



FREE CHOICE
in
ST. MAXIMUS
The CONFESSOR

Joseph P. Farrell, D. Phil (Oxon).

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With a forward by
His Grace the Right Reverend
Kallistos (Ware)
Bishop of Diokleia

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To

Stephen E. Johnson:
friend and godson:

“Ὡστε ἀδελφὸς μου ἀγαπητὸ καὶ ἐπιπόθητο,
χαρὰ καὶ στέφανός μου, οὕτως στήκε ἐν κυρίῳ, ἀγαπητέ.

Acknowledgments

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It goes without saying that if it were not for the sacrifices of my parents this work would not have seen the light of day. It also goes without saying that this work in no way compares to the measure of their generosity.

Joseph P. Farrell
Feast of the Holy Ascension, 1988
Topeka, Kansas

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Forward

St Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) is without doubt one of the most outstanding Fathers of the Eastern Church - indeed, one of the greatest thinkers in the whole history of Christianity. His writings embrace almost all the major themes of Christian theology: the Trinity, the doctrine of creation, the human person as microcosm and mediator, Christ as the centre of history, the sacraments, the ascetic and mystical life. His crucial significance has become ever more manifest in the past twenty-five years, but hitherto little has been written about him in English, apart from two fundamental volumes by Dr. Lars Thunberg. The present work by Dr. Joseph Farrell forms a notable addition to the existing English bibliography.

Dr. Farrell's work is concerned with a central element in the doctrinal synthesis of the Confessor: his understanding of human free choice. St Maximus was *par excellence* a theologian of freedom - the human freedom of Christ, the human freedom given to each of us. Dr. Farrell inquires more specifically how, according to St. Maximus, it is possible for the redeemed in Heaven to possess a genuine possibility of choice, even though all their choices will be good. This is a topic of basic importance for any appreciation of Maximus, yet one to which little detailed study has so far been devoted.

Central to Dr. Farrell's argument is St. Maximus' notion of a multiplicity of divine principles or energies in Heaven. He contrasts this with the conception of divine simplicity to be found in the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and Origen. At the end of his work he also attempts a fascinating comparison between St. Maximus and St. Augustine, referring here to Western disputes concerning free will and predestination. Without claiming to deal exhaustively with this last subject, he indicates some highly promising avenues for future discussion.

There are various ways of approaching St. Maximus. In opposition to much recent Maximian scholarship, Dr. Farrell believes that he is best regarded as a precursor of the great Byzantine theologian St. Gregory Palamas, rather than of Thomas Aquinas. This is not a view that all specialists will readily accept, but Dr. Farrell has argued his case with lucidity and force. He

possesses a penetrating and creative mind, and he is gifted with unusual powers of analysis and insight. St. Maximus is a difficult thinker, and Dr. Farrell does not gloss over the difficulties; but he has the ability to handle a vast and highly complex theme with sensitivity and dialectical skill.

This new study of St. Maximus deserves to be read with close attention by all who are concerned with Patristic Studies or with Orthodox theology. As a work of careful scholarship and genuine originality, it makes a significant contribution to our understanding of St. Maximus the Confessor.

+ Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia
University of Oxford
26 January 1989

PART ONE