

contributions for the overall project. As a result of those extended opportunities for personal interaction, an essay on a particular theme often refers to and interacts with one or several other such contributors, giving the whole book a happy sense of inter-relatedness not often found in such a collective work.

To its credit, this is not always an easy book to read. It presents challenging facts and sometimes abstruse theories. Equally to its credit, this is always an interesting book to read for Jesuits and others alike, a help to understanding our several pasts, our present circumstances, and our yet-to-be lived-out futures in an increasingly globalized world.

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Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World. By Paul M. Blowers. *Christian Theology in Context.* Oxford: Oxford University, 2016. Pp. 367. \$110.

Blower's latest study on Maximus secures his place among the foremost scholars of the Confessor's life and thought. Published in a series that highlights the social, cultural, historical, and political background of seminal Christian thinkers, B. depicts Maximus as a figure "betwixt and between" in a society itself "betwixt and between" different historical epochs and competing imperial forces. While B. explores the range of influences on Maximus's thought, he maintains throughout that the Maximian synthesis is a genuine innovation that cannot be reduced to its contexts.

The book comprises four parts: "Backgrounds," "The Cosmic Landscapes of Maximus' Theology," "Maximus' Vision for the Transfigured Creation," and "Maximus' Afterlife East and West," with a brief epilogue. While attending to the multiple perspectives in Maximus's "kaleidoscopic approach" (194), B. returns to common themes, especially the christocentric economy at the heart of the Confessor's theology as well as his emergence as a public figure in the imperial and doctrinal struggles of his time.

"Backgrounds" focuses on the tumult facing seventh-century Byzantium as Maximus rose to prominence during the reign of Heraclius. The early period of Maximus's career witnessed the emperor's struggle to confront major internal conflicts within Constantinople and to repel threats from Persian forces in the East and Germanic tribes in the West. As B. notes, despite the chaos of his life and times, Maximus rarely mentions contemporary personalities and events. Rather, he works to weave a seemingly timeless vision of the cosmos and the human person, drawing on threads from the treasury of the Christian tradition in a "scholastic" synthesis.

B. challenges readings that interpret Maximus's scholasticism as a reflection of the empire's ideological quest for a "total discourse" (65, quoting Averil Cameron). Thus, B. contrasts Maximus's writings with the poetry of George of Pisidia, who

shares many of Maximus's theological commitments but who develops a largely political eschatology that understands the reign of Heraclius as the climax of the Christian imperial consciousness. Maximus's relative silence on political matters suggests that his own "cosmo-politeian" vision is fixed on the participation of all creatures "in the new, unprecedented *politeia* of Jesus Christ" (131). To be sure, B.'s focus on the inner coherence and the christocentrism of Maximus's thought means that, after the initial contextualization, the study contains relatively few references to Maximus's sociopolitical milieu. While readers of the Oxford series might expect more explicit links to the historical circumstances of Maximus's theology, B. argues convincingly that an exaggerated focus on context hinders our appreciation of Maximus's synthetic originality.

For B., Maximus is always negotiating a range of influences and authorities: he is at once a monk deeply influenced by Evagrius and Origen, a Chalcedonian committed to the christological formulations professed by the ecumenical councils, an exegete who understands sacred Scripture as an interplay of "intimacy and elusion" (86), and a philosopher with debts to Plato and Aristotle, all of which he interprets through a "Neo-Irenaeian" perspective that sees the "Wondrous Exchange" enacted at the Incarnation in the center of the cosmic plan. The result is a well-balanced integration of the sometimes-conflicting depictions of Maximus that have emerged in scholarship in the past 60 years.

Indeed, B. himself aims to mediate an array of scholarly views. With a dedication that signals his debt to the pioneers in modern Maximus scholarship, B. returns often to Sergius Epifanovich, Polycarp Sherwood, Jean-Luc Marion, Lars Thunberg, and, in particular, Hans Urs von Balthasar. Although he often corrects some of Balthasar's excessively Hegelian readings of Maximus, B. himself presents Maximus's vision in "theodramatic" terms and draws attention to the dialectical features of the Maximian corpus, according to which God's transcendence is ever at "play" in the immanent elevation of creation.

The final chapter, on Maximus's *Nachleben*, offers a compelling argument for Maximus's role "betwixt and between" the mutual alienation of Greek East and Latin West; Maximus, a mediator in his own time, should mediate again in confessional dispute. B. also indicates future applications of Maximus's thought to ecological theology and virtue ethics, thus providing guidance for a rising generation of Maximus scholars.

B. writes in a clear and elegant style, and the editing is of a high quality. Future printing might supply the helpful diagrams of Maximus's categories in a larger font size so that they are accessible to the reader. Still, the monograph should become a standard resource for students of Maximus, Byzantium, and early Christian thought. Because of B.'s attention to Maximus as a synthesizer, the volume could also accompany general introductions to patristic theology.

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