

ABSTRACT

DOCTORATE DISSERTATION THESIS: THE PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE ASCENSION IN THE *QUAESTIONES AD THALASSIUM* BY MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how within the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* the monk *Massimo the Confessor's* reasoning is structured in two different perspectives: practical philosophy and mystical ascension. The idea behind this type of research is determined by two needs: the first one, obvious and tangible, is based on the scarceness of thorough studies on this worthy philosopher and theologian, whom for a long time was only considered for his suggestive critical interpretation of the Holy Writ; the second one, however, a deeper one, aims to demonstrate how Massimo's work is characterised by a complex and articulate philosophic framework, which the following research aims to illustrate.

In order to obtain a complete study which would render the complexity characterising the monk, the first part of the research *Massimo the Confessor-theologian and philosopher* focuses on the monk's personality and its various aspects, by revisiting under a historiographic light his life's most significant events within their specific historic context (Ch. 1) and by reconstructing what could be considered an ideal *corpus* of his authentic works (Ch. 2). It seems easy to deduct that, when analysing Massimo's work and in order to understand its time of writing and its contents, two complimentary approaches can be used: the chronological and the historic-doctrinal one. Each one of his works has been synoptically analysed together with a list of the different editions and translations into the modern tongue. Considering the scarceness of scientific studies which specifically focus on the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, the aim of this thesis is to provide the reader with a genesis of his work in order to trace the overall conceptual structure which sustains the whole study (Ch. 3).

In the second part of the study, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium an ethical and ascetic essay*, the objective is to demonstrate how his work is actually a pedagogic essay, in which Massimo's aim is to indicate to his interlocutor Talassio the road to mystical ascension. Within the ἀποκρίσεις, as a matter of fact, lie three fundamental elements: the ethical element, the contemplative one, and the theological one, which articulate themselves, in the dialectic πρᾶξις-θεωρία-θεολογία. The essay is therefore primarily aimed to the follower, whose fundamental aspiration needs to be the mystic experience. Through the analysis of the three dimensions (Ch. 1) mentioned earlier, we have illustrated how Massimo is able to progress from the ethic to the contemplative dimension in order to finally reach an understanding of divine reality in a theological context. As a matter of fact the Christian's main objective is the ascension to perfection, which is made possible by an authentic and active relationship with God. In all of the Confessor's works, and in the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* in particular, the mystical ascension is indicated as feasible for man as he

was created «in His own image and likeness» and determined in his own authentic essence by the logos-tropos relationship (Ch. 2). Within this perspective, the understanding of the actual ontological structure of the universe leads to realising how divinisation, the ultimate objective of ascension, is possible for man. Through divinisation, man can recognise himself in both Adam and Christ, and conceive himself as a mediator for a cosmic liturgy, which returns man to the Creator according to His original design. This dissertation thesis, therefore, questions Massimo the Confessor through his works, particularly the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, in order to demonstrate how the monk was a philosopher as well as a theologian, and how he focused his reflections on man's authentic essence.