
,THE Gnostic' MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR

NOTES ON A NEW TRANSLATION IN ROMANIAN

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Abstract

In this study I intend to briefly analyze the reception of Saint Maximus the Confessor's texts (580–662) in the Romanian culture. I will particularly take into consideration Maximus' text *Capita theologica et oeconomica*, that benefits of two translations in Romanian (made by D. Stăniloae and W.A. Prager). I tend to believe that the different options of translation estrange Maximus' text from the tradition from which it comes. Without certain clarifications, the ambiguity increases around the difficult patristic text. The analysis below intends to explain, as far as possible, the preliminary data, the presuppositions which were the basis of these translations.

Keywords: Maximus the Confessor, tradition, Gnosticism, knowledge, hermeneutic, anagogy

1. Introduction

“And they despised what their ancestors had regarded as honors, while they highly prized what the Greeks esteemed as glory.”
(2 Maccabees 4.15)

We are becoming a big culture. Not necessarily by great creations of spirit – as we should -, but by translations, both from the classical languages, but mostly from the modern ones. A (big) culture of translations. Let us be grateful with that. Even so, this situation is a gratifying one, especially where the fundamental texts benefit of several Romanian translations. In such a fortunate situation is the text of Saint Maximus the Confessor (580-662): *Capita theologica et oeconomica* [1-3].

Without any doubt, Maximus the Confessor has a privileged place in the Romanian culture: he is the patristic author translated almost entirely by Father Dumitru Stăniloae [4]. But this fortunate event does not mean that new translations of Maximus' texts are not welcomed, on the contrary. Recently, at

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the Herald publishing house, the translation of Maximus' text *Capita theologica et oeconomica* made by Walther Alexander Prager [5] was published. The last Romanian translator of the writings of Saint Confessor enters thus an exclusive category that descends – going through the translations and studies made by D. Stăniloae [6] and Ioan I. Ică jr.[7] – till Paisie Velicikovski [8].

In the lines below I shall try, as much as it is in my power, to analyze, starting from W.A. Prager's translation, in four sections unequally developed, the following themes: first of all, the preference of the Romanian translator for the title *Gnostic Chapters*; secondly, a discussion about 'the Gnostic' from Maximus' writing; thirdly, a short presentation of the exegesis practiced by Saint Maximus; and in the last section, I shall try a comparative analysis of the translations made for these *Chapters* of Maximus. This analysis will follow a triple perspective: i) the relation of the translation proposed by W.A. Prager with the original text; ii) reporting this translation to the Romanian theological translation and iii) the comparison of this new Romanian translation with other existing translations in other languages (English, French, German, Italian). Finally, I will try to take out a few conclusions.

2. Gnostic or theological chapters?

First of all, it must be noticed a fact of intellectual honesty encountered in most efforts of translating a text, namely the mentioning of any previous translator of that writing. There is the possibility, especially in a culture such as ours, that there are no previous translators of the considered text. Usually, translators take into consideration older writings or newer ones which do not have a translation yet. There is also the possibility that one or several translators of a text to be unknown, because their attempts lie in a manuscript who knows in which storeroom of a library. Beyond these named cases, I am sure there are other reasons as well for which a previous translator is not mentioned. For the translator W.A. Prager it is so normal the fact that Father D. Stăniloae has translated these *Chapters*, that he no longer feels the need to mention this.

Indeed, W.A. Prager notes in bibliography only this: "Stăniloae, D. 1993. *The Philokalia of the Holy Needs of Perfection*, second edition, volume 2, Bucharest: Harisma". In his comments to *The Gnostic Chapters of Saint Maximus the Confessor*, W.A. Prager mentions sometimes explicitly, other times implicitly, the translations of Maximus' texts made by Father D. Stăniloae: 1. the comment for chapter (next: com. c.) 1, 61: "Stăniloae, n. 63, ad. loc."; 2. com. c. 1, 75: "Stăniloae, n. 77, ad. loc."; 3. com. c. 1, 75: "for this idea I have followed the suggestion from Stăniloae, *Philokalia*, 2, 170 and n. ad. loc."; 4. com. c. 1, 78: "PSB, 82, p. 97"; 5. com. c. 1, 80: "Stăniloae, *Philokalia* 2, n. ad. loc."; 6. com. c. 1, 98: "PSB, 82, 202"; 7. com. c. 1, 99: "PSB, 82, 181-2"; 8. com. c. 1, 99: "ibidem, 179-180"; 9. com. c. 2, 9: "PSB, 82, 183"; 10. com. c. 2, 9: "ibidem, 186"; 11. com. c. 2, 66: "apud PSB 82, n. 355". It can be easily noticed that the references to the texts translated by D. Stăniloae are not made after only one criterion. It is difficult to intuit to what it is making reference: "Stăniloae, n.

63, ad. loc.”, without first mentioning the text to which he is referring. On the other hand, in the comment for chapter 1, 55, W.A. Prager sends us to a certain “Brad., p. 173, n. 56”; somewhere further, - p. 166 – he sends to the same “Brad., 173, n. 60” and “Brad., 173-174, n. 61”; at p. 179 we are send again to “Brad., p. 174, n. ad. loc”. I must mention that we do not find this author or text (!) neither in bibliography, nor somewhere else.

Before his translation published at Herald publishing house, there was already another translation of the same text made by Father D. Stăniloae. W.A. Prager does not however mention this. In order to translate the *200 Chapters on Theology and the Iconomy of Incarnation*, the two Romanian translators use the Migne edition, *Patrologia Graeca*, volume 90 [9]. Father D. Stăniloae sends to coll. 1083-1186, and W. A. Prager to coll. 1084–1176.

After my knowledge, Constant de Vocht has been preparing for some time a critical edition of this writing of Maximus (*Capita theologica et oeconomica*) in the well-known collection *Corpus Christianorum*. When he was translating these chapters, Father D. Stăniloae stated that a critical edition of these *Chapters* has been promised since 1928 by F. Skulella [10]. So far, I do not know if such an edition has been published.

The translator W.A. Prager prefers for Maximus' text the title *Gnostic Chapters*. The Greek title of Maximus' text is Κεφάλαια Σ'περὶ θεολογίας καὶ τῆς ἐνσάρκου οἰκονομίας τοῦ Υἱοῦ Θεοῦ. The way in which this text of Maximus is written, κεφάλαιον, was pretty frequently used in the monastic environment of that time, but the tradition of this kind of writing comes from “outside” and goes all the way down to Porphyry [11]. As you can see, the term γνῶσις (or another one from his family) does not appear in the original title and yet, based on a certain tradition – that is not mentioned –, the Romanian translator W.A. Prager chooses for the title *Gnostic Chapters*. Hans Urs von Balthasar's influence – the one who named Maximus' writing *Gnostic Chapters* – on the translation and the comments made by W.A. Prager is so obvious that it is no longer necessary any other specification.

In my opinion, beyond the translator's option, a certain ambiguity steals in even from this title. I believe things can be clarified, in a certain measure, if we find out of what kind of ‘Gnostic’ (γνῶστικός) [12] is Saint Maximus talking about. It also must be mentioned that, in many places in his writings, Maximus seems to prefer the term τελείος instead of γνῶστικός, being here closer to Origen than to Clement of Alexandria. The term γνῶστικός is rarely used by Origen, who prefers the term τέλειοι for naming the category of Christians that have reached a certain spiritual level [13]. In the volume that we are taking into consideration, the translator of Maximus' text does not do this. Or, I believe it is obvious for everyone that the ‘Gnostic’ from the patristic texts is clearly different from the Gnostic from the texts of Marcion, Valentinus, Mani or of others from the same category.

3. ,The Gnostic' from Maximus' writings

In Christian literature, it seems that the line of *Gnostic* is drawn by Clement of Alexandria (150-217) [14, 15], which then passes, among others, through the texts of Evagrius of Pontus (approx. 345-399), Dionysius Areopagite and, finally, it is valued also by Maximus the Confessor.

The idea of the Gnostic, i.e. the connoisseur of God, is much more ancient, being noticeable ever since 1 John 2.13, 14: “you have known Him who is from the beginning”; cf. Galatians 4.9: “now that you know God, or rather you are known by God”. 29 occurrences of the term γνῶσις (or its family) appear in the New Testament: γνῶσει (1 Corinthians 1.5, 8.11, 14.6; 2 Corinthians 6.6, 8.7, 11.6; 2 Peter 1.6, 3.18); γνῶσεως (Luke 11.52; Romans 2.20, 11.33, 15.14; 1 Corinthians 12.8; 2 Corinthians 2.14, 4.6, 10.5; Ephesians 5.19; Philippians 3.8; Colossians 2.3; 1 Timothy 6.20); γνῶσιν (Luke 1.77; 1 Corinthians 8.1, 8.10, 13.2; 1 Peter 3.7; 2 Peter 1.5); γνῶσις (1 Corinthians 8.1, 8.7, 13.8). In one of these places, Luke 1.77, it is actually talking about “γνῶσιν σωτηρίας”. Both the translation of D. Cornilescu, as well as the one approved by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, present Luke’s expression by “cunoștința mântuirii”; la traduction œcuménique de la Bible by “la connaissance du salut”, and the English translation (Word English Bible) by “knowledge of salvation”. None of these translations does, however, justify the statement: “salvation is made only through gnosis”.

I have chosen to invoke here Dionysius and Evagrius because, from Hans Urs von Balthasar’s point of view, Maximus the Confessor did nothing else but a synthesis between the teachings of those two. In the texts of Dionysius Areopagite, the term γνῶσις appears in *CH*, 140 B; 181 B; 205 BC; 209 C2D2; 212 A2; 273 B; 292 CD2; 305 A; *EH*, 372 AB; 373 C; 376 AC; 437 AC; 480 C; 501 B; 504 C; 513 D; 536 C; 537 B; 568 A; *DN*, 592 D2; 593 A2B; 596 AB; 645 A; 684 C; 701 B; 705 B; 709 C; 713 B; 733 D2; 736 A2; 825 A; 868 A2BCD; 981 B; *MT*, 997 B; 1000 A; 1001 A; 1025 A; 1048 A; *Ep.* 1, 1065 A2; *Ep.* 5, 1073 A2B; *Ep.* 7, 1080 B2; *Ep.* 8, 1097 C; *Ep.* 9, 1104 C2; 1108 A; 1112 A; γνῶστης in *DN*, 596 B; γνῶστικός- ὤς in *CH*, 205 C; 304 A2; 321 A; 332 A; *DN*, 593 D; 700 B; *MT*, 1001 A [16].

For Clement, gnosis is a superior knowledge of divine things, which he opposes to not only to “Greek and barbarian philosophers” [Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, II, 1; *PG* 8, col. 984], but also to the “common faith” of Christians [17]. The Alexandrian believes that gnosis involves faith, but it also surpasses it. In chapter III of book VII of *Stromata*, he speaks about a perfect contemplation, printed in the soul of the Gnostic Christ [17, p. 485].

Below, before seeing of what kind of ‘Gnostic’ is Maximus talking about, I will delay only on the ‘Gnostic’ suggested by Evagrius especially in *Κεφάλαια γνῶστικά* [5, p. 121]. From the point of view of the monk from Kellia, “it is worthy of praising the man who yoked knowledge (gnosis) and making (practice), so that he can wet for virtue the land of soul from both these sources” [18]. In Gabriel Bunge’s opinion, “the purpose of this synthesis between

praktike and *gnostike* was an extremely concrete one: it was about blocking up efficiently the way of seductions of a *pseudo-gnosis* that spread in that period of time in the monastic circles [...]; the only plausible answer to the challenge of the new pseudo-gnosis, which starts penetrating today more and more both in the broad layers of intellectuality, as well as in those of the simple people is – exactly as in the time of someone like Clement of Alexandria or Origen, even in the period of time of John the Evangelist or Paul the Apostle – a true Christian ‘gnosis’, whose foundation is not empty human curiosity and the unleashed enjoyment of speculation, but the faith developed throughout life in a knowledge of the mysteries of Revelation received in it. Therefore, this ‘true gnosis’ – of John and Paul – that is not the fruit of an arbitrary speculation, or of a mystifying ‘initiation’, but a gift of God’s grace made to those who submitted to the troubles of a real *following of Christ*.” [18]

Without any doubt, in what the relation between *praktike* and *gnostike* is concerned, Evagrius is an authority that must not be avoided. However, the distinction between *πρᾶξις* and *γνώσις* is frequently encountered in all monastic literature. The term *praxis* (*πρᾶξις*, *πρακτική*) is frequently attached to the one of contemplation (*θεωρία*). *Θεωρία* and *θεολογία* are sometimes regrouped by Maximus under the notion of *γνώσις* [19]. The couple *πρᾶξις* – *θεωρία* or *πρᾶξις* - *γνώσις* is analyzed by M. Viller [20]. M. Viller emphasizes sometimes too much Saint Maximus’ dependence on Evagrius.

In patristic texts, *πρᾶξις* (‘practical philosophy’) is considered to be the first degree of the spiritual life, being followed by *θεωρία* and by *θεολογία*, which is called by Maximus ‘theological philosophy’, ‘theological contemplation’, ‘theological science’, ‘theological wisdom’, ‘mystical theology’, ‘contemplative theology’ [Cf. Maximus the Confessor, *Chapters on Love*, II, 26; *Quaestiones et Dubia*, 29, CCSG 10, p. 24. 22-23; 46, CCSG 10, p. 39. 21-23; 73, CCSG 10, p. 56. 28-30; 182, CCSG 10, p. 124; 192, CCSG 10, p. 135; Amb. Io., 47, PG 91, col. 1360 C ; 48, PG 91, col. 1364 C; 50, PG 91, col. 1369 B ; 67, PG 91, col. 1397 BC; 71, PG 91, col. 1413 C; Q. Thal., 5, PG 90, col. 280 AB, CCSG 7, p. 67.38 ; 25, PG 90, col. 332 C, 333 CD, CCSG 7, p. 165. 105-122; 65, PG 90, col. 757 A, CCSG 22, p. 281.494-283. 497].

Jean-Claude Larchet highlights a major difference that separates Maximus from Evagrius, where we encounter the same steps of spiritual life: “for him, this is also what distinguishes, on the one hand, his standpoint from that of Evagrius, *Praxis* is not just a phase destined to be surpassed by the knowledge that follows and which it prepares. It remains present till the peak of the spiritual life where its experiences are necessary. It is not just a preparation of contemplation (which is impossible without enduring and virtues), but also the indispensable and permanent addition of it. If *Praxis* and *Theôria* are very frequent quoted together with Maximus, is that they form in his eyes a united and inseparable couple, because these are a nature and contributes to the perfection of man.” [19] Shortly, “the contemplative does not stop from fulfilling the commandments”.

Without neglecting the important shade introduced by J.-C. Larchet, I tend to believe that the interpretation suggested by the hieromonk Gabriel Bunge regarding the texts of Evagrius fits, in some way, for the writings of Maximus as well. But in order to better understand this, I think we should find out an answer to the question: for whom does Maximus write these *chapters*? Without any doubt, Maximus did not write for philosophers, i.e. for those ‘philosophers from outside’, but for those monks spiritually improved, that have reached a certain level of knowledge (γνώσις) (1 Corinthians 2.6, 7). But, by which means can we obtain this knowledge of God? From Saint Maximus’ texts results that the Incarnation of Word is triple: i) Incarnation of Word in *logoi* of creatures, in the moment of creation; ii) Incarnation of Word in *logoi* of Scripture and iii) Incarnation of Logos in human body [Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 33, PG 91, coll. 1285 A-1288 A]. Thus, we can know God in a triple manner: contemplating the created ones, from Scriptures and, in a perfect manner, by means of the Incarnation of Word. This triple knowledge is accessible to man according to the stage he has reached in the spiritual hike: *the natural law* (φυσικοῦ νόμου), *the written law* (γραπτοῦ νόμου) and *the law of grace* (χάριτος νόμου). But, no matter how spiritually advanced we were, we shall never have a knowledge of God’s being (οὐσία), only of His manifestations, works. It is here where the patristic distinction between theology (θεολογία) and iconomy (οἰκονομία) steps in. In my opinion, in the comments to Maximus’ *Chapters*, I would have found essential the development of the distinction between *theology* and *iconomy* (as it appears right in the title suggested by Saint Maximus: *On Theology and on the Iconomy of the Incarnation of God’s Son*).

Taking into account the terminology suggested by the translator W.A. Prager, let us see to what the *gnosis* (γνώσις) from Maximus’ writing refers to. A specification must be remade here as well: the ‘Gnostic’ from patristic texts is clearly distinct from the Gnostic who believed that he can be saved only by knowledge (γνώσις) [21]. Church Fathers cannot imagine salvation outside Christ (John 14.6, 7). No matter how large our knowledge acquired in this world would be, without Christ everything is in vain: “Without Me, you cannot do anything!” (John 15.5). However, our effort to acquire the state of deification (θέωσις) is necessary, but it is not enough. For this reason, in Christianity it is fundamental the collaboration (συνεργεία) between divine grace and human facts. In this respect it may also be interpreted the statement of Saint Maximus: “it is said that God and man are models for each other (παραδείγματα)” [22]. “Φασί γαρ ἀλλήλων εἶναι παραδείγματα τον Θεόν και τον άνθρωπον” (“Dicunt enim inter se invicem esse paradigmata Deum et hominem”, Latin translation from PG 91, col. 1114 B). This very interesting formula of Maximus is commented by D. Stăniloae, who, at some point, states: “the expression that man is a paradigm of God sounds very bold” [22]. It is true that Maximus’ phrase “sounds very bold”, but Maximus sends here to a certain tradition when he mentions from the beginning “it is said that”. *Nihil sine Traditio*. On the other hand, D. Stăniloae notices the fact that the term ἀντιτυπούσα is frequently used

by Maximus and it refers to the one who refuses to shape himself after the divine pattern, choosing another model.

For a Church Father, we cannot know God if His grace did not come upon the connoisseur. In Saint Maximus' words, "the soul cannot ever reach to the knowledge of God, if God Himself, by His descend, would not allow to be touched by him and would not raise him to Himself" [5, p. 27]. How far, even opposed, is the statement of Saint Maximus regarding the standpoint of Gnostics, who thought that they could save themselves only through knowledge (γνῶσις): "knowledge makes you arrogant, but love builds" (1 Corinthians 8.1) [23].

A counter-argument may be invoked here, and this could be thus expressed: "only starting with XVIII century does the term 'Gnostic' names a follower of the wandering stigmatized by Paul the Apostle under the name of "gnosis with a false name" [18, p. 17] (1 Timothy 6, 20 "stepping away from empty and worldly speech and the oppositions of the false science" – "τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως"). However, as I have already mentioned, the fight between the true gnosis and the false gnosis is pretty ancient, almost as ancient as Christianity. According to certain authors, gnosis is "a pre-Christian movement whose main center was the school of Alexandria, where Hebrew Hellenized authors have combined Judaism with Greek philosophy" [24]. Against the background of "the crisis of Origen" (Hans Urs von Balthasar), can anyone think of a connection between Alexandria, gnosis, Origen and Maximus the Confessor? Definitely yes. There are ,speculative', ,insightful' spirits, which believe that by means of the texts of Origen, Maximus would have had access to a esoteric teaching. In reality, it seems that things were different, and Origen reacts when Celsus does not make the difference between Gnostics and Christians. "These are doctrines that do not belong to some Christians, but to some people totally unrelated to salvation." [25]

Saint Maximus is a representative example for this fight. The two types of 'Gnostics' are presented by Maximus through the notions of 'wise' and 'the one who seems wise' (1.28) [5, p. 23, 26]. Obviously, the fight of Saint Maximus is with this 'false gnosis (γνῶσις)'. Maximus' 'gnosis' is a *theo*-logical one. In Gabriel Bunge's words, "the distinctive characteristic of Christian gnosis is the fact that it has its basis on the personal existence of God and in the character of image of God of the personal existence of the creature. Gnosis is *and interpersonal process*" [18, p. 77].

The knowledge (γνῶσις) promoted by Maximus the Confessor is not a knowledge *about* God, but it always urges to a way of *life in Christ* (foreshadowing thus Saint Nicholas Cabasilas). In fact, the true knowledge of which Maximus is talking about is love (see *Κεφάλαια περὶ ἀγάπης*). I do not think that in Maximus' case it is applied the interpretative tradition of Augustinian origin, according to which you cannot love someone if you have not previously met him. In the case of Saint Confessor, the paradigm is backwards: if we cannot love, we cannot know. It is not about a knowledge in the normal sense of the term, but more of a communion. "This communion is made by

means of love, which is thus the unifying principle.” [26] Practically, for Saint Maximus knowledge (γνῶσις) and love (ἀγάπη) grow together, feed one another. Maximus’ statement comes thus as an extension of the ones said by Saint Paul the Apostle about love (1 Corinthians 13.1-13). Christ the Saviour Himself urges us to respect, first of all, these two commandments: “Love Lord your God with all your heart and with all thy soul and with all your strength and with your entire mind, and your neighbour as yourself” (Luke 10.27). I think that the tradition followed by Maximus leaves no room for ambiguities: “him who thus gained love, gained God Himself, since “God is love”” (1 John 4.16) [23, p. 113].

In *Epistle 12* (PG 91, col. 465 C), Saint Maximus says that: “to conceal the word of Truth means to deny it”. Here is a reason for which tradition gave him the name of Confessor of Christ. Somewhere else, Maximus urges us: “do not easily deny spiritual love, because there is no other way left for people for salvation” [23, p. 102]. For Maximus, love (ἀγάπη) is beyond knowledge (γνῶσις) [Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, 10, PG 91, col. 1153 BC]. Jean-Claude Larchet says in this respect that “love is not for Maximus as it is for Evagrius a stage of the spiritual life that prepares the gnosis [...], but a state that subsists till the peak of the spiritual life and of definitive manner” [19, p. 482].

It is very true that for Saint Maximus “knowledge is double: on the one hand, it is of scientifically nature and, only as habit, it collects the principles of makings, without being of any use, unless it extends till the work of commandments; on the other hand, as an act, it is practical, bringing, by experimenting the makings, the true understanding” (1.22) [5, p. 24]; which means that, ultimately, the true knowledge in the vision of the Confessor adds up to respecting John’s verses: “And in this we know that we knew Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 John 2.3).

The fight between Gnostics and the Fathers of Church was real and represented a decisive moment in the formation of Christian dogma. In order to leave no room for any ambiguity, I believe that the translator of Maximus’ text – W.A. Prager – should have, at least in a note, mentioned this distinction between the two ways of understanding ‘gnosis’.

4. Saint Maximus exegesis

In the 3rd section of this text, I wonder if it can be justified the interpretation of Maximus’ writings outside the tradition in which they have been created. Saint Maximus himself gives us an answer in this respect, in the Prologue for *Chapters on Love*: “please take note with great insistence at each chapter. For I believe not all of them are easily understood by everyone, but most of them lack a joint research from many, although they seem easy after word” [23, p. 50]. The individual effort on which Gnosticism relies has no validity in this case described by Saint Maximus. In his time, Saint Irenaeus of Lyons (approx. 130-202) claims that the entire “Gnosticism is subject to the caprices of the individual” [Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus haereses*, II, 27,

1; PG 6, col. 802].

This joint research – ‘a joint research on behalf of many’ – (with the ones present or with those from the same tradition) of the text is in contrast with the ‘apparent simplicity of the chapters’ of Maximus. The interpreter of these chapters must go beyond the first sense, the literary one, of the text and to penetrate the deeper sense of it. After all, these chapters are nothing else but a guide in the spiritual hike. Maximus’ chapters are not ‘esoteric’ [5, p. 13], i.e. accessible only for some initiated persons, but to all of those engaged in the spiritual hiking. By means of the formula ‘a joint research on behalf of many’, the less practiced ones in the spiritual life are not excluded, on the contrary. Especially those on an inferior step of the spiritual hiking must be guided in the understanding of such difficult texts by the ones with more spiritual experience. The reader was always supervised by a certain exegetic community. I.e., without the recourse to tradition you could not have read, let alone interpret. Nobody read withdrawn, in solitude, a particular text, not even Jesus (Luke 4.16-20). In those times there was a real ritual of the lecture in common [27].

In what the interpretation of texts is concerned [28-30], Saint Maximus is closer to the model frequently encountered in the Alexandrian school, which emphasized especially the allegorical interpretation (ἀλληγορία). In my opinion, Maximus goes further, as he could be seen as the supporter of *anagogical* (ἀναγωγή) interpretation [53]. “Read for the spiritual benefit” urges us Maximus the Confessor in the prologue to *Chapters on Love*. Regarding the anagogical (spiritual) sense in Saint Maximus’ texts, see, among others, *Mystagogy*, chapter VI: “How and in what way is the Holy Scripture as well called man?” [31], “it is better to make higher efforts and always ask God to gives us wisdom and power to understand the entire spiritual Scripture (πρὸς τὸ πᾶσαν νοηθῆναι πνευματικῶς τὴν γραφήν)” (cf. *Q. Thal.*, 38, PG 90, col. 389 B; CCSG 22, p. 255. 8-9 ; Ibid., 52, CCSG 7, p. 417. 32-38; Ibid., 65, PG 90, coll. 749 D–752 A; see also *Ambigua* 10, PG 91, coll. 1129 D–1131 A). It must be made here the specification that *anagogic* does not mean “interprétation allégorique”, nor “de manière allégorique”; *allegorical* and *anagogic* refers to two different plans. If the anagogical and the allegorical interpretations were identical, then it would not have been justified *the doctrine of four interpretations (or meanings)*. Latins were exact enough in the differentiation of the four meanings when they were stating: “littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia” [32]. I mention the fact that the term *anagogic* does not appear in Robert Maltby *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies*, ARCA Papers and Monographs 25, Leeds, 1991, or in *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968.

“Maximus inherited from Alexandrians and partially from Saint Dionysius Areopagite the conception of Scripture interpretation as ἀναγωγή, spiritual hiking.” [33] In the texts of Dionysius Areopagite the term ἀναγωγή appears in *CH*, 121 C; 137 B; 145 B2; 180 C; 237 C; 260 BC; 261 A; 273 C; 304 D; 337 D; 340 A; *EH*, 376 D; 377 A; 392 A; 397 C; 401 C; 429 D; 436 C; 441 B; 473 B; 477 B; 501 C; 504 C; 513 D; 536 BC2; 557 C; 565 C; 568 C2; *DN*, 709 C;

ἀναγωγή only in *CH*, 140 A; ἀναγωγικός, - ὤς in *CH*, 121 AB2; 137 BC; 196 C; 205 C; 332 BD; 336 C; *EH*, 481 A2; 516 B; 532 C; *DN*, 696 A; ἀναγωγός in *CH*, 301 B; 333 B; *EH*, 441; *DN*, 712 C [16].

According to Hilarion Alfeyev, “the term (ἀναγωγή) comes from Philon and it is used in the *Areopagitic corpus* for the allegorical interpretation of the Scripture” [33]. It is very possible that this term comes from Philon, however, it is not correct the statement according to which the term ἀναγωγή is used for the allegorical interpretation of Scripture. The statement from above of Hilarion Alfeyev is even harder to understand as in the same note (3 from p. 60) he says, starting from a text of P. Sherwood [34], that Maximus the Confessor prefers the term ἀναγωγή to ἀλληγορία [29, p. 184].

Without any doubt, anagogy is not to be found only in Christian East. “The culture of the early Middle Ages remains essentially anagogical, i.e. mainly oriented towards the Other Part, to heavenly Jerusalem. But, unlike, maybe, the case of earlier patristic period, the anagogy of Middle Ages is strongly *structure*.” [35] Clearly, anagogy is not just a simple way of interpretation as it happens in the case of literary, moral or allegorical interpretation [32]. “The allegorical sense suppresses the literary sense, while the anagogical sense does not suppress this sense, but it accompanies and completes it by adding a higher idea.” [36] The anagogical sense represents the core of Christian interpretation, completely involving the person of the engaged one in the spiritual hike. For a monk, exegesis was not an academic one, scholastic, but it was based on every day experience.

I considered it necessary, this short trip on anagogy in order to understand Maximus’ way of interpretation, foreign today to most of us. I believe that Maximus’ exegesis represents a relevant argument in favour of the distinction, clear enough for some, between a certain Gnostic sect and patristic tradition. Sometimes, texts meet us on the way to Damascus.

5. Comparative analysis of translations

Even in a culture such as ours, where we have several translators of the texts of Maximus, I wonder to what extent the language used by them could be unitary. At a first look, both D. Stăniloae, as well as Ioan I. Ică jr. follow, to a certain extend, the tradition inaugurated in our cultural space by the school of Paisius from Neamț. A tradition that is indissociably linked to the Philokalian spirit and the Eastern Orthodoxy, which it had represented. On the other hand, the terminology used by W.A. Prager seems to me different from the one already implanted for us in the translation of patristic texts. In this last section of this text I shall try to argue this thesis turning to some examples.

A first analysis regards the relation of the translation suggested by W. A. Prager with the original text. Because of editorial constraints it is impossible for me to analyze here the entire effort of translator made by W.A. Prager. I will reduce myself only to one of the most significant terms of Maximus’ writing: γνῶσις. As far as I could notice, checking certain places from the original Greek,

W.A. Prager does not translate uniformly in Romanian the Greek γνῶσις and the family of this term. It usually is translated by 'gnosis', but also by 'knowledge' (sometimes even inside the same chapter, as it is for example 1, 61). I wonder, however, which is the criterion used by the translator in order to equalize the same Greek term (γνῶσις) with two notions which do not always have an identical significance? It is very possible that the term 'gnosis' refers to a 'superior knowledge', while the notion of 'knowledge' sends only to a 'simple knowledge'. The unity of which I was talking about somewhere above seems impossible to find not even in the same translator.

In the second stage of my analysis I shall invoke only few examples of the two translations published in Romanian (W.A. Prager and D. Stăniloae) of Maximus' writing: *Capita theologica et oeconomica*, to which I add, for comparison, other translations of the same text in modern languages (English, French, German, Italian): 1. γνῶσεως χώραν translated by 'the land of gnosis' (1, 53), and D.S. by 'land of knowledge' [37-41]; 2. γνῶσιν translated by 'gnosis' (1, 55), and D.S. by 'knowledge' [37; 38, p. 251; 40, p. 621; 41]; 3. Ὁ γνωστικός by 'the Gnostic' (1, 63), and D.S. by "the one who is engaged in knowledge (the Gnostic)" [37, p. 126; 38, p. 252; 40, p. 627; 41, p. 126]; 4. τῆς γνῶσεως translated by 'knowledge' (1, 72), and D.S. by 'knowledge' [37, p. 128; 38, p. 254; 40, p. 630; 41, p. 128]; in the same chapter, W.A. Prager translates πνευματικὴν γνῶσιν by 'spiritual knowledge', and D.S. by 'spiritual knowledge'; 5. τῷ γνωστικῷ translated by 'the Gnostic' (1, 78), and D.S. by "the one who reached the step of knowledge" (and in a added note "the Gnostic") [37, p. 129; 38, p. 255; 40, p. 580; 41, p. 129]; 6. W.A. Prager translates τῆς γνῶσεως by 'knowledge', and γνωστικῶς by 'Gnostic', and this happens in the same chapter (1, 80); things are the same also in the case of D.S., who translates by 'knowledge' and 'Gnostic' [37, p. 131; 38, p. 256; 41, p. 131]; 7. τοῦς γνωστικούς translated by 'the Gnostics' (1, 97), and D.S. by "the ones from the step of knowledge" [37, p. 135; 38, p. 260; 41, p. 134]; 8. γνωστικός translated by 'the Gnostic' (2, 17), and D.S. by "the one who is on the step of knowledge" [37, p. 141]; 9. ὀρθῆς γνώσεως translated by "the right knowledge" (2, 98), and D.S. by "right knowledge"; and in the same chapter: γνωστικὴν ἐπιστήμην is translated by "Gnostic science" (2, 98), and D.S. by "understanding knowledge" (correctly I think it would be *the understanding of knowledge*) [37, p. 163; 40, p. 557; 41, p. 164]; 10. Λόγου γνῶσιν translated by "gnosis of Word" (2, 76), and D.S. by "knowledge of Word"; 11. γνωστικὴν φιλοσοφίαν translated by "philosophy of gnosis" (2, 94), and D.S. by "philosophy of knowledge".

6. Conclusions

What conclusions can we draw from all these comparisons?

First of all, it is clear that W.A. Prager prefers translating γνῶσις (and the family of this term) by 'gnosis' and sometimes by 'knowledge'. On the other side, Father D. Stăniloae translates γνῶσις by 'knowledge' and γνωστικός by

“the one who is engaged in knowledge (the Gnostic)”. Even if, in a certain measure, it can be felt the influence of H.U. von Balthasar in the translation of D. Stăniloae as well, he uses with a certain reserve the term ‘Gnostic’, most of the times in parentheses. D. Stăniloae, both in the translation, but especially in the notes of Maximus’ *Chapters*, uses the term ‘gnosis, the gnosis, of the gnosis’ four times (‘knowledge of God’ (the gnosis), note in chapter 1, 20; “any knowledge of God (gnosis) is by grace”, note to chapter 1, 31; “knowledge (gnosis)”, note to 2, 6; “place of the gnosis”, note to 2, 45), “the Gnostic” six times (“the one who is engaged in knowledge (the Gnostic)” – 1, 36; “the one who advanced to secret knowledge (the Gnostic)” – 1, 61; “the one who is engaged in knowledge (the Gnostic)” – 1, 63; “the Gnostic, the one who advanced up to the last step of the experience of God’s resurrection in him”, note to 1, 63; “the one who reached the step of knowledge” (in footnote: “the Gnostic”) – 1, 78; “knowledge of the Gnostic”, note to 2, 16), once “Gnostic” (“Gnostic view” – 1, 80) and once “Gnostic” (chapters). D. Stăniloae translates the title of the second hundred thus: “The Second Hundred of the Gnostic Chapters”, faithfully presenting the title from *PG* “ΕΚΑΤΟΝΤΑΣ Β' ΓΝΩΣΤΙΚΑ ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΑ” (Latin translation in *Migne* edition: “Centena Iterum Gnostica Capita” – *PG* 90, col. 1123). It is one of the few places from the translation of Father D. Stăniloae where he prefers to directly translate by the term ‘Gnostic’. In the logic of his translation up to this point, he could have very well translated thus: “The Second Hundred of the Chapters on Knowledge (Gnostic)”.

As it can be noticed, with three exceptions (the last ones in my enumeration), Father D. Stăniloae never uses the term ‘gnosis’ or ‘Gnostic’ isolated, but always between parentheses, following ‘knowledge’ or “to the one who has reached the step of knowledge”. The caution of using the terms ‘gnosis’, ‘Gnostic’, ‘the Gnostic’ in the translation of Father D. Stăniloae is obvious.

However, a careful reader of the translation made by D. Stăniloae may reasonably ask: to what extent can you consider as incorrect the translation of the term γνῶσις by ‘gnosis’ while the most important representative of Romanian theological tradition sometimes justifies this translation? Following the model of the editions published in West (*Corpus Christianorum; Sources chrétiennes*), I think that the only solution remains the justification of this option through at least one note. W.A. Prager, and not even D. Stăniloae, does not do this. The influence of H.U. von Balthasar is obvious in both cases, but the ambiguity that penetrates into the Romanian translation of Maximus’ text cannot be attributed to the Catholic theologian.

Even if D. Stăniloae uses in the translation of Maximus’ writing the term ‘Gnostic’, not for one moment does he give the impression that he would have mixed the two traditions: patristic and Gnostic. For Father D. Stăniloae, ‘the Gnostic’ is ‘the one who reached the step of knowledge’. I think that not even in the case of a simple translation tradition cannot be ignored, and D. Stăniloae is one of the most important representatives of the Romanian theological tradition.

Sometimes tradition is much more important than the equalizations more or less appropriate suggested by some translators. Being careful too much at letters, we could lose from sight the spirit, the message of that text. It is true that we cannot read without letters, but we cannot either remain only to the first sense offered by it (the literary sense). In the writing that we are taking into account and to support the ones stated above, Saint Maximus says that “opinions are born from the attention given only to the letter of Scripture” (2, 75, translator D. Stăniloae). A written text, translated, according to ‘opinion’ clearly differs from a written text, translated in the spirit of a particular tradition.

Coming back to our comparison, we must mention that W.A. Prager does not translate in accordance with the tradition of theological language imposed to us. If it is right or not, whether or not it is dangerous for those who have a precarious theological training, each of us may decide depending on purposes and abilities.

Secondly, it is easy to seize from the notes above the fact that the translators of Maximus’ text in Italian and English totally avoid the term *Gnostic* (and its family), which is pretty ambiguous. Nor in the Latin translation from *Migne* edition that accompanies Maximus’ text does the term ‘Gnostic’ appear, but with one exception – the title of the second hundred – ‘Centena Iterum Gnostica Capita’ – PG 90, col. 1123. Certainly, the Italian translators and the English ones have understood best the danger that it represents this term introduced in the translation of a Philokalian writing.

“The genius of Orthodoxy is Philokalian.” [42] Whatever we would say, Saint Maximus is a Philokalian Father. As we have seen in one of the notes above, Saint Maximus’ texts are part of all the editions of *Philokalia*. Philokalian texts represent “a lively way” [43], which offers a *spiritual experience* to those who, in their searches, meet all kinds of obstacles and difficulties. Such a language used for translating Maximus’ texts seems to me unnatural and inconsistent with the tradition to which Saint Confessor was part of. A translation using philosophical terminology, ‘esoteric’, may be interesting, but doesn’t it obturates the sense of a Philokalian text, as it is the one of Maximus? Another example that strengthens my conviction that W.A. Prager translates Maximus’ text by using a philosophical terminology, mostly, is the following: the Greek οὐσία is translated when by ‘essence’, when by ‘substance’, without explaining why he chooses this option clearly philosophical.

In the end of the conclusions drawn from the comparisons made, it must be noticed the decisive influence of H.U. von Balthasar on the majority of translators of the texts of Maximus. I believe however, that the most faithful follower of the Catholic theologian, at least in the translation of this text of Maximus, is A. Riou. ‘The school’ inaugurated by Balthasar continues to fascinate even today. In my opinion, W.A. Prager seems to prefer the model of translation suggested by Hans Urs von Balthasar, as well as his comments.

Publishing the translation of Maximus' text to Herald publishing house does not seem randomly to me. In the opinion of some, *Gnostic Chapters* fits perfectly in the editorial plan of this publishing house, which aims at publishing especially texts from the fields of: "spirituality, religion, theology, philosophy of culture, esoteric" [44-49]. The difference would lie only in the following fact: 'the Gnostic' from Maximus' texts is completely stranger to the Gnostic from the texts of Ophites or Naessens. Paul the Apostle stated in this respect: "for it will come a time when they will not like anymore the healthy teaching, but – willing to delight their hearing – they shall gather teachers according to their will, and they will turn away their hearing from the truth and they will divert towards fairytales" (1 Timothy 4.3 - 4).

Without any doubt, each translates as he knows and according to the aims he has settled. Reading the translation made by W.A. Prager and the conditions in which it was published (Herald publishing house), I wonder: did the Romanian translator wanted to make from Saint Maximus' writing a Gnostic text or, simply, this is how he perceives Maximus' text, as being a Gnostic one? The presumption of good faith encourages us to state that the second version is the real one.

Toward the end of these lines, there must be mentioned also the comments of W.A. Prager which accompany the *Chapters on Knowledge*, that are very consistent and deserve the entire attention from the reader. As it can be noticed, the notes signed by W. A. Prager are twice as large as Maximus' text translated in this volume. Something absolutely outstanding.

As it is normal, the interpretations suggested in these comments are strongly connected to the bibliography. The bibliography used in this volume is at page 284 and includes only 10 titles, among which at least five of them have nothing to do directly with the subject. But how are connected the comments and the bibliography? Personally, I see no other answer but this: having insufficient bibliographical information, you are left with nothing else but to take on your account the explanation of the difficult chapters of Maximus. Something absolutely praiseworthy, but in patristic hermeneutics things were completely different. And Saint Maximus is an example in this respect as well: "[...] neither these are the fruits of my thinking. But, crossing the writings of the Holy Fathers, and taking from there what is related to our theme, I have stuffed many things in few words, so that they can be easily remembered" [23, p. 50]. For this reason, I do not understand very clearly either the statement of H.-G. Beck, who calls Maximus "the last independent thinker of Byzantine Church" [50]. What does it mean for a Church Father to be an "independent thinker"? The answer is offered by Maximus the Confessor in the lines above.

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