

Antoine Lévy, Pauli Annala, Olli Hallamaa, Tuomo Lankila, eds.

The Architecture of the Cosmos. St. Maximus the Confessor. New Perspectives.

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The growing interest in Maximus the Confessor's teachings has led in recent years to many publications and conferences dedicated to his *œuvre*. It seems to be getting harder and harder to find a really innovative thesis among all the papers that have been recently published. I was impressed with this seemingly modest post-conference publication, *The Architecture of the Cosmos. St. Maximus the Confessor. New Perspectives*. The volume, containing fourteen papers in English, is the outcome of the conference organised in Helsinki in 2013. The title of the book that of the conference itself contains, of course, a hint at the classical study by A.H. Armstrong on the philosophy of Plotinus (*The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe*).

The structure of the book is transparent and, after a general introduction, we find four chapters covering the introductory problems, the philosophical approach, the theological approach, and then, finally, the modern one. I was impressed with the first paper (*A polycentric introduction*), prepared by Antoine Lévy, one of the editors of the book, as it not only presents all the problems that are going to be developed in the main part of the publication, but also gives a synthetic introduction to the main topics of the Confessor's teachings in general.

In Chapter One, entitled 'Contextualization', we find only two papers. In the first one, P. Van Deun presents some unedited texts by Maximus. The second one, prepared by Ch. Boudignon, describes the Pseudo-Macarian understanding of the relation between God, church and soul as the source of *Mystagogy*.

Chapter Two, which covers philosophical problems in the Confessor's teachings, begins with "Maximus the Confessor on the logical dimension of the structure of reality" prepared by Ch. Erismann. Then, T.T. Tollefsen and V.V. Petroff present the concept of the universal and the understanding of *ὑπάρχω* and *ὑφίστημι*. Grigory Benevich provides us with a summary of his book *A Brief History of 'Providence' from Plato to Maximus the Confessor*, which was first written in Russian. The paper about the metaphysical position of the divine as 'desirable' does not provide final conclusions, but the author presents an interesting and precise analysis of similarities between Proclus and Maximus. Generally, we can find numerous accurate references to pagan philosophy—especially the Neoplatonic one (G. Benevich, V.V. Petroff, P. Mueller-Jourdan, A. Lévy). Although the link is obvious in a way, many other papers do not refer to this background.

As regards the theological approach, we find Antoine Lévy's paper, in which arguments are presented as to why, for Maximus, the conjunction of Jews and Greeks that characterizes Christ as the cornerstone of the Church means much more than a mere change of ethical criteria in the composition of the people of God. Vladimir Cvetković presents one of the crucial theological themes—Incarnation—as a series of unifications and differentiations that could be understood only when looking at the Confessor's ideas as an integral system. The other two papers, by I. Perczel and P. Annala, provide textual analyses of select passages of the *Lord's Prayer* and *Mystagogy*.

The main advantage of the book is that it gives the reader the possibility of analyzing particular problems from different points of view. For example, the analysis of *Mystagogy* occurs in the context of its sources (Ch. Boudignon), and the various theological (P. Annala, V. Cvetković) and philosophical interpretations (T.T. Tollefsen, P. Mueller-Jourdan), as well as its modern reinterpretation (A.V. Nesteruk). Some of the papers are focused on specific issues (Ch. Boudignon, I. Perczel), while others deliver a complete panorama of the problem (G. Benevich, N. Loudovikos). The entire publication is very well presented and laid out; the majority of the authors are experienced and all have published on Maximus before. There are many quotations of Confessor's own words, which is really useful while analyzing the argumentation.

Are there weak points in the volume? Minor ones perhaps. Some papers give us only an English translation of the sources quoted (I. Perczel), when the original Greek would have been useful. In one case the list of references is unexpectedly short (P. Mueller-Jourdan) while other papers (Ch. Erismann, T.T. Tollefsen, A. Lévy, N. Loudovikos, P. Annala) do not separate conclusions from summary.

The book is the fruit of interesting cooperation and helps us realize, once again, that the writings of patristic authors, such as Maximus the Confessor, should be studied by philosophers, theologians, historians and philologists in order to highlight their quality and substance, substance which might indeed be compared with aspects of modern science (A.V. Nesteruk).

Table of Contents

A. Lévy, A polycentric introduction

Chapter One: Contextualization

P. Van Deun, Building the architecture of the Cosmos: the Maximian Bricks

C. Boudignon, Pseudo-Macarius as a source of the *Mystogogy of Maximus*