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Perichoresis In Gregory Nazianzen and Maximus the Confessor

Abstract

The doctrine of *perichoresis* applied to Trinity is the mutual coinherence or interpenetration of the Persons of the Godhead. Applied to Christology, *perichoreo* is, first, the reciprocal passing of characteristics and titles between the divine and human natures hypostatically united in Yeshua. Secondly, it also describes the distinct but intimate union between Christ's natures. Historically, the Trinitarian use of perichoresis grew out of the christological use of perichoreo first developed by Gregory Nazianzen (A.D. 4th century) and then, subsequently, explained by Maximus the Confessor (A.D 7th century). Maximus, often directly commenting on Gregory's use of *perichoreo*, seeks to expound upon the union of the divine and human nature in Christ. This essay begins with an investigation into Gregory's use of the term and concept of *perichoreo* followed by a summarization of the findings . After this, Maximus' use of the concept and term of *perichoreo/perichoresis* in his *Quaestiones Ad Thalassium*, *Ambigua 1-5*, and the *2nd Letter to Thomas* will be analyzed and summarized . Lastly, this essay demonstrates how Maximus follows and advances Gregory's use of *perichoreo* in said works as well as notes the discontinuity between Maximus' use and Gregory's.

Keywords

perichōréō, perichōrēsis, Gregory Nazianzen, Maximus the Confessor, Christological Use of Perichōréō

Cover Page Footnote

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INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of *perichōrēsis* (interpenetration/coinherence/passing reciprocally)¹ first began in Scripture, specifically in John 17. However, the early church would struggle for terminology to describe these realities for some time. The first use of the verb *perichōréō* (from which *perichōrēsis* is derived) appears in Gregory of Nazianzus' works. In Gregory, the term is used in several different ways. Also in Gregory, there are passages where he describes perichoretic realities without using either of the two terms above. The term(s) would gain greater currency between Gregory's time (4th century) and Maximus the Confessor (7th Century).² Maximus is heavily reliant on Gregory. The goal of this essay is threefold. First, this essay seeks to analyze Gregory's use of *perichōréō* and texts which carry heavy perichoretic conceptions.³ Second, texts from Maximus' *Quaestiones Ad Thalassium*, *Ambigua 1-5*, and the *2nd Letter to Thomas* will be analyzed to observe Maximus' use of the term and also to investigate, as with Gregory, passages which carry significant perichoretic conceptions. Lastly, this essay seeks to explain how Maximus espoused Gregory's use of the term/concept and how Maximus advanced the concept/term.

Perichōréō IN GREGORY NAZIANZEN

EPISTLE CI

Gregory Nazianzen's celebrated *Epistle CI*, "To Cledonius the Priest against Apollinarius," sets the foundation for this inquiry into *Perichōréō*. After defending that Christ's flesh is indeed human flesh (assumed $\sigma\alpha\rho\acute{\xi}$) and not some heavenly flesh which "came down from heaven," Gregory offers some explanation of difficult verses which could be contrived to teach the notion of "heavenly flesh" of Jesus.⁴ Even with the difficulty presented by the terms used in these verses, Gregory the

¹ The doctrine of *perichōrēsis* can either be applied christologically, that is, to help explain the relationship of the natures in Christ that are hypostatically united, or it can be applied to the members of the Trinity to show how they are related. Specifically, the doctrine is frequently used to show how the members of the Trinity are "in" one another yet distinct. Likewise, the natures which are hypostatically united in Christ are distinct and in some sense interpenetrate one another, but Christological *perichōrēsis* needs more nuance since the "indwelling" or "interpenetration" is of unequal natures (human is less than divine). Much of this essay focuses on this nuancing of the christological *perichōrēsis*, so its defining elements will be handled in route.

² E.g. Pseudo-Cyril

³ Because of the limited number of texts which deal with the perichoretic relationships in Gregory, it was possible to analyze his works exhaustively; although, Ora. 22 should also be investigated, but room did not allow. However, with Maximus, the sources investigated had to be limited because of the great number that address the perichoretic relationship in the hypostatic union in Christ.

⁴ E.g. "The Second Man is the Lord from heaven." This could imply that Christ's flesh was his prior to incarnation and consequently His flesh would not be human flesh but only have a likeness of human flesh.

Theologian states that it is still accurate to speak this way because of the union of the heavenly λογος with the earthly σαρξ. He argues that saying “Christ dwelleth in your hearts” is not saying that the physical, visible man Yeshua is in the saints. Rather, it is that invisible, non-corporeal subsistence (i.e. Spirit) of God and Christ which dwells in saints. The name “heavenly man,” likewise, is accurate because it is appropriate to combine the names because of the true union (*duo fuseōn*) in Yeshua (the hypostasis). *Perichōréō* first appears as a theological term while Gregory is addressing these problems.⁵ So he says, “the names being mingled like the natures, and flowing [*perichōréō*] into one another, according to the law of their intimate union.”⁶ Even as the natures (divine and human) have been unified, so follows the mingling of the names. Leonard Prestige says that Gregory does not actually apply the term *perichōréō* to the natures hoping to make the case that *perichōréō* should be defined as “to pass reciprocally” or “to interchange with.”⁷ The sense is of something being passed reciprocally between two sides of one object as when a flat plate is rotated from one side to the next. If a plate could pass something from one side to the next, it would then pass this something to its opposing side and then this opposing side would pass something of itself back to the side which first passed. The phrase “two sides of one coin” captures the meaning well, but the material on one side of the coin would need to be different from the material on the other side so that their substances’ differ. Prestige seeks to distance the term *perichōréō* from its frequent definition as “interpenetration” or “coinherence” claiming that this usage is rare until John of Damascus’ popularization of the term as such in the 8th century.⁸ However, the mingling of the names happens because of the logically prior mingling of the natures: “... κίρναμένων, ὡςπερ τῶν φύσεων, οὕτω δὴ καὶ τῶν κλησέων, καὶ περιχωρουσῶν εἰς ἀλλήλας τῷ λόγῳ τῆς συμφυσίας.” Rendered literally, this states: “being mixed/mingled just as the natures, thus exactly also the titles, and interpenetrating/interchanging into/between one another by the reason of intimate union (Trans. mine).” δὴ is a particle of exactness, used to clarify the heightened exactness of a statement. Contrary to Prestige’s claim, Gregory does apply *perichōréō* to the natures—more logically than grammatically. Because the mixing of the natures is the archetype (model) which the titles (*houtō dē kai*) replicate exactly, *perichōrousōn* explains the relationship between the natures. And if the relationship of the natures is the archetype for the titles, then the archetype, as being more basic and supplying the model for the titles, represents the pristine occurrence of *perichōréō*. It should also be added that, grammatically, both *klēseōn* and *fuseōn* are feminine nouns. It is not clear which feminine noun *perichōrousōn* is modifying. It is frequently true that it would be the nearest antecedent but this is not as regular in Greek as in English. Gregory *could* very well have *fuseōn* in view

⁵ Verna Harrison, “Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers,” *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1991), 56.

⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle CI*, par. 4.

⁷ Leonard Prestige, “Perichoreo and Perichoresis in the Fathers,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 29 (1928), 242.

⁸ *Ibid.*

or both feminine nouns. Although this argument disagrees with Prestige, he offers an invaluable insight in his “to interchange with/pass reciprocally” definition, especially for developing an adequate christological *perichōrēsis*. Effectively, Prestige’s definition amounts to the *communicatio idiomatum*: the properties and hence the titles proper to those properties interchange between the natures. In this way, Prestige avoids the severe difficulty of the “how” of the interpenetration of the human nature into the divine nature—a problem because of the impassibility of the divine. Instead, Prestige can say that the properties of one nature are appropriated by the other nature, and vice versa (hence, passed reciprocally). Yet in this he can maintain the particular distinctness of either nature without the accompanying difficulties tied to the concept of “interpenetration.”

ORATION 18.42

Gregory’s oration 18, section 42, provides the next instance for this study. Considering the death of his father, Gregory ruminates, “Life and death, as they are called, apparently so different, are in a sense resolved into (*perichōrei*), and successive to, each other.” Prestige thinks this passage teaches and supports his argument for *perichōréō* as “interchanging with/pass reciprocally.”⁹ Contra this, Verna Harrison rightly claims that Prestige misunderstands, saying that Gregory’s very point is to show how life is contained in death, and death in life: a mother’s body brings forth life but she herself is a container of vice and, therefore, sin and death.¹⁰ Death and life are seen to be intermixed, to interpenetrate one another. Again, as in the former text analyzed, the manner of this interpenetration is not addressed. Gregory applies this term with the meaning of interpenetration/coherence because he is reflecting upon how the one (life) is in the other (death). Noteworthy, Gregory also suggests the double reality of *perichōréō* as both static and dynamic. Life comes forth from a body of death (*via* birth) yet in this new life is contained death (a body of sin). So there is both movement (dynamic) and rest (static).

ORATION 30.6 (1)

Although the next text does not explicitly contain *perichōréō* or any of its derivatives, it contains a perichoretic conception and works with the language that was acceptable and familiar to Gregory during his time: i.e. using terms like mixing, blending, and mingling.¹¹ In this study, precedent for closely relating perichoretic conceptions with language of this sort has already been observed in Gregory’s

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Harrison, “Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers,” 56.

¹¹ Ibid., 54. Stoic usage of verb *chōrein* has sense of “go,” “extend,” and “contain.” In Nazianzen’s Christology “probably used the compound form of *perichōrein* in this sense with the prefix *peri* expressing the completeness (*di’ holōn*) of the mutual interpenetration.”

Epistle CI. There he uses κίρναμένων (mixing) and then employs περιχωρουσῶν to explain further, appositionally expounding on the nature of the mixing.¹² Later with the ongoing existence of Apollarianism and the growth of Nestorianism, terms connoting mixing, confusion, or which were vague about the notion of the union between the natures in Yeshua were banned (esp. post Chalcedon). Gregory, however, was before the doctrinal terminological exactness of this period and therefore appropriates the terms available.

With this in mind, Gregory writes,

But, in the character of the Form of a Servant, He condescends to His fellow servants, nay, to His servants, and takes upon Him a strange form, bearing all me and mine in Himself, that in Himself He may exhaust the bad, as fire does wax, or as the sun does the mists of earth; and that I may partake of His nature by the blending. Thus He honours obedience by His action, and proves it experimentally by His Passion. For to possess the disposition is not enough, just as it would not be enough for us, unless we also proved it by our acts; for action is the proof of disposition.¹³

What is evil in the human is dissolved (exhausted) with the purpose of making the human partake in the nature of Yeshua “by the blending.” The properties of the divinity of Yeshua passed to humanity. Gregory’s discussion is asymmetrical, focusing on the divine properties passed to the human. Both the hypostatic union and the consequential sanctifying union—not a full developed theosis, but tending in that direction—are in view. The former refers to the humanity united to *Meshiah* and the latter refers to the humanity of Gregory (and presumably any saint) united to *Meshiah*. It is because of the first activity of the divine, in uniting itself (the divine) to the human nature, which enables this divine passing of properties to the humanity of a saint. So although “blending” is used, the immediate context demonstrates that Gregory has in mind the divine activity affecting and benefiting the humanity of the saints. Divinity assumes humanity and, in this, the “bad” of humanity melts away so that the divine affects upon the human are apparent. There is no explication or suggestion that the humanity changes the divinity. Apart from the meaning of the word “blending” itself, there is little indication of symmetrical blending between divinity and humanity. What is plain is the asymmetrical activity of the divine upon humanity, however “upon the humanity” is

¹² The function could be otherwise than appositional. Nevertheless, the explanatory significance of many of the other participial functions should be duly noted: e.g. manner = in the manner of interpenetrating; means = by means of interpenetrating; temporal = while interpenetrating. In any of these cases, there is still an explanatory element and, hence, an appositional element. Also whether *perichōrousōn* is directly modifying the main verb or the former participle, it is still explaining, either correlatively being used with *kirnnamenōn* to explicate the main verb or, as suggested in the main text of this essay, being used to modify a former participle though dependent upon the main verb still for its temporal relations.

¹³ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 30*, sec. 6.

to be understood. In sum, the divine activates the process of union and because of the union, humanity is made to partake of the divine; what is evil in humanity becomes dissolved. Sinful man is obliterated leaving man in his noble and true human form.

ORATION 30.6 (2)

Another passage coming from Oration 30.6 bears on the issue of *perichōréō̄*. His comments allude to the familiar language of 1 Cor 15:28 saying, “But God will be all in all in the time of restitution; not in the sense that the Father alone will Be; and the Son be wholly resolved into Him, like a torch into a great pyre, from which it was reft away for a little space, and then put back.”¹⁴ Paul is discussing the future of the kingdom and the binitarian relationship between the Father and the Son; likewise, Gregory is discussing the “time of restitution” and that relationship between Father and Son. The English translation has the extremely equivocal word “resolve” carrying the perichoretic meaning.¹⁵ This word is not left ambiguous by Gregory. He clarifies it with the example of the torch and pyre. The meaning is clearly “to be contained in so as to be dissolved.” The torch, for a time, will maintain some semblance of what it is until the pyre disintegrates it. This text provides the unique opportunity of defining how *perichōréō̄* in Gregory should not be understood. Whatever semantic boundaries and resulting connotations for *perichōréō̄* result from this study, it may be said that the meaning is not “to be contained in so as to be dissolved.” Also important is the small adverb “wholly.” The Son “wholly resolved into” the Father ruins the potential for some remaining distinctness. Conclusions follow from this: 1) the distinction of the Son is not merely economic; 2) *perichōréō̄* does not threaten the unique distinctions among the persons; and 3) it is not the Father alone who will be “God all in all” but also the Son and—from the teaching of the *homoousion* of the Spirit in Oration 31—the Spirit as well: if *homoousion*, then God.¹⁶

ORATION 31.14

Another text not explicitly containing *perichōréō̄* but extremely important towards perichoretic conceptions in Gregory is a section in Oration 31.14. For the purposes here, only the analogy of the sun in the passage is the direct concern: “... the Godhead is, to speak concisely, undivided in separate Persons; and there is one

¹⁴ Cf. 1 Cor. 15:28: “When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.” It is worth noting that though Paul mentions “God also/even Father (*theō kai patri*)” in v. 24, he does not append “kai patēr” to the final clause: instead only God (*theos*) appears— “... that God may be all in all.”

¹⁵ Prestige, “Perichoreo and Perichoresis in the Fathers,” 242. He notes that *perichōréō̄* can be defined as “resolved into.”

¹⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 31*, sec. 10.

mingling of Light, as it were of three suns joined to each other.”¹⁷ There is some dispute over the perichoretic conception contained in this text. Theodorou has taught that this text shows the “loving coinher[ence] of the three Persons.”¹⁸ Egan objects.¹⁹ First, the term did not appear until later in a Trinitarian context (Pseudo-Cyril the first according to Egan). However, Egan does allow that Ps. Cyril did find “support” for his Trinitarian *perichoresis* teaching in Gregory. Certainly, the Trinitarian perichoretic conception cannot be denied for this is the very reality Gregory is seeking to explain through the analogy of suns. Commenting further, Egan claims that “Ps. Cyril apparent lack of satisfaction with Gregory’s presentation of the divine unity in Or. 31.14 is a sign that Ps. Cyril did not find, in that text, an understanding of Trinitarian perichoresis identical with his own.”²⁰ The term *perichōrēsis* does not appear in Gregory as Egan rightly notes. However, Egan’s analysis that Ps. Cyril only finds support for *perichōrēsis* and that Theodorou is wrong for using the term to commentate on Oration 31.14 is amiss. Egan states that Theodorou’s use of the term is unsatisfactory “because he does not refer to the late appearance of that term, as used in a Trinitarian context.”²¹ It is difficult to understand how Gregory’s discussion is not a Trinitarian context, unless what is meant by “Trinitarian context” is that the term “Trinity” or one of its derivatives appears near or in it.²² Or perhaps Egan is referencing the appearance of the term *perichōrēsis* (as opposed to *perichōréō*) during the beginning stages of the Trinitarian debates.²³ Egan is right that *perichōrēsis* does not appear until later but perichoretic concepts can be presented with other terms and *perichōréō* appears in a number of Gregory’s texts. But do not the terms in Oration 31.14—Godhead, one Godhead, three Persons, *monarchia*, and timelessly equal mediate Trinitarian concepts even to a robust measure of Trinitarian elegance? Additionally, it is not

¹⁷ Ibid., sec. 14. The fuller context follows: “What is our quarrel and dispute with both? To us there is One God, for the Godhead is One, and all that proceedeth from Him is referred to One, though we believe in Three Persons. For one is not more and another less God; nor is One before and another after; nor are They divided in will or parted in power; nor can you find here any of the qualities of divisible things; but the Godhead is, to speak concisely, undivided in separate Persons; and there is one mingling of Light, as it were of three suns joined to each other. When then we look at the Godhead, or the First Cause, or the Monarchia, that which we conceive is One; but when we look at the Persons in Whom the Godhead dwells, and at Those Who timelessly and with equal glory have their Being from the First Cause—there are Three Whom we worship.”

¹⁸ A. Theodorou, “Light as Image and Symbol in the Theology of Gregory Nazianzos,” *Theologia* 47 (1976), 254.

¹⁹ J.P. Egan, “Towards Trinitarian Perichoresis: Saint Gregory the Theologian, Oration 31.14,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39, no. 1 (1994), 85-93.

²⁰ Ibid., 93.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Gregory was addressing the Christological issues and not the later Trinitarian ones. This, however, does not mean that the writings of Gregory did not address Trinitarian matters, even if inadvertent and implicit.

²³ All Christological controversies either indirectly or directly affect the later Trinitarian discussions. Any sharp bifurcation between the Christological controversies and Trinitarian controversies is due to historical developments, not because of the lack of conceptual overlap between the two.

cogent to object to Theodorou's use of the word because he did not cite where it first appeared. Even if Theodorou's usage is anachronistic, the sufficiency of the term *perichōrēsis* for describing Gregory's teaching in Oration 31.14 can be used, especially since—as just argued above—Gregory's context is a Trinitarian one (heavily so). Even Egan admits that Ps. Cyril found support for his teaching from it, thereby supporting the usefulness of it for perichoretic formulation. Gregory provides the perichoretic groundwork and gives an analogy for a Trinitarian *perichōrēsis* through summary of Oration 31.14. In Oration 31.14, the symmetry between the Persons is explicitly demonstrated (i.e. equal glory) and they are “undivided in separate Persons.” It will be some time until the phrase “undivided in separate Persons” achieves the concision of the term coinherence (*perichōrēsis*), but this lack of terminology does not nullify the conceptual evidence found in this text through differing, but equally illuminating terms—even if not as precise as *perichōrēsis*.

SUMMARY OF GREGORY

Gregory first uses the term *perichōrēō* theologically in *Epistle CI*. The sense there follows the definition offered by Prestige: “to pass reciprocally,” which effectively means “to exchange.” It should be noted that the term ἀντιδοσις will become the prevalent term used to connote “exchange” in the later Maximus the Confessor's works. A question presents itself: why not use *antidosis* to show exchange if that is all which is meant in Gregory? The term, after all, according to Liddell and Scott dates back to Athens.²⁴ *Perichōrēō* in *Epistle CI* was applied to both the names and natures, the latter being the model and basis for the former. Life and death are understood by Gregory (Or. 18.42) to pass into one another and then one is contained in the other. This shows both movement and symmetry between death and life. Both act upon one another and are contained in one another. In 30.6 (1), Gregory presents the deifying of the human. This is a developing theosis and it occurs by the divine properties passing to humanity. This deifying is heavily asymmetrical: the divine both activates the process and is the sole penetrator in the process, piercing through humanity and changing it. In this same context, the word “blending” appears. Semantically, this word would seem to imply some measure of symmetry but Gregory's context excludes this from being a real possibility. The next section in 30.6 (2) addresses the binitarian (and Trinitarian by extension of context to Or. 31) relationships. How *perichōrēō* should not be defined is given: coinhering (for a time) unto dissolution. From this, it is evident that the distinctions in the relationships are not merely economic, that *perichōrēō* does not threaten distinctions, and that all three persons of the Godhead will be “God all in all.” Lastly, the analogy of the light of the three suns (Or. 31.14) rightly presents the perichoretic concept (*perichōrēō* = interpenetrating) of the

²⁴ Liddell and Scott, “Antidosis,” in *Intermediate Greek Lexicon*, 7th ed. (Oxford: Oxford, 1990). The term means “exchange” in both Xenophon (6th or 5th century B.C.) and Aristotle.

mutual relationships in the Trinity, albeit without the precision of the later term *perichōrēsis*. The only danger entailed in the analogy is the possibility of introducing a fourth element alongside the three persons, namely, the mingled light. Gregory does recognize this potential problem arising from his analogy and discusses it in 31.33.²⁵ In this analogy, there is symmetry between the persons (“equal glory”). They are distinct yet sharing one common light. Moreover, they dwell in one another’s light, which is common to all three. The term *perichōrēsis* does not appear but the development of the perichoretic concept is evident, so much so that Ps. Cyril later comments on the analogy at length.²⁶

Perichōrēō IN MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR

QUAESTIONES AD THALASSIUM

Verna Harrison’s article deals at length with a section concerning Maximus’s deification of the human as it pertains to the concept of *perichōrēō*.²⁷ (Because of the length of Maximus’ text, it is included below).²⁸ Harrison notes that this is a soteriological text, additionally formulating the activity of theosis in salvation. Since the “revelation is the inexpressible interpenetration of the believer towards (or “with” *pros*) the object of belief” there is presupposed that the Object has made Himself available. Harrison writes that in Maximus this process of deification is activated from above (from God) but it occurs from below, the believer interpenetrating into the divine.²⁹ Revelation of God and by God is the objective Content and Activator, which corresponds to the subjective illumination achieved through faith. It is hard to tell but Maximus may be using the word “revelation” as illumination, having the meaning of “revelation received and participated with.” This is evident when he says that “[r]evelation is the inexpressible interpenetration of the believer towards the object of belief and takes place according to each believer’s degree of faith.” The revelation is something “of the believer” which

²⁵ Egan, “Towards Trinitarian Perichoresis: Saint Gregory the Theologian, Oration 31.14,” 88-92.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 86-90.

²⁷ Harrison, “Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers,” 57-60.

²⁸ G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, eds. and trans., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, 5 vols. (London, 1979), under “Quaestiones Ad Thalassium.” The text reads: “The soul’s salvation is the consummation of faith. This consummation is the revelation of what has been believed. Revelation is the inexpressible interpenetration (*perichōresis*) of the believer towards (*pros*) the object of belief and takes place according to each believer’s degree of faith. Through that interpenetration the believer finally returns to his origin. The return is the fulfillment of desire. Fulfillment of desire is ever-active repose in the object of desire. Such repose is eternal uninterrupted enjoyment of this object. Enjoyment of this kind entails participation in supranatural divine realities. This participation consists in the participant becoming like that in which he participates. Such likeness involves, so far as this is possible, an identity with respect to energy between the participant and that in which he participates by virtue of the likeness. This identity with respect to energy constitutes the deification of the saints.”

²⁹ Harrison, “Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers,” 58.

functions to enable participation with/towards the divine. Also, revelation “takes place according to each believer’s degree of faith.” This hardly sounds like objective revelation in itself.

The term *perichōrēsis* continues to develop significantly through Maximus. The conjoining of “ever-active” with “repose” constructs the paradoxical “rest in movement” or “rest with movement.” With this paradox, the distinction between the *coinherence* and *interpenetration* is manifest. *Perichōrēsis* can be translated as either because of the semantic elasticity of the word. On the one hand, *coinherence* emphasizes the static, that is, repose. On the other hand, *interpenetration* highlights movement, that is, the “ever-active.”³⁰

Although Maximus says that “through interpenetration the believer finally returns to his origin” this cannot assume a *full* interpenetration into the divine since Adam (in Eden) did not originate in the divine, but rather instead by the divine. And if Adam is said to originate “in the divine”—as in some interiority of the Godhead’s infinite non-spatial space—this must be qualified by being “in” yet completely distinct and other than the divine—or else pantheism or panentheism follow closely behind. Whatever this “return” entails it is disproportional to the original state of man in the garden. That dignity which first belonged to man but was lost is restored, achieving proportionality. Yet the latter dignity of man is greater than the first, inasmuch as the union and intimacy between God and man is greater in Christ than prior to the unification with Christ. In sum, man returns to his origin as more than the Edenic man.

Theosis is plainly seen. By participating in the divine, man becomes like the divine. But how is this obtained? It is noteworthy that the preposition used is *προς* and neither *εἰς* nor *ἐν*. *Pros* conveys motion, usually over a distance (trans. “towards”). Also, *pros* when used in the context of relationships (personal) can be translated as “with.”³¹ Unfortunately, the difference in meaning between “with” and “towards” in this context is enormous. The personal, yet metaphysical, context adds to the difficulty. It does not make it clear whether to translate this word as “towards” or “with.” Should it be translated in view of the properties (and energy; *energeia*) and metaphysical realities (i.e. “towards”)? Or should it be translated in view of the personal relationship achieved by the metaphysical union(s) (i.e. “with”)? There is a context of movement but also of relationship. If “with” is chosen then the translation of *perichōrēsis* as “reciprocally passing”—as proposed by Prestige—works well: “Revelation is the inexpressible reciprocal passing (*perichōresis*) of the believer *with* (*pros*) the object of belief and takes place according to each believer’s degree of faith.”³² However, this is forced because “believer with the object” must mean “the believer’s human properties with the object ...” The other option of “towards” is better and confirmed by the motion implied in the immediately

³⁰ Harrison, “Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers,” 53-54.

³¹ Also, although this preposition takes objects in either the genitive (with) or accusative (towards), the preposition’s translation is frequently contextual derived as in John 1:1: ... *προς* τὸν Θεὸν = with God.

³² Prestige, “Perichoreo and Perichoresis in the Fathers.”

following sentence: “Revelation is the inexpressible interpenetration (*perichōresis*) of the believer towards (*pros*) the object of belief and takes place according to each believer’s degree of faith. Through that interpenetration the believer finally returns to his origin.” With “towards” being used, the next question is one of magnitude.

To what extent does the believer (the human) interpenetrate toward the divine? The three prepositions formerly mentioned show nuance regarding motion. *προς* emphasizes the actual motion of movement. *εἰς* carries a similar meaning but highlights the end or the goal of the movement. *ἐν* shows the achieved end of motion, that is, arriving and being contained at said destination. *Pros* shows the reaching toward, the grasping out, but can be used to maintain the impassibility of the divine. Maximus thus distances humanity from actually interpenetrating the divine (*fusis*). Instead, humanity is continually moving toward the divine in its interpenetrating. But why bother calling this “interpenetration” if there is no interpenetration? Maximus, however, by means of *ἐνεργεῖα*, can teach an interpenetrating of the human into the divine life: i.e. namely, humanity interpenetrating into the divine *energeia*. The preposition “in” appears several times towards the end of the section: “... entails participation *in* supernatural divine realities, “... *in* the participant becoming like that *in* which he participates ...”, and “energy between the participant and that *in* which he participates [emphasis mine].” And to close the section Maximus explicitly identifies the *energeia* to be what deifies humans. Maximus, when explaining how the interpenetrating occurs, specifies the interpenetrated locale to be in the divine *energeia*, at which point he is comfortable to use the preposition *en*.

To close this section, Harrison reminds of an important point: since Maximus teaches a real interpenetrating of the believer into the divine (*energeia*), the human element in the hypostatic union in Christ must be thought to interpenetrate more than this. In the hypostatic union in Christ, it is the natures which are considered to be perichoretically related. In the believer and divine relationship, the divine penetrates the human nature but the human nature only penetrates the divine *energeia*. With Christ, the penetration must be more than this because it is the divine nature which is receiving the perichoretic activity from the human nature. Although the *perichōrēsis* of believers is asymmetrical—human nature is penetrated by the divine but human nature not penetrating the divine nature, but only divine *energeia*. It is not at all clear that it is so with Christ.³³

AMBIGUUM 2

In *Ambiguum 2*, Maximus explains the hypostatic union. He does not use the term *perichōrēsis* but his teaching effectively uses perichoretic concepts to supplement the *communicatio idiomatum*.³⁴ Christ is “the hypostasis of two

³³ Harrison, “Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers,” 58.

³⁴ Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 2nd ed. (Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing Co., 1995), 23. He notes that *perichōrēsis* in

natures, of the uncreated and the created, of the impassible and the passible, receiving without fail all of the natural principles of which he was the hypostasis.”³⁵ Whatever principles (= properties) belonged to either nature, the hypostasis, who is Yeshua, received them. Maximus does not advance the concept of *perchōrēsis* but reaffirms what has already been observed in Gregory: namely, the passing reciprocally of the properties between natures. Maximus is discussing the relationship between the two natures and the one hypostasis. Inasmuch as the one hypostasis Yeshua receives the properties, likewise the natures share them. No explanation of the sharing is offered in the near context.

AMBIGUUM 3

Ambiguum 3 contains several advances regarding the relationship between the natures as hypostatically united: quoting Gregory Nazianzen, Maximus’s writes, “in that he became man, he was God below, since it was mixed with God, and he has become one. In this, the better part achieved the victory, so that I might become god to the degree that he became man.”³⁶ The term *perichōrēsis* does not appear in the section Maximus is quoting. Still, because of the proportional language used—“to the degree that”—this text provides insight into the perichoretic relationship of natures.³⁷ Maximus accounts the fact that since Gregory says Yeshua “become one,” this indicates that Gregory means one hypostasis. If Gregory meant “one thing” he could have used the masculine numeral one (*heis*, instead of *hen*). Maximus claims that Gregory was cognizant of this. Turning from this, Maximus addresses Gregory’s statement: “so that I might become god to the degree that he became man.” Commenting, Maximus says, “[you] are destined to be shown forth by [grace’s] power “to the degree that” the one who is God by nature became flesh and shared in our weakness, for the deification of those who are saved by grace corresponds ... to the degree of his self-emptying.”³⁸ Whatever the magnitude of the divine’s condescension is also the magnitude of humanity’s ascension. The activation of this process is (by) the divine which then entails a certain measure of asymmetry. Nevertheless, the proportionality between the condescension and ascension has no *energeia* in view. Christ condescends to become flesh; man ascends—by the initial activation of the divine—to become divine. There is a symmetrical relationship between the two. In Christ’s condescension, a real hypostatic union occurs between the natures. They remain wholly distinct but

Maximus is not the *communicatio* idea but that *perichōrēsis* modifies and qualifies the *communicatio* idea.

³⁵ Joshua Lollar, “Ambiguum 2,” in *Maximus the Confessor, Corpus Christianorum in Translation*, pt. 2 (Belgium: Turnhout Brepols Publishers, 2009), 8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁷ It might be asked why this text was not addressed in the Gregory section. Because Maximus was writing post Chalcedon with a greater terminological arsenal—with many clarified terms compared to the 4th century—his use of proportional phraseology, especially in view of his controversial humanity-penetrating-the-divine, deserves greater scrutiny.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

interpenetrate or pass their properties reciprocally.³⁹ Because of the proportionality discussed by Gregory and Maximus, the believer's human nature ascends to penetrate the divine nature. Without *energeia* to protect the impassibility of the divine, this passage is left with humanity either interpenetrating into the divine nature or passing human properties to the divine nature. In both cases, the impassibility of the divine becomes threatened. Can the divine nature of God be humanized by humanity interpenetrating *in* the divine? And if the divine interpenetrated *in* humanity but humanity only penetrates *towards* the divine, why say this is proportional? Certainly, the divine nature interpenetrated the human. If the proportionality is real, then the humanity interpenetrates the divine. Christ became man to the degree that the divine nature interpenetrated humanity; man becomes god to the degree that humanity interpenetrates the divine. Although *perichōréō* is not used in the passage, the proportionality between the condescension and ascension is a strained difficulty.

Maximus, in *Ambiguum 4* offers an elongated explanation⁴⁰ of Gregory Nazianzen's *Oration 30.6*,⁴¹ which has already been reviewed in the section on Gregory above. There it was found that the language of mixing and blending—as in *Epistle CI*—is closely associated with *perichōréō*, even with *perichōrou̇sōn* being used to explain more completely what was meant by *kirnamenōn* (mingling/mixing). Maximus adopts the earlier and less controversial understanding of the relationship between the natures in Christ: namely, that the properties exchange (pass reciprocally) between them. To this, though, he does add his own understanding of activity (*energeia*). It is interesting that, although he chooses the less controversial of the possible definitions for the perichoretic relationship, he nevertheless introduces *energeia*. This becomes especially important in view of the last section on *Ambiguum 3*. Why, when Maximus was discussing the less controversial

³⁹ From the context, it is impossible to tell which sense might be more correct; the *Ambiguum* ends shortly after the section quoted above.

⁴⁰ “For in the exchange of the divine and fleshly he clearly confirmed the natures of which he himself was the hypostasis, along with their essential activities, i.e., their movements, of which he himself was the unconfused unity, a unity which admits of no division with respect to the two natures of which he was the hypostasis since they naturally belong to him. This is because he acts monadically, that is, in a unified form, and by means of each of the things that are predicated of him, he shows forth the power of his own divinity and the activity of his flesh at one and the same time, without separation ... Because of this, even while suffering, he was truly God, and even while working wonders, the same one was truly man, since he was the true hypostasis of true natures according to an ineffable union. Acting in them both reciprocally and naturally, he was shown truly to preserve them, preserving them unconfused for himself, since he remained both dispassionate by nature and passible, immortal and mortal, visible and intelligible, the same one being both God and man by nature.”

⁴¹ “... since the Word was neither obedient nor disobedient. For these concepts pertain to those who are under authority, to those who have a secondary status: the one (obedience) to those who have a more agreeable disposition, the other (disobedience) to those who are worthy of chastisement. And as the form of a slave, he condescends to those who are his fellow slaves and his slaves, and he takes on a form foreign to himself, bearing my entirety in himself, along with the things that pertain to me, that he might consume the worse aspect in himself, as fire consumes wax, or as the sun vapor of the earth, that I might partake of what is his because of the blending.”

“exchanging” did he employ *energeia* (in *Amb. 4*) but not in the more difficult passage (*Amb. 3*) dealing with the proportionality? One possible answer is that in *Ambiguum 3* the term *perichōréō* does not appear but in *Ambiguum 4* Maximus is directly addressing Gregory’s use of the term “blending.” In *Ambiguum 3* the perichoretic relationship is only implied whereas in 4 it is directly in view. Whatever the case, Maximus to adamant to preserve the distinction in unity while appropriating the *perichōréō* concept: “Acting in them both reciprocally and naturally, he was shown truly to preserve them ... unconfused for Himself.”

AMBIGUUM 5

Maximus achieves a penetrable divine nature (or *energeia*) in *Ambiguum 5*, which is his commentary on St. Denys the Areopagite (= Pseudo-Dionysius).⁴² He begins by quoting Denys who says that Yeshua performed human things transcendently. About this, Maximus says: “... demonstrating in an exalted union that the human activity is assimilated to the divine power without being changed. Since human nature was united to divine nature without confusion, *it* has penetrated through the whole [Emp. mine].”⁴³ The “it” is a reference to the human nature which is made clear by the immediately following sentence: “It has absolutely nothing loose and separated from the divinity ...”⁴⁴ To this Maximus adds the strong preposition of passing (through) which implies an “into,” a “within,” and an “out of.” The penetrable-ness of this “whole” is evident but Maximus does barricade against any possible assault against impassibility (of the divine)—or at least the immutability of the divine nature—by affirming that the human nature was not changed. It is a lesser to greater argument. If the human nature is penetrated by the infinitely more potent divine nature yet unchanged, then the human nature penetrating through the whole—the divine, vastly more powerful—cannot change it. What is not clear is why Maximus is comfortable to say that the penetration of the human by the divine creates a “newness of modes” by Yeshua “possessing the mode of being beyond human nature conjoined to the principle of being of human nature ...” This “newness of modes” does not cause any “alteration in rational principle.”⁴⁵ It is likely due to Maximus’ *energeia* that he can speak such for what is a mode but the manner of activity. So even if humanity penetrates the divine, it does so by means of a newness of modes, which is a change in the activity (*energeia*) but neither threatens to make the divine nature changeable nor passible. This teaching, however, when investigated further will constitute a serious threat to impassibility. The believer may only penetrate through the whole by means of a newness of mode but what of Christ. Even though Maximus confirms the union of the divine and humanity, he quickly adds that it creates a newness of modes,

⁴² Pseudo-Dionysius, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, ed. John Farina, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

⁴³ Lollar, *Maximus the Confessor*, 26-27.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

explicitly dealing with the person of Christ. But Christ is a subsistent hypostasis (among the members of the Trinity) who now has humanity conjoined to His nature and He does not merely dwell in the peripheral sphere of *energeia* but is one in nature with the divine.⁴⁶ If there is an interpenetration of the divine by the humanity of Christ, then this must mean something more than only interpenetration into the *energeia*—or whatever the penetration of a believer into the divine entails.⁴⁷ But if it is a penetration through the nature, how is it logical to speak of the impassibility of the divine, having been passed through by creation? And further, if this interpenetration constitutes a change in God—even if only an addition—does it make sense to affirm the perfection of God? It seems difficult to accept that humanity has interpenetrated (in and through) the divine without change or confusion; the movement of something within the divine—from outside—would seem to “shift” one thing or another.⁴⁸ In sum, Maximus is careful to guard impassibility but leaves the doctrine weakened in several ways. He does present a significant advance and trajectory for further thought and, in his defense, the mysteries of the union are ripe with ambiguities, as his titles clearly portray (*Ambigua* = difficulty).

Shortly after this passage, Maximus continues with the difficulty by discussing the “theandric activity” of Denys.⁴⁹ He equally affirms the interpenetration: “who knows how God becomes flesh, and remains God? How, remaining true God, is he true man, truly demonstrating in himself the natural existence of both natures, and each through the other, while being changed in reference to neither.”⁵⁰ Maximus apparently knows the criticisms that are possible of the “penetrating-through” of the divine by humanity like the ones listed above. He takes bastion in apophaticism at this point, explicitly affirming the darkness of men on the manner (how?) of the union. What is strange is that he begins by commenting on the new theandric activity, “the activity is characteristic of a new mystery ...” but during his explanation he proceeds to affirm that one nature passes through the other and vice versa.⁵¹ Often, the penetrating of humanity of the divine is achieved, for Maximus, by help of *energeia* moving the discussion from nature to *energeia* to penetration. Strangely, his discussion moves in the opposite direction here: from activity to nature to penetration rather than distancing nature (divine) from the activity of penetration (by humanity) by means of the *energeia*. Perhaps his direct appeal to apophatic theology attains for him a new freedom of expression,

⁴⁶ It must be remembered that Maximus is dealing primarily with Christological issues so any sharp denunciation or quickness to assign fault to Maximus’ teaching in view of Trinitarian thought is amiss.

⁴⁷ Harrison, “Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers,” 58.

⁴⁸ This “shift” is not to be perceived as spatial. Yet the infinite nature of God may be one way to answer the prevention of any “shift” despite the intrusion of something other.

⁴⁹ “It must be remembered that Maximus is dealing primarily with Christological issues so any sharp denunciation or quickness to assign fault to Maximus’ teaching in view of Trinitarian thought is amiss.”

⁵⁰ Lollar, *Maximus the Confessor*, 30-31.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

enabling him to write more boldly and more loosely about *mysteria Christi et Dei et hóminis* (“mysteries of Christ and God and humanity”) which deserve treatment but which are far beyond men. In close, it is noteworthy that Maximus, shortly after this section, returns to the interchanging of properties without change and without confusion. He is careful to protect the boundaries which his former thought may have rivaled: “... the mode of exchange in the ineffable union ... achieved in respect to nature without change or co-mingling of each part with the other.”⁵²

No study of *perichōrēsis* in Maximus is complete without addressing his analogy of a heated sword.⁵³ The quote below is from *Abiguum* 5, which is the revision of his first use of the analogy in a disputation.⁵⁴ Maximus is more careful with his language in *Abiguum* 5 than in his *Disputatio Cum Pyrrho*. The analogy—part—effectively communicates the exchanging of properties but fails to portray an equal penetration between the fire and iron, unless the penetration is conceived as one of synthesis or synergy. This, of course, results in the confusion of either *fuseis* or *energeiai*, either undergoing some extent of melding. Maximus was not ignorant of the difficulties of this analogy and later abandoned using them.⁵⁵ The analogy had the same problem as most analogies attempting to describe the divine realities of hypostatic or Trinitarian theology: they are only useful to a degree and, when relied upon to heavily, are given to error.

SECOND LETTER TO THOMAS

The last section addressed in this study is found in Maximus’ *Second Letter to Thomas*. Toward the end of Maximus’ lengthy salutation, he commends Thomas and then says, “You have made the convergence with that which truly is mixed with desire and fear of the Creator the distinctive mark of both [wisdom and virtue], according to which the whole of yourself has been mixed with the spiritual state of the whole God.”⁵⁶ Here is found mixture language (mixed-with). This is limited, though, by what the whole of Thomas is being mixed with: it is neither simply *theon* nor is the *fusis theou* but the spiritual state *theou*. Given that the “spiritual state”

⁵² Ibid., 32-33.

⁵³ “For it is just as when a sword has been heated: what is able to cut becomes able to burn, and what is able to burn becomes able to cut (for just as fire was united to iron, thus also the burning of fire was united to the cutting of the iron). The iron has become able to burn by a union with the fire, and the fire becomes able to cut by a union with the iron. Neither thing has undergone a change with respect to mode of exchange with the other in the union, but each has remained, in the identity of what was composed in the union, without falling from what belonged to it according to nature. Likewise, in the mystery of the divine incarnation, the divine and the human were united hypostatically, where neither of the natural activities was displaced because of the union, and neither was acquired after the union as something unrelated, as though it was divided both from what was composed and what was co-hypostasized.”

⁵⁴ Maximus the Confessor, *Disputatio Cum Pyrrho*, 91.

⁵⁵ Elena Vishnevskaya, *Perichoresis in the Context of Divinization: Maximus the Confessor's Vision of a "Blessed and Most Holy Embrace"* (Madison, NJ: Drew University Dissertations, 2004), 212, Proquest Dissertations (accessed March 29, 2011).

⁵⁶ Lollar, *Maximus the Confessor*, 38.

is contemplation—intellectual activity—in much of Maximus,⁵⁷ this likely means *energeia* so that the whole of Thomas is mixed with the *energeia* of the whole God. This section is not using precise terminology. Clearly, Maximus knows that mixture-language is dangerous (cf. Council of Chalcedon) and much of his work is designed to safeguard against confusion (as in his frequently used term, δούχυστως). It is better, therefore, to understand Maximus’ language here as being due to the non-formal and non-technical nature of a personal salutation. There is still a real active humanity mixing (penetrating?) with the divine so that, again, it is found that Maximus understands a real, active role of humanity penetrating (mixing) the divine.

SUMMARY OF MAXIMUS

The potent section from *Quaestiones Ad Thalassium* demonstrates that Maximus sees theosis occurring by means of the divine *energeia*. There is an advance in Gregory’s idea of movement and rest: in Gregory’s rumination on life and death (Or. 18.42) the two are seen to move into one another and be contained in one another. Maximus makes this explicit by discussing the life of the saint as one of an “ever-active repose.” Though this passage approaches teaching a real penetration into the divine by the human nature, it does not achieve it due to the preposition *pros*. Maximus says the saints will return to their origination but this return is thought of in terms of *pros* which emphasizes and conceptualizes the movement or journey *unto* somewhere. So Maximus’ return is really a “returning” without end. In what sense can this be called a real return if the destination is never reached? There is both asymmetry and partial symmetry in this text. The divine activates the process but the believer penetrates towards (*pros*) the divine. There is certainly more asymmetry than symmetry. On the side of symmetry is Maximus’ use of the term revelation. Effectively, it means illumination in participation (received revelation = illumination = participation). Still the participation is only a movement toward (*pros*) and so does not threaten impassibility. Maximus is far bolder in this text to understand the human penetrating into the divine *energeia*. The preposition *en* is seen on multiple accounts near the end of the text and theosis is accomplished by the human penetrating into the divine *energeia*. In *Ambiguum 2*, there is no real advance of *perichōrēsis*. He is content to reproduce the pass reciprocally meaning as already developed in Gregory’s *Epistle CI. Ambiguum 3* presented proportionality between the divine descent and the human ascend—by means of the prior divine descent. There is no *energeia* in view in this text but the question should be asked if this passage needs to be seen in light of Maximus’ broader teaching. Allowing that *energeia* is not appropriated, this text presents asymmetry by its reliance on the divine for the activation of the process but then becomes symmetrical. The human

⁵⁷ As seen immediately before this section: “Thus, the manner of life of those who practice contemplation is an unwavering demonstration of wisdom, and the principle of contemplation of those engaged in the practical life is the firmly established foundation of virtue (*Ad Thom.*, 37).”

penetrates the divine to the degree that the divine penetrated the human. Maximus is commenting on Gregory's text and so explicating further the proportionality of man becoming divine. This text, through this proportional teaching, contends to teach a real humanizing of the divine. It seems that proportional phraseology should be avoided if the penetrating is really only asymmetrical. *Ambiguum 4* returned to the typical "pass reciprocally" definition but Maximus introduces his *energeia*. What was strange was that he added *energeia* in *Amb. 4* with the less difficult meaning of *perichōrēsis* (pass reciprocally) than was found in *Amb. 3*. Since he did add *energeia* in *Amb. 4*, it seems strange that had he intended the penetrating in *Amb. 3* to mean into *energeia*, he would leave it out in *Amb. 3*. This supports understanding *Ambiguum 3* as teaching the human nature penetrating into the divine nature and not merely into the divine *energeia*. In *Ambiguum 5*, Maximus achieves a real interpenetrating of the human nature into both the divine nature and *energeia*. He makes this stark by using "through (*dia*)." Somehow, the divine *fusis* is not changed though passed through just as the human nature was passed through by the divine. Maximus does use the concept and phrase "newness of modes" which was argued to mean the manner of activity (mode = activity = *energeia*). But even if this "mode" is applicable to believers it cannot be applicable in the same way to Christ. Even if believers were only to penetrate into the divine *energeia*, this cannot be the case with Christ; it must be something more. Maximus attempts to guard impassibility but nevertheless weakens it by teaching a full interpenetration of humanity *through (dia)* the divine. After recognizing the difficulties of what he has been teaching, Maximus' thought moved differently than typical. It went from activity to nature to penetration. The tendency is to distance the nature being penetrated by moving the discussion to activity and then say that humanity penetrates into the divine activity (*energeia*). The analogy of the heated sword worked to show the exchange of properties but failed to present the interpenetration accurate, thereby confusing it with synergy or synthesis. Finally, the *2nd Letter to Thomas* said the Thomas was mixed with God's spiritual state (which was argued to mean *energeia*). This passage again shows that, for Maximus, the human nature does not simply passively become penetrated by the divine but that it actively penetrates it as well, even if only the energy. What is certain is that the human nature is responding and penetrating something of the divine—this is unclear due to the ambiguity of "spiritual state."

CONCLUSION

Gregory the Theologian uses *perichōrēō* to show the passing reciprocally of the properties of Christ's natures and the titles of those respective natures. He can also use the term to show one thing passing into another and therein contained. In his use of "blending," he asymmetrically shows the deification of the humanity by the divine. In no way, for Gregory, can *perichōrēō* mean "contained in so as to be disintegrated." But Gregory will use the term to describe Trinitarian relationships and not only the hypostatically united natures in Christ (Christologically). In the

final text dealing with the suns/mingled light, the perichoretic relationships are implied though neither *perichōréō* nor *perichōrēsis* is used. There is symmetry between the persons and they dwell in one another's light.

Maximus advances *perichōrēsis*—the noun form of *perichōréō* coming into use first by Ps. Cyril—by building on the movement of the interpenetration which Gregory began during his writing about life and death (Or. 18.42). To this, Maximus makes explicit the coinherence idea by the term *repose* and then, consequently, unites that term with “ever-active” into order to achieve both rest and movement in one idea: “ever-active movement.” Maximus’ teaching on *perichōrēsis* remains strictly in a Christological context; he does not apply it to the Trinitarian relationships as does Gregory. He follows Gregory by showing the deification of the human as occurring through the asymmetrical penetration of the divine into the human. But Maximus also advances *perichōrēsis* here by his addition of *energeia* and his explicit teaching that the human nature does penetration the divine without confusion (esp. *Amb. 5*). Both Gregory and Maximus see the deification of humanity to be accomplished by *perichōréō* or *perichōrēsis*. Maximus is also comfortable to espouse the traditional meaning of *perichōréō* as seen in Gregory’s *Epistle CI* (pass reciprocally). For both men, the initiation of the penetration is always from the divine side and thus always has that measure of asymmetry. Both men will struggle with proportional phraseology. Maximus more so as he seeks to explain Gregory’s meaning when he uses it. I contend that this need to explain the proportionality is one of the reasons that Maximus vacillates between teaching an asymmetrical *perichōrēsis* (usually by using *energeia*) and a symmetrical one with a real penetrating of the divine by the human nature, presenting the possible humanizing of the divine. Both men are careful to guard impassibility, but Maximus more so, probably due to his need to explain in greater detail the relationship between the divine and humanity in Christ which led him into more controversial explanations. The thought that Maximus was inconsistent certainly arises but understandable so. Who can teach the divine mysteries without erring and without inconsistencies? In his great humility, he even recognized the weakness of his language as he sought to explain such mammoth *ambigua*.

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