

## REVIEW

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**Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Liturghia cosmică. Lumea în gândirea Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul [Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor]*, translation from German Language by Father Alexandru I. Roșu, col. “Patristica. Studii”, 23, Doxologia Publishing House, Iași, 2018.**

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In the monographs dedicated to the great Father Byzantine (580- August 13 662), Hans Urs von Balthasar remains undoubtedly an author of “first class” that cannot be excluded from any serious academic research. The works of the Catholic theologian of Swiss origin, translated in the Romanian space since 1994 (*Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”?* with a Short Discourse on Hell, translated by Alexandru Șahighian, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest), attracted attention through two central aspects, namely: the detachment from neo-scholastic thinking (still so strongly present in our Romanian space) and the burning desire of the Catholic author to write theology extracted from the spirituality and thinking of the Church Fathers. The last Romanian translation published in the *Patristica: Studies* collection at the Doxologia Publishing house in Iași (2018) brings to the fore the monograph of Hans Urs von Balthasar dedicated to the cosmological and anthropological thinking of Saint Maximus the Confessor.

Although *editio princeps* was in 1941, the speed with which it became known and appreciated was overwhelming. Of course, some critical opinions from reviewers,

such as those of Polycarp Sherwood, led to a substantial improvement in volume in the second edition in 1961 (reprinted in 1988). The work plan of Hans Urs von Balthasar is *almost* complete: he manages to offer both cosmological and anthropological thought of St. Maximus, yet also offer translations from Byzantine author corpus, of Dionysius (pp. 429-64). It is a “manual for use” and instruction on how St. Maximus corroborates cosmology and anthropology in the Person of Christ. Von Balthasar’s book starts from the sincere and current premise on the *ad fontes* saying and the theological charge that Saint Maximus, “a spiritual world-traveler” leaves to contemporaneity: “We search, with our lanterns, for models to imitate, but we do not like to look for them in the distant past. Here is one who seems extraordinarily contemporary: a spiritual world-traveler, who continued to work quietly while the waves of the Persian armies and the still more threatening waves of Islam drove him ever farther from home and while ecclesiastical and political integralism captured him, put him on trial, attempted to seduce him, condemned him, and banished him, until – at the southern end of what one day to be Holy Russia”

(p. 18). Topics such as history and Parousia (pp. 215-7), paradise and freedom (pp. 217-22), the Synthetic person (pp. 281-304), the drama of Redemption (pp. 314-23), personal and Gnostic will (γνώμη) emphasizes very concretely how von Balthasar's monograph can be accepted and promoted today as a true *Handbook* of Dogmatic Theology, a *Handbook* that no longer has contacts and "relations" with the scholastic ones already known to the general public. Von Balthasar manages to avoid the clumsiness of Catholic thought, making a pertinent analysis of Maxim's texts and highlighting patristic spirituality. It is not in vain that he exclaims towards the end of his monograph that "the life of the Christian is an imitation of the life of Christ. Christ loved us more than Himself, since He preferred the darkness of His life in the flesh to the primordial light of God" (p. 331). There is a fantastic balance in von Balthasar's work not to fall into the trap of relative exaggerations and positions; he sketches very deeply the sensitivity of the patristic text, and the lines of his monograph compose a true dogmatic-patristic picture. In addition, von Balthasar's writing and thinking manage to create a bridge between the East and the West. He himself sees the East not only in Byzantium, but in Asia, and in the West not only Rome, but the whole West. *In extension* Saint Maximus "is par excellence the thinker philosopher and theologian located between East and West" (p. 14), and his writing best described this ecumenical opening. He is not content to sketch positive opinions about Maxim, but even recalls that Dionysius the Areopagite must be seen today and categorized as "one of the titans of Christian thought of all time" (p. 429), although the contemporary temptation is to see him "half

Neoplatonic", half Monophysite" (429). What is certain is that the Swiss theologian probes not only the letters of Maximus, but also the spirit of his texts and how they led to the direct solution of the problem of the two wills in the Person of the Son of God.

Von Balthasar's merit is to be faithful to the thought of Saint Maximus and to always put it in parallel with the Fathers before the great Maximus. Not only does he make a pertinent analysis of the corpus of Maxim's writings, but he makes contact with all the sources that led to the theology promoted by the Byzantine theologian. He is, of course, interested in how the philosophy or writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite managed to influence the thinking of the great Constantinopolitan Father.

The theological profile of Hans Urs von Balthasar, his magnificent and refined theological pen in places, the power of synthesizing and updating the patristic message of the seventh century, make the monograph dedicated to the world and man in the thought of Maxim the Confessor a piece of maximum importance for maximum current research. It is clear: any serious study of the theological thinking of St. Maximus cannot exclude this piece from a Byzantine *puzzle* that focuses on the one who through his *bios* and writing succumbed to the Christological thinking of that troubled century.

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