

Chapter 7

Mapping Reality within the Experience of Holiness in *Amb.Io.* 41 and *Q.Thal.* 48

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The prologue of *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91. 1304D) claims that what could be considered St Maximus' theory of everything (Costache 2011: 27–30),¹ which depicts five divisions and unions of reality, draws on the mystical tradition of the saints. Scholars have long addressed the intricacies of this construct (Larchet 1996: 107–12; Lossky 2002: 108–10; Louth 1996: 69–71; Thunberg 1995²: 373–427; Thunberg 1985: 80–91; Tollefsen 2008: 82–3, 101–2; von Balthasar 2003: 271–75) but the Confessor's enigmatic claim is yet to receive proper attention—despite the attempts to discuss the anonymous saints evoked in the *Ambigua* (Sherwood 1955b: 9–10). I endeavour to make sense of the puzzling prologue by revisiting *Amb.Io.* 41, *Q.Thal.* 48 and relevant parallels from the early 630s. I propose that, even within his cosmological theory the Confessor was primarily interested in mapping the content of holy life, as throughout his writings (Louth 1996: 22, 33–46). Furthermore, I propose that his worldview was conditioned by the experience of holiness, which he beheld in the contemporary ascetics and to which he himself was no stranger. My two propositions are built precisely upon the prologue in question, finding numerous endorsements within the two classical *loci*, namely, *Amb.Io.* 41 and *Q.Thal.* 48. Whilst this remains the aim of the present chapter, i.e. to prove the holy life as the source and purpose of the theory, in revisiting the relevant passages I highlight aspects so far ignored within the Maximian construct.

***Amb.Io.* 41: The expanded theory**

St Maximus perceived reality, humanity's wide habitat, as consisting of various strands of being, which, whilst engaged in tensioning rapports are divinely conditioned to reach higher levels of complexity and coherence. The classical reference for this depiction of reality is *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91. 1304D–1316A). Sometimes reduced to its anthropological significance (Sherwood 1955b: 10) and sometimes ignored (Sherwood 1955a: 47–51, 63–70; Sherwood 1955b: 228), *Amb.Io.* 41 depicts the Maximian worldview in all its amplitude. Taking as a pretext a saying from St Gregory the Theologian, to which I shall return, the chapter can be roughly divided into five parts, namely, the prologue and the five divisions (PG 91. 1304D–5A); the project of the five unions (PG 91. 1305A–8C); the fall, its divisive nature and the five syntheses accomplished by Christ (PG 91. 1308C–12B); the factors that make unification possible (PG 91. 1312B–13B); and the interpretation of the initial

Gregorian saying (PG 91. 1313C–16A). In the following, we are concerned only with the first three parts.

The five divisions (PG 91. 1304D–1305B)

The theory begins by recording five layers of reality, each consisting of as many dichotomies or polarities. The passage of interest is placed directly after the very brief prologue of the chapter, which refers to the wisdom of the saints as the source of this worldview. The text reads as follows.

The saints . . . say that the reality (ὑπόστασιν) of all the beings that are subject to becoming bears within itself five divisions (πέντε διαιρέσεις). The first . . . separates (διαίρουσαν) the entire created nature [...] from the uncreated nature. . . . The second is that according to which the entire being that has received existence from God by creation is divided (διαίρεται) into intelligible and sensible. The third is that by which the sensible being is divided (διαίρεται) into sky and earth. The fourth is that by which the earth is divided (διαίρεται) into paradise and the inhabited land (οἰκουμένη). And the fifth is that by which the human being, like a comprehensive workshop of everything and which mediates physically between the edges of all polarities . . . is divided (διαίρεται) into male and female.

The terms for the elements that constitute the five divisions, we shall see, are identical to those utilised for the five syntheses within *Amb.Io.* 41 and *Q.Thal.* 48. Structurally, furthermore, these texts mirror each other perfectly. Whereas the five unions begin with the closest one to us, referring to humankind, to then move through increasingly wider horizons—terrestrial, cosmic, and the ensemble of creation—toward the encompassing perspective of a reality that is created and uncreated, the above passage begins from the vantage point of the created and the uncreated, and then progresses through narrower concentric circles to the closest one to us, represented by humankind (Lossky 2002: 108). We shall see later on that this symmetry is deliberate and meaningful.

Our passage enunciates the five polarities concisely, insisting on the first and the last ones. The first dichotomy consists in the ultimate ontological rift between uncreated and created, signified by the ignorance (ἄγνοιαν) of the creation regarding the ineffable principle (λόγον . . . ἄρρητον) of this division (PG 91. 1305A); the second one refers to the heterogeneity of the created domain, which includes the intelligible and the sensible;² the third one is found within the sensible realm, and refers to the sky and the earth; the fourth distinguishes on earth the inhabited land, or civilisation, and paradise, or the spiritual experience; and the fifth one is the anthropological, gender-marked division, at the level of which, according to von Balthasar (2003: 199), ‘the differentiation and multiplicity of the world, which has progressed to an extreme degree, takes its first turn toward unity.’ The first dichotomy, ontological in nature, is the strongest whilst the other four, unfolding within the order of creation, are weaker, structural in nature.

Contrary to what scholars sometimes assert (Thunberg 1995²: 373, 381; Thunberg 1985: 81–3), none of the five divisions and the tensions they entail are caused by the fall (Riou 1973: 147), although *Q.Thal.* 48 treats the five unions exclusively as saving

stages of a fallen creation. True, *Amb.Io.* 41 itself does not discuss the nature of all the polarities yet it makes clear that, although sharpened by sin (PG 91. 1308C), they are by design; another sign of the flowing nature of the creation (Blowers 2012b: 207–10). Not without reason, later *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91. 1305C) uses the term ‘distance’ (διάστημα), typical for the Nyssenian discourse (Jaeger 1960: 246.14–22), as an overall dimension of the creation. For instance, in addressing the first dichotomy the saint mentioned a factor which ‘naturally (φυσικῶς) separates [the elements] from one another, in no way permitting their union into one essence’ (εἰς μίαν οὐσίαν ἔνωσιν) or their convergence into ‘one and the same principle’ (τόν ἓνα καί τόν αὐτόν . . . λόγον) (PG 91. 1305A). The first polarity is therefore caused by the natural incommensurability of the principles underlying the created and the uncreated. Keeping the proportions, since no other dichotomy is as strong as the first one, certainly other principles are responsible for the rest of the divisions, and so they are designated by the same verb (διαίρουσαν, διαίρεται). Moreover, the same principles appear as instrumental toward the five syntheses both within *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91. 1305CD; 1308A,D; 1309B; 1312BC; 1313A) and *Q.Thal.* 48 (Laga and Steel 1980: 333.70, 335.76, 341.178–93). The result is that due to their principles, at once differentiating and unifying, the opposite elements of the five polarities remain dissimilar whilst united and likewise they associate without being obliterated; this is a common feature of Maximian ontology (von Balthasar 2003: 154–7). We shall discover later that whilst the differences remain intact, within the unifying process the contrary elements nevertheless reach higher levels of coherence and complexity.

The unfolding of the five dichotomies reveals an interesting blend of scriptural and cultural elements. Indeed, within a markedly scriptural framework as represented by the first division (see Genesis 1: God and the creation), the fourth one (see Genesis 2–3: the paradise and the outside land), and the fifth one (see Genesis 1: male and female), the narrative accommodates aspects from the ancient cosmologies. For instance, the second polarity, namely, the duality inherent to the creation, coincides with the ultimate Platonic division of the intelligible and the sensible. Likewise, the third one refers to the Aristotelian division of reality, which mainly comprises the sensible domain, subdivided into sky and the sublunar region of the earth. The ease with which the Confessor included, and developed (Bradshaw 2010: 813) such cultural elements within a fundamentally scriptural worldview proves that at the time of its elaboration the Maximian construct found those elements fully assimilated within the Christian Hellenic tradition. Notoriously, both Gregory the Theologian’s *Or.* 38.10.1–14 (Moreschini 1990: 122–4) and St Gregory of Nyssa’s *C.Eun.* 1.270-1 (Jaeger 1960: 105.19–106.6) included Plato’s highest division of being. Nevertheless, when considered from within the scriptural framework, this multilevel depiction of reality with the conspicuous philosophical strokes it displays tells a familiar story, well, at least when the scriptural narrative is itself traditionally mediated. Indeed, the whole construct can be read as centred on the human inhabitants of the cosmic house, signified by the word οἰκουμένη (the inhabited land is the world assimilated by humankind, humanized and perceived as a house), as in Gregory of Nyssa’s interpretation of Genesis 1 as describing the palace where the king was meant to live, in *Opif.* 2 (PG 44. 132D–133B). Maximus’ preference for the word οἰκουμένη instead of κόσμος (the world, the ecosystem, the cosmic milieu) may signify more than a single element among the ten constituents of the polarized reality; it could be a metaphor of the universe as cradle of and house for humanity.

Interestingly, although Maximus began by pointing out that this was the teaching of the saints, namely, that reality is multileveled, in *Amb.Io.* 41 he neither explicitly returned to this statement nor explained why the saints would need awareness of such intricacies. Perhaps this very obscurity prevented scholars from realizing the centrality of the experience of holiness for the Maximian construct. I must turn now to the aspect of unification.

The five syntheses (PG 91. 1305A–1308C)

Whether it is about the weak tensions within the various layers of the universe or the ontological rift between the created and the uncreated, the five divisions constitute as many existential challenges faced by the human person—the centre from which and by which the whole is represented, and the ecosystemic agent divinely appointed to bridge the many strands of being. Whereas *Q.Thal.* 48, as we shall see, speaks only indirectly about the human unifying vocation through describing the exploits of the saints, *Amb.Io.* 41 allocates some space to it (PG 91. 1305A–C) by introducing the philosophical theme of the microcosm (Tollefsen 2008: 102–3; von Balthasar 2003: 173–6, 199–200), without the term being used. More precisely, in addressing the fifth polarity the passage emphasises the gendered humankind as situated by God in the midst of everything, to naturally connect the components of all dichotomies. Humanity appears from the outset ‘as a kind of workshop (ἐργαστήριον) within which all things are supremely held together’ (συνεκτικώτατον). The text continues as follows (PG 91. 1305B).

Being provided with a unifying potential (τὴν πρὸς ἔνωσιν δύναμιν) due to the characteristic of its own parts of being related (σχετικῆς ιδιότητος) to all the extremities, [the human being] naturally mediates (φυσικῶς μεσιτεύων) between all the extremities. In this fashion the mode of creation of the divided things is completed in accordance with the [divine] cause, [humanity] being destined to manifest within itself the great mystery of the divine intention in an obvious way, namely, the reciprocal union (τὴν πρὸς ἄλληλα . . . ἔνωσιν) of the extremities pertaining to beings into a harmonious manner. [This union] keeps advancing upwards from things closer to those far off and from those inferior to those superior, ending in God. For this purpose humankind had to be finally introduced among the [created] beings like a grace (χάριν) and like a natural bond of sorts (σύνδεσμός τις φυσικός) that mediates between the extremities of the universe by way of its own parts. [Indeed, the human being] brings to unity (εἰς ἓν) within itself the things that are naturally separated from one another by a great distance (πολλῷ . . . τῷ διαστήματι), so that all are gathered together into a union with God, their cause. Thus, firmly beginning with the first or its own division [the human being] advances in stages and in order—through the intermediate ones—towards God, in whom it finds the limit of the supreme and unifying ascension through all things, and in whom there is no division.

Our passage speaks of humankind’s divine mandate (see χάριν) and capacity for unification, an aspect entailed by the three designations, namely, as a natural connector (σύνδεσμός τις φυσικός), as having a ‘unifying potential’ (τὴν πρὸς ἔνωσιν δύναμιν) and as endowed with a ‘relational characteristic’ (σχετικῆς ιδιότητος); all three allude to the microcosm. The Confessor understood these three features as

signifying humankind's consubstantiality with all the levels of creation, consubstantiality which in the process of unification, we assume, becomes familiarity. Though differently worded, a similar understanding occurs in *Myst.* 7 (Boudignon 2011: 33.540–35.575), from where the term 'microcosm' is again missing (Thunberg 1985: 73–4). *Myst.* 7 depicts a symmetry between the dichotomous human being and the equally dichotomous universe (Boudignon 2011: 33.540–34.552), whose convergence is secured by a mystical bond rooted in the pervading divine principles (Boudignon 2011: 34.552–65). The chapter implies the microcosm and its ramifications even further, in terms of the human being 'as a part by relation to the whole and a small measure in relation to the great one' (ὡς μέρος τῷ ὅλῳ καὶ μικρὸς τῷ μεγάλῳ), and the cosmos 'as a human being' (ὡς ἄνθρωπος) (Boudignon 2011: 34.565–35.569). Here, *Myst.* 7 echoes *Amb.Io.* 41 and its reference to the final outcome of the process of unification accomplished by Christ, namely, the metamorphosis of the cosmos into 'another human being' (ἄνθρωπον ἄλλον; PG 91. 1312A). In their microcosmic allusions both *Myst.* 7 and *Amb.Io.* 41 seem to borrow from Gregory the Theologian's *Or.* 28.22 and 38.11 (Costache 2011: 31, 36–7; Thunberg 1995²: 135). The Cappadocian influences upon the Maximian use of the microcosm are well documented (Blowers 2012a: 357–8, 359–60; Meyendorff 1983: 142). Whilst Maximus applied the theme of the microcosm to convey the natural capability of the human being as a comprehensive mediator, he suggested that the microcosm could not be a sufficient requirement for unification.

For its unifying potential to be activated, the human being has to adopt a theocentric lifestyle (Nellas 1997: 54–6). The passage cited above actually presents the whole unifying journey as an ascent to God (εἰς θεόν and πρὸς Θεόν; PG 91. 1305BC). The idea features similarly in *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1092BC), where the deified human being appears both as connected to the entire creation and, by adopting a theocentric life, as facilitating God's encompassing of the universe. The concrete form of this lifestyle is the virtuous path, which leads to true knowledge and love, to familiarity again. *Amb.Io.* 41 refers repeatedly to virtue, which appears as the privileged way to make good use of all things, in accordance with their principles (Costache 2013: 274–5, 279–80). For instance, 'divine virtue' (θεῖαν ἀρετήν) is necessary to accomplish the first union (PG 91. 1305CD). The text includes likewise the phrase 'in what concerns virtue' (κατ' ἀρετήν), which refers to the angelic-like status reached by those who undertake the final stages of the unifying ascent (PG 91. 1305D). Moreover, virtue emerges implicitly in the second synthesis, through the phrase 'leading a holy life' or 'leading a life befitting the saints' (ἀγιοπρεποῦς ἀγωγῆς; PG 91. 1305D). Virtue introduces human beings, furthermore, to an angelic form of knowing (γνώσις) that results in the overcoming of ignorance, the main sign of the divide between the creation and God (PG 91. 1305A,D; 1308A,B). The topic of ignorance and knowledge echoes again the Cappadocian discourse (Bradshaw 2004: 199; Costache 2011: 35–6). Moreover, virtue and its highest form, i.e. love (ἀγάπη), is the means by which the human being communes (ἐνώσας) with God in the fifth synthesis (PG 91. 1308B); this occurrence of love, which escaped von Balthasar (2003: 339), is analogous to the construal of love in *Ep.* 2 (PG 91. 400A). The emphasis on virtue, mystical knowledge and love, all pertaining to a 'life befitting the saints', points to the experience of holiness as the underlying factor of the Maximian worldview. We shall see below that the same emphasis is present in *Q.Thal.* 48, which describes the achievements of the saints.

Amb.Io. 41 emerges therefore as complexly structured. Culture and ecclesial tradition went hand in hand for the Confessor, both in relation to the representation of reality and the understanding of the factors leading the universe to a deeper coherence. Indeed, in symmetry with the depiction of the five divisions by way of scriptural and philosophical concepts, the presuppositions of unification are described in both philosophical (the microcosm) and ecclesial (saintly life) images. The two aspects are not incompatible. In fact, we can surmise that Maximus believed God to have secured the unity of the universe by the mediatory function of the human microcosm, which in turn had to be activated through the virtuous lifestyle. I must turn now to the five syntheses.

According to God's intention the unions had to unfold, in the inverse order of the five polarities, as follows (PG 91. 1305C–1308C): first, the human synthesis, achievable by virtuously overcoming the passionate approach to gender division; second, the union between the inhabited land and the paradise, to be effected by way of a saintly life; third, the union of earth and sky, achievable through an angelic type of virtue; fourth, the synthesis of the visible and invisible domains, by acquiring the knowledge of the angels; and fifth, the communion of the created and the uncreated, achieved through love (δι' ἀγάπης). The passage addresses four of the five syntheses by using the same verb, ἐνώω ('to unify' or 'to unite'), which in *Q.Thal.* 48 is applied to all five stages—with the major difference that in *Q.Thal.* it appears as ἥνωσεν, aorist indicative, and points to a *fait accompli* by Christ whilst here the verb appears as ἐνώσας, in the present participle, thus showing a task to be completed. Strangely, *Amb.Io.* 41 omits this verb altogether with reference to the first unification, both here and in the first depiction of the syntheses effected by Christ (PG 91. 1308D); this omission may suggest the crucial role played by the human synthesis within the entire unifying process.

In contrast to the Thalassian rendition, which, we shall see, stresses the oneness of creation in an explicit manner solely in regards to the third and the fourth syntheses, our passage points out that all five syntheses achieve and reveal higher levels of unity. For instance, in speaking of the first union (PG 91. 1305C), the text maintains that in committing themselves to 'divine virtue' human beings overcome the gender division and the complications it entails, experiencing a unity that corresponds to 'the antecedent principle of human creation' and so to God's intention. In reaching this state, a human being appears exclusively as human (ἄνθρωπον μόνον), thus illustrating a broader category that takes precedence over those of male and female. Whilst gender categories and human multiplicity are never abolished, they are overwhelmed by the principle of a new life, above gender (Costache 2013: 278–86). The fact that the differences remain in this new state emerges within the Confessor's return to the topic by using the plural, 'human beings only' (ἀνθρώπους μόνον; PG 91. 1312A). The solution of a state above gender yet without eliminating the gender division echoes the Christological logic of unions and distinctions attributed to the council of Chalcedon (Bucur 2008: 200–1, 203–5; Cooper 2005: 9–13; Louth 1996: 22–3, 49–51; Riou 1973: 146–9), a complex logic that articulates both aspects as mutually inclusive yet on a higher plane of existence and organization. It is noteworthy that this logic goes back to the Platonic method of 'collection and division' in *Phaedrus* 265DE (Fowler 1925a: 532–4) and *Philebus* 16C–17A (Fowler 1925b: 220) (Harrington 2007: 201–5), roots that become more obvious in the fourth part of *Amb.Io.* 41.

Given as a potentiality in nature and actualized through a holy life, this type of complex union defines the next three syntheses. Thus, the unifying process leads successively to ‘one earth’ (μίαν . . . γῆν; PG 91. 1305D), ‘one and indivisible sensible creation’ (μίαν . . . ἀδιαίρετον . . . τὴν αἰσθητὴν φύσιν; PG 91. 1305D–1308A), and ‘one creation’ (μίαν . . . κτίσιν; PG 91. 1308A). The fifth union, ‘of the created nature with the uncreated one’ (κτιστὴν φύσιν τῇ ἀκτίστῳ; PG 91. 1308B) is achievable only above nature, here through God’s love for humankind and the love of humankind for God, resulting in the total ‘oneness and sameness’ (ἐν καὶ ταυτόν) of the creation with God, yet by grace and not by nature (PG 91. 1308BC) (Bradshaw 2004: 199–200; Lossky 2002: 87). In the expression ‘oneness and sameness’ we recognise the two aspects of the process as unification and transformation, further developed in the description of Christ’s ascent. What matters for now is that, as with the first unification it seems that the five syntheses result in higher orders of unity and complexity: one humanity out of male and female; one earth out of paradise and inhabited land; one cosmos out of earth and the sky; one creation out of the visible and the intelligible; and finally one (theandric) reality (ὑπόστασις) out of the created and the uncreated. These complexly unified orders remind one of Cyril of Alexandria’s ‘one Christ and Son out of both [natures]’, in *Ep.* 4.3 (Wickham 1983: 6). Suggested by the repeated occurrence of ἐνώω within our passage, the Christological reference is not inapt. Elsewhere, and seemingly echoing Plato’s *Philebus* 16C (Fowler 1925b: 220), in *Q. Thal.* 60 (Laga and Steel 1990: 73.27–75.51) the Confessor affirmed that the whole of reality, created and uncreated, was designed from the outset to correspond to the mystery of the composite Christ, and that Christ emerged ‘in the fullness of time’ precisely to reveal the divine intention concerning a reality that was both coherent and complex. In pointing to the deification of the entire creation through the union of humankind with God, *Amb.Io.* 41 reiterates the same idea (Larchet 1996: 107–9).

For Maximus, however, the project of unification was not accomplished by humankind, which failed to take the virtuous path that would have led to knowledge and communion with God. It was Christ who, through his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, achieved the five syntheses. *Amb.Io.* 41 meets in this point the message put straightforwardly by *Q. Thal.* 48.

Christ and the five syntheses (PG 91. 1308C–1312B)

Whereas the project of the five unifications appears as the original assignment of humankind, the latter’s failure to fulfil the divine intention prompted the salvific intervention of God, who in Christ, the Logos incarnate, both restored humanity and achieved the syntheses (Blowers 2012a: 284–6); in *Amb.Io.* 41 St Maximus did not leave room for the possibility of the incarnation to have taken place irrespective of the fall (Blowers 2012b: 205; Radosavljevic 1982: 202–4). In the Confessor’s words, whilst humankind was so designed as to fulfil ‘the great mystery of the divine intention, namely, the reciprocal union (τὴν πρὸς ἄλληλα . . . ἔνωσιν) of the extremities pertaining to beings into a harmonious manner’ (PG 91. 1305B), it was Christ who brought the intention of God the Father to its completion. Given the human failure, the Logos became incarnate ‘to save the wasted humankind’ first; only then it became possible for him to fulfil God’s original intention, by recapitulating (ἀνακεφαλαιώσας) and bringing to union (ἔνωσις) all things that are in heaven and on

earth (PG 91. 1308D). In fact, in saving the fallen humankind, Christ restored its natural unifying capabilities (Bradshaw 2010: 820–1).

The relevant passage begins by addressing the fall as the reason behind the salvific intervention of Christ (PG 91. 1308C). In reiterating the classical theme of the fall St Maximus reinterpreted it radically within the framework of his narrative of everything. Thus, alongside highlighting the turning away of humanity from God as the content of the fall—a theme in which we discern echoes from St Athanasius’ *C.Gent.* 23 (Thomson 1971: 64.38–47) and the broader Alexandrine tradition—the Confessor observed that this shift caused the failure of God’s unification project. Human beings abandoned their theocentric and God-given (θεόθεν) course for a mindless (ἀνοήτως) and unnatural (παρὰ φύσιν) movement towards things created, and in taking this course—opposite to the saintly lifestyle required by the unifying project—they misused (παραχρησάμενος) their natural unifying potential into deepening the chasms within an already polarised reality (Nellas 1997: 57–8). Their new lifestyle caused therefore not merely ethical disturbances. The fall introduced a factor of disunity (διαίρεσις), an ontological imbalance that resulted in a shattered creation, a universe that risked the relapse into nothingness (εἰς τὸ μὴ ὄν). St Maximus returned to similar consequences for the unity of humankind in *Q.Thal.* introd. (Laga and Steel 1980: 33.265–72).

The severity of this degradation emerged in that it prompted the immovable God (τὸ ἀκίνητον) to execute a paradoxical unmoved movement (κινούμενον ἀκινήτως) towards the fallen humanity and the wounded creation (PG 91. 1308CD). Indeed, the fall disrupted the informational matrix of the universe—signified by the λόγοι or principles—and so only their source, the Logos incarnate, was able to reactivate the principles of beings according to the divine intention (Bradshaw 2004: 206), by directing the particular *logoi* toward the general ones. It is within this context (PG 91. 1308C) that the Confessor turned to the phrase from St Gregory the Theologian’s *Or.* 39.13.8–9 (Moreschini 1990: 176; PG 36. 348D), ‘the natures renew, and God becomes man’, which serves as a pretext for the whole chapter (PG 91. 1304D); the fuller interpretation of which he offered at the end of *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91. 1313CD). For St Maximus, the Gregorian phrase envisaged the Logos’ paradoxical motion towards the wandering creation, a movement which culminated in the incarnation and which found a proportionate echo in the renovation of human/created nature.

From this point on, St Maximus undertook a contemplation of Christ’s salvific journey by reinterpreting it along the lines of the narrative of everything; this is likewise the starting point of *Q.Thal.* 48, as we shall see, which does not refer to the task appointed to humankind before the fall. Like with the retake on the fall, the new angle brought to light aspects of the salvation wrought by Christ that are usually ignored within the written tradition; these aspects will become obvious below. The relevant passage consists of two sections which address different sides of the unifying process, an aspect disregarded by scholars; the first one offers a lengthier description of Christ who went through the five layers of the polarised reality ‘as a human being’ (ὡς ἄνθρωπος) or on behalf of humankind, whilst the second one depicts the same process, reduced to just four stages, as a gradual transformation of the whole of creation into ‘something like another human being’ (καθάπερ ἄνθρωπον ἄλλον). The two descriptions are complementary, and together they convey further clarity to the original task of humankind, the task of the saints. Indeed, the syntheses operated by Christ within the bosom of reality did not just fulfil the divine intention where

humanity failed; they fully revealed the purpose of the unification project, namely, the radical transformation of reality. The fact that both sections refer to Christ's resurrection casts a paschal light upon the human destiny, and that of the creation.

Ascending to God as a human being (PG 91. 1308D–1309D)

The first rendering displays the features of a journey account, intended maybe as an abridged version of the gospel narratives, with the notable difference that the journey unfolds within the schema of the fivefold unification process and is ascribed a significance which is only possible within that specific framework.

The Logos entered the course of our existence through the incarnation, 'becoming a perfect human being' (τέλειος ἄνθρωπος). By way of the paradoxical circumstances of his conception and birth, above the fallen nature, Christ 'forced out' (ἐξωθούμενος) the rule of gender categories, revealing that the original intention of God concerning human existence did not regard biological reproduction. So he restored humankind's power to transcend biology—supposedly together with the complications, prejudices and discriminations entailed by the male and female division. Interestingly, in conveying this message the Confessor mentioned a line from Gal 3:28 which refers to holiness (Costache 2013: 272–4, 277), a phrase dear to St Gregory of Nyssa, see e.g. *Opif.* 16 (PG 44. 181A), namely, that in Christ there is neither male nor female. This is how Christ accomplished the first synthesis, by entering this life in an extraordinary manner and by living above the constraints of gender.

After the liberation of humankind from the tyranny of gender categories, Christ bridged paradise and the inhabited land by sanctifying (ἀγιάσας) the world through his dwelling in it as a man; as a sanctification of the οἰκουμένη, humankind's abode, salvation amounts to a house blessing, which may be another clue to understanding the Maximian theory as proposing the transformation of reality. The expression ἄνθρωποπρεποῦς ἀναστροφῆς corresponds to the ideal of a saintly life required by the unifying process, a connection supported by the reference to Christ who unified reality 'as a man', namely, as a perfect, or perfected, human being. This accomplishment was further confirmed by his death, which did not constitute for him an obstacle when passing from here to paradise, and by his resurrection, since he encountered no difficulty in returning from paradise to his disciples. In short, the second stage amounts to keeping safe (διασώζουσα) the sanctified earth by preserving the principle (λόγον) of its unity free (ἐλεύθερον) from the division between paradise and the inhabited land, the way human nature was freed from the oppression of gender. The account continues with Christ's ascension as a whole human being, of body and soul, by which he both revealed the unity of the creation and unified the strayed parts of the universe. The passage ends by referring to the fifth synthesis in terms of Christ appearing (ἐμφανισθείς) on/in our behalf (ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν) to God the Father, fulfilling (πληρώσας, τελειώσας) as a human being the latter's intention. The end of the account seems to reiterate a theme from *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91. 1092BC), where God embraces all things through the intermediary of the human being (Cooper 2005: 64–5); the two chapters, in which we recognise an Athanasian influence, see *Inc.* 41.5–7 (Kannengiesser 1973: 412.18–414.35), are in fact complementary.

Whilst being existentially richer, terminologically this account is less precise than those of the second part of *Amb.Io.* 41 and *Q.Thal.* 48, where the verb ἐνώω features

consistently. The account under consideration begins indeed with Christ's unifying action, rendered as a noun, speaking of 'the general unification (τῆς καθόλου . . . ἐνώσεως) of all things' yet it utilises the verb ἥνωσε only twice, for the third and the fourth syntheses. In turn, our account refers to the first union in terms of the incarnation and the liberation of humankind from the rule of gender; regarding the earth synthesis the text employs ἁγίασας ('he is the one that sanctified') for the action of the Lord, an action which reached its end in the revelation of the earth as indivisibly one; and finally, for the fifth synthesis it employs the scriptural image of Christ presenting himself as a man to God the Father. This terminological variation may suggest that St Maximus intended to present the unification theory not in the technical jargon of Christology but as a scriptural kind of account, the five unions featuring as details of a narrative based on the gospels. Alongside the events of the Lord's life mentioned herein, this aspect emerges e.g. in the reference to Christ as acting in obedience (καθ' ὑπακοήν) to the Father, to whom he was accountable, which reminds of a series of New Testament passages (see John 5:30; 17:4; Rom 5:19); of course, the phrase has likewise a strong monastic resonance. The effect is unmistakable, for the text reads indeed as a scriptural summary, a story, together with conveying the message of Christ's journey through the five stages as a salvific activity.

Another explanation for this variation from the Christological vocabulary related to the verb ἐνώω, may be that *Amb.Io.* 41 is primarily interested in discussing the unifying task appointed to humankind, or rather to the saints, and not the salvation wrought by Christ; although the chapter contains strong soteriological overtones, the latter does not represent its main goal. Thus, similar to the very Christological focus of *Q.Thal.* 48, which, we shall see, gives room to a lengthy discussion about the saints, the Lord's activity becomes here a function within the anthropologically conditioned schema of reality. The emphasis on Christ fulfilling the task in obedience to the Father 'as a man' (Meyendorff 1983: 142; Larchet 1996: 112) or rather a holy person, confirms this interpretation. Indeed, the use of ἁγίασας to show one of the outcomes of Christ's life on earth echoes the saintly lifestyle that conditions the grand unification of reality; Christ genuinely lived a saintly life when we failed to do so, sanctifying the earth on our behalf. The text is therefore about Christ emulating the saintly life required by the unifying process, and not about human beings having to emulate Christ, as is sometimes believed (Blowers 2012a: 359; Thunberg 1995²: 383) very likely because of the omission regarding the prelapsarian ecosystemic ministry of humankind in *Q.Thal.* 48. Anyway, since the gospels do not directly refer to this aspect of salvation, we can surmise that the reference to the earth's sanctification is a Maximian projection that is based on his exposure to saintly people, together with their experiences and wisdom—as the beginning of *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91. 1304D) suggests. The two explanations are not mutually exclusive; it follows that the Confessor took both Christ's activity and the Scriptures as signifying the experiences of the saints.

Unification and metamorphosis (PG 91. 1309C–1312B)

The second rendering addresses only the first four unions, which it depicts as stages of a metamorphic process that ends up in the humanisation or the anthropic transformation of the universe; the fact that this account makes no reference to the

fifth synthesis may suggest that it takes for granted the conclusion of the previous narrative (with Christ presenting himself to the Father as a man) whilst intending to highlight another side of the unifying process. Symbolic in nature, this mystical account ostensibly reiterates the theme of the microcosm only to alter it through a daring generalisation, in which the container, i.e. the cosmos, is contained within its human summary, here the human nature of Christ, and anthropomorphically shaped in the process. Significantly, the unifying activity is herein rendered by the verbs ἐνώσας, περιλαβὼν and ἀνεκεφαλαιώσατο, which depict it as ontologically occurring within Christ who embraces all things like an actual ἐργαστήριον, laboratory or workshop; in Christ, the human microcosm becomes therefore the limited that encompasses the unlimited (*finitum capax infinitum*), the part that contains the whole. After pointing once more to our failure to fulfil the divine intention, St Maximus disclosed how Christ performed the first four syntheses.

First of all, he united (ἐνώσας) us to ourselves within himself by removing the difference between male and female. Instead of men and women, in which the manner of the division is primarily observed, he showed us chiefly and truly as human beings only (ἀνθρώπους μόνον), fully shaped (μεμορφωμένους) like him and bearing his image properly and entirely unsullied, within which by no means is bound any of the known features of decay. Thus, together with us and for us, he is the one that embraced (περιλαβὼν) the extremities of the whole of creation as his own parts, through those in the middle. [More precisely,] he indissolubly bound to one another around himself the paradise and the inhabited land, the sky and the earth, the sensible beings and the intelligible beings, given that he possessed a body, a sensory capacity, a soul and a mind, just as we do. In line with the given manner, through appropriating each extremity [of reality] by its corresponding part, he recapitulated (ἀνεκεφαλαιώσατο) all things within himself in a divine manner (θεοπρεπῶς). This way, he pointed out that the whole of creation exists as one, like another human being (καθάπερ ἄνθρωπον ἄλλον) . . .

The mystical distinctiveness of the passage exceeds all previous depictions of reality and of the unifying process. The unifying journey shows Christ descending as God towards the creation and humanisation, and then ascending as a human being or rather as God incarnate, through the whole of the creation which in turn is transformed into ‘another human being’. It looks like St Maximus set a Byzantine precedent to the Kabbalistic and Sufi concepts of *Adam Elyon* and *al-Insân al-Kâmil*. What matters is that the divine economy embraces the entire creation and not only humankind. Our chapter provides therefore a cosmological complement to the anthropological and historical account of the economy of *Q.Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7, 137.4–16). This cosmological schema meets that of *Myst.* 7, differing in that whereas the latter addresses the symmetrical dichotomies of the human being and the cosmos *Amb.Io.* 41 displays a more intricate anthropology and a more comprehensive cosmology. More specifically, the four levels of reality discussed in our passage, i.e. humankind, the earth, the universe and the creation, correspond symbolically to an anthropological outline that refers to body, sense, soul and mind. Furthermore, *Amb.Io.* 41 has Christ as a protagonist, whom *Myst.* 7 ignores, and speaks of a radical transformation of the universe within the humanity of the Lord, whereas *Myst.* 7 proposes just a metaphorical symmetry. Indeed, Christ, the Logos incarnate, put on all the features of the human being who, as a natural link of all things, was called from the beginning to unify the utterly polarised reality. Christ has become then the microcosm, the

connector and the unifying workshop whose members both signify the various cosmic regions and are connected to the universe. Due to the infrastructural bonds between the four parts of the human being and the four levels of reality, Christ unifies and/or recapitulates within himself the whole of creation, bringing it to a higher level of complexity—as ‘another human being’.

St Maximus believed in a fundamentally anthropic conditioning of the universe, an aspect now revealed by the accomplishments of Christ ‘as a man’. Looking closer, it appears that within the ascent of the Lord the universe experiences a transformation similar to that of the first synthesis, where men and women become ‘only humans’; they are not just perceived differently, they become what they represent, as signified by the perfect participle μεμορφωμένους. Although mentioning it only for the first and the fourth syntheses, seemingly the Confessor extended the idea of transformation to the entire unification process, as proven by its final outcome, the humaniform universe. This way, the Confessor followed till its logical end the theme of the incarnation: Christ ascended ‘as a human being’ and in so doing he transformed everything that he united into ‘another human being’.

Regarding the unification process, alongside the mystical perspective of the human microcosm that lends its shape to the universe, St Maximus referred to two other factors. The first factor is signified by the adverb θεοπρεπῶς, which appears as a conceptual climax of the line begun by the statement concerning the saintly life required for the unifying process and continued in the reference to the sanctifying activity of Christ. More than revealing Christ’s divine identity, the adverb rendered above as ‘in a divine manner’ points to the fact that the whole process requires for the agent(s) to be either divine or deified. Subtly, the Confessor strengthened here the earlier point that no natural factor is sufficient for the grand unification, and in so doing he confirmed the experience of holiness as the metanarrative of the whole construct. The second factor, introduced at the end of the passage, shows, like in *Q.Thal.* 48 and earlier in *Amb.Io.* 41, that this unity is possible, internally, ‘given the one, simple and unqualified . . . principle’ of the creation (PG 91. 1312B). This second factor leads into the last part of *Amb.Io.* 41, which deals with various other natural and epistemological factors.

Christ’s accomplishment of the unifying project as a journey through the layers of reality and as a transformation of the creation, reveals both the cosmic proportions of the salvific activity of the Lord and the original intention of God regarding the universe, which eschatologically—we assume—will become what the Maximian theory asserts. Whereas the second part of *Amb.Io.* 41 shows the human being as called to mediate between the opposite ends of the five dichotomies, the third part presents Christ both as performing ‘like a human being’ what was from the outset our task and as revealing the ultimate implications of the unifying process, namely, the sanctification of humankind’s cosmic house and the (the)anthropic transformation of the cosmos; the latter nuance is mainly supported by *Q.Thal.* 60, discussed above. The three relevant parts of *Amb.Io.* 41 provide us with a description from the outside in of humankind’s wide milieu, which pertains to the five dichotomies, and a triple description from the inside out of the human efforts to transform the milieu by (divine)humanising or sanctifying it. When glanced through the concentric circles of the five polarities, imbedded within the design of the cosmic house we discern a metaphorical anthropocentrism, as signified by οἰκουμένη; likewise, we discern a mystical anthropomorphism in the triple depiction of the ecosystemic activity (a

human οἰκονομία, without the term being used) pertaining to the five syntheses. I must turn now to the other classical locus of the theory.

***Q.Thal.* 48: A summary of the theory**

Whilst not directly concerned with the Maximian worldview, *Q.Thal.* 48 (Laga and Steel 1980: 331–49) includes a few passages relevant here. In answering queries about various types from 2 Chronicles 26 (LXX), the most relevant passage in *Q.Thal.* 48 (Laga and Steel 1980: 333.65–335.81) ponders the ecosystemic amplitude of Christ’s mediating activity, which, in light of the five occurrences of the verb ἦνωσεν (‘he united’), appears as a generalisation of the hypostatic union. This lexical connection between Christ’s mediating ministry and the mystery of the incarnation finds no explicit confirmation within the passage under consideration. Nevertheless, the association of the two aspects could be inferred from an earlier passage (Laga and Steel 1980: 333.40–9), where St Maximus discussed the mystical meaning of the towers, the door, the corners and the cornerstone. He perceived in those items symbols of the Church, the ‘corner’ that brought to a connection (πρὸς . . . συνάφειαν) the two walls, representing the Jews and the Gentiles, and of Christ, the link (σύνδεσμος) of whose incarnation (σάρκωσις) (see also Laga and Steel 1980: 339.165–341.172) is the cornerstone of the Church itself. Here is the text.

Jesus Christ . . . has become the cornerstone of the angle, that is of the Church. For the way the corner (γωνία) as such brings two walls to an interlock (συνάφειαν), that way the Church of God, having Christ as a connection (σύνδεσμον), becomes the union (ἔνωσις) of two nations, of those from among the Gentiles and those from among the Jews . . . For he that says, ‘I am the door’ is the gate and the door of the Church, and the gate has towers, that is the fortifications of the divine dogmas concerning the incarnation (σαρκώσεως).

We find here two keywords from *Amb.Io.* 41, σύνδεσμος and ἔνωσις, which show a clear connection with the theory of everything. Furthermore, whilst paying attention to the activity of the Church this passage signals explicitly the importance of the Christological event of the incarnation for the unifying program. Like in *Q.Thal.* 63 (Laga and Steel 1990: 177.485–92), St Maximus could not construe the activity of the Church in separation from Christ; in uniting the nations, the Church continues Christ’s very work, thus expanding his incarnation. This ecclesial generalisation of the paradigm complements the statement that ‘the Logos of God and God ever wishes to operate within all the mystery of his embodiment’ (*Amb.Io.* 7; PG 91. 1084CD). The Confessor addressed more broadly the unifying activity of the Church as a recapitulation of the faithful under Christ in *Myst.* 1 (Boudignon 2011: 12.164–14.198; Riou 1973: 135–46, 148–59).

Returning to the passage of interest (Laga and Steel 1980: 333.65–335.81), the text shows that Christ joined together the divided creation by way of ‘various unifications’ (διαφόρους . . . ἐνώσεις) or ‘corners’ (γωνίας). Here is text.

‘And upon the corners he built towers.’ It may be that the word [of Scripture] called corners the various unions accomplished through Christ between the divided created beings. For he united (ἦνωσε) humankind in the spirit (τῷ πνεύματι), by mystically taking away [from it] the difference between male and

female through liberating the principle of being from the passionate features set down upon both [genders]. He also united (ἥνωσεν) the earth by tearing away the utter difference between the sensible paradise and the inhabited land. Then he united (ἥνωσεν) the earth and the sky, thus proving that the self-contained nature of the sensible beings is one. Furthermore he united (ἥνωσεν) the sensible and the intelligible beings, showing the nature of things created to be one, linked by way of a mystical principle. Finally he united (ἥνωσεν) the created nature to the uncreated one, by way of a principle and mode that are above nature. Upon each union (ένώσεως) or corner (γωνίας) he built cohesive and connective towers, namely, making them secure by the divine dogmas.

The passage appears to be a summary of the third part within *Amb.Io.* 41, paying attention to neither the five divisions nor the original task of humankind. The five syntheses depict the whole of reality from particular to general by way of increasingly wider spheres that take humanity as a starting point, to end with the union of the creation and the uncreated. Since the first unification refers to the fallen humankind, this depiction addresses a wounded creation in need of salvation. Like in *Amb.Io.* 41, Christ restored the spheres from within, through their λόγοι (Laga and Steel 1980: 333.70, 335.76–7), here represented as ‘corners’ that unite the divided layers of reality. Namely, he activated within humankind the ‘principle of nature’ (τὸν λόγον τῆς φύσεως), then a ‘certain mystical principle’ (τινα λόγον μυστικόν) that secures the unification of the universe, and then the ‘supernatural principle and mode’ (τὸν ὑπὲρ φύσιν λόγον τε καὶ τρόπον) that unites the created and the uncreated. We recognise in the latter both the phraseology of *Amb.Io.* 41 and the Christological synthesis, the hypostatic union, briefly addressed by the previously analysed passage and fully disclosed as a reason and purpose of the cosmic existence in *Q.Thal.* 60 (Laga and Steel 1990: 73.5–77.62). Given these correspondences, alongside unveiling the crescendo of Christ’s ecosystemic activity, the fivefold occurrence of ἥνωσεν suggests this activity as unfolding within the paradigm of the hypostatic union or Christ’s very mode of existence. We retain the strong Christological emphasis within the construct of the five syntheses, endorsed a little later (Laga and Steel 1980: 337.130–2), which points to the understanding of the theory as a generalisation of the hypostatic union clearer than *Amb.Io.* 41. Interestingly, the syntheses were effected ‘in the spirit’ (τῷ πνεύματι), a phrase which may suggest both a Trinitarian dimension, referring therefore to the Holy Spirit, and a *modus operandi*, thus meaning ‘spiritually’. Although the first possibility cannot be excluded, it is more probable that St Maximus used the phrase as ‘spiritually’, intending to highlight the mystical aspect of the unions, which even as remaining obscure to the eyes of many is disclosed to the saints (Bradshaw 2010: 819–20). Related, in referring to the ‘cohesive and connective’ function of the ‘divine dogmas’ of Christ, the above passage apparently makes another allusion to the experience of holiness, a line continued in the next paragraphs.

Without returning to the five stages, the immediately following paragraphs (Laga and Steel 1980: 335.82–97) show Christ as providing the saints with the necessary tools to contribute to the great unification. The chief unifying factors are the ‘contemplation of nature’ (φυσικὴ θεωρία) and the commandments of the ‘ethical teaching’ (ἠθικὴ διδασκαλία) (Laga and Steel 1980: 335.86, 96–7) or, later, ‘praxis and contemplation’ (πρᾶξιν καὶ θεωρίαν; Laga and Steel 1980: 339.144; Harrington 2007: 195–6). The texts in question reiterate the theme of the dogmas about reality (Laga and Steel 1980: 335.85–7) that had been referred to in the conclusion of the anterior passage (Laga

and Steel 1980: 335.78–81), further associating the practical and contemplative achievements of the saints with the activity of Christ. The dogmas or the perceptions of the saints coincide with those of Christ, the way the activity of the Church coincides with that of its head.

Another relevant passage is found in the second half of *Q.Thal.* 48 (Laga and Steel 1980: 341.178–193), which contains a new reference to ‘the many corners’ and ‘the towers built upon them’. Here is the text.

‘And upon the corners.’ [The phrase] affirms that many are the corners (γωνίας) upon which the God-strengthened mind built the towers (πύργους). A corner is not only the union (ἔνωσις) of the parts to the wholes, [which is possible] within the same nature (ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτῆς φύσεως) or by way of the same principle of being (κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τοῦ εἶναι λόγον); . . . it [also] carries individual beings to the species to which they belong, the species to the families and the families to the essence; and so, in unique ways, [each of] the extremities are connected together through their edges. Within these parts the principles (λόγοι) become wholly manifested as though they were corners through which are accomplished the many and various unions (ένώσεις) of the divided things. Likewise, [corners are the unions] of the mind and the sensorial faculty, of the sky and the earth, of the sensible beings and the intelligible ones, and of nature with [its] principle. Upon all these, by way of its own knowledge the contemplative mind raises up the right opinions about each, thus wisely building spiritual towers upon the corners, that is [building] the connecting opinions about [or representations of] the unions upon the [actual] unions.

The text refers to an aspect pertaining to the experience of holiness, namely the way ‘the God-strengthened mind’ (ὁ κατὰ θεὸν ἰσχυρότατος νοῦς) or ‘the contemplative mind’ (ὁ θεωρητικὸς νοῦς; Laga and Steel 1980: 341. 179–80, 191) represents reality. As with the previous passage, neither does this one rigorously return to the five unifications, of which it mentions only two, the third and the fourth; in exchange it adds more examples (Laga and Steel 1980: 341.188, 189, 181), such as the union of the mind to the sensorial faculty (νοῦ πρὸς αἴσθησιν), that of nature to its principle (φύσεως πρὸς λόγον) and that of the parts to the wholes (ἡ τῶν μερικῶν πρὸς τὰ καθ’ ὅλου). The passage allocates more space to the latter (Laga and Steel 1980: 341.180–7), St Maximus describing this synthesis in terms of an ascending union made possible within a given species by its ‘principle of existence’ (τοῦ εἶναι λόγον; Laga and Steel 1980: 341.182). Due to this common denominator of all created beings, i.e. the principle, individual beings are united to the species to which they belong, the species to the families and the families to the essence (Laga and Steel 1980: 341.182–4; Harrington 2007: 198–9). From this viewpoint, the passage presents many affinities with the fourth part of *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91. 1312B–1313B). This contemplative elucidation of the conceptual ‘towers’ and ‘corners’, i.e. the links between the ‘extremities’ (Laga and Steel 1980: 341.184) represented by the various orders of being, appears as a significant contribution to the understanding of the mode of union. This matter has not escaped the scholiast who, taking as a pretext the reference within the construct of the five syntheses, discussed above, to the ‘principle of being’ and to a ‘certain mystical principle’, interpreted the five steps in the light of the last passage treated here, showing how the unions were secured by the principles that pervade the whole of the creation (see the fifth and sixth scholia; Laga and Steel 1980: 345.24–347.31).

Of further interest is the end of the passage, which refers to the mind that ‘builds spiritual towers upon the corners’ or rather links the representations—‘the connecting opinions about the unions’—with the unions themselves. At a first glance tautological, the sentence in question points to a tension between representation and reality. This is a very specific Maximian topic, if to think of the Confessor’s usual concern with rectifying the misrepresentations of reality that lead humankind to a misuse of things; a classical illustration of this concern undoubtedly remains *Q.Thal.* intro. (Laga and Steel 1980: 29.209–41.404). Thus, in contrast with the minds, which, bothered by worldly matters, misrepresent reality, the ‘contemplative mind’ is called to achieve representations of reality that coincide with the nature of things. We surmise from the text that to the eyes of the saints the ‘corners’ imbedded in the very matrix of reality are no longer hidden and misinterpreted; the perceptions of holy people about reality coincide with reality. This conclusion finds confirmation a few lines below (Laga and Steel 1980: 335.84–5), in a sentence that speaks of the worldview of the saints as constituted upon ‘the pious opinions about beings’ (τὰς εὐσεβεῖς περὶ τῶν ὄντων . . . δόξας). Together, these statements cast clarifying lights upon the earlier reference to Christ as securing the unions by way of ‘divine dogmas’. *Q.Thal.* 48 appears therefore as an internally consistent whole within which all the parts refer to one another even without St Maximus explicitly making such connections.

Whilst providing only scarce details pertaining to the Maximian theory of everything, *Q.Thal.* 48 displays important elements for the understanding of the unification process. Indeed, together with showing that what makes the syntheses possible are the divine principles which pervade the whole of the creation, the chapter discusses three unifying agents, namely, Christ, the saints, and the Church, and their respective—and connected—activities. Roughly the same aspects feature in *Amb.Io.* 41, where, however, nothing is said of the unifying ministry of the Church. The emphasis of *Q.Thal.* 48 on the experience of holiness and its significance for the unification of reality, combined with the references to this experience in *Amb.Io.* 41 (sanctification, virtue, contemplation, and love), casts light upon the prologue of the latter, which announces the five divisions and unions as known to the saints. Both directly ‘initiated in the knowledge of beings’ and instructed within the succession of tradition (PG 91. 1304D), the saints are not just the unwritten source of the Maximian theory; they are those who have to face the fivefold challenge, being called by God to catalyse the creation’s journey toward further unity and complexity. Therefore, the two chapters, *Q.Thal.* 48 and *Amb.Io.* 41, propose more than a theory of everything; they outline a theory of the saintly life. It results that the significance of the Maximian multilevel worldview and its challenging implications, such as the anthropic conditioning of the divine unifying project and the anthropomorphic future of the creation, cannot be discussed outside the frame of reference delineated by the experience of holiness.

Recommended readings

For the standard interpretation of the theory of everything, see Thunberg 1995²: 373–427 and Thunberg 1985: 80–91.

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¹ The designation of St Maximus' teaching in *Amb.Io.* 41 and *Q.Thal.* 48 as a theory of everything belongs to me. I used this label in my unpublished doctoral thesis, *Logos and Creation: From the*

² The inclusion here of the intelligible within the realm of creation is somehow against the overall Maximian teaching that the principles (λόγοι) are uncreated divine thoughts.