of the cosmos and hence the association - as I said - with the Miorița ballad, deeply rooted in the soul of the Romanian people. In the context of the debates on Orthodoxy and Romanian nation in the interwar period, in this association we can see an additional argument for Father Staniloae’s vision of the essence of the debates about the relevance of Orthodoxy in the genesis, the becoming, and the historical affirmation of the Romanian nation. With all this concern for the ecclesial and liturgical importance of *Mystagogy*, it does not appear between St. Maximus’ writings included in Philocalia or in the collection “Church Fathers and Writers”, remaining unedited in volume until 2000. However, Father Stăniloae comments the text of

<sup>8</sup> Protopop Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Cosmosul și sufletul, chipuri ale Bisericii”, in: *Revista Teologică*, XXXIX (1944) 3-4, p. 164.

<sup>9</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul”, in: *Filocalia*, vol. II, Editura Harisma, București, 1993, nota 4, p. 289.

<sup>10</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Introduction” to Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mystagogia cosmosul și sufletul, chipuri ale Bisericii*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2000, p. 7. About the translation, the way, and the influence of *Mystagogy* on the Christianity of the second millennium see Diac. Ioan I. ICA JR, *De la Dionisie Areopagitul la Simeon al Tesalonicului. Integrarea comentariilor liturgice bizantine*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2011, pp. 175-202.

Mystagogy in 85 notes that were published in 1973 by Panayotis Nellas in Athens<sup>11</sup>.

In 1961, Hans Urs von Balthasar's translation of St. Maximus' Mystagogy into German appeared as an annex to the second edition of the *Cosmic Liturgy*<sup>12</sup>. We note a concern of the two theologians for Saint Maximus' *Mystagogy*, identifying in this text an "important key" for cosmology and anthropology of the saint in a Christological and ecclesial-eschatological perspective.

### **b) Saint Maximus' *Mystagogy* in the thinking of the theologians Balthasar and Stăniloae**

For Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mystagogy* represents "one of the most aesthetically pleasing and spiritual comprehensive works of the Confessor"<sup>13</sup>. For Balthasar, *Mystagogy* must not be broken from the context of the Areopagitic hierarchies, but, on the other hand, it is necessary to understand that Saint Maximus "goes on his own way"<sup>14</sup>. Through this, he wants to show that, while assuming the Patristic tradition up to him, St. Maximus succeeds in his approaches to a new level of deepening and interpretation. He demonstrates that Saint Maximus reduces "the triadic cosmic structure of the Areopagite to a dual one". This dual construction, centred on the "decisive articulation between the clergy and the people", represents a point which Saint Maximus departs from to *overcome* it, and overcoming can only be achieved through Christology. Balthasar will strongly emphasize this vision of Saint Maximus in *Mystagogy*, a vision that restored Origen's old Alexandrian world (heaven-earth, spirit-body, New Testament - Old Testament): "the unmixed dyad-unity of the hierarchically-visible Church is the representation of Christ, as it is witnessed by the Chalcedon theology"<sup>15</sup>. Thus, Saint Maximus recovers

<sup>11</sup> *Mystagōgia tou hagiou Maximou tou Homologetou* Eisagogē kai scholia protopresbyterou D. STĂNILOAE, metaphrasē Ignatiou Sakalē, Apostoliki Diokonia, Atena, 1973.

<sup>12</sup> See "Die Mystagogie", in: Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Kosmische Liturgie. Das Weltbild des Maximus des Bekenner*, 2, völlig veränderte Auflage, Johannes Verlag, Eisedeln, 1961, pp. 367-407.

<sup>13</sup> Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, "Cuvânt înainte la ediția a doua", in: *Liturghia cosmică, lumina în gândirea Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, trad. Pr. Alexandru I. Roșu, Editura Doxologia, 2018, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Liturghia cosmică...*, pp. 376-377.

<sup>15</sup> Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Liturghia cosmică...*, p. 378.

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and recurs Christologically the four principles of Origen - God, the cosmos, the soul, the Scripture - the novelty of Mystagogy being - in Balthasar's opinion - a sort of Chalcedonian Origenism<sup>16</sup>.

Hans Urs von Balthasar identifies the two directions in which Mystagogy is interpreted: *mystical* and *eschatological*. In the mystical interpretation, Balthasar believes that Evagrius' monastic theology finds its place in the Orthodox ecclesiology. By the eschatological dimension, Saint Maximus exceeds both Evagrius and Dionysius in the sense that the place of a spiritual Church, which is lacking in the body, is taken by the Church of the resurrected. This image does not appear because of the separation of the different categories of believers, but by the Church going in union with Christ on the road from earthly life, through death, to the Resurrection. St. Maximus does not understand the Church as of the chosen one, but being in the midst of the natural and supernatural cosmos, an epicentre of light that all gravitates around for transfiguration<sup>17</sup>. Making the distinctions in the vision of Evagrius, Dionysius and Maximus, Balthasar underlines the originality and novelty of St. Maximus' vision: "again, in opposition to both Evagrius and Saint Dionysius - for St. Maximus, the Liturgy is Cosmic Liturgy from the very beginning: the inclusion of the whole world, based on Christological foundation of both the world and the ecclesial Liturgy, in the hypostatic union"<sup>18</sup>. Balthasar notes the eschatological dimension of the Liturgy in St. Maximus' *Mystagogy* and its significance for *theosis*.

Indeed, in *Mystagogy* Saint Maximus the Confessor emphasizes the eschatological dimension of the Divine Liturgy, through which man lives in advance the realities of the eschatological age. In *Mythagogy*, through the various liturgical moments Saint Maxim carries out a crescendo of the experience of the future age present in the concrete of the life and of the personal and communitarian experience of the Church. Balthasar has the merit of interpreting St. Maximus' mystagogical thought in a multifaceted approach to the mystagogic thinking encountered at Origen, Evagrius and Dionysius. He identifies the methodological and content accents and limits of each of Saint Maximus' predecessors and concentrates all the argumentative force in the ecclesial reality of the doctrine of Chalcedon. Therefore, Balthasar observes the cosmic-human unity in St. Maximus'

<sup>16</sup> Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, *Liturghia cosmică...*, p. 378.

<sup>17</sup> Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, *Liturghia cosmică...*, pp. 383-384.

<sup>18</sup> Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, *Liturghia cosmică...*, p. 384.



thinking, their Christological and ecclesial foundation and perspective, and their final destination.

The ecclesiology that Balthasar understands from St. Maximus' texts is not an ecclesiology that eludes history, cosmos, and the body. On the contrary, the work of the Church is a transfigurative and deifying work of Christ in the midst of cosmos, history, and human existence, overcoming both the vision of Evagrius' spiritualism and that of Dionysius' angelism. Therefore, the Liturgy of the Church is a cosmic Liturgy having the hypostatic union and Christology as foundation. Therefore, we cannot identify *Mystagogy* with a simple liturgical commentary, but with an introduction to the Mystery of Christ, starting from the principles of the Chalcedonian Christology that assumes man and the cosmos in a transfigurative and deifying perspective. In *Mystagogy* asceticism and mysticism are integrated into a vision and a liturgical-ecclesial realism, Saint Maximus unifying the various complementary accents of tradition in a grand original synthesis.

For Father Stăniloae, in *Mythagogy* Saint Maximus explains more problems related to ontology, especially "the theological premises and the ontological character of the movement of all to God by advancing into the spiritual life"<sup>19</sup>. This dynamics of the creatures to perfection and union with God, rendered by Saint Maximus by the concept of "movement", appears in all his other works: *Ambigua, Chapters on Theology and the Economy, Commentary on the Lord's Prayer, Questions Addressed to Thalassius*. Methodologically, as compared to the other works mentioned, in *Mystagogy*, Saint Maximus renders the dynamics of creation to the union with God - man and the cosmos - in a *concentrated* way. Without an "analysis of the various moments of the movement", Saint Maximus shows "the succession of degrees of this climb", insisting on how "man can attain each spiritual degree"<sup>20</sup>. Father Staniloae sees the methodological specificity of *Mystagogy* in relation to the other works and the concentration of the whole anthropological and cosmic vision of St. Maximus in its content. In *Mystagogy*, Saint Maximus, expresses the unity and movement of man and

<sup>19</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "Conținutul Mistagogiei Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul", in: Sfântul Maxim MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, ediție îngrijită de Pr. Alexandru Atanase BARNĂ, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2017, p. 83.

<sup>20</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "Conținutul Mistagogiei Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul", in: Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, p. 84.

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cosmos in paradoxical terms, having the Church as a model. Analyzing this perspective, Father Stăniloae emphasizes that there is an initial unity of the cosmos, and this unity through motion grows and completes. However, this movement is not the isolated movement of a part, but the movement of the union of the parts, and this dynamics encompasses the Church, man, and cosmos. In the view of Father Stăniloae, the Church is not only a model of union with God, “but the Church is also a part of the cosmos which the unifying work of God is exercised in (...) is the highest, most up-to-date part of the cosmos in the movement toward God and the effective presence of God in it”<sup>21</sup>. From this perspective, the Church is at the centre of the cosmos, an idea that we also encounter at Balthasar. In the middle of the cosmos in order to unite it with God, the Church is not a static reality, but a dynamic one, Father Stăniloae arguing that the universe is an undeveloped church that tends to become a church, having the Church as a *ferment*. Just like Balthasar, who interpreted the significance of the Church as an edifice and community, Father Staniloae expresses the perichoretic triad of Church-man-cosmos:

“We can say, therefore, that the Church is not only the icon of the cosmos and man, but also that she is within the cosmos and man and that man and the cosmos are within the Church; and that the Church is the intensified form of unity and unifying dynamism of the cosmos and man”<sup>22</sup>.

Thus, man is a church and called to become a church and the cosmos is a church and called to become a church in unity with the Church and with God who works and pours grace through her and within her. In this ecclesial perspective on man and the cosmos, the Liturgy has a unifying role not only in the Church but also in man and the cosmos. Father Staniloae develops the same logic in anthropology and cosmosology from the perspective of the role of the Liturgy as well as of the Church. If man and the cosmos are churches according to the pattern of the Church - having a structure similar to the church - the Liturgy of the Church becomes an icon (model) of a

<sup>21</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Conținutul Mistagogiei Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul”, in: Sfântul Maxim MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, p. 85.

<sup>22</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Conținutul Mistagogiei Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul”, in: Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, pp. 88-89.

cosmic and anthropological liturgy. At this point Father Stăniloae deepens St. Maximus' vision.

“if the Church cannot exist without Liturgy, then the Liturgy celebrated in the Church should be an icon (or model) of a liturgy done in the cosmos and inside man, as the Church itself is an icon (or model) of the cosmos, and man. In this case, the Liturgy of the Church would be but an intensified form of the liturgy of the cosmos and of man, and the liturgy of the cosmos and man would only be participation at the Liturgy of the Church to a certain extent that is the actual Liturgy”<sup>23</sup>.

In the implications of Saint Maximus' thought Father Stăniloae sought to deepen the vision of a history development, which at the time of Saint Maximus did not exist in the form which theology understood it in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

“This development of the movement of history and cosmos to a common degree to the liturgical movement, but to an extent different from the liturgical movement of the Church, and inter-conditioning in some way, shows us again a certain participation of the life of cosmos and man to the life of the Church and the life of the Church to the life of cosmos and man of every age”<sup>24</sup>.

In another place, Father Stăniloae shows that because Saint Maximus could not see the development in history in the context of his age, he understood Liturgy only as “the prefiguration of the end of the cosmos and not as levels, which the cosmos advances through towards its end, as in human life”. Making comparisons between the spiritual development of man and of cosmos and vice versa, Father Stăniloae believes that in this dynamic unity we can identify the “beginning of a more detailed liturgical vision of history” since “the spiritual development of believers as individuals should have effect in the similar development of the cosmos”<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Conținutul Mistagogiei Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul”, in: Sfântul Maxim MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, p. 90.

<sup>24</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Conținutul Mistagogiei Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul”, in: Sfântul Maxim MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, p. 98.

<sup>25</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Comentarii la Mistagogia Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul”, in: Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2017, p. 205.

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Also in the second chapter of Mystagogy St. Maximus the Confessor underlined the unity and interpenetration between the intelligible and the sensible world. He makes a parallel between the Church and cosmos made up of the seen and unseen, and speaks of the interpenetration of the intelligible creation with the sensible one. He points out that all the intelligible creation is shown in the sensible one, and the sensible one exists in the intelligible one; therefore, their work is one, such as “a wheel in the wheel” (Ezekiel 1, 16)<sup>26</sup>. This interpenetration - Father Stăniloae shows - makes it possible to transfigure creation and to bring out the spiritual or divine beauties and meanings in the future age through the omnipotence of God<sup>27</sup>. Starting from the first two chapters of Mystagogy, Saint Maximus presents the Church from the perspective of communion in Christ as the image of God’s union with the whole world, and the edifice of the church with the believers gathered in it as an image of the whole creation, an image of the union and distinction between the visible, invisible and invisible beings. Therefore, Father Stăniloae shows that the visible and the invisible part “refer to their reason as a whole consisting of two parts” and these are complementary to the superior reason they are in. He interprets that Saint Maximus sees “a unity” and “a dynamic relationship” between the two parts of the church made by human hands - hierateion and naos - and “an interference” between the angelic order and the seen cosmos. Saint Maximus takes the idea of a “dynamic relationship” from Dionysius the Areopagite, in the sense of an advancement of all creation to Christ. He explains St. Maximus’ vision:

“Every angelic intellect (nous) contains in itself the reasons of all sensitive realities, in increasingly higher levels of understanding and, implicitly, in a solidarity between them; likewise, at a significantly lower level of a common manner, the human minds contain them, but in a continuous progress. Thus, the sensible order is contained in the angel’s one (logis), and the angelic rank is shown in the sensible through the image (tipois). Moreover,

<sup>26</sup> Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, II, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2017, pp. 110-112.

<sup>27</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. III, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1978, p. 419.

their work is the same: knowing the same content and persistence in Him as «a wheel in the wheel»<sup>28</sup>.

In the third and fourth chapter of *Mystagogy*, Father Staniloae shows that St. Maximus is not so much influenced by Dionysius the Areopagite as Evagrius Ponticus.

“The man considered as a church exerts the practical philosophy through the body as a naos, that is, the philosophy manifested through deeds; through the soul, as a sacred place (hierateion) he realizes the spiritual contemplation; finally, through the mind (nous), as through a divine altar, he penetrates the mysterious knowledge of God”<sup>29</sup>.

There is a close connection between active philosophy and natural contemplation and between these two and mystical theology. On the one hand, St. Maximus shows that the church is in the image of man and the cosmos is in the image of man in a unitary sense. Father Staniloae expresses this idea in the sense that the intelligible order is the soul of the cosmos, and the sensible order is its body and the union does not abolish their identity. Saint Maximus expressed this unity without confusion of the mystery of man and cosmos through the terminology of the dogma of Chalcedon<sup>30</sup>.

Father Staniloae identifies the eschatological dimension of *Mystagogy*. Starting with the eighth chapter of *Mystagogy*, Saint Maximus the Confessor presents the meanings of the different moments of the Divine Liturgy. If in Chapters 8-13, Saint Maximus' explanations have a spiritual character at different liturgical moments, in chapters 14-21, the observations refer to the eschatological destiny of the man and of the cosmos in unity. In this respect, Father Dumitru Stăniloae states that, starting with the 14th chapter of *Mystagogy*, the liturgical explanations of Saint Maximus refer

<sup>28</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Comentarii la *Mistagogia* Sfântului Maxim Mărturisorul”, in: Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, pp. 168-169.

<sup>29</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Comentarii la *Mistagogia* Sfântului Maxim Mărturisorul”, in: Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, p. 171.

<sup>30</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Comentarii la *Mistagogia* Sfântului Maxim Mărturisorul”, in: Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, pp. 192-193.

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to the eschatological destiny of all creation. For St. Maximus, the Divine Liturgy symbolizes both the ascension (anabasis) of believers to God and the ascension of all creation to God. Creation is a *cosmic liturgy*, being at the same time a church as man is a church. This is because man and the cosmos are called to move incessantly towards their Creator<sup>31</sup>. Like Balthasar, Father Stăniloae notes the relevance that Saint Maximus gives to cosmos and man from an Christological and ecclesiological perspective. For St. Maximus, the closure of the church doors, following the reading of the evangelical pericope, signifies the end of sensitive things. Father Stăniloae says that the closing of the doors of the holy church after the exit of the catechumens signifies both the condemnation of the sinful at the terrible last judgment and the entry of the saints into Christ's chamber of marriage and the abandonment of the deceptive work of the senses understood as "their supreme spiritualization"<sup>32</sup>.

Saint Maximus the Confessor also gives an eschatological interpretation to the moment when the priest exits with the sacred gifts. Thus, for him the Great Entrance or the entrance of the sacred gifts is

"the beginning and the end (...) of the new teaching, which will be shared in heaven (in eschaton) about God's economy to us and the revelation of the mystery our salvation, which lies in the unseen depths of the divine mystery. «But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom» (Matt. 26: 29)"<sup>33</sup>.

Explaining this text of St. Maximus', Father Dumitru Stăniloae shows that the teaching that will be revealed to the deified in the eschaton will no longer consist of words as in the present life, but will be a teaching transmitted by sight, through a perfect, personal and communal revelation. In eschaton God will be perfectly revealed to those who are deified. The deified will know the mystery of divine economy or the mystery of human

<sup>31</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "Comentarii la Mistagogia Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul", in: Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, p. 204.

<sup>32</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "Comentarii la Mistagogia Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul", in: Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, p. 205.

<sup>33</sup> Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, XVI, p. 131.

salvation only in the future age and in a perfect way. Only in eschaton the saved will live with Christ the perfect joy of love, for only then will they drink the new wine of joy together with the Lord, as Christ promised in the evening of the Last Supper<sup>34</sup>.

The clergy and faithful' confession of the Symbol of Faith conceals the gratitude that the saved will bring to God in the eschatological age for the reasons of the divine grace through which they have been saved. Father Stăniloae shows that for the Saint Maximus the Confessor, the joint utterance of the Creed by the clergy and the people after the spiritual Kiss of Peace is the sign of the everlasting glories and thanksgivings that the deified will bring to God in the eschaton<sup>35</sup>. St. Maximus distinguishes between *reasons* and *ways*, and Father Stăniloae - quoting P. Sherwood - explains this distinction that appears in Mystagogy 18. It refers to the "immutable ontological basis of a reality and the varied forms which this base passes through, or the possibilities to use it". Father Staniloae shows that from this eschatological explanation of the Symbol of Faith uttered by those gathered at the Divine Liturgy, we can remember three things. First of all, the gratitude the worthy ones will bring to God in eschaton will be for the paradoxical reasons and ways of his grace that made them be saved. Secondly, that gratitude the deified ones will bring to show their gratefulness for the godly benevolence poured upon them, will be the only thing they will offer to the Holy Trinity in exchange for the happiness received as a gift. Thirdly, the unspeakable things from eschaton the saints will receive from God will be endless, and infinite<sup>36</sup>.

The eschatological interpretation of the seraphimic Trisagion recalls the unity and equality in dignity of the deified ones with the intelligible and immaterial powers from eschaton. The unity and equality of the saints and angels in the next life will be manifested through the eternal and unchangeable move around the Holy Trinity. This is different from the change (*tropi*) that means somebody's fall from the reason of his own

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<sup>34</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Comentarii la Mistagogia Sfântului Maxim Mărturisorul*, p. 206.

<sup>35</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în liturghia ortodoxă*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2004, p. 408.

<sup>36</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Comentarii la Mistagogia Sfântului Maxim Mărturisorul*, p. 208.

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nature. The unchangeable move around God is “the move in accordance with nature” – *status mobilis* and *motus stabilis*<sup>37</sup>.

Lord's Prayer is related to the future gift of adoption (hyothesisia). St. Maximus presented this idea in chapter 20 from Mystagogy. In this chapter he shows that the most-holy invocation of God-Father during the Liturgy by Lord's Prayer is the symbol of the real and true adoption that will be given to all that did God's will, in the life to come through the grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit<sup>38</sup>. Fr. Stăniloae shows that for St. Maximus the adoption of the saints in the next life is accomplished by the grace and gift of the Holy Spirit<sup>39</sup>. By the future adoption of the deified ones by God, all the features characteristic to the human nature will be overwhelmed by the uncreated grace, and “people won't appear and manifest as sons of men, but as sons of God, having all God's features”<sup>40</sup>.

According to St. Maximus the Confessor, the future unity and gathering of the worthy ones in the secret intimacy of the divine simplicity is indicated by the liturgical hymn «One is Holy», sung during the Liturgy by all the present faithful. That gathering and unity of the saints in the divine simplicity will be above reason and word. In the age to come the worthy ones will watch and continuously participate along with the holy angels at the unspeakable light of the Holy Trinity that will reflect upon them through the divine grace. All become one in Christ but no one will ever stop to experience this deep reality<sup>41</sup>.

St. Maximus the Confessor underlines the connection between the Eucharist and deification or *theosis*. Through the Eucharist, the worthy acquire deification that begins in the present life but is fully or completely received in the age to come. In a text from Mystagogy 24, Saint Maximus shows that communion with the holy Mysteries of Christ prepares for the future union, adoption, and deification that all who have done the will of

<sup>37</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Comentarii la Mistagogia Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, p. 210.

<sup>38</sup> Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, XX, p. 133.

<sup>39</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Comentarii la Mistagogia Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, p. 211.

<sup>40</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Comentarii la Mistagogia Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, p. 211.

<sup>41</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Comentarii la Mistagogia Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, pp. 211-212.



God will rejoice<sup>42</sup>. Father Stăniloae notes that Saint Maximus concentrates the Holy Liturgy around 12 moments, many of which are already exposed: 1) the entrance of the bishop and the people into the church for Liturgy; 2) readings from Scripture; 3) singing; 4) exhortations for peace; 5) reading of the Gospel; 6) closing the doors; 7) the entrance of the Holy Mysteries; 8) the Kiss of Peace; 9) the Creed; 10) Trisagion; 11) Lord's Prayer; 12) singing One is Holy. He noted "the absence of the anamnesis, the epiclesis, and the sanctification" between the 10th and 11th moments and the lack of preparation of the Mysteries for Communion at the time of the 12th, absences motivated by Saint Maximus through the mystery, as "they are unspeakable peaks of the mystery to be respected in silence"<sup>43</sup>. Regarding these aspects in the opinion of Father Stăniloae, Balthasar believes that Saint Maximus did not mention these moments either because he could not descend to a "symbolic explanation", or because he considered them as part of the so-called "arcane discipline of the Church". In this respect, Father Stăniloae points out that Saint Maximus speaks about the moment of communion and the Mystery of presence in the Body and Blood of Christ in other parts of his work and even in *Mystagogy* <sup>44</sup>.

In chapter 24, Father Stăniloae observes that Saint Maximus synthesizes previous eschatological and spiritual explanations, bringing new insights about the importance of liturgical moments. Thus, if through previous explanations he sought to point out the spiritual ascension of the members of the Church, in chapter 24 he seeks to specify the exigencies of each step of the spiritual life, in particular in the sense that the liturgical ascension has three overlapping steps in each of its moments corresponding to the three spiritual stages of the believers. Through this comment on chapter 24 Father Stăniloae concludes that:

"The mysticism of Saint Maximus is thus revealed as ecclesial and liturgical mystics. St. Maximus' *Mystagogy* can be considered as a systematic mystical course in which the Church and the Liturgy have a very important role. It is a course in which all of

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<sup>42</sup> Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, XXIV, p. 144.

<sup>43</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Comentarii la Mistagogia Sfântului Maxim Mărturisorul*, p. 195.

<sup>44</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Comentarii la Mistagogia Sfântului Maxim Mărturisorul*, p. 196.

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St. Maximus' vision is systematically exposed as a vision of the progress of believers in God within the general destiny of the world, even if the actual exposure is highly concentrated"<sup>45</sup>.

Thus, St. Maximus' Mystagogy is a major source of Byzantine liturgical mysticism and present liturgical and dogmatic theology in the sense that we understand Dogmatics united with the Spirituality and Liturgy of the Church. At the same time, Mystagogy remains a true spiritual guide in the liturgical climb of man in unity with the cosmos and with the whole Church towards unification with God, being a common treasure of the first Christian millennium.

### **III. Conclusions**

St. Maximus' Mystagogia drew the attention of two Christian theologians: Hans Urs von Balthasar and Dumitru Stăniloae, being translated and commented on by each one. If Balthasar exerts a certain influence on Father Staniloae's thinking, we can identify it in the beginning of the rediscovery of Saint Maximus' writings and the appearance of the work *the Cosmic Liturgy*. Regarding the interpretation of Mystagogy in the thinking of the two theologians, we appreciate the following: a) by its content St. Maximus' Mystagogia fascinates the two scholars, one Roman Catholic, and the other Orthodox, which is a key to interpreting St. Maximus' thought; b) Balthasar regards the content of Mystagogy more in the context of the development of the ideas and expression of the dogma of Chalcedon, and in the context of the influences that Evagrius and Dionysius had upon Saint Maximus, without shading his creativity and originality. Assuming the insights of Balthasar, Father Staniloae analyzes the content of Mystagogy in a continuous deepening of the vision of Saint Maximus, an ever-expanded specification of ties, complementarity, unity in distinction, and the dynamics that man, cosmos, and the Church are supposed to have in their journey with Christ, to Christ; c) to a certain extent Balthasar also assumes a historical approach to the ideas and content of Mystagogy, aspects that are also related to a theological aesthetics. Father

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<sup>45</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Comentarii la Mistagogia Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, p. 220.

Staniloae emphasizes the spiritual strength of its content, its relevance to the understanding of the work of God in the Church, man and the cosmos, in the Liturgy, the interrelation between them for the discovery of the transcendent meaning of the world - sensitive and intelligible - in Christ and the deification of man and the transfiguration of the cosmos in the church; he is more interested in expressing the deep spiritual message of Mystagogy for man of the 20th century than in identifying the concrete context and spiritual relationships of the origin of this message; d) Balthasar explicitly states the implications of the dogma of Chalcedon and the influence of Evagrius and Dionysius in the selective construction of Saint Maximus the Confessor's thought. By identifying the importance of Chalcedon and its methodological distinctions, Father Staniloae seeks to specify the paradoxical reality of man, cosmos and the Church in their union and dynamics with Christ toward Christ, in a suitable terminology - unity in distinction, paradox, interrelation, union, deification; e) both Balthasar and Father Stăniloae identify an eschatological dimension of man and the cosmos in the Church, in the thought of Saint Maximus exposed in Mystagogy, as well as the centrality of the dogma of Chalcedon and the Person of Christ; f) Both Balthasar and Father Staniloae note the importance of the edifice of the church and of the Liturgy in the perfection and sanctification of man and the cosmos, as well as the ascetic dimension of Christian life; g) both Balthasar and Father Staniloae correlate aspects of Mystagogy with the whole of Saint Maximus' thought from other works, especially with regard to anthropology.

Thus, we can say that with regard to the central aspects of Mystagogy of Saint Maximus the Confessor there is a common thought of the two theologians. There are only interpretative nuances and differences of approach and theological style inherent in some aspects of the content of St. Maximus' work, as well as some accents that Hans Urs von Balthasar and Dumitru Stăniloae developed specifically. The interpretative effort of the two theologians is part of the common effort of Christian theology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to discover and deepen the mysterious meanings of St. Maximus the Confessor's thought by enrolling them in the life and experience of the Church and the present world.