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# Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor

*Mika Kalevi Törönen*

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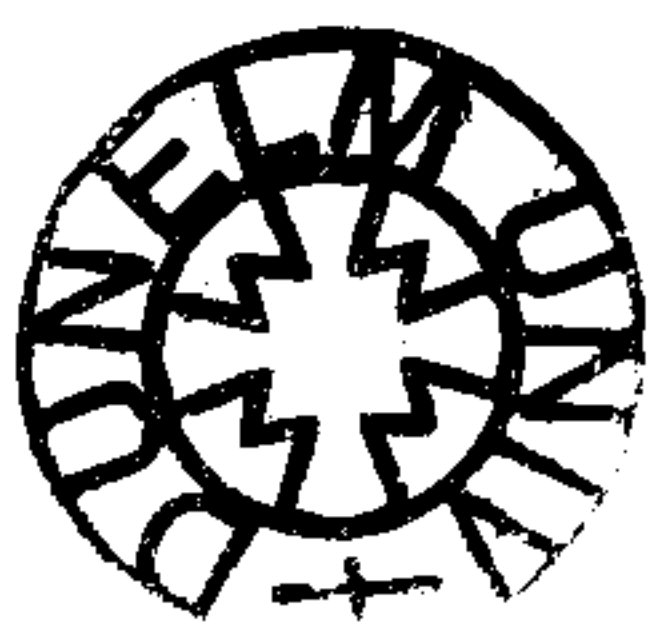
PhD Thesis

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Department of Theology

2002

- 7 NOV 2003



# Abstract

MIKA TÖRÖNEN

## UNION AND DISTINCTION IN THE THOUGHT OF ST MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR

PhD, 2002

The present study examines the principle of simultaneous unity and differentiation in the thought of St Maximus the Confessor (580-662). This principle pervades every area of Maximus' theology, and can be summarized in the following way: things united remain distinct and without confusion in an inseparable union.

Part one introduces the logical tools and the metaphors by means of which Maximus presents his thought. Parts two and three examine the way in which Maximus views unity and difference in the Trinity and in Christ. The distinction between the universal and the particular, expressed in terms of essence (or nature) and hypostasis (or person), proves fundamental for a correct interpretation of Maximus' theology. Maximus' dyophysite Christology includes topics on natural difference and number, composite hypostasis, will and activity, and culminates in the notions of 'union without confusion' and '*perichoresis*'.

In part four, the common denominator is that God is the principle of unity behind the multiplicity in the universe, Scripture and the Church. The contingent functions as a prism which makes the divine accessible to human beings. There is movement, in a perspective of eschatological fulfilment, from and through the multiplicity of the visible things to the unity of the invisible.

Finally, part five discusses Maximus' understanding of unity of virtue and commandments under the all-embracing generic virtue of love, and how breaking or keeping the twofold commandment of love affects the unity of humanity. Spiritual love, which results from the mind's detachment from the realm of sense-perception and its ascent to God, functions as an antidote to self-love (which is confounding and fragmenting) and effects unification both at the level of the individual and at the level of the humanity as a whole, a unification which is the realization of the twofold commandment of love.

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## **Declaration concerning the use of previously submitted material**

In chapters 4, 8 and 9 of the thesis, I have made use of a very limited amount of material drawn from a dissertation (max. 10.000 words) submitted in this University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Theological Research.

Signed: 

Mika Törönen



## Acknowledgements

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## The Works of St Maximus

<i>Ambig.</i>	<i>Ambiguorum liber</i> , ( <i>Ambig. Thom.</i> 1-5) CCSG 48, 3-34; ( <i>Ambig. Ioh.</i> 6-71) PG 91, 1061-1417
<i>Anim.</i>	<i>Opusculum de anima</i> , PG 91, 353-361
<i>Ascet.</i>	<i>Liber asceticus</i> , CCSG 40
<i>Cap. x</i>	<i>Capita x</i> [= <i>Diversa capita</i> I, 16-25], PG 90, 1185-1189
<i>Cap. xv</i>	<i>Capita xv</i> [= <i>Diversa capita</i> I, 1-15], PG 90, 1177-1185
<i>Cap. theol.</i>	<i>Capitum theologicorum et oeconomicorum duae centuriae</i> , PG 90, 1084-1173
<i>Carit.</i>	<i>Capita de caritate quattuor centuriae</i> , PG 90, 960-1073
<i>Disp. Biz.</i>	<i>Disputatio Bizyae cum Theodosio</i> , CCSG 39, 73-151
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i> (1-45), PG 91, 361-650
<i>Ep. sec. Th.</i>	<i>Epistula secunda ad Thomam</i> , CCSG 48, 37-49
<i>Ep. Anast.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Anastasium monachum</i> , CCSG 39, 161-163
<i>Exp. Ps. 59</i>	<i>Expositio in Psalmum lix</i> , CCSG 23, 3-22
<i>Myst.</i>	<i>Mystagogia</i> , Soteropoulos 1993 <sup>2</sup> [= PG 91, 657-717]
<i>Opusc.</i>	<i>Opuscula theologica et polemica</i> (1-27), PG 91, 9-285
<i>Or. dom.</i>	<i>Expositio orationis dominicae</i> , CCSG 23, 27-73
<i>Pyrr.</i>	<i>Disputatio cum Pyrrho</i> , PG 91, 288-353
<i>Qu. dub.</i>	<i>Quaestiones et dubia</i> , CCSG 10
<i>Qu. Thal.</i>	<i>Quaestiones ad Thalassium</i> , CCSG 7 and 22
<i>Qu. Theop.</i>	<i>Quaestiones ad Theopemptum</i> , PG 90, 1393-1400
<i>Rel. mot.</i>	<i>Relatio motionis</i> , CCSG 39, 13-51



## Abbreviations

ABAW.PH	Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Abteilung, Neue Folge (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1929ff.)
ACO	Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum (Straßburg—Leipzig—Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, series prima 1914ff., series secunda 1984ff.)
ACPhQ	<i>American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly</i>
AHDL	<i>Archives d'histoire doctrinales et littéraire du moyen âge</i>
<i>Aristotle Transformed</i>	<i>Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence</i> , edited by R. Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1990)
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CAG	Commentaria in Aristotelem graeca (Berlin: Busse, 1891-1903)
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, cont. mediaevalis (Turnhout: Brepols)
CCSG	Corpus Christianorum, ser. graeca (Turnhout: Brepols, 1977ff.)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, ser. latina (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953ff.)
ChH	<i>Church History</i>
CM	<i>Classica et Mediaevalia</i>
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum Christianorum orientalium (Louvain: L. Durbecq)
<i>Doctrina patrum</i>	<i>Doctrina patrum de incarnatione verbi. Ein griechisches Florilegium aus der Wende des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts</i> , first edited by Franz Diekamp in 1907, second and revised edition by B. Phanourgakis and E. Chrysos (Münster: Aschendorff, 1981)
ÉOr	<i>Échos d'Orient</i>
GNO	Gregorii Nysseni Opera, general editor Werner Jaeger (Leiden: E.J. Brill)
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
GSC	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1897ff.)
JThS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
JÖB	<i>Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
Loeb	The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1912ff.
MO	<i>Le Messenger Orthodoxe</i>
OCT	Oxford Classical Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press)
OCA	Orientalia Christiana Analecta (Rome: PIOS, 1935ff.)

<i>OCP</i>	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i>
<i>PBR</i>	<i>Patristic and Byzantine Review</i>
<i>PG</i>	Patrologia cursus completus, series graeca (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1857-1904)
<i>Philohistôr</i>	<i>Philohistôr. Miscellanea in honorem Caroli Laga septuagenarii</i> , edited by A. Schoors and P. van Deun (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1994)
<i>PL</i>	Patrologia cursus completus, series latina (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1844-1864)
<i>PTS</i>	Patristische Texte und Studien (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1964ff.)
<i>RAM</i>	<i>Revue d'ascétique et de mystique</i>
<i>RDCCIF</i>	<i>Recherches et débats du Centre Catholique des Intellectuels Français</i>
<i>REB</i>	<i>Revue des Études Byzantines</i>
<i>REG</i>	<i>Revue des Études Grecques</i>
<i>RevSR</i>	<i>Revue des sciences religieuses</i>
<i>RHE</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique</i>
<i>RMPH</i>	<i>Rheinisches Museum für Philologie</i>
<i>RSPHTh</i>	<i>Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques</i>
<i>RThAM</i>	<i>Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale</i>
<i>RTL</i>	<i>Revue théologique de Louvain</i>
<i>SC</i>	Sources Chrétiennes (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1941ff.)
<i>ScE</i>	<i>Science et Esprit</i> , Montréal
<i>SE</i>	<i>Sacris erudiri</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
<i>SVThQ</i>	<i>Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>Symposium</i>	<i>Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur. Fribourg, 2-5 septembre 1980</i> , edited by F. Heinzer and Ch. von Schönborn (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1982)
<i>TU</i>	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte altchristlichen Literatur (Leipzig—Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1882ff.)
<i>VCh</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>



## INTRODUCTION

THE HOLY TRINITY, Christ, the universe, the Church, Scripture, humanity and virtue, each of these constitutes a reality which is at once both united and distinct. There is simultaneously both union and distinction; these two go hand in hand, never the one without the other. The present study investigates the way in which St Maximus the Confessor (580-662) expresses the principle of simultaneous unity and differentiation in these areas of reality. That Maximus' thought is characterized by unity-in-diversity has been signalled by a number of scholars, but has never been the focal point of a special investigation. This study will to some extent fill the gap.

This project started, not from St Maximus in particular, but from the idea of simultaneous unity and differentiation in general. I first encountered it in some modern Eastern Christian thought, and later in Dionysius the Areopagite who in his treatise *On the Divine Names* sets his Trinitarian theology within the framework of what he calls 'unions and distinctions'. This was something I found fascinating in its own right and despite the fact that it first seemed so very abstract and too all-embracing to be the object of an academic study, it kept haunting me. At a time when doctoral study seemed like a dream beyond reach in the future, I recall saying to a fellow-student that if ever I were to do a doctorate this was the kind of area I should like to explore; but actually to write a thesis on the topic seemed to me almost entirely unrealistic. I had no real intention in doing so until the whole-hearted encouragement of Professor Andrew Louth at the University of Durham finally opened the right doors for me. I began to research into Dionysius and Maximus. I set off by writing a short dissertation on Dionysius and then continued by reading Maximus. The principle of simultaneous unity and differentiation presented by Dionysius in terms of 'union' and 'distinction' seemed to be equally applicable to Maximus, even if expressed in a different vocabulary. This urged me on. Also the fact that such Maximus specialists as Polycarp Sherwood and Lars Thunberg make a point of the importance of this kind of thinking in Maximus, and the fact that so far no-one had dedicated a monograph on the subject, only encouraged me to pursue the



project further. This has now been brought to completion and the outcome can be read in the pages that follow.

Here is a survey of the contents of the present study. As I said earlier on the central theme of this study is the principle of simultaneous unity and differentiation. This principle pervades all the areas of Maximus' thought: Trinitarian theology, Christology, cosmology, scriptural interpretation, ecclesiology, anthropology and spiritual life. Each of these will be studied in the light of this principle. There are, of course, individual themes in Maximus' thought which escape its scope and such themes do not, therefore, form a part of this work.

The fundamental idea could be summarized in the following way: things united remain distinct and without confusion in an inseparable union. This is the starting point for our investigation. Not every pattern and idea in Maximus' thought matches exactly with it (and I have tried to avoid pushing things too far) but it still expresses the kind of architecture of his thought that can be traced in all these areas. If it is born in mind in reading some of the more technical chapters that follow, the actual coherence of the mosaic that is constituted by Maximus' theology as a whole will become apparent.

Part one introduces the logical tools and settings of which Maximus makes use in his thought, including metaphors that express a 'union without confusion'. These are there to help us to understand why he theologizes in the way he does and to see how unity and difference work in areas where this is not that obvious. For example, the distinction between the universal and the particular, or essence and hypostasis, goes through the whole of Maximus' Trinitarian and Christological thought, and the logic provided by the Tree of Porphyry proves an essential tool for grasping some of Maximus' insights about cosmology and even such remote areas as the unity of virtues and the architecture of soul.

Part two embarks on the actual theological journey. After setting the basic rules of Maximus' Trinitarian theology and Christology, there follows a more detailed discussion on some notions of Byzantine theology. Maximus' Trinitarian theology achieves a very careful balance of Monad and Triad based on the distinction between the



universal and the particular which the Cappadocians began to use in this context in the fourth century. Maximus is, however, also very careful in keeping the Trinity at a safe distance from Porphyrian logic: logical categories are applied to God only ‘in a manner of speaking’. In general, Maximus tends to speak of the Trinity extraordinarily sparingly, and when he does so, it is often in quasi-liturgical phrases.

The concept of hypostasis is given special focus and is discussed in relation to some trends in modern theology and philosophy. Although this concept has received a fuller development in the context of Christology, especially in the sixth-century, it is discussed at the very outset both because it draws heavily on earlier Trinitarian doctrine and because its correct understanding is essential for speaking of Maximus’ theology in general. The reason why the notion of hypostasis/person is discussed so extensively in chapter three arises from the need to break away from the tendency to read modern personalist theologies back into the patristic tradition, and to Maximus in particular. Several modern scholars and their views on what seems to be important in the Fathers are to an overwhelming extent inspired by personalist currents. A closer reading of the works of the Fathers reveals a rather different picture from what one might expect on the basis of such secondary literature. In parts two and three, a number of related issues are discussed so as, on the one hand, to enable the reader to approach St Maximus’ theology in its own right, and on the one hand, to give a few thoughts as to what consequences a more historically sensitive reading of the Fathers may have for contemporary theology.

Chapter four raises questions arising from modern theology which are directly relevant to Dionysius, Maximus and Gregory Palamas. In this chapter which at first glance may seem a red herring, there is included an exposition of Dionysius’ theology of ‘unions and distinctions’ that in many ways has been the initial starting point for this project and as such is of considerable importance for the study as a whole. Dionysius’ theology is an illuminating case in point because his system, which, in my view, draws on the Cappadocian theology, describes with a remarkable coherence the structure of



the universal and the particular in the Trinity in itself and in its relation to creation: and all this is done in terms of union and distinction.

At the end of this part is included a chapter on spirituality, as the bulk of Maximus' text is concerned with spiritual life. This is an account limited to the study of texts with Trinitarian content and its corollary is the realization of the *imago Trinitatis* in the soul (mind, reason and spirit) of the deified person as the reflection of the Monad in Triad, at once united and distinct.

With part three the study moves on to Christology. As with the Trinity so also with Christ distinction between the universal and the particular is fundamental. Christ is one concrete and particular being incorporating two universal realities. In other words, he is one hypostasis in two natures. Unity goes with the hypostasis, that is, the particular, and difference goes with the natures, that is, the universal. This is the basic rule. Activities and wills belong to the realm of the universal or the natural, and therefore Maximus' dyophysite Christology naturally unfolds into a theology of two activities and wills. But that is not the whole story. The corollary here is that the two natures and their constituent activities and wills are united in the one particular being that Christ is, united in such a way which allows them to retain their integrity as natures: they are united 'without confusion'.

With part four a different kind of thinking is encountered. Three successive chapters expound aspects on unity and differentiation in the universe, Scripture and the Church. The common denominator here is that God is the principle of unity behind the multiplicity. The contingent functions as a prism which makes the divine accessible to human beings, just like a prism which refracting the unified white light makes it visible and multicoloured to the eye. There is movement, a dynamic, in a perspective of eschatological fulfilment, from and through the multiplicity of the visible things to the unity of the invisible.

Chapter nine discusses the connection between God and creation which in Maximus' view is a kind of union and distinction through the *logoi* and through God's *energeiai*. This is a form of participation which although it draws on Neoplatonic



language is significantly different from it, as I shall argue when comparing Proclus' understanding of union and distinction between productive causes and products with Maximus' view of creation. There is immanence but not emanation; there is creation but not God's unfolding into the beings.

Where Maximus comes much closer to Neoplatonic thinking, even if not its metaphysics, is in his vision of the unconfused union of the many *logoi* in the one Logos. This is strongly reminiscent of Plotinus' theory of the Universal Intellect which is presented here. A reflection of the unconfused union of the *logoi* can be seen in the harmony of the universe itself. This is another kind of simultaneous union and distinction where wholes and parts through God's wisdom and providence make up a harmonious manifold.

With Scripture the pattern becomes less obvious, and yet there is one. The simile of light refracted through a prism, perhaps, best describes this pattern. Here, the letter and the contingent is bound to multiplicity. Unity lies in the Logos himself who is behind the individual words of Scripture. Realizing the transparency of the words and syllables, their unity in the one Logos becomes apparent. This, however, entails a whole process of spiritual endeavour, a process of turning every type and symbol (whether in the Scriptures, the universe or the senses) into vehicles which carry the person from the fluctuating reality of the present age to the unified truth of the age to come.

Chapter eleven discusses the Church as forming a harmonious unity-in-diversity with its hierarchically arranged ranks. The ranks are defined by a variety of gifts of the Holy Spirit and it is in the Spirit that they find their unity. Furthermore, just as the universe, so also the Church is an entity made up of diverse members, not separated by their differences but united without confusion by virtue of their faith in Christ.

Finally, part five discusses the unity of virtue and commandments, the Christian life and the fragmentation and unification of humanity. In chapter twelve, unity of virtue is seen in the context of the Porphyrian Tree in which love is the all-embracing generic genus of virtues and of God's commandments. Keeping the commandments (united in



the twofold commandment of love), or failure to do so, has its implications: failure properly to love God and one's neighbour leads by an inexorable logic to a simultaneous fragmentation and confusion both of the humanity and of the individual soul. Here confusion is an unhealthy kind of union of the mind with the irrational parts of the soul and things perceived through the senses, and a cause of distortion in the architecture of the human being. The soul's powers need to be distinguished so that the hierarchical structure of the soul can be re-established. Only then can one truthfully love both God and one's fellow man and in this way create a unified humanity constituted of individuals with true integrity. Distinction and unification at the level of the individual, therefore, leads to unification at the level of the humanity as a whole, too.

Drawing together all the different ways unity and difference feature in Maximus theology, it could be argued, as a general conclusion of this thesis, that simultaneous union and distinction, unity and difference, is nothing less than the principle of truth of all reality in Maximus' thought. But whether that is too much to say is a question that is left for the reader to decide.

\* \* \*

Translations of Maximus' texts are to a large extent my own. Some were wrought with Adam Cooper but the final versions are mine. I have freely made use of the existing English translations listed in the bibliography, including some extracts translated in a number of monographs and articles by various people such as Paul Blowers, Stephen Gersh and Norman Russell. Only where I have adopted a translation *verbatim*, or with some minor changes, I have acknowledged the source. I have followed the same principle with respect to all the other translations. The sole exception is the translation of the *Ascetic Life* and the *Chapters on Love* by Polycarp Sherwood which I have used throughout this study.

Where an ancient authority has been quoted, the abbreviated Latin form of the title has been given in a footnote reference. This is followed by chapter number or equivalent, the edition used and pagination. Where the edition provides line numbers, these have been included after the relevant part of the text, whether page, chapter,



paragraph or the treatise itself. Line numbers are always preceded by a colon. References are made to the editions used in this study. In the case of *Mystagogia* reference also to the edition of J.P. Migne, PG 91, is provided. The abbreviations, with a very few exceptions, follow those given in G.W.H. Lampe (ed.), *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: OUP, 1961) and H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, H.S. Jones and R. McKenzie (eds), *A Greek-English Lexicon. With a Supplement* (Oxford: OUP, 1940<sup>9</sup>, supplement 1968).

\* \* \*

It is a long established tradition in the English academic writing to quote works such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* or *Winnie-the-Pooh*. This study, although written by a non-native English speaker, is no exception. One always feels the need, after a spell of hard and serious thinking, to balance it with some childish nonsense, nonsense which sometimes manages to carry more weight than the heavy pondering that came before it. The quotations in this work have emerged from seeking such balance.

Another source of balance for the writer has been early music which, it seems to me, also has a similar rhythm. In Elizabethan England, for example, the slow and grave pavans were always followed by the fast and bright galliards, and the melancholy lamentations found company in songs of courtly love. As a token of gratitude to the great masters of early music, a fragment from that world, too, has slipped into some of the later chapters. And now if the introduction has been a heavy enough 'pavan' for the reader, we shall end the beginning with a little 'galliard' (or perhaps it is an 'almain').

Some two years ago, while visiting Tübingen for a short period of time, my German landlady asked me over supper one evening: 'What is it exactly that you are studying there in England? 'Well...', I started, with some difficulty, 'it is about St Maximus the Confessor, and about how he understands unity and differentiation, and... Well, how can I put it? It all sounds a bit too philosophical, I gather, but you know, in fact, it is quite practical in the end. Take, for example, this *Gemüsesuppe* (= vegetable soup). It is a single unity of a variety of elements: carrots, potatoes, onions

*etc.* Now, if the vegetables in the soup dissolve and get blended to such a degree that you can no longer distinguish them, then you no longer have a real soup but a mash, or just a mess. That is what is called *confusion* in theology. If, on the other hand, you leave the vegetables on the chopping board rather than putting them into a casserole and cooking them, you will have just a heap of vegetables. This is called *juxtaposition*. And if perchance one of your more inquisitive grandchildren sneaks into the kitchen and treats your chopping board as a tennis racket, then, ... (oh, well) you will have what in theology is called *separation*.

But when you want to have a real *Gemüsesuppe*, you need to have vegetables in a casserole but so that you can still distinguish the carrots from the potatoes. That is called *union without confusion and distinction without separation*. So, what I am studying, is the logic or the principle which makes a *Gemüsesuppe* *Gemüsesuppe*. This I call the logic of simultaneous union and distinction.’ ‘*Also,*’ she replied to my strange answer with a kind of smile which showed that my explanation had not been in vain, ‘you are studying a *Gemüsesuppe*?’ ‘Precisely,’ I said. ‘Well, then,’ she concluded, ‘*Guten Appetit!*’



## **Part I**

### **LOGIC**

#### **1**

### **Tools**

#### **Background**

IN ALL PROBABILITY St Maximus was born in 580 in Constantinople where he was also brought up. He worked as a courtier during Heraclius' reign from 610 onwards but left his post some three years later to enter a monastery in the vicinity of the capital city. After a decade he moved to a monastery in Cyzicus (modern Kapıdaç, on the southern shore of the sea of Marmara) from where he fled under the pressure of the Persian invasion to go *via* Crete to North Africa, where he settled down in a monastery near Carthage. During the fifteen years of his sojourn there he carried out much of his literary activity. Later his involvement in the Monothelete controversy took him to Rome where he, together with Pope Martin, played a central role in the Lateran Council 649 which condemned the Monothelete and Monenergist heresies. This led to their condemnation in Constantinople, and Maximus died in exile in 662.

The years of his secular and monastic formation gave Maximus the opportunity to read extensively in the church Fathers, but also in philosophy and history. He is very well versed in such authors as Dionysius the Areopagite and Evagrius of Pontus, but the great authority for him remains St Gregory Nazianzen. From the Church Fathers also the other two Cappadocians, Gregory of Nyssa and Basil the Great, as well as Clement of Alexandria, Leontius of Byzantium, Cyril of Alexandria, Nemesis of Emesa and Origen, to mention the most important ones, feature in his work.

What seem to be Neoplatonic trends in Maximus, are almost invariable themes which reach him filtered through the Fathers; Dionysius, Clement and Cyril come to mind in the first place. It is very unlikely that Maximus had read any such authors like

Plotinus or Damascius. Yet, with the first reading his treatment of the *logoi* of beings, for instance, appears to strike a very Neoplatonic note, and it is only when seen in context that it becomes clear that what Maximus is pursuing is genuinely Christian. Such principles as the distinction between the uncreated and the created, sanctification both of soul and body, and the twofold commandment of love, that are characteristic of the Christian faith—and not of Neoplatonism—are pivotal to Maximus' thought and seem never to leave his mind.

There is, however, a philosophical tradition which stands out in Maximus' works, a tradition Maximus may have known directly, that of the Neoplatonic Aristotelian commentaries.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Boethius or Abelard in the Latin speaking world,<sup>2</sup> or indeed the fifteenth-century Greek patriarch Gennadius Scholarius,<sup>3</sup> Maximus was not an Aristotelian commentator himself. He, nevertheless, was acquainted with this tradition and made a considerable use of it as a tool to serve his own primarily theological and exegetical purposes. His concern, we should not forget, was to continue, not the philosophical tradition of the Aristotelian commentators, but the theological one of the Fathers. In *Opusculum* 21, where he discusses the notions of property, quality and difference, Maximus makes a point which is characteristic of his stance:

The meaning of these terms by the secular philosophers is very complex, and it would take [too] long to expound [all] their subdivisions. One would have to extend the account so much that it would no longer comply with letter-writing but would become a business of book-writing. In contrast, the explanation of these [terms] by the divine Fathers is compact and brief, and is not done in relation to some substratum, that is, essence or nature, but in relation to the things that are considered in essence, and indeed, in hypostasis.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For general surveys on this tradition, see Richard Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence* (London: Duckworth, 1990); Klaus Oehler, 'Aristotle in Byzantium', in *GRBS* 5 (1964), pp. 133-146; and Linos G. Benakis, 'Commentaries and Commentators on the Logical Works of Aristotle in Byzantium' in *Gedankenzeichen. Festschrift für Klaus Oehler zum 60. Geburtstag*, edited by R. Claussen and R. Daube-Schackat (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1988), pp. 3-12; and L.G. Westerink's introduction to *Prolégomènes à la philosophie de Platon*, edited by L.G. Westerink translated into French by J. Trouillard (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, ch. 3 'The old logic', in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy, from the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism 1100-1600*, edited by N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny, J. Pinborg and E. Stump (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), pp. 99-157.

<sup>3</sup> Much of his work consists of translations of Abelard and Aquinas. See Gennade Scholarios, *Oeuvres complètes*, vols 6 and 8 edited by L. Petit, X.A. Siderides and M. Jugie (Paris: Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1933 and 1936).

<sup>4</sup> *Opusc.* 21, PG 91, 248BC.



Clearly Maximus knew what the ‘philosophers’ were saying, although he abstains from expounding their doctrine. The philosophical tradition I am referring to here was inaugurated in the third century by Porphyry, a student of Plotinus, in the form of an introduction to Aristotle’s *Categories*, known as the *Isagoge*, and the commentaries on the *Organon*. These texts were taught and new commentaries continued to be written both in Athens<sup>5</sup> and in Alexandria well into the sixth century. In Alexandria, some of the latest representatives of the school were Christians,<sup>6</sup> notably, John Philoponus,<sup>7</sup> Elias, David<sup>8</sup> and Stephen.

The last of them, Stephen of Alexandria presents more immediate interest to us since he is the only one who was still alive and teaching in the early seventh century (died sometime after 610). He has been identified with a number of people: Stephen of Athens, Stephen the Sophist (mentioned by John Moschus) and Pseudo-Elias.<sup>9</sup> Stephen was summoned by the Emperor Heraclius to teach philosophy in the capital at a time when Maximus was still in office at the imperial court. We also know this same Stephen from a Christological controversy within the Jacobite community caused by his

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<sup>5</sup> On the date of the closing of the Academy at Athens see H.J. Blumenthal, ‘529 and its Sequel: What Happened to the Academy?’, in *Byzantion* 48/2 (1978), pp. 369-358.

<sup>6</sup> See Richard Sorabji, ‘The Ancient Commentators on Aristotle’, in *Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators and their Influence*, edited by R. Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1990), p. 14; and L.G. Westerink, ‘Elias on the Prior Analytics’, in *Mnemosyne*, ser. 4, vol. 14 (1961), pp. 126-133; and his ‘The Alexandrian Commentators and the Introductions to their Commentaries’, in *Aristotle Transformed*, pp. 338-341.

<sup>7</sup> H.-D. Saffrey, ‘Le Chrétien Jean Philopon et la survivance de l’école d’Alexandrie au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle’, in *REG* 67 (1954), pp. 396-410.

<sup>8</sup> David’s works were translated into Armenian at an early stage and played an important role in introducing this tradition to the Armenian speaking world. See Avedis K. Sanjian (ed.) *David Anghat’ The Invisible Philosopher* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> See the article of Wanda Wolska-Conus, ‘Stéphanos d’Athenes et Stéphanos d’Alexandrie. Essai d’identification et de Biographie’, in *REB* 47 (1989), pp. 5-89. Mossman Roueché has expressed some reservations concerning this identification. See his ‘The Definitions of Philosophy and a New Fragment of Stephanus the Philosopher’, in *JÖB* 40 (1990), pp. 107-128. If Stephen and Pseudo-Elias are indeed one and the same person then the following two items will be of interest: Pseudo-Elias (Pseudo-David), *Lectures on Porphyry’s Isagoge*, introduced and edited by L.G. Westerink (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1967); and H.J. Blumenthal, ‘Pseudo-Elias and the Isagoge Commentaries again’, in *RMPH* 124 (1981), pp. 188-192; Stephen seems to have played a role at the beginnings of the Armenian story, too. See Jean-Pierre Mahé, ‘Quadrivium et cursus d’études au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle en Arménie et dans le monde Byzantin, d’après le “K’nnikon” d’Anania Sirakac’i’ in *Travaux et Mémoires* 10 (1987), pp. 159-206.

opinions on ‘difference’ and ‘nature’, with the result that two of his students converted into Chalcedonian orthodoxy.<sup>10</sup>

It is very likely that Maximus knew Stephen, but whether Maximus actually studied with him or read his works, is a question far more difficult to answer. That Maximus had read some of the later commentaries on Aristotle’s logical works, remains still highly plausible. The connection, however, with the second-century Porphyry and his *Isagoge* is much stronger and to this we shall now turn.

### Genus and Species

In his *Isagoge*,<sup>11</sup> Porphyry wants to furnish his reader with the necessary means needed for studying Aristotle. Porphyry does this by discussing what he calls the ‘five terms’: genus, difference, species, property and accident. Out of these five terms the first and the third, that is, genus and species, make up a framework within which all the beings that constitute the universe can be considered.<sup>12</sup> The hierarchy of genera and species is commonly known as the Porphyrian Tree. Its description as a tree is not Porphyry’s own idea but it does convey in a tangible way the idea of hierarchy of predication which Porphyry presents in his treatise. The Porphyrian Tree is, however, rather an unusual tree, for it grows downwards, and one might, in actual fact, think of its ramifications as the roots rather than the branches. After all, the things that are being predicated with the help of this structure, lie right at the end of each subdivision. (Maximus is explicit about the fact that reality consists of the particulars, and that if all the particulars are destroyed, the universals are destroyed with them.)<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Albert van Roey, ‘Une controverse christologique sous le patriarcat de Pierre de Callinique’, in *Symposium Syriacum 1976* (OCA 205, Roma: PIOS, 1978), pp. 349-357; and below, ch. 6: ‘A Sixth-century Controversy over Natural Difference’.

<sup>11</sup> CAG 4/1. On Maximus and the *Isagoge* see the discussion of Torstein Tollefsen in his thesis *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor—A Study of His Metaphysical Principles* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 1999). pp. 104-134; and below, ch. 9: ‘The Universe and the Tree of Porphyry’.

<sup>12</sup> The pair expansion–contraction in relation to genera and species will be discussed in ch. 9. Maximus also makes use of another ‘telescope’ logic, mainly in his Scriptural exegesis, that of Pythagorean procession of numbers, the notion of *tetrad* being a good example.

<sup>13</sup> See *Ambig.* 10.42, PG 91, 1189CD.



However one wishes to imagine this tree, whether as a kind of a weeping willow or as the roots of an ancient oak, in terms of logic, what is generic, is at the top and what is specific, is at the bottom. At the very top, then, we have what Porphyry calls the ‘most generic genus’. This ‘most generic genus’ is divided or differentiated by ‘dividing/constitutive differences’ into species. The same differences are called both ‘dividing’, because they divide the genus into species, and ‘constitutive’, because they are the particular ingredient that makes the species what they are *qua* species. Every species which has other species subordinate to it is by the same token regarded as a genus. Thus all the intermediary classes are in fact species/genera. Only the very last species, which Porphyry calls ‘most specific species’, do not have the status of genus; instead, these ‘most specific species’ include the actual ‘individuals’. In summary, from the top to the bottom the Porphyrian Tree has: ‘the most generic genus’, ‘species/genera’ and ‘the most specific species’ which include ‘the individuals’.

The fundamental rule of predication in this pattern is that the higher ones, that is , the more generic ones, are predicated of the lower ones, and never the reverse. The other rule is that the higher ones ‘contain’ the lower ones, and the lower ones are ‘contained’ by the higher ones. For example, the species ‘human being’ belongs to the genus ‘living being’, but the reverse is not true since also ‘cat’ or ‘elephant’ is ‘living being’. Thus the genus ‘living being’ includes and is predicated of the species ‘human being’, ‘cat’, ‘elephant’, and so on. Similarly the ‘most specific species’ is predicated of the individuals that it includes. The species ‘human being’, for example, is predicated of ‘John’, ‘Anna’ or any other ‘human individual’. We find Maximus to be a faithful adherent to these principles of predication when he, in *Ambiguum* 17, says:

The particular things are never predicated of the universal, or the species of the genera, or the contained of the containing, and for this reason the universal things do not relate conversely to the particular, or the genera to the species, or the common to the individual, or, in summary, the containing to the contained.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Ambig.* 17, PG 91, 1225BC.



One of the five terms particularly rich in the *Isagoge*<sup>15</sup> is the notion of ‘difference,’ and of the several kinds of difference Porphyry expounds the one which seems to have the greatest importance for theology is the so called ‘ἰδιαίτατα-difference’ or ‘the most specific<sup>16</sup> difference’. This is a difference which makes a difference in species. In Porphyry’s terms it makes something ἄλλο,<sup>17</sup> and ἄλλο, as is well known, is a technical term particularly reminiscent of the Cappadocian theology.

This raises the question of a possible patristic interpretation of the ‘ἰδιαίτατα-difference’. Is there an expression in the Fathers denoting a difference constitutive of a particular nature that would correspond to this notion? In a *Middle Byzantine Handbook of Logic Terminology*<sup>18</sup> (dating just after Maximus) following some sentences which draw heavily on the *Isagoge* it says: ‘“Difference” is a *logos* in accordance with which the substrata differ one from another, and which is indicative of the “how it is”, in other words, it is indicative of the flesh being by nature and essence what it is.’ (διαφορά ἐστι λόγος, καθ’ὸν ἀλλήλων διαφέρει τὰ ὑποκείμενα, καὶ τοῦ πῶς εἶναι δηλωτικός· τουτέστι τὸ εἶναι τὴν σάρκα τῇ φύσει καὶ τῇ οὐσίᾳ ὅπερ ἐστί.) The author, then, clarifies which difference it is that he is speaking of by saying that ‘difference is what is called ἰδιαίτατα by the philosophers, which also is *essential*.’ (διαφορά ἐστὶν ἡ παρὰ τοῖς φιλοσόφοις καλουμένη ἰδιαίτατα, ἥτις καὶ οὐσιώδης ὑπάρχει).<sup>19</sup>

This confirms two things. Firstly, that the ἰδιαίτατα-difference (one of the many in the Neoplatonic school) was indeed identified with the ‘essential difference’ of the Christian theology and, secondly, as a consequence of this, that the ‘species’ (εἶδος), and more precisely ‘the most specific species’, of the Aristotelian commentaries

<sup>15</sup> See 3a:13ff., CAG 4/1, 8-12. Tollefsen gives a useful diagram in *The Christocentric Cosmology*, p. 126, fn. 417.

<sup>16</sup> Although this is an adverb in the original, I have rendered it as an adjective.

<sup>17</sup> *Isag.*, 3a:26, CAG 14/1, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Mossman Roueché, ‘Middle Byzantine Handbook of Logic Terminology’, in *JÖB* 29 (1980), pp. 71-98. This and a number of other short texts published by Roueché in ‘Byzantine Philosophical Texts of the Seventh Century’, in *JÖB* 23 (1974), pp. 61-76, are attributed to Maximus in the manuscripts. I have not treated them as authentic. Although it is not entirely unlikely that they were written by Maximus himself, they nevertheless remain notebook summaries of the *Isagoge*, of Aristotle’s categories and of some other logical works, with a very few comments.

corresponds to the notion of ‘essence’ or ‘nature’ in Byzantine theology.<sup>20</sup> All this features strongly in the Christological debates of the sixth and seventh centuries. Curiously enough, the first part of our quotation is taken *verbatim* from Maximus’ *Letter* 12.<sup>21</sup> Its context, as one might expect, is Christological. However, Maximus is also aware of the patristic usage of ‘constitutive difference’. In the *Opusculum* 21, already referred to, he points out that ‘the Fathers say that “difference” is constitutive and defining of beings. Whence also they name it thus, calling it a “constitutive difference”.’<sup>22</sup>

In the same *Opusculum*, Maximus summarizes the patristic interpretation of the terms ‘quality’, ‘property’ and ‘difference’. He regards them as virtually synonymous making only some very fine points as to their difference.

Consequently, the Fathers say that these, I mean ‘quality’, ‘property’ and ‘difference’, are identical one with another, and that they hold the *logos* of accidents, but not that of a substratum, that is of an essence. They [also] say that these terms differ in the sense that ‘quality’ is more universal, and is applied to all beings, since no being—God excepted—is without quality (being not incomparable) or formless; and in the sense that ‘property’ is more particular, being said of a certain essence and not of every essence, it is said of a certain kind of essence, of this one essence and not of another.<sup>23</sup>

Maximus makes two further distinctions which are essential for the exposition of the Christian doctrine. The first is the distinction between essential and hypostatic differences. (In Porphyry there is the distinction between species and individual, but in the *Isagoge* he deals only with terms which, as he puts it, ‘are predicated of many’.)<sup>24</sup>

The Fathers, then, say that an ‘essential quality’, in the case of the human being, for instance, is rationality, and in the case of horse, neighing. A ‘hypostatic quality’, on the other hand, of a particular human being is, [for instance], being snub-nosed or hook-nosed, and that of a particular horse, being dapple-grey or chestnut. Similarly, ‘quality’ is considered in all the other created essences and hypostases, commonly and individually, that is, in general and in particular, and by it the difference, that exists between species and between individuals, is made known, as it clarifies the truth of things.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Roueché, ‘Middle Byzantine’, p. 91, 37-41. There is a similar case in the seventh-century *Doctrina patrum*, p. 255:8-10.

<sup>20</sup> Lambros Siasos makes the same observation in relation to John Damascene’s *Dialectica*. See his Πατερική κριτική τῆς φιλοσοφικῆς μεθόδου (Thessalonica: Πουρναράς, 1989), p. 47 where he gives two elucidating diagrams.

<sup>21</sup> *Ep.* 12, PG 91, 469AB.

<sup>22</sup> *Opusc.* 21, PG 91, 248C.

<sup>23</sup> *Opusc.* 21, PG 91, 249BC.

<sup>24</sup> *Isag.* 4a, CAG 4/1, 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Opusc.* 21, PG 91, 248C-249A.



The second distinction is that between the created and the uncreated. The question here is: Can these concepts be applied to the uncreated God? Maximus qualifies his position by saying that qualities or differences are applied to the created order ‘properly speaking’ but to God only ‘in a manner of speaking’ (καταχρηστικῶς).

Now, with regards to the uncreated and monarchic nature, ‘quality’ cannot be said, properly speaking—if at all. For the divine is not out of an essence and accidents, since it would [in such case] be created, being composite and compounded of these. Instead, ‘quality’ is made use of, with regards to the divine, in a manner of speaking (καταχρηστικῶς) and to the extent we are able to conjecture what is beyond us from what is within the scope of our capacities; since we are in any case scarcely capable of taking in knowledge of them even faintly, and of explaining this in some measure at least, even if not completely.<sup>26</sup>

He, then, says what the essential and hypostatic differences in God are, even if only in a manner of speaking.

Natural qualities<sup>27</sup> are God’s being: all-holy, omnipotent, all-perfect, more than complete, self-sufficient, self-ruling, all-ruling, and the like natural and divine things that are said, things proper to God alone as being beyond being. ‘Hypostatic qualities’ are: that of the Father, unbegottenness; that of the Son, begottenness; and that of the Holy Spirit, procession. [Both kinds of qualities] are also called ‘properties’, on the grounds that they naturally or hypostatically belong to this one [nature or hypostasis] and not to another. Out of these [qualities] are put together essential and hypostatic differences, and as I said, they are applied properly speaking to all created beings by nature, but only in a manner of speaking to God.<sup>28</sup>

### The Universal and the Particular

These distinctions brings us to one of the most fundamental principles in Maximus’ theology: the distinction between the universal (τὸ κοινόν) and the particular (τὸ ἴδιον). Maximus derives his understanding of the universal (or common) and the particular from the Cappadocians following their theological distinction between essence and hypostasis. In *Letter* 15, Maximus says: ‘Common and universal, that is to say generic, is, according to the Fathers, the essence and nature, for they say that these two are identical with each other. Individual and particular is the hypostasis and person, for these too are identical with each other.’<sup>29</sup> He then goes on to quote a whole sequence of texts from the Cappadocians illustrating this principle.

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<sup>26</sup> *Opusc.* 21, PG 91, 249A.

<sup>27</sup> In the singular in the text.

<sup>28</sup> *Opusc.* 21, PG 91, 249AB.

<sup>29</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 545A.



The question that arises is, how far does Maximus want to take the identification of the universal with essence and the particular with hypostasis, and how far does he want to take the distinction between essence and hypostasis which this pattern implies? Maximus begins with the created order and argues that the particular instances of created natures differ according to hypostasis, not according to nature:

[B]eings that are united according to one and the same nature or essence (that is, beings that are of one and the same nature) are distinguished from one another according to hypostasis or person, as is the case with angels and men, and with all the created beings that are considered in species (εἶδος) and in genus (γένος).<sup>30</sup>

Porphry's logic is lurking at the back here. And as we saw above, Maximus is reluctant to apply such logical categories to God but only in a manner of speaking. Here he only just *dares* to attribute to God the distinction between the universal and the particular, or better that between essence and hypostasis, but only after quoting Basil who reminds his reader that this distinction between essence and hypostasis in God is like that between the universal and the particular.<sup>31</sup>

And our account will dare to say something much greater, which is, that even in the case of the first creative and beginningless cause of beings we do not regard nature and hypostasis to be identical with each other, since we recognize one essence and nature of the Godhead, which exists in three hypostases different from one another in particularities, and three hypostases in one and the same essence or nature of the Godhead. For that which we worship is a Monad in Triad and a Triad in Monad:<sup>32</sup> Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God.<sup>33</sup>

How Aristotelian this understanding of the universal and the particular is, is not the question to ask in relation to Maximus. For him it is a Christian formulation concerning questions in Christian theology; a theology which makes use of commonly accepted terminology. Having said that, it should be noted that Maximus never speaks in terms of the first and the second *ousia* of Aristotle's *Categories*.

Λόγος-Τρόπος. An extension of the universal and the particular is the pair *logos-tropos*. The Cappadocian distinction between the *logos* of nature and the *tropos*, or the mode, of existence within the Trinitarian theology is well known and needs no further comments. In Maximus' thought, however, the pair obtains a very wide ranging usage.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 549C.

<sup>31</sup> See *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 545AB.

<sup>32</sup> μονάς ἐν τριάδι καὶ τριάς ἐν μονάδι. An alternative translation would be 'a Unity in Trinity and a Trinity in Unity'.

<sup>33</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 549CD-552A.

It is there in the Trinitarian theology as well as in Christology, including the questions on activities and wills, but it can also be found in contexts such as the knowledge of God, the gospel commandments, the differentiation of virtues, the consequences of the Fall, and so on.

*Tropos* very often expresses the individual aspect, that which differentiates the particular from the general, whereas *logos* stands for the universal. With rational beings endowed with freewill, this differentiation can be viewed also within the moral context. Sin and virtue are a matter of what one makes of one's natural capacities; they are the *tropoi* of the application of one's *logos*. Although the usage of *tropos* in Trinitarian theology, on the one hand, and in the moral context, on the other, are closely related, it can be very misleading to take *τρόπος* as a straightforward synonym of *τρόπος υπάρξεως*. This becomes more evident when speaking of *tropos* more 'ontologically', for example, in the case of the Fall where the *tropos* represents the state or the condition of a nature.

### Union and Distinction

In his understanding of the structure of reality Maximus regards integrity to be of the greatest importance. The question of integrity arises when things are united or are regarded in unity, and this can take place either at the level of the particular or at the level of the universal. For example, the way in which the basic ontological divide between the created and the uncreated is bridged in Christ represents a union at the level of the particular, and the way in which the *logoi* of beings are united in the one Logos represents a union at the level of the universal. In both cases there is a simultaneous union and distinction.

At the level of the universal, integrity is seen in the nature or the essence of the things united. This becomes evident especially in Christology, but also in the doctrine of the deification of man. Concepts such as 'union without confusion', applied by Porphyry to discuss the union of body and soul, and 'difference', a particularly significant notion in the *Isagoge*, became the basic tools for Christian theologians, in



particular St Cyril of Alexandria and Maximus, to express the fact that in Christ, after the union, the natures did not lose that natural *difference* which made them what they were *qua* natures. The natures are united and distinguished simultaneously. They are united but not confused, distinguished but not separated.

Although we here encounter a kind of logic which is strongly reminiscent of the four adverbs of the Chalcedonian definition, it should not be regarded as a Chalcedonian monopoly. After all, this logic had been clearly articulated long before Chalcedon by the Cappadocians, Cyril of Alexandria and (in Maximus' understanding) Dionysius the Areopagite, but also—and perhaps more importantly—by the Neoplatonists. It appears in a variety of contexts, and it would be wrong to think that if one discovers the phrase 'without confusion' in a cosmological context, for instance, that this cosmology is *per se* 'Chalcedonian' simply because this adverb was used in the Chalcedonian definition: Plotinus and Syrianus, for example, have an understanding of the Intelligible Universe (or the Universal Intellect) which presents an intriguing case of 'union without confusion'. Having said that, there is, of course, no doubt that Chalcedon heavily influenced the subsequent Christology and in the course of time also other areas of theology.

In a union between natures or essences, if the natural integrity is to be preserved, the 'essential difference' of each constituent must necessarily remain. As we shall see later, there is in such a case union according to one and the same hypostasis or person, but differentiation according to nature. The *logos* of nature, its essential difference and its integrity go hand in hand. This is true not only of the union between the created and the uncreated but also, in Maximus' words, of the 'union of the mind with the senses, and the union of the heaven with the earth, and the union of the sensible things with the intelligible, and the union of the nature with the *logos*.'<sup>34</sup> All these are unions within the realm of the created.

If we now move from the level of the universal to that of the particular, we shall see that where there is union of things retaining their *particularity*, there, too,

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<sup>34</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 48:188-189, CCSG 7, 341. See also below, part 4.

simultaneous distinction is required. For example, Maximus speaks of the *logoi* of beings that are united in the one Logos without confusion: ‘Who would not consider the many *logoi* as one, through the relationship of all things to him, existing *unconfusedly* in himself?’<sup>35</sup> Each *logos* remains distinct from the other *logoi* even in their supreme union. The *logoi* retain their individual particularity and do not cease to be particular *logoi*: ‘Who ... would not recognize that the one Logos is many *logoi* distinguished in the undivided difference of created things through their *unconfused individuality* in relation to each other and themselves?’<sup>36</sup>

One might think that the *logoi* are always those of natures only, but in fact there is a *logos* of particularity, too, in Maximus’ thinking. In the context of Christological anthropology he makes this explicit.

According to this *logos* the properties, that separate all others from the community which exists according to its own essence, are made the distinguishing marks of the single hypostasis constituted of them, according to their union with one another which is simultaneous to their coming into being. And it is according to this single hypostasis that between them is considered an identity which admits no difference whatsoever, as is, for instance, with a human soul and body. For the particularities, which differentiate *someone’s* body from other bodies and which differentiate *someone’s* soul from other souls, when they concur in union, at once both characterize the hypostasis (constituted of body and soul) of Peter or Paul, for instance, and, by the same token, differentiate it from the rest of men. But they do not differentiate the soul of Peter or Paul from his own body.<sup>37</sup>

Very similar picture to that of the union of the *logoi* in the One Logos can be found among the Neoplatonists in their description of the world of Forms. For example Syrianus says ‘that the divine and intellectual Forms are united with one another and pervade one another in a pure and unconfused fashion.’<sup>38</sup> What Syrianus describes here is a very sublime reality, but it still is not the ultimate. For a Neoplatonist (as well as for an Origenist) the ultimate is where all differentiation, and therefore all multiplicity, disappears. For an orthodox Christian, however, the *integrity of the particular* forms the criterion of a true union, of an undivided union within which there is also differentiation.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1077C.

<sup>36</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1077C.

<sup>37</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 552CD.

<sup>38</sup> *In Metaph.* 119:27-30; quoted in Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena. An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), p. 95.



## One and Many

The question of the One and the many, which for the Neoplatonists was pivotal, for Maximus is both a mystery and a vision. God's absolute singleness and his simultaneous immanence in the universe as a whole and in each of its constituents separately is not a puzzling dilemma for Maximus but rather a cause for wonder and for the acknowledgement of limitations of the human intelligence.<sup>39</sup>

Oneness and multiplicity is also developed as a dialectic between the one Logos and the many *logoi*. Using the Neoplatonic imagery of a centre and radii, Maximus argues that the one Logos is the many *logoi* and the many *logoi* are the One Logos:

The one Logos is the many *logoi* according to the benevolent creative and preserving procession of the One towards beings. And the many *logoi* are the one Logos as bringing them all together according to the reference and providence which returns and guides the many into the One, like as into an all-governing principle or a centre which contains the beginnings of the radii that derive from it.<sup>40</sup>

When viewed from the perspective of the creation, something similar can be found in the context of participation. The Neoplatonic *Scala naturae*, a kind of hierarchy of participation, is transformed in Maximus into the one Logos, who is, as it were, filtered through a sieve with variable sizes of holes.

And the same (Logos) is revealed and multiplied benevolently in all things derived from him according to the analogy of each ... and everything participates in God by coming to be from him analogously either according to intellect, reason, sense, or vital motion, or according to essential and habitual fitness.<sup>41</sup>

The creation, although by essence radically different from the uncreated God, functions as a prism that makes God visible and manifest. God's unified manifestation spreads out in multiple colours through the prism of the creatures which he himself has made. Their multiplicity need not be in any contrast to the unity of their cause, as long as they exist in accordance with their natural *logoi* without confusing them. There is a hierarchy in the universe and there is a harmony, too, realized through the *logoi* by the providence of the one Logos. This harmony is again a simultaneous union and distinction of the different creatures.

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Ambig.* 22, PG 91, 1257AB.

<sup>40</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1081C.

<sup>41</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1080B; quoted in Gersh, *From Iamblichus*, p. 162; cf. Dionysius, *D.n.* 5.5, PTS 33, 183-184 and *D.n.* 1.5, PTS 33, 117-118.

## Wholes and Parts

One more tool which Maximus uses to discuss union and distinction in a variety of contexts is the pair whole and parts. He has a fascinating, if dense, discussion of the creation in the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 2 where the structure wholes/parts overlaps with Porphyrian logic. The question presented to Maximus runs as follows: ‘If God in six days created all the species which constitute the universe, why does the Father continue to work after this? For the Saviour says *My Father works still, and I work*.<sup>42</sup> Is he not, perhaps, referring to the preservation of species once created?’<sup>43</sup> In one sentence (in the original Greek), Maximus captures a whole cosmology. Time, providence, freewill, universal substances, parts, harmony, movement, well-being and deification, all find their place in his answer—a good example of how Maximus can be at once both immensely demanding and rewarding to his reader.

God, having completed the first *logoi* of creatures and the universal substances of all beings at one time (as he himself knows how), still works not only their preservation to keep them in existence, but also the actual creation, coming-forth and constitution of the parts potentially in them. Moreover, he through providence works also the assimilation of the particular parts to the universal wholes. This he does until such time as he unites the self-willed urge of the particular parts to the more generic natural *logos* of rational substance through their movement towards well-being, and thus makes them harmonious and of identical movement with one another and with the whole, so that the particular beings have no difference of will from universal beings, but that in all one and the same *logos* becomes apparent; a *logos* that is not severed by the modes [of action] of those of whom to an equal measure it is predicated. And in this way he demonstrates as effective the grace that deifies all.<sup>44</sup>

Parts, as the individual instances of the universal substances, that is, the wholes, are created by God in due time. He directs his providence to the parts of the universal rational substance, that is, to the particular human individuals with a view to creating a harmonious world. Here the parts conform to the universal and by the same token maintain a harmonious unity among themselves.

A different case is that of the human being as a composite of body and soul. Body and soul are the essential parts which constitute every instance of the human species, or which constitute the human *eidos*. Neither part on its own can be the *eidos* which the human being is: both are needed. The whole, a concrete individual composed of body

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<sup>42</sup> Jn 5:17.

<sup>43</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 2:2-6, CCSG 7, 51.



and soul, possesses the *eidos* and can be predicated of as a human being. In *Ambiguum* 7,<sup>45</sup> where he argues against the Origenist doctrine of pre-existence of souls, Maximus makes a very subtle point about this. There can be no pre-existence of souls, for a particular human being comes-into-being only when the human *eidos* or form comes into existence, and for this both body and soul are needed. The parts, body and soul, can be spoken of *only* in relation to the whole, that is, a particular human individual, John or Anna, for example. Therefore, when speaking even of the dead body of John, we speak of it as the body *of* John, which is to say that we predicate it of the whole, because the body is a constitutive part of it. Similarly, the soul can be predicated of only of the whole which possesses the *eidos*, and this cannot be the case with a pre-existent soul. Maximus, therefore, maintains that both body and soul come into being simultaneously at the moment of their union.

Let me take one last example of whole and parts, from Christology this time, where it plays a role of some importance. For Maximus, it is essential to maintain that Christ is one hypostasis, that is, one concrete and particular being. It is equally important for him that Christ incorporates two different natures within this concrete and particular being, for through the natures Christ is in an essential communion with his Father and his mother. The parts, then, that constitute the one Christ are his two natures, and the whole is, not a new composite nature, but a composite hypostasis or person. We shall return to Christology in chapter six but before that, here, as a foretaste, is a long and challenging quotation illustrating whole and parts.

He, one and the same, remained unchanged, undivided and unconfused in the permanence of the parts of which he was constituted, so that he might mediate according to the hypostasis between the parts of which he was composed, closing in himself the distance between the extremities, making peace and reconciling, through the Spirit, the human nature with the God and Father, as he in truth was God by essence and as in truth he became man by nature in the Dispensation, neither being divided because of the natural difference of his parts, nor confused because of their hypostatic unity. But, on the one hand, being united according to nature with [his] Father and mother by virtue of the principle (*logos*) of the essential community of his constituent parts, he proved to have preserved the difference between the parts of which he was constituted. On the other hand, by virtue of the hypostatic particularity of his own parts, he was distinguished from his extremities, I mean from his Father and mother, and he proved to have kept the oneness of his own hypostasis totally undifferentiated and always unified in

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<sup>44</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 2:7-22, CCSG 7, 51.

<sup>45</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1100A-1101C.

the extreme personal identity of his own parts one with another. For the essential community of one of the parts with the extremities in the unity of the one hypostasis, preserves unconfused the differentness of the other part's nature. Now, this rationale does *not* teach to the devote faithful that from the union one nature of both should be known—lest the coming-into-being of the one nature, the whole, by composition of them, become a total passing-away of the parts by essence, because [such one nature would] not have the capacity (the 'how') to guard the natural kinship of the extremities with the parts for not preserving, after the union, the natural difference which the constituent parts had between each other. Instead it teaches the devout faithful to behold *one composite hypostasis* from the union; a hypostasis preserved by virtue of the existence by nature of its constituent parts.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 556A-C.



## Metaphors

WHEN ONE has to put into words something that eludes verbal description, one immediately feels the need to turn to other forms of artistic expression, such as painting, music or dance. But as one, say, paints a picture of the indescribable, one then begins to see how one, eventually, might try and put it into words. The process of searching for metaphors, to make the invisible visible or the unthinkable thinkable, is very similar. In Maximus' theology the ideas of 'union without confusion' and '*perichoresis*', for instance, are especially among those which require 'images' for their meaning to be conveyed to the reader.<sup>1</sup> Maximus has made use of a number of such metaphors for portraying realities of simultaneous union and distinction, oneness and multiplicity, and it is these that we shall briefly introduce in the present chapter.

### Fire and Light

St Cyril of Alexandria, in his *Commentary on Isaiah*, says that '[i]t is customary in the inspired Scriptures to compare the divine nature to fire.'<sup>2</sup> Cyril relates how God was seen by the ancient Israelites as fire on Mount Horeb on the day of assembly,<sup>3</sup> and how he appeared in the form of the burning bush to Moses in the desert.<sup>4</sup> Cyril, then, goes on to interpret the biblical image of a burning coal from *Isaiah* 6:6:<sup>5</sup>

Now the coal is by nature wood, only it is entirely filled with fire and acquires its power and energy. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, in my view, may very appropriately be conceived of in the same way. *For the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*<sup>6</sup> But although he was seen by us as a man, in accordance with the Dispensation of the Incarnation, the fullness of the Godhead nevertheless dwelt in

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<sup>1</sup> These two notions will be discussed below, in ch. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *In Is.* 1.4, PG 70, 181B; translated by Norman Russell in his *Cyril of Alexandria* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> *Cf.* Deut. 4:10-11.

<sup>4</sup> *Cf.* Ex. 3:1-6.

<sup>5</sup> See Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, part 2, translated by J. Cawte and P. Allen (London: Mowbray, 1995; original German edition 1989), pp. 39-40.

<sup>6</sup> Jn 1:14.

him, by means, I would emphasize, of the union. Thus it may be seen that he has the energies most appropriate to God operating through his own flesh.<sup>7</sup>

Maximus does not have exactly these same imagery of burning bush or coal, but ‘fire’ remains *the* metaphor of God for him, too. He prefers the metaphor of incandescent iron, and in some cases, not just any iron, but a sword (as in *Ambiguum* 5, for instance).<sup>8</sup>

The choice of red-hot sword as a Christological metaphor is very likely because of its usefulness in proving natural activity or operation. One can say that a sword *does* something, whereas it is not so easy to say that of a piece of coal. A red-hot sword possesses activity simultaneously at two different levels, in other words it both cuts and burns, and this provides a very practical tool for discussing two activities in Christ. In contrast, the ‘burning coal’ metaphor, for instance, could hardly serve a similar purpose.

In *Ambiguum* 7, speaking of deification, Maximus develops a sequence of the rational being’s movement towards God, and the final union where he finds himself ‘wholly in the whole desired one’. One of the two metaphors used here is precisely that the deified person becomes ‘like an iron wholly permeated by the whole of the fire’.<sup>9</sup> The other metaphor used is that of ‘air wholly illuminated by light’, a metaphor which can be found only twice in the surviving Maximian corpus.<sup>10</sup> However, John Scotus Eriugena, drawing heavily on Maximus, has developed the metaphor in an interesting way. While Maximus only speaks of the overwhelming presence of God in the deified man which he illustrates with the metaphor of light and air,<sup>11</sup> Eriugena develops the use of the metaphor, and his interpretation is worth quoting:

For just as air illuminated by the sun seems to be nothing else but light, not because it loses its own nature but because light predominates in it so that it is believed itself to be light, thus human nature united with God is said to be God

<sup>7</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *In Is.* 1.4, PG 70, 181BC; translation in Russell, *Cyril*, p. 77.

<sup>8</sup> See *Ambig.* 5, CCSG 48, 33. See also *Pyrr.*, PG 91, 337C-340A.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Whole in whole’ (ὅλος ἐν ὅλῳ) is a very widespread theme in Maximus. Here are only a few references: *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1073D-1076A, 1076C, 1088A-C; *Ambig.* 33, 1285D; *Ambig.* 47, 1361A; *Myst.* Prol., Soteropoulos, 146:12-13 [= PG 91, 661C]; 2, 158 [= 669BC]; 21, 210 [= 697A]; *Or. dom.*, CCSG 23, lines 392 and 779. Cf. Porphyry, *Sent.* 33, Lamberz, 35-38.

<sup>10</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1076A and 1088D.

<sup>11</sup> Maximus does have the idea that the light of the rising sun overpowers the light of stars, but this appears in a entirely different context (*Myst.* 1, Soteropoulos, 150:22-24 [=PG 91, 665AB]).



totally, not because its nature ceases to be, but because it achieves participation in divinity so that God alone appears within it. Likewise the air is dark when there is no light, while the light of the sun is comprehended by no bodily sense when it exists through itself. Yet when sunlight blends with air it begins to appear, so that in itself it is incomprehensible to the senses, but when mingled with air it can be comprehended.<sup>12</sup>

It is worth noticing that, as Stephen Gersh has pointed out, in these texts of Maximus and Eriugena, 'the blending involves no loss of the original separate identities,' and 'that each of the two natures blends as a whole with the other.'<sup>13</sup> Again, integrity is of an immense importance.

To go to another metaphor, Maximus has a rather unusual case of the fire-metaphor in *Quaestiones et dubia* 5. He is asked to explain, and to illustrate by an example, what is meant when St Gregory says that the apostles received perfection through three gifts, the final stage being the reception of 'the Spirit itself, essentially, in the form of fiery tongues'.<sup>14</sup> In particular, the question refers to the adverb 'essentially' for which Maximus provides an example:

It is like with a piece of wood placed in a frying-pan (τήγανον). When a fire is kindled underneath it, the piece of wood partakes of the warmth of the fire by the mediation of the frying-pan. This is how the Spirit operated in the saints faintly earlier on. If, now—to use the same simile—one removes the frying-pan from the middle, and the wood is grasped by the fire without any intermediary, it straightaway assimilates the wood to its own nature.<sup>15</sup>

Gersh refers to one more light-metaphor which was popular among the Neoplatonists, that of several lights forming a single illumination. This was taken over by Dionysius the Areopagite who applies it to the Trinitarian context.<sup>16</sup> As a Trinitarian image it is one of the very rare examples before John of Damascus which contains the idea (even if not the word itself) of περιχώρησις.

[E]ven as the lights of lamps being in one house and wholly interpenetrating one another, severally possess a clear and absolute distinction each from each, and are united in distinction and distinct in union. Even so do we see, when there are many lamps in a house, how that the lights of them all are unified into one undifferentiated light, so that there shines forth from them one indivisible brightness. ... And even if any one takes out of the dwelling one of the burning lamps, all its particular light will therewith depart from the place ... For as I said,

<sup>12</sup> *Periph.* I:331-340, CCCM 161, 14; quoted in Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus*, p. 195. I have drawn on his illuminating discussion on these metaphors on pp. 193-203.

<sup>13</sup> Gersh, *From Iamblichus*, pp. 196-197.

<sup>14</sup> *Or.* 41, PG 36, 444C.

<sup>15</sup> *Qu. dub.* 5:19-26, CCSG 10, 5.

<sup>16</sup> See Ysabel de Andia, 'La Théologie trinitaire de Denys l'Aréopagite', in *SP*, 32 (1997), pp. 290-295.

the entire and complete union of lights one with another brought no commixture in any of the parts.<sup>17</sup>

Dionysius' source of inspiration may well have been Syrianus who says that 'immaterial things are like the illuminations given off by different lamps which pervade the whole of a dwelling and intermingle with each other in an unconfused and indivisible manner.'<sup>18</sup>

## Body and Soul

To emphasize the fact that in Christ, divinity permeates the whole of his human nature without confusion, Maximus utilizes the metaphor of body and soul. He says, for example, in *Ambiguum* 42 that 'it is impossible for God himself who has become flesh—in the way the soul is united with the body, wholly but without confusion permeating it at the moment of the union—to fall away from deification.'<sup>19</sup> In a different context he illustrates the capacity of the soul to remain one and at the same time penetrate the diversity of members of the body.

The whole soul penetrates through the whole of the body and gives it life and motion. Being simple and incorporeal by nature it is not severed into pieces or cut off with the body ... but is wholly present in the whole of the body and in each of its members.<sup>20</sup>

What is common to all of the metaphors<sup>21</sup> we have seen so far, is that they can accommodate different realities where two essentially different natures are brought into union. They can express a union which respects the integrity of the constituent parts and which for that reason can be called a 'union without confusion'. Union and distinction exist simultaneously in the realities they denote, and in particular a reality of a union between the created and the uncreated which does not annul the essential difference between the two realms but preserves their fundamental distinction.

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<sup>17</sup> *D.n.* 2.4, PTS 33, 127:4-9, 13-14, 127:15-128:1.

<sup>18</sup> *Metaph.* 85.19-22, quoted in Gersh, *From Iamblichus*, p. 197.

<sup>19</sup> *Ambig.* 42, PG 91, 1320B.

<sup>20</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1100AB.

<sup>21</sup> An odd one, not included here, is the metaphor of 'reason and concept' which appears only once in Maximus' works. It is used in a Christological context (*Pyrr.*, PG 91, 337CD).



## Circle, Centre and Radii

The imagery of a central point with radii extending from it, belongs to another category of metaphors and is one which Maximus uses for reconciling oneness and multiplicity.<sup>22</sup> As this was a major question in Neoplatonism, it is not surprising that we find it in Plotinus<sup>23</sup> and in Proclus. For example, Proclus in his commentary on Euclid writes:

Let us conceive the centre among them as a totally unified, undivided, and steadfast transcendence, the distances from the centre as the processions from this unity towards infinite plurality according to its potency, and the circumference of the circle as the reversion towards the centre of those things which have proceeded.<sup>24</sup>

After the pagan Neoplatonists we find it twice in Dionysius' *On the Divine Names*,<sup>25</sup> where the second instance is connected with the theme of the *logoi*. Maximus follows in this line. In *Ambiguum* 7, he uses our metaphor to describe the unity of the many *logoi* in the one Logos with reference to Gregory's problematic phrase 'we are a portion of God'.<sup>26</sup>

And the many *logoi* are the one Logos as bringing them all together according to the reference and providence which returns and guides the many into the One, like as into an all-governing principle or a centre which contains the beginnings of the radii that derive from it. Thus, we are and are called 'a portion of God' on account of the fact that the *logoi* of our being pre-exist in God. Again, we are said to be 'fallen from above' because we have not moved in accord with the *logos* that pre-exists in God and according to which we were created.<sup>27</sup>

In *Centuries on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation* II.4, he again refers to the *logoi* and their unity in God, but this time in the context of spiritual knowledge.

The centre of a circle is regarded as the indivisible source of all the radii extending from it; similarly, by means of a certain simple and indivisible act of spiritual knowledge, the person found worthy to dwell in God will perceive pre-existing in God all the *logoi* of created beings.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See the discussion of this metaphor in Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology*, pp. 86-104, and in Gersh, *From Iamblichus*, pp. 251-253; 72-74. For metaphors describing the unity and diversity of virtue, see below, ch. 12.

<sup>23</sup> See *Enn.* I.7.1, V.1.11, VI.4.7, VI.8.18 and VI.9.8.

<sup>24</sup> *In Eucl.* 153.21ff; quoted in Gersh, *From Iamblichus*, p. 74.

<sup>25</sup> *D.n.* 2.5, PTS 33, 129:6-7 and *D.n.* 5.6, 185:4-11.

<sup>26</sup> *Or.* 14.7, PG 35, 865C.

<sup>27</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1081C.

<sup>28</sup> *Cap. theol.* II.4, PG 90, 1125D-1128A, translation in *The Philokalia. The Complete Text*, vol. 2, compiled by St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth, edited and translated by G.E.H. Palmer, Ph. Sherrard, and K. Ware (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1981), p. 138.

This metaphor is also utilized in an ecclesiological context, in connection with the biblical metaphor of body and members. The fragmenting effect of difference and diversity of the members of the Church is overcome by the reference and relation of all to the one source. Maximus, in actual fact, adds one more metaphor to the list to describe the reality of the Church body: the manifold universe, or more precisely, God as the creator of a manifold universe in which unity, harmony and diversity coexist in peace.<sup>29</sup>

### Stone and Colours

Lastly, an entirely different metaphor for discussing simultaneous oneness and multiplicity can be found in one of Maximus' Christological *Letters*. Here he demonstrates how a particular object can be at once one and many, at different levels no doubt. He takes the example of a stone, in which one can observe different colours, and concludes that the multiplicity of colours does not make the stone to be many stones.<sup>30</sup> Number neither unites nor divides, is his basic rule. Here is his argumentation.

When we speak of a two-coloured or five-coloured stone (or of any multi-coloured one) we do not divide the one stone into two or five stones. Nor do we sever the colours that exist in the stone one from another, but without confusing them we indicate their being this many around the stone and in the stone as the subject. And there neither has come about, nor can be, any division or cutting of the stone on account of the continuous quantity of colours counted with respect to it, just as there is no confusion or mingling of the colours on account of the stone's being one subject. For this shows the singleness of the subject which the stone possesses, and the quantity of colours which it has without division.

In a similar way also, the colours of the same stone, as they differ one from another in respect of quality and [thus] possess quantity, they again have singleness without confusion by virtue of their constituting by composition the subject of the stone: the stone remains one and the same, neither being divided by the quantity of the colours nor confounded by the singleness of the subject. The stone possesses existence that is defined by different *logoi*, and with respect to one *logos* it admits number, with respect to the other it does not.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See *Myst.* 1, Soteropoulos, 150-154; in particular for the metaphor of circle and radii see 154:4-6.

<sup>30</sup> He extends it to flowers and animals, too, *Ep.* 12, PG 91, 476D.

<sup>31</sup> *Ep.* 12, PG 91, 476A-C.



## Part II

### TRINITY

#### 3

#### Monad and Triad

##### The Principles

IN ORDER fully to appreciate St Maximus' understanding of the Trinity, or Christology, it is important to make clear the basic principles, or 'rules' as Maximus calls them,<sup>1</sup> concerning the key concepts in Byzantine theology, such as essence and hypostasis. Although relatively simple these rules are of such an importance that a failure to give due attention to them will inevitably result in misunderstanding and distorting not only Maximus' theology but also that of the whole of the Byzantine tradition. It is of an equal, if not perhaps even greater, importance not to confuse the patristic notion of 'person' (or 'hypostasis') with those of the modern times.

By the time of Maximus, within the Chalcedonian tradition to which he adhered, there had emerged a fairly clearly defined structure of theology with its own terminology. The actual story how this emerged is long and arduous, but a few glimpses from it will give us an idea of the principles and the structure that I wish to highlight here.

The fundamental question in both Trinitarian theology and Christology was how to reconcile simultaneous unity and difference. If Christ was God and the Father was God, how, then, could there be only one God and not two Gods, (or even three when the Holy Spirit was included in the disputes)? And if Christ was both God and man, how could it be explained that he was one and not two?

Some of the early solutions to the Trinitarian dilemma were attempts to secure unity in God by compromising the concrete and distinct reality of the Son and the Spirit. These trends are conventionally gathered under the title monarchianism. One such solution was promoted by Sabellius in the third century who maintained that God was one

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<sup>1</sup> Maximus speaks of 'rules' in this sense in *Opusc.* 10, PG 91, 136CD and in *Pyrr.*, PG 91, 316A.

single person acting, as it were, three different roles in history.<sup>2</sup> The next century brought with it Arianism which in its various forms saw the solution in radically differentiating between the Father, who alone was God by essence properly speaking, and the Son and the Spirit. In the Arian perspective, as R.P.C. Hanson puts it: 'There is no common nature shared by Father, Son and Spirit, no divine "substance" which they all possess. ... The Three are not equal, their difference of nature entails a difference of degree.'<sup>3</sup>

In the latter half of the fourth century, the Cappadocian Fathers made an attempt to sail between these two tendencies, and although their theology was to become normative, it did not pass without reactions: they were charged with Tritheism. As the erudite men of their time they cast their counter-arguments in the form of commonly accepted notions. They argued that as with human beings there can be observed unity at the level of the universal and differentiation at the level of the particular, so also with God something analogous can be perceived. Unity and differentiation could, then, be viewed as simultaneous at different levels or, one might say, from different aspects. God could be said to be absolutely one at the level of the universal and, at the same time, three, or a triad, at the level of the particular.

Terminology denoting the different aspects was not established and the Cappadocian settlement was an attempt to establish one. There were dangers. Virtually any expression could be misinterpreted by one or another party. Sabellianism and Arianism were for the theologian the Scylla and Charybdis of the time, and the Cappadocians proposed terms and distinctions which could function as the true *via media*.

What was the choice of terminology, then? With regard to the universal, the term 'essence' presented no ambiguities. It was a cognate of the verb 'to be' thus signifying being in general but also corresponding to the revelation of God to Moses as 'He Who

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<sup>2</sup> 'Thus the one godhead regarded as creator and law-giver was the Father; for redemption it was projected like a ray of sun, and was then withdrawn; then, thirdly, the same godhead operated as Spirit to inspire and bestow grace.' J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1977, fifth and revised edition), p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God. The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), p. 104. See also Manlio Simonetti, *La crisi Ariana nel IV secolo* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum "Augustinianum", 1975).



Is' (ὁ ὢν).<sup>4</sup> Latin had no such word and thus *essentia* was, according to St Augustine, coined from the verb *esse* on the basis of the Greek οὐσία.<sup>5</sup> Also the Nicene anti-Arian key concept ὁμοούσιον was based on this word.<sup>6</sup>

Another term which could serve for the same purpose was ὑπόστασις, the literal Latin translation of which was *substantia*. In Tertullian's formulation, for example, God was *una substantia, tres personae*.<sup>7</sup> But in Greek ὑπόστασις was beginning to have the meaning of the particular, and thus things were not that straightforward. To say in Greek one ὑπόστασις, three πρόσωπα — which corresponded literally to the Latin *una substantia, tres personae* of Tertullian — sounded, at least in St Basil's time, dangerously Sabellian. The term πρόσωπον meant 'mask' or 'face' and lacked somehow the requisite concreteness.<sup>8</sup> It was therefore too easy to take the formula 'one ὑπόστασις and three πρόσωπα' in a Sabellian way to mean one God with three different faces or roles.

For this reason Basil insisted that the only way out was to distinguish between οὐσία and ὑπόστασις. These corresponded to the universal and the particular respectively: 'Those who say that essence and hypostasis are identical are compelled to confess that there are only different masks (πρόσωπα).'<sup>9</sup> Basil maintained that the creed of the council of Nicaea 325 A.D. distinguishes between hypostasis and essence when it declares anathema on 'those who allege that the Son of God is of another hypostasis (ὑπόστασις) or essence (οὐσία)'<sup>10</sup> [than that of the Father]. 'For it is *not* said therein,' Basil argues, 'that essence and hypostasis are the same thing. For if the words revealed one and the same meaning, what was the need of each separately?'<sup>11</sup> And yet, these terms *had* been identical at the time of the council—for St Athanasius, for example—

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<sup>4</sup> Ex. 3:14.

<sup>5</sup> *De civ. Dei* 12.2, CCSL 48, 357.

<sup>6</sup> See Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation. The Faith of the Early Church*, translated by M. Westerhoff and edited by A. Louth (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical press, 1993; original German edition 1985), p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> *Adversus Praxeas* 11-12, PL 2, 1670D.

<sup>8</sup> The term ἐνυπόστατον was first used precisely in this context to emphasize the concrete reality of the divine persons as opposed to accidental reality.

<sup>9</sup> *Ep.* 236, Deferrari 3, 402.

<sup>10</sup> *Degrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Tanner, 5:22-25.

<sup>11</sup> *Ep.* 125, Deferrari 2, 262.

and they still were so in the minds of the so-called Old Nicenes.<sup>12</sup> Basil's distinction, therefore, was met with objection.

But what Basil was trying to do was to find a way of expressing the distinction and true subsistence of the three divine 'somethings' without falling into Sabellianism, on the one hand, or to Tritheism or Arianism, on the other hand. Saying that God was one essence and three πρόσωπα was what Sabellius had said and was clearly a dangerous thing to do. The Arian, or Eunomian, line of thinking maintained that there were three different essences, and consequently, identifying hypostasis with essence and thus speaking of three hypostases (= essences) meant falling into the other trap. Distinguishing between οὐσία and ὑπόστασις was the only way out.

Although he could distinguish between these two terms, Basil was not happy identifying ὑπόστασις and πρόσωπον, as André de Halleux has convincingly argued.<sup>13</sup> Again, this was owing to the danger of Sabellianism. It was Basil's friend Gregory Nazianzen and his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa who established this correspondence. The former is somewhat tentative when he says that 'God is three in regard to distinctive properties, or hypostases, or, if you like, persons (πρόσωπα); for we shall not quarrel about the names, as long as the terms lead to the same conception.'<sup>14</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, in contrast, states plainly that 'the Scripture ... safeguards the identity of the godhead in the particularity of the three hypostases, that is to say, persons (πρόσωπα).'<sup>15</sup> He does not stop there, however, but makes another identification: 'When we say particular (μερική οὐσία) or individual essence (ἰδική οὐσία), we do not wish to denote anything else than individual (ἄτομον), which is person.'<sup>16</sup> Thus, in actual fact, for Gregory of Nyssa all the three notions—hypostasis, person and individual—are identical, and this identification will in due time become the standard in the Chalcedonian theological tradition. In *Institutio elementaris*, a treatise attributed to St

<sup>12</sup> See the article by André de Halleux, "Hypostase" et "Personne" dans la formation du dogme trinitaire (ca 375-381)', (reprinted) in *Patrologie et Oecuménisme. Recueil d'études* (Leuven: Leuven Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 113-214.

<sup>13</sup> See de Halleux, "Hypostase" et "Personne", pp. 114-130.

<sup>14</sup> *Or.* 39.11, SC 358, 170-171.

<sup>15</sup> *Comm. not.*, GNO 3, part 1, 26.

<sup>16</sup> *Comm. not.*, GNO 3, part 1, 23.



John of Damascus (8th c.), the author summarizes this by saying that ‘hypostasis, person and individual are the same thing.’<sup>17</sup> There may, of course, be some nuances to the individual notions, and clearly their etymologies are entirely different, but their basic usage in the context of theology becomes identical from this time onwards.<sup>18</sup>

What I wish to demonstrate with this brief sketch, is that the Trinitarian mystery was discussed, or began to be discussed, by the Cappadocians within the framework of the universal and the particular, and that as a result of their labours certain terms, which henceforth became standard, were designated to the one or the other of these two realms. ‘The mystery of the Trinity, however, remained a mystery: these distinctions were not pressed very far; they simply provided terms in which the oneness of the Godhead and the threeness of the Father, Son, and Spirit could be expressed,’<sup>19</sup> As Andrew Louth in his latest book has observed.

The kind of ambivalence that the term ‘hypostasis’ presented in the Trinitarian disputes, the term ‘nature’ continued to have in Christology. Chalcedon and its aftermath is an obvious case in point. In the Chalcedonian tradition ‘nature’ was identified with ‘essence’, and thus by the time of Maximus Trinitarian and Christological languages could be discussed within a unified theological framework. Maximus sums up the terminology in a sentence:

Common and universal, that is to say generic, is, according to the Fathers, the essence and nature, for they say that these two are identical with each other. Individual and particular is the hypostasis and person, for these too are identical with each other.<sup>20</sup>

This for Maximus is the tradition of the Fathers, and these are the principles according to which he argues. To spell out what the rule is: that which is common to certain beings is their essence or nature, or an essential property; and thus common, universal and essential go together. That, again, which is particular to one individual being, something which it does not share with other members of its kind, is what characterizes the hypostasis or person; therefore, particular, individual, personal and hypos-

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<sup>17</sup> *Inst. el.* a:3, PTS 7, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> For such nuances see *Doctrina patrum* 6.16-21, Diekamp, 39-46.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene. Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p. 97.

tatic go together. Any confusion between the universal and the particular, that is, the essential and the personal (in the patristic sense) leads to problems in doctrine.

## Hypostasis

Let us then examine a little closer what the Fathers mean by ‘hypostasis’, bearing in mind that this is an immensely weighty term.<sup>21</sup> We have seen that St Basil established its place as denoting the particular. Here is his own statement, as quoted by St Maximus at the beginning of *Letter* 15.

If we, too, are to express briefly what we think, we shall say that what the universal is in relation to the particular, this the essence is in relation to the hypostasis. For each one of us both participates in being by virtue of the common principle (*logos*) of essence, and is so-and-so by virtue of the particularities which are around the principle (*logos*) of essence. In the same way there too the principle of essence is common, like goodness, godhead, or any other concept, but the hypostasis is considered in the property of fatherhood, sonship or sanctifying power.<sup>22</sup>

The principle of essence is what is common to all the particulars but the particulars have some characteristic features of their own which individuate them in relation to each other. If we look at some other definitions of ‘hypostasis’, coming from Christological context this time, we shall see that they all make the same point. Leontius of Byzantium (6th c.), for example, says the following.

Nature admits of the predication of being, but hypostasis also of being-by-oneself, and the former presents the character of genus, the latter expresses individual identity. The one brings out what is peculiar to something universal, the other distinguishes the particular from the general. To put it concisely, things sharing the same essence and things whose structure of being is common are properly said to be of one nature; but we can define as ‘hypostasis’ either things which share a nature but differ in number, or things which are put together from different natures, but which share reciprocally in a common being.<sup>23</sup>

Maximus moves along the same lines in his definition in *Letter* 15: “‘Hypostasis’ is that which exists distinctly and by-itself, since they say that “hypostasis” is an essence to-

<sup>20</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 545A.

<sup>21</sup> Marcel Richard in his article ‘L’Introduction du mot “hypostase” dans la théologie de l’Incarnation’, in *Opera Minora*, vol. 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1977), article 42, p. 5, says characteristically: ‘Des mots consacrés par la théologie un des plus importants est sans contredit le mot grec ὑπόστασις. Son emploi par l’Église dans les définitions des dogmes de la Trinité et de l’Incarnation l’ont rendu si lourd de sens qu’il est devenu pratiquement intraduisible et très malaisément définissable. Des pages et des pages lui ont été consacrés du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours qui, réunies, formeraient plusieurs gros volumes.’

<sup>22</sup> St Basil, *Ep.* 214, Deferrari 3, 234; Maximus, *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 545A.

<sup>23</sup> *Nest. et Eut.*, PG 86, 1280A; quoted in Brian E. Daley, “‘A Richer Union’: Leontius of Byzantium and the Relationship of Human and Divine in Christ”, in *SP* 24 (1993), p. 247.



gether with particular properties and it differs from other members of the same genus in number.’ (Τὸ γὰρ καθ’ αὐτὸ διωρισμένως συνεστῶς ἐστὶν ὑπόστασις· εἴπερ ὑπόστασιν εἶναι φασὶν οὐσίαν μετὰ ἰδιωμάτων, ἀριθμῷ τῶν ὁμογενῶν διαφέρουσιν.)<sup>24</sup> This definition is virtually identical with that of Leontius. One could add a whole host of similar definitions from the sixth and seventh centuries only to come to the same conclusion that the term ‘hypostasis’ denotes the particular.<sup>25</sup>

From these we could draw the conclusion that a hypostasis is an instance of a nature, distinguished in number from other individual instances of the same nature by its particular properties. It shares with the other instances of the same essence their essential properties but is differentiated from them in its particular personal properties. It is, therefore, not something opposed to essence but a concrete and particular instance of it: ‘an essence with particular properties’.

### Can a mouse be a person?

But here arises a question: If hypostasis is simply a particular, an essence with particular properties—and since for St Maximus hypostasis is the same thing as person—we may ask: can simply any particular being be a hypostasis or a person? Can, for example, a particular mouse be a person? (Asking this question, I quite deliberately use the two terms as synonyms, and for Maximus they are such. ‘Hypostasis’ is the more common of the two terms in the Fathers, whereas the term ‘person’ is brought into the discussion because of its strong modern overtones which the present chapter attempts to shake off.)

This question about the personhood of a mouse must have been in the mind of a once-upon-a-time Durham student who, perhaps like myself, had sought inspiration in a well-thumbed library copy of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. He had made an interesting annotation on one of its pages. This was in chapter three,

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<sup>24</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 557D.

<sup>25</sup> For example, ‘Pamphilus’, *Solutio* I, CCSG 19, 127-133; Anastasius of Antioch, *Philosophical Chapters* 54-61, Uthemann, 350-352; Anastasius the Sinaite, *Viae dux* II.3, CCSG 8, 50-79; Theodore of Raithu, *Praeparatio*, in Franz Diekamp, *Analecta patristica* (OCA 117, Rome: 1938), pp. 204-206 (= *Doctrina patrum*, 6.17, Diekamp, pp. 41-42).

where Alice has just survived from the flood caused by her own tears, and where she finds herself with an odd party of animals on the river bank holding a consultation as to how to get dry again—there, I noticed an annotation in pencil: The words ‘Mouse’ and ‘person’ had been drawn a circle around them, and the words ‘seemed to be’ were underlined. Here is a rough reproduction: ‘At last the Mouse, who seemed to be a person of...’<sup>26</sup> The phrase ‘Mouse seemed to be a person’<sup>27</sup> stood out. The anonymous annotator was obviously puzzled by Carroll’s claim that a mouse could be (or could at least seem to be) a *person*, albeit in a Wonderland. After all, mouse is an animal and animals are not persons. So, at least, we think today.

But can a mouse be a person? This is a question that brings us to a point where modern and early thought meet but do not necessarily coincide. It is, however, a crucial point and discussing it will prove helpful when we come to examine Maximus’ theology. We have already seen that when the Fathers speak about these concepts they refer mostly to human beings or to God. The question we want to ask first is whether the same notion of person or hypostasis can be extended to include other beings too, and if so, why? The purpose of asking such a question is not so much to make ‘animal theology’ but rather to clarify further the patristic concept of hypostasis, especially in relation to modern thinking.

One example can be found in Gregory of Nyssa who quite clearly makes a point suggesting that individual animals also are hypostases.

One thing is distinguished from another either by essence or by hypostasis, or both by essence and hypostasis. On the one hand, a man is distinguished from a horse by essence, and Peter is distinguished from Paul by hypostasis. On the other hand, such-and-such a hypostasis of man is distinguished from such-and-such a *hypostasis of horse* both by essence and hypostasis.<sup>28</sup>

Would Maximus then agree with such a statement? As the following text shows, he in fact would not only agree with it but would also further develop it.

Beings that are united according to one and the same nature or essence (*i.e.* beings that are of one and the same nature) are distinguished from one another by *hypostasis* or *person*, as is the case with angels and men, and with all the created beings that are considered in species (εἶδος) and in genus (γένος). For an angel is

<sup>26</sup> I have used the edition of Roger L. Green with illustrations by John Tenniel (London: OUP, 1971). The annotation is on p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> The phrase is, of course, taken out of context.

<sup>28</sup> *Comm. not.*, GNO 3 part 1, 29. Italics mine.



distinguished from an angel, a man from a man, an ox from an ox and a dog from a dog, *not* according to nature or essence, but *according to hypostasis*.<sup>29</sup>

For Maximus, then, the individual instances of ‘all the created beings that are considered in species (εἶδος) and in genus (γένος)’ are hypostases or persons.<sup>30</sup> (This no doubt includes Alice’s Mouse, too; not to mention the Lory and the Rabbit.)

What I wish to make clear here is that for the Greek Fathers the terms ‘hypostasis’ (as well as ‘person’) simply denotes the particular. To put it bluntly, ‘hypostasis’ as a technical term is a logical tool which characterizes particularity and concrete reality, and little else beyond that. Particularity in turn consists in differences which may be of various kinds.

And yet, the modern reader will surely object if we say that a mouse is a person. The obvious reason for this is that our contemporary understanding of the notion of person includes something which excludes mice from this category. Of the various theories of personhood, the kind of personalist theology that has been popular during the last century concentrates, it seems to me, on four notions which are most commonly linked with being a ‘person’. These are rationality, freedom, relatedness and self-consciousness.<sup>31</sup> If we consider these concepts in the light of the patristic tradition, we shall soon realize that they all are, directly or indirectly, connected with, not the personal, but the common and universal. (‘Relation’ is the only exception when taken as a personal difference.)

Rationality is perhaps the most conspicuous feature which distinguishes human beings from animals. Among created beings only angels and men have this property, animals being regarded as irrational. Rationality is a property that resides in our intellect or reason, and as such it is a faculty within the structure of the human soul. Rationality, therefore, is a part of human nature.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 549C. Italics mine.

<sup>30</sup> See also *Opusc.* 21, PG 91, 248B-249A.

<sup>31</sup> I am not referring to any work or writer in particular, but the line of thought which I wish to address here could be found in, for example, Colin E. Gunton *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997<sup>2</sup>, first published in 1991). Also a very lucid presentation of the issue can be found in the article of Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia, ‘The human person as an icon of the Trinity’, in *Sobornost* 8:2 (1986), pp. 6-23.

The seat of freedom, in turn, lies within our rational capacities, the νοῦς or the λόγος. And the patristic concept for free-will or self-determination, αὐτεξούσιον,<sup>32</sup> is closely related to that of λογικόν and is even identified with that of ‘will’ (θέλημα) by St Maximus.<sup>33</sup> All these are faculties which make up the human soul. Here again we may note that rationality and freedom are characteristic features of the human (as well as of the divine) nature, that is, of the human being *qua* human being, rather than *qua* person, that is, *qua* John or Jill.<sup>34</sup> They are essential properties; properties which all divine and human persons share; and properties without which God is not God nor a man, man. As Maximus so strikingly states in the *Dispute with Pyrrhus*: ‘If, therefore, man is an image of the divine nature; and the divine nature is *autexousios* [self-governed, endowed with free-will], then also the image, since it preserves the likeness to the archetype, is *autexousios* by nature.’ (Εἰ οὖν εἰκὼν ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς θείας φύσεως· αὐτεξούσιος δὲ ἡ θεία φύσις· ἄρα καὶ ἡ εἰκὼν· εἴπερ τὴν πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον σώζει ὁμοίωσιν, αὐτεξούσιος φύσει τυγχάνει.)<sup>35</sup> Consequently, rationality and freedom, in patristic terms, are not personal properties. Nor are they constitutive of persons, as features common and not particular to many individuals: They are constitutive of rational and free natures of which individual human persons are instances.

In the modern ‘dialogist’ perspective only a person, endowed with freedom and rationality, can relate. And relationship is seen as constitutive of personhood. There is no ‘I’ where there is no ‘Thou’. Relationship makes us persons. But when we speak of personal relations today we in fact mean a certain kind of relatedness; relatedness which is governed by freedom, rationality and psychological and emotional aspects peculiar to human beings. What this implies is that there are, I would argue, different kinds of relatedness conditioned by the natural capacities of each subject. Human beings relate humanly, mice in a mouse-kind-of-way, trees in a tree-kind-of-way, and so on.

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<sup>32</sup> In Maximus also self-determined movement, αὐτεξούσιος κίνησις. See *Pyrr.*, PG 91, 301C, 304CD.

<sup>33</sup> *Pyrr.*, PG 91, 324D.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Opusc.* 10, PG 91, 137A.

<sup>35</sup> *Pyrr.*, PG 91, 324D. See also George C. Berthold, ‘The Cappadocian Roots of Maximus’, in *Symposium*, p. 53.



I was once told by a micro-biologist, a student of bacterial behaviour, that even bacteria relate to one another and their environment. They do so, as Maximus would put it, according to their *logos* of essence. Yet, and here is an important point, we human beings, too, relate in accordance with the *logos* of our essence. That is, we relate in freedom, for ‘the natural things of intelligent/intellective natures’<sup>36</sup> are not under necessity,’<sup>37</sup> as St Maximus says. (This is why human beings can also act against their natural *logos*.)

Moreover, ‘relationship’ (πρὸς τι, σχέσις) in the ancient sense meant more than anything else a relationship of comparison: what one thing or person is in relation to another. Say, for example, this stone is twice as big as that stone, or Aristotle is the student of Plato, or the Earth is a part of the Solar System.<sup>38</sup> This, as I said earlier, can be regarded as a personal difference.

Lastly, what makes us think that we are persons, is our awareness of our own existence and uniqueness. We observe a certain centre of self-consciousness somewhere deep inside us—something which we cannot really determine but which at the same time makes us feel that we are persons, and that ‘I am I’ and nobody else. Yet, here too we ought to point out (even if it sounds odd) that even self-consciousness is a part of the human nature; it is an ingredient of our essence. There is no human being without this property and thus it is common to all humans. Therefore, from the stand-point of Byzantine thought, as I have presented it here, self-consciousness is not constitutive of the personal but of the essential.

If at this point we look at these four ingredients, we notice that they are all directly or indirectly linked with essence or nature (when understood in the light of the patristic rules). In fact, it is rationality as the seat of free-will which is at the heart of all these qualifications. It is interesting to note then that the only Late Antique definition of person which limits it to rational beings alone—namely the famous definition of Boethius

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<sup>36</sup> This refers to the rational part of the soul which is to govern the irrational, animal part of the amphibian human being.

<sup>37</sup> *Pyrr.*, PG 91, 293C.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Cat.* 7, Loeb 325, 6a:37ff.

(5th-6th c.) *persona est naturae rationalis individua substantia*<sup>39</sup> — makes it explicit that we are speaking of a natural quality. Early Greek theology, however, never made this delimitation. (Boethius thinks otherwise when he a little after this definition says that the Greeks use the word ὑπόστασις for *persona* and that they never apply it to irrational animals.)<sup>40</sup>

The only real qualification for person/hypostasis that remains, and which we have not yet discussed, is particularity. This is where an existentialist type of personalism and Greek patristic theology coincide. Particularity and its integrity is for both of immense importance. Unity which annihilates the particularity of those united cannot be true unity. The common unites the particulars, but without confusion. And yet, particularity is not a psychological entity. Otherness does not depend on our ability or disability to observe or to be conscious of it. In St Maximus' vision of the cosmos this is a matter of difference:

If the beings which have come-to-be are many, they necessarily are also different (if indeed they are many). For it is not possible that the many are not also different. And if the many are different, then, also the *logoi* by means of which they exist in substance are to be understood as being different. [It is ] by means of these *logoi*, and even more so because of them, that the different beings differ [from one another]. For the different beings would not differ from one another, had the *logoi* by means of which they have come-into-being no difference.<sup>41</sup>

But let us return to the Mouse. It will have become clear by now that the reason why a mouse cannot be regarded as a person in the modern view, is because it does not possess the above-mentioned ingredients: it has no rationality by nature, therefore it cannot act or relate freely, let alone be conscious of its own personality. But every mouse is a particular mouse, as unique as any other particular being in the universe, and, as we have seen, the only characteristics that a person or hypostasis has in Byzantine theology are concreteness and particularity. These every mouse does possess. Consequently, in that sense, every particular mouse is a hypostasis. (I must underline here that I am not attempting to underestimate rational beings nor am I trying to attribute properties of rational beings to irrational. Rational beings are ontologically infinitely

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<sup>39</sup> *Contra Eutychem*, 3, PL 64, 1343CD.

<sup>40</sup> *Contra Eutychem*, 3, PL 64, 1343D and 1344D.

<sup>41</sup> *Ambig.* 22, PG 91, 1256D.



higher than irrational; and mice are and remain irrational beings, except perhaps in Wonderland.) Why was it then that the Mouse Alice met ‘seemed to be a person’?<sup>42</sup> The answer is, of course, very simple: the Mouse *seemed* to possess rationality and free-will. It or he could relate and be related to as a rational being, as an ‘animal person’. But thus only in Wonderland.

One conclusion we can draw from this is that when we say ‘person’ or ‘hypostasis’ today we tend to mean much more than when the Fathers<sup>43</sup> used the same words. We have seen that in the modern understanding of the notion we attribute features to it which (apart from particularity) belong to the essence, that is, to the realm of the universal, and when we speak of these features we speak of them as being ‘personal’ or ‘hypostatic’.<sup>44</sup> There is a shift from the universal to the particular.

The development of the concept of person is of course very complex, as, for example, the article of Adolf Trendelenburg ‘A Contribution to the History of the Word Person’<sup>45</sup> clearly demonstrates. For our purposes here, limited to a specific area, there is one point in this development that is of significance and which Trendelenburg brings out. From his analysis it becomes apparent that there *was* a shift from the universal to the particular and that it probably was Emmanuel Kant who first made it explicit. However the case may be, this gives us a certain direction. And same direction can be seen in Samuel M. Powell’s recent study *The Trinity in German Thought* where he remarks that ‘[i]t was ... in Germany that the contemporary understanding of the self finds its roots.’<sup>46</sup> Powell’s study also shows that the anxieties about confusing ancient concepts with modern ones are not new. They have already been expressed in the 20th-century German theology, and this may well be a reaction to the shift which had taken place some time earlier.

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<sup>42</sup> Taking the verb ‘seemed’ out of context in accordance with the annotation.

<sup>43</sup> Even if we include Boethius with them.

<sup>44</sup> It is, perhaps, not out of place here to point out that in Greek there is no word which corresponds to ‘personhood’. In Modern Greek the phrase ‘notion of person’ (ἡ ἐννοια τοῦ προσώπου) is used instead. Also the form with the Germanic ending *-hood* (*-heit*) suggests a universal quality rather than a differentiating one.

<sup>45</sup> published in German in 1908, and in English two years later in *Monist* 20 (1910), pp. 336-363.

<sup>46</sup> *The Trinity in German Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), p. 2.

The emphasis on the singularity of God's selfhood appears also in Barth's strictures against the word 'person' when discussing the three Trinitarian persons. Barth exhibited on this issue a remarkable anxiety that modern personalistic connotations would be carried over and applied to each of the three persons. Hence his repeated and ardent insistence that personality and personal characteristics pertain to the singular essence of God, not individually to the three persons.<sup>47</sup>

Where this might lead in Barth's understanding becomes clear from the following.

In addition to being anxious over possible misunderstanding of 'person', Barth was convinced that this concept was to blame for the bane of modern theology—Sabellianism. As he saw it, nineteenth-century theologians, recognizing that personality had come in the modern era to be associated with self-consciousness and individuality, drew the correct conclusion that tritheism loomed with such use and fled instead in the direction of Sabellianism. In this way, they were able to preserve the one personality of God, but at the cost of making the Trinitarian persons mere epiphenomena.<sup>48</sup>

## Two Problems

### a) *Person—Nature Dichotomy*

I shall not delve any more deeply into German thought but shall instead bring in two aspects in modern theology—probably inspired by German thought—which require a brief discussion before we move on to Maximus. The first is a tendency in some modern theology to drive a wedge between nature and person. A text from Vladimir Lossky on the Trinitarian doctrine provides a starting-point.

Trinitarian theology thus opens to us a new aspect of the human reality: that of personhood. Ancient philosophy was indeed ignorant of the meaning of personhood. ... Only the revelation of the Trinity, unique foundation of Christian anthropology, could situate personhood in an absolute manner. For the Fathers, indeed, personhood is freedom in relation to nature.<sup>49</sup>

For Lossky, then, the corner-stone of the patristic Trinitarian doctrine is that 'personhood is freedom in relation to nature.'<sup>50</sup> A charitable reading of this claim would take it to mean that the fallen man who comes to know the living Trinitarian God in a close relationship with Him will experience an absolute freedom from his passions, that is, from the fallenness of his nature. Freedom from nature is, in such a case, free-

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<sup>47</sup> *The Trinity*, p. 221. Powell's references are to Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, translated by G.T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), pp. 402ff.

<sup>48</sup> *The Trinity*, pp. 219-220. 'Ironically, they [Pannenberg and Moltmann] fault Barth for the same tendency, Sabellianism (*i.e.* failing to concede full reality to the Trinitarian persons), for which he criticized nineteenth-century theology' (p. 220).

<sup>49</sup> *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood, New York: SVSP, 1989), p. 42. This book consists of translations of articles published in French in 1964-65.

<sup>50</sup> It must be noted that in *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, New York: SVSP, 1985; original French edition 1967) Lossky says: 'I must admit that until now I have not found what one might call an elaborated doctrine of the human person in patristic theology' (p. 112).



dom of the rational part of the soul from its attachment to the irrational which owing to the Fall has blurred the former. This freedom is gained through one's relationship with God in the Holy Spirit and involves an ecstasy of the *voûs* out of the senses into the realm of the intelligible, and ultimately to God.<sup>51</sup> It may well be that this is what Lossky had at the back of his mind.

A less charitable reading, however, will see in Lossky's position an opposition between nature and person (both in man and in God), an opposition which draws directly on the Sartrean principle 'existence [or subject] precedes essence',<sup>52</sup> and which takes for granted that nature or essence is bound to necessity and that personhood functions as the redeeming principle of freedom from this necessity. A certain nature—person dichotomy is apparent here. Lossky goes on to say that

[p]ersonal uniqueness is what remains when one takes away all cosmic context, social and individual—all, indeed, that may be conceptualized. Eluding concepts, personhood cannot be defined. It is the incomparable, the wholly-other. ... For that which remains irreducible to every nature cannot be defined, but only designated.

What seems to lie behind all this is, on the one hand, an existentialist uneasiness with respect to nature, and, on the other hand, an idealist understanding of selfhood. The tendency I wish to avoid in bringing out these views is the attribution of necessity to intelligent, rational or, indeed, divine natures which results in distancing nature from person; as we have said earlier 'the natural things of intelligent beings are not under necessity',<sup>53</sup> according to St Maximus.

In the patristic understanding, we are not free because we are persons; we are free because we are rational by *nature*, that is, by *essence*. Freedom resides in our rationality rather than in an indeterminate principle of personhood. We human beings (let alone God) are not in want of some extra principle of liberty which is not already part of our essential being. Human nature is after all an extremely fine and complex fabric which as such is already a supreme mystery. It is another matter how the Fall has affected humanity and how its results have limited our natural freedom.

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. *Ambig.* 6, PG 91, 1068C and *Qu. Thal.* 54, CCSG 7, 443ff.

<sup>52</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris: Les Éditions Nagel, 1970), p. 21.

<sup>53</sup> *Pyrr.*, PG 91, 293C.

### b) *Person and Individual*

The other problem I wish to address here is the distinction made in modern thought between person and individual. Here a comment of Colin Gunton on P.F. Strawson's book *Individuals. An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*<sup>54</sup> can furnish a beginning: 'To treat the person and the individual as the same thing—to define the person as an individual—is to lose both person and individual.'<sup>55</sup>

Here we need to place the question in context. As we have seen, the challenge the Fathers were facing was how to explain absolute unity and real difference in God. How could the One God be three truly divine and distinct 'somethings' and still not be three Gods? To explicate this they made use of the current logical tools. They distinguished between the universal and the particular and spoke of these two dimensions in terms of contemporary logic. In that context, the term 'individual' was correctly used as a synonym of person and hypostasis. When the terms 'individual' and 'species' were not made use of in *theologia*, this was not because 'individual' could not express the 'personal', but because the 'genus—species—individual' -structure (that is, the Porphyrian Tree) was regarded as inapplicable to the uncreated realm.

The modern context is altogether different. We live in a sad world of disintegration and fragmentation. People suffer from desperate loneliness albeit in the midst of millions of others. Societies are only forms; they lack every notion of true community. Happiness is sought within the framework of satisfying everyone's individual needs (too often dictated by the passions and created by the mass-media). On the whole, destructive individualism prevails. In such a context anything which promotes communion with others, personal care and social integration is more than welcome. And it is precisely to this challenge that so much modern theology and philosophy is responding, and rightly so. Gunton's statement belongs to this category. But it becomes problematic when read against or back into the patristic tradition. Characteristically Gunton regards Boethius as an 'individualist' for the simple reason that he makes use of the word 'individual' in his definition of 'person'. (Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus and John Dam-

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<sup>54</sup> London: Macmillan, 1982; first published in 1959.



ascene would have had the same condemnation.) What our situation is all about and what difficulties it creates in understanding words and concepts, even common ones, is perhaps what another passage from *Alice in Wonderland* could teach us—especially if we bear in mind the trend of defining personhood in terms of love.

“’Tis so,” said the Duchess: “and the moral of that is—“Oh, ’tis love, ’tis love, that makes the world go round!””

‘Somebody said,’ Alice whispered, ‘that it’s done by everybody minding their own business!’

‘Ah, well! It means much the same thing,’ said the Duchess, digging her sharp little chin into Alice’s shoulder as she added ‘and the moral of *that* is—“Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves.”’<sup>56</sup>

In other words, we are in a muddle. Even when we want to define ‘person’ in terms of love, we then do not really know what ‘love’ means.

The Duchess’ last point is what we need here: to ‘take care of the sense’. In the present context, person and individual are no longer logical terms. They are terms which designate a certain, one might say, spiritual state and attitude, and a certain kind of relatedness to which this state corresponds, whether at the level of personal relations or that of society. The questions we are asking today are, in fact, what it is to be truly human, and what it is to be a true human community or society. And in the various responses given to these questions, ‘individual’ stands for what ‘to be truly human’ is *not*, that is, fragmentation, self-sufficiency, egocentrism, disintegration, inability to relate and so on; whereas ‘person’ (and in some theologies ‘hypostasis’) stands for what it is, that is, relatedness in love, communion, sharing, self-emptying, humility and so on. One could almost say that the modern understanding of individual—in some theologies, at any rate—signifies nothing less than the state of fallen man, and person/hypostasis signifies the state of the man deified in the image and likeness of God.<sup>57</sup> Person/hypostasis is, one might argue, he who in the truest sense realizes the twofold commandment of love. If we wanted to avoid the confusion we would rather speak in the patristic terms of the man after the transgression and the man restored in the image and likeness of God than in terms of individuals and persons.

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<sup>55</sup> *The Promise*, p. 85.

<sup>56</sup> *Alice’s Adventures*, p. 80.

In any case, considering the present unfortunate context one can easily understand and accept the distinction between person and individual, as long as we ‘take care of the sense’ so that ‘the sounds can take care of themselves,’ that is, as long as these terms are duly explained and understood in each particular context, and as long as the distinction between person and individual, non-existent in Late Antiquity, is not read into the works of authors of that period.

### Monad in Triad and Triad in Monad

Let us now move on to St Maximus and his understanding of the Trinity. ‘How does extreme union possess both identity and otherness, that is to say, identity of essences and otherness of persons or *vice versa*?’ Maximus asks. ‘For instance, in the Holy Trinity, there is identity of essence and otherness of persons; for we confess one essence and three hypostases.’<sup>58</sup> As we have seen above, the Cappadocians spoke of unity and difference in God in terms of the universal and the particular. This logic forms also the foundation for St Maximus’ Trinitarian theology. The most obvious example can be found in his *Letter to Cosmas, On the universal and the particular, that is, on essence and hypostasis*<sup>59</sup> which we have already quoted earlier. There, after identifying the universal with essence and nature, and the particular with hypostasis and person, Maximus goes on to speak of the distinction between essence and hypostasis first in the created order<sup>60</sup> and then also in the Trinity.<sup>61</sup> The conclusion Maximus draws from this gives him a logical pattern for unity and differentiation of consubstantial beings, the Holy Trinity being the most sublime example.

Therefore, beings that are united according to one and the same essence or nature (*i.e.* beings that are of one and the same essence or nature) are necessarily consubstantial with one another and of different hypostases (ἑτερουπόστατα). They are, on the one hand, consubstantial by virtue of the *logos* of the essential community which is considered in them unalterably in their natural identity. According to this *logos* no one being is more *that which it is* than another, and no one being is more *what it is called* than another, but they all admit one and the

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<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Archim. Zacharias Zacharou, *Ἀναφορά στὴ θεολογία τοῦ Γέροντος Σωφρονίου* (Tolleshunt Knights: Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2000), pp. 23-47.

<sup>58</sup> *Opusc.* 13.2, PG 91, 145B.

<sup>59</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 544C.

<sup>60</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 549Bff.

<sup>61</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 549CD.



same definition (ὅρος) and *logos* of essence.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, they are of different hypostases (ἑτερουπόστατα) by virtue of the *logos* of personal otherness which distinguishes them, one from another. The hypostases do not coincide in their characteristic distinguishing marks, but each one by virtue of the sum of its characteristic properties bears a most particular *logos* of its own hypostasis, and in accordance with this *logos* it admits no community with those that are connatural and consubstantial with it.<sup>63</sup>

Although Maximus discusses the doctrine in logical concepts, his favourite terms for the Trinity are Monad and Triad which he ultimately finds in the context of worship, and it is worship that forms the basis for the correct understanding of God: ‘For that which we worship is Monad in Triad and Triad in Monad.’<sup>64</sup> Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God.’<sup>65</sup> One might also say that correct formulation of doctrine forms the basis of true worship. The two texts in which Maximus expounds in some length his understanding of Monad and Triad, *On the Lord’s Prayer*<sup>66</sup> and *Mystagogia* 23,<sup>67</sup> are both associated with liturgical prayer and an elevated state of spiritual knowledge. In the former, Maximus speaks of how ‘mystical theology teaches us, who through faith have been adopted by grace and brought to the knowledge of truth, to recognize one nature and power of the divinity, that is to say, one God contemplated in Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’<sup>68</sup> And in the latter, he says: ‘Now as the soul by a simple and indivisible power through its instruction, has already encompassed by knowledge the principles of both sensible and intelligible things, the Word then leads it to the knowledge of theology...’<sup>69</sup> Theology here is, of course, *theologia* in the strict sense of the word: the knowledge of the Trinity, which Maximus specifies as knowing ‘one God; one essence, three hypostases; tri-hypostatic Monad of essence and consubstantial Triad of hypostases; Monad in Triad and Triad in Monad.’<sup>70</sup>

How Monad and Triad, essence and the hypostases, relate to each other is carefully presented. Maximus makes it clear that we are dealing with a single reality. God, one

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Cat.* 5, Loeb 325, 3b-4a.

<sup>63</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 552BC.

<sup>64</sup> μονάς ἐν τριάδι καὶ τριάς ἐν μονάδι. An alternative translation would be ‘a Unity in Trinity and a Trinity in Unity’.

<sup>65</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 549D-552A.

<sup>66</sup> *Or. dom.*:414-467, CCSG 23, 51-54.

<sup>67</sup> *Myst.* 23, Soteropoulos, 216:12 -218:10 [= PG 91, 700C-701B].

<sup>68</sup> *Or. dom.*:439-442, CCSG 23, 53.

<sup>69</sup> *Myst.* 23, Soteropoulos, 216:12-17 [= PG 91, 700C].

and the same, is simultaneously *both* Monad *and* Triad. In *Ambiguum* 67, contemplating on number twelve and its factors, he very interestingly says that ‘the divine essence is expressed through number three, as it is triadically praised for the sake of its tri-hypostatic existence. For the Monad is Triad as being complete in three complete hypostases, that is to say, by mode of existence; and the Triad is truly Monad by the *logos* of its essence or being.’<sup>71</sup> Neither the Monad nor the Triad has any ‘ontological priority’ over the other but both are aspects of a single reality and are in balance with each other. God is Monad in Triad and Triad in Monad,

<p><b>not</b> one thing and another thing;  nor one <i>above</i> the other,  nor one [existing] <i>through</i> the other;  nor one <i>in</i> the other,  nor one [derived] <i>from</i> the other;</p>	<p><b>but</b> the same  in itself and  by itself,  upon itself,  by virtue of itself.<sup>72</sup></p>
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This perhaps slightly enigmatic sequence of statements from the *Mystagogia* finds some explanation in *On the Lord's Prayer*. Here, too, we have a similar sequence of statements as above. In this case each statement is followed by an explanatory comment. The order also is slightly different: in the text here below statement four, which speaks of ‘quality’, comes first. The reason for this is probably the fact that the excerpt comes from a context where Maximus speaks of the theological errors in the Greek and the Jewish religions. And with the latter, he says, God ‘only possesses word and spirit as qualities, without itself being Intellect, Word and Spirit.’<sup>73</sup> For the Christian, God is Triad of ‘essentially subsistent’ Intellect, Word and Spirit, as opposed to mere qualities.<sup>74</sup> He, therefore, starts off from quality and accident.

It [mystical theology] teaches us to recognize God as Triad in Monad and Monad in Triad,  
not, however, as one *in* the other:  
    for the Triad is not in the Monad as an accident is in a substance, or *vice versa*, since God is without qualities;  
nor as one thing *and* another thing:  
    for the Monad does not differ from the Triad by otherness of nature, being a simple and single nature;  
nor as one being *above* the other:  
    for the Triad is not distinguished from the Monad by inferiority of power, or *vice versa*,  
    or like as something which is common and generic, considered merely conceptually, from the particulars subordinate to it: it is a self-existent essence *par excellence* and a truly self-empowered power.  
nor as one [existing] *through* the other:  
    for that which is altogether the same and non-relative has no such mediating relationship as an effect has with its cause;

<sup>70</sup> *Myst.* 23, Soteropoulos, 216:17-19 [= PG 91, 700D].

<sup>71</sup> *Ambig.* 67, PG 91, 1400D-1401A.

<sup>72</sup> *Myst.* 23, Soteropoulos, 216:19-22 [= PG 91, 700D].

<sup>73</sup> *Or. dom.*:436-438, CCSG 23, 52-53.

<sup>74</sup> *Or. dom.*:443ff., CCSG 23, 53.



nor as one derived *from* the other:

for the Triad is not derived from the Monad by production or by bringing forth, since it is ungenerated and self shown-forth.<sup>75</sup>

Here Maximus is first and foremost underlining consubstantiality within the divine being, but he is also drawing the line between the created and the uncreated, so crucial to his theology as a whole. Monad and Triad are both on the side of the uncreated. They are neither two different natures or beings in union, nor subordinate to each other, nor deriving one from or through the other in such a way which would introduce otherness of essence within the divine, or, indeed, any kind of otherness which would cause separation between the Monad and the Triad.

Differences and accidents play a significant role in the context of the Porphyrian Tree within which Maximus often discusses the created order. Since these have no place in the divine, he makes it plain that Monad and Triad are not accidental qualities. Also the generic is something substantial in God rather than simply a conceptual idea realized in the subordinate individuals, as can be observed within the Porphyrian Tree.

The corollary of *Mystagogia* 23 brings us to the heart of this study: ‘The same [is] *both* Monad *and* Triad, possessing union (ἔνωσις) uncompounded and without confusion, and possessing distinction (διάκρισις) undivided and without parts.’<sup>76</sup> In God there is observed a simultaneous union/unity and distinction which, on the one hand, avoids composition and confusion, and, on the other hand, division, separation and partition. God is, Maximus continues, ‘Monad according to the *logos* of essence or being (not, however, by synthesis, conflation or confusion of any kind); Triad according to the *logos* of how it exists and subsists (nevertheless not by separation, alienation or any kind of division).’<sup>77</sup>

## Deviations

What happens if there *is* confusion or separation? Maximus’ heresiology has precisely to do with this side of the question. Arius and Macedonius rejecting the consub-

<sup>75</sup> *Or. dom.*:446-461, CCSG 23, 53-54.

<sup>76</sup> *Myst.* 23, Soteropoulos, 216:22-23 [= PG 91, 700D].

<sup>77</sup> *Myst.* 23, Soteropoulos, 216:23-27 [= PG 91, 700D-701A]. See also *Ambig.* 40, PG 91, 1304A.

stantiality within the Triad break the Monad.<sup>78</sup> '[W]e anathematize Arius, not for proclaiming the hypostatic difference in the Trinity, but for not declaring the natural union.'<sup>79</sup> Here the Triad causes a split in the Monad. Sabellius, on the contrary, professes the Monad but regarding it as uni-personal rejects the Triad.<sup>80</sup> '[W]e anathematize Sabellius, not for proclaiming the natural unity in the Holy Trinity, but for not declaring the hypostatic difference.'<sup>81</sup> The Monad here confuses the Triad. Finally, Tritheism<sup>82</sup> represents a more subtle type of separation.

The Tritheists who separate the Father from the Son, go off the deep end either way. For they either say that the Son is coeternal with the Father, but separate one from the other and so are forced to say that He was not born of Him and to go off the deep end—that there are three Gods and three origins; or else ...[: Arianism].<sup>83</sup>

Maximus argues that 'when the Lord says: *I in the Father and the Father in me*,<sup>84</sup> He shows the inseparableness of the persons,' and that there is in God (according to St Gregory) a certain wondrous undivided division and a conjunction with distinction. 'Therefore, he concludes, both the division and the union are extraordinary. But what is there extraordinary, if as one man with another, so likewise the Son and the Father, is both united and separate and nothing more?'<sup>85</sup>

## Today

In the modern context there has emerged a question as to whether the Greek Fathers (in particular the Cappadocians) in their Trinitarian theology are personalists or essentialists. It is a question to which the present chapter may have already given a partial answer. Nevertheless, I should like to refer to an article of André de Halleux<sup>86</sup> de-

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<sup>78</sup> *Opusc.* 13.1, PG 91, 145A.

<sup>79</sup> *Opusc.* 13.4, PG 91, 148B.

<sup>80</sup> *Opusc.* 13.1, PG 91, 145A.

<sup>81</sup> *Opusc.* 13.5, PG 91, 148B.

<sup>82</sup> Polycarp Sherwood argues that the tritheism Maximus has in view here is that of John Philoponus, a sixth-century Monophysite and Aristotelian commentator. See his *St Maximus the Confessor. The Ascetic Life. The Four Centuries on Charity* (ACW 21, New York: Newman Press, 1955), p. 255, n. 104.

<sup>83</sup> *Carit.* II.29, PG 90, 993A.

<sup>84</sup> Jn. 10:38.

<sup>85</sup> *Carit.* II.29, PG 90, 993AB.

<sup>86</sup> 'Personnalisme ou essentialisme trinitaire chez les Pères cappadociens?' (reprinted as article 6) in *Patrologie et Oecuménisme. Recueil d'études* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), pp. 215-268 [= *RTL* 17 (1986), pp. 129-155, 265-292].



voted to this issue, and to present some of his main conclusions. De Halleux concentrates on the Cappadocian Fathers, and on the claim by modern Eastern theologians that the Cappadocians have made a personalist revolution in ontology by introducing the distinction between hypostasis and essence. He also discusses the accusation by some Western theologians that these same Fathers are essentialists. Our interest lies in the former.

According to de Halleux the Cappadocians did not wish to give priority to either the Monad or the Triad, since both possess an equal importance.<sup>87</sup> (The same is true of St Maximus.) In that sense the Fathers were, at once, both personalists and essentialists. But these notions, de Halleux argues, bear too strong modern connotations to be applied to the patristic era. The promotion of the *subjectivité de l'esprit* into the category of ontology, let alone the philosophy of the *intersubjectivité de la personne*, are very recent phenomena. The risk, therefore, of anachronism, when reading existentialist values into the Fathers, is great. Subjectivity and dialogism in the modern sense were hardly issues in their agenda. What was at stake then, de Halleux maintains, was 'the paradox of distinction and union of a God considered as the Transcendent rather than of a God considered as the absolute Subject.' 'The "ontological revolution", too generously attributed to the Cappadocian Fathers, does not inaugurate personalism in the modern sense of the word.'<sup>88</sup> In one sentence de Halleux captures the central themes of the personalist current.

A ceux qui interprètent la théologie cappadocienne comme une ontologie existentielle et communionnelle, allergique au langage de l'essence, il faut rappeler que Basile et les deux Grégoire parlaient de l'ousie et du consubstantiel aussi volontiers que des hypostases et de la 'monarchie' du Père, et que ce qu'ils désignaient par le terme de *koinônia* intradivine était la nature commune, et non des relations dialogales interpersonnelles.<sup>89</sup>

It is interesting to notice that what de Halleux says about the *monarchia* of the Father *versus* essence finds a striking parallel in Maximus. In chapter four of the *Capita* xv, he says: 'One God, [is] Father, the begetter of one Son and the source of one Spirit; Monad without confusion and Triad without division; Mind without beginning, the only

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. 'Personnalisme', pp. 265ff.

<sup>88</sup> 'Personnalisme', p. 266.

begetter *by essence* of the only Logos without beginning, and the source of the only everlasting Life, that is, of the Holy Spirit.<sup>90</sup> In the immediately following chapter, he says: 'God [is] one, for there is one godhead, a Monad without beginning, simple, beyond being, without parts and undivided.'<sup>91</sup> In the former Maximus would appear to be more of a personalist and in the latter more of an essentialist. But as de Halleux emphasizes, these terms are not applicable to patristic theology.

Maximus professes the *monarchia* of the Father without being allergic to the language of essence. The doctrine of the Father's monarchy is in no way opposed to that of the one essence or, indeed, *vice versa*. In God there is unity 'for there is one godhead', the only source of which, that is the *μόνη ἀρχή* of which, is the Father. 'The Father's οὐσία is the ἀρχή of the Son' and of the Spirit.<sup>92</sup> Essence and person are distinguished but not opposed to each other. The universal, the common essence, never stands alone, of course. As St Basil says, 'we must add the particular to the universal and thus confess the faith. The godhead is universal, the paternity particular, and combining these we should say: "I believe in God the Father".'<sup>93</sup> Or as Gregory Nazianzen puts it: 'The godhead is one in the three, and the three are one, in whom the godhead is or, to speak more accurately, who *are* the godhead.'<sup>94</sup> Or again St Maximus:

Neither is the Son Father, but he is *what* the Father is, nor is the Spirit Son, but he is *what* the Son is; for the Son is all that the Father is, apart from unbegottenness, since he is begotten; and the Holy Spirit is all that the Son is, apart from begottenness, since he proceeds; while the unbegottenness, begottenness and procession do not sever the one nature and power of the inexpressible godhead into three unequal or equal essences or natures, but characterize the persons or hypostases, in which or which the one godhead (*i.e.* the essence and nature) is.<sup>95</sup>

Consequently, balance between the Monad and the Triad should be kept now as in the time of the Cappadocians and of St Maximus. Modern anxieties must be responded

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<sup>89</sup> 'Personnalisme', p. 266.

<sup>90</sup> *Cap. xv* 4, PG 90, 1180A.

<sup>91</sup> *Cap. xv* 5, PG 90, 1180A. Cf. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 31.14, SC 250, 302.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (Oxford: OUP, second and revised edition 2000, first published in 1994), p. 174.

<sup>93</sup> *Ep.* 236, Deferrari III, 402.

<sup>94</sup> *Or.* 39.11, SC 358, 172. See also Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge & London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd, 1957; original French edition 1944), pp. 52-53.

<sup>95</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 549D-552A.



to but not at the cost of losing or misrepresenting the patristic theological legacy which still has a lot to offer to us today.

## Trinity and Activity

### Essential Activity and the Trinity

ANOTHER QUESTION which has occupied the minds of theologians for the last twenty years or so is whether the activity of God is essential or personal.<sup>1</sup> This is basically a question of the way in which the union and distinction of God as Trinity is made manifest in his relation to us. Links between Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas<sup>2</sup> have been drawn by some and disowned by others.<sup>3</sup> Palamas' theology of the divine activities (or energies) has been presented as 'the defeat of Trinitarian theology',<sup>4</sup> and this has been responded to by advancing the idea of God's personal activities.<sup>5</sup>

To discuss this issue I should like to examine the Trinitarian theology of Dionysius the Areopagite which, I believe, will shed some light on the problem as a whole. In his work *On the Divine Names*, Dionysius expounds the Trinitarian theology in terms of union and distinction of the Thearchy. His understanding of union and distinction, as found in chapter two of the treatise *On the Divine Names*,<sup>6</sup> could be presented in a cross-shaped plan such as this:

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive and perceptive discussion of the question in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean see Chrysostomos A. Stamoules, *Περὶ Φωτός. Προσωπικὲς ἢ φυσικὲς ἐνέργειες; Συμβολὴ στὴ σύγχρονη περὶ Ἀγίας Τριάδος προβληματικὴ στὸν Ὁρθόδοξο χώρο* (Thessalonica: Τὸ Παλίμψηστον, 1999), pp. 13-44. See also Jacques Lison, 'L'énergie des trois hypostases divines selon Grégoire Palamas', in *ScE* 44/1 (1992), pp. 67-77.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Vladimir Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, pp. 67-90.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Stephen Gersh, 'Ideas and Energies in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite' in *SP* 15/1 (TU 128, 1984), pp. 297-300.

<sup>4</sup> See the article of Dorothea Wendebourg, 'From the Cappadocian Fathers to Gregory Palamas. The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology' in *SP* 17/1 (1982), pp. 194-197.

<sup>5</sup> See Stamoules, *Περὶ Φωτός*, pp. 29-32.

<sup>6</sup> *D.n.* 2, PTS 33, 122-137. See also Jean-Claude Larchet, 'Nature et fonction de la theologie negative selon Denys l'Areopagite', in *MO* 166 (1991/1), pp. 3-16; Isabel de Andia, *Henosis: L'union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), pp. 29-48, and her article 'La Théologie trinitaire de Denys l'Aréopagite', in *SP* 32 (1997), pp. 278-301.



	(⌘) TA HNΩMENA	(❖) TA ΔΙΑΚΕΚΡΙΜΕΝΑ
I UNIONS	b) unions of unions	c) distinctions of unions
II DISTINCTIONS	a) unions of distinctions	d) distinctions of distinctions

Starting from the horizontal bar, above it we have God in himself, the Thearchy as he is in his ‘existence beyond being’ according to which he is totally unknowable to us. This is called in the plural ‘the unions’ (I).<sup>7</sup> Below the horizontal cross bar we have God as he is in his manifestations towards the creation, and as such knowable. This is called, again in the plural, ‘the distinctions’ (II).<sup>8</sup> ‘Unions’, then, are more or less equivalent to what we call *theologia*, and ‘distinctions’ to what we call the *oikonomia*.

Then the vertical bar.<sup>9</sup> On the left hand side (⌘) we have what is common to all the three divine hypostases, whether in their ‘beyond beingness’ or in their manifestations. These are called ‘the things united’. These can also be taken separately as particular ‘unions’ at the two levels across the horizontal bar; as (a) ‘unions of unions’ and (b) ‘unions of distinctions’. Then, on the right hand side (❖) we have what is particular to each individual hypostasis: ‘the things distinct’.<sup>10</sup> This again can be taken as the particular (c) ‘distinctions of unions’ (‘The name and fact of Father, Son and Spirit beyond being’) and (d) ‘distinctions of distinctions’ (The Incarnation).

What Dionysius presents in the treatise are the names of God which are common to all the hypostases, that is, names which are common to the entire Thearchy.<sup>11</sup> These are names which the ‘theologians’, the biblical authors, have given to God on the basis of God’s manifestations to them. Dionysius is, then, dealing with the unified manifestations of the Trinity to the creation; manifestations which he also calls

<sup>7</sup> *D.n.* 2.4, PTS 33, 126-128.

<sup>8</sup> *D.n.* 2.5, PTS 33, 128-129.

<sup>9</sup> *D.n.* 2.3, PTS 33, 125:13-19.

<sup>10</sup> *D.n.* 2, PTS 33, 125:19-126:2.

<sup>11</sup> *D.n.* 2.11, PTS 33, 135-137.

‘processions’, ‘illuminations’, ‘powers’, ‘benevolent gifts’<sup>12</sup> and, as said above, ‘unions of distinctions’.

But why does he call them ‘unions’ of distinctions? First of all he says that ‘all the names proper to God are always praised by the Scriptures not in particular but referring to the whole, entire, complete and full godhead.’<sup>13</sup> He, therefore, endeavours

to praise the common and unified distinctions or benevolent processions of the whole of godhead as they are made manifest in the Scriptures by the divine names; it being taken for granted that every good-working divine name, upon whichever of the three thearchic hypostases it lies, applies to the whole of the thearchic wholeness without discrimination.<sup>14</sup>

They are called ‘unions’ because they are something the hypostases have in common, something which unites them. The names are not names which have nothing to do with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. On the contrary, they are names made known through each and all of them. Nevertheless, they are not names in particular of any of the three. The Father, as well as the Son and the Holy Spirit, all three, are Being, Good, Lord, Life, and so on. These names are therefore common to all the three, that is to say, they are universal names of the godhead. Rorem and Lamoreaux make a point in this direction in their discussion on Dionysius’ commentator.

When Dionysius named God with the general term ‘divinity’, John [of Scythopolis] drew on considerable patristic precedent in noting that this was a reference to the Trinity: ‘He customarily calls the revered Trinity the “entire” divinity.’<sup>15</sup> ... The Areopagite’s most characteristic term for God ‘Thearchy’, is also an orthodox synonym for the Trinity.<sup>16</sup>

Since the names are universal, do they then reveal the essence of God to us? After all, as we have seen above, universal and essential go hand in hand. Here we come to the point where we need to distinguish between the unknowable essence of God and his knowable, yet essential, manifestations. What do the Fathers call this aspect of God? We have already found a host of terms in Dionysius for it above, ‘distinctions’ being

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Illuminations’ (*D.n.* 1.2, PTS 33, 110:13); ‘processions’ (*D.n.* 1.4, PTS 33, 112:9); ‘benevolent gifts’ (*D.n.* 2.3, PTS 33, 125:18); ‘manifestations’ (*D.n.* 2.4, PTS 33, 126:11); ‘participations’ (*D.n.* 2.7, PTS 33, 131:5); and ‘powers’ (*D.n.* 2.7, PTS 33, 131:9).

<sup>13</sup> *D.n.* 2.1, PTS 33, 122:6-8.

<sup>14</sup> *D.n.* 2.11, PTS 33, 137:8-13.

<sup>15</sup> *Schol.*, PG 4, 209A.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus. Annotating the Areopagite* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 69.



only one of them. Gregory of Nyssa<sup>17</sup> and Basil of Caesarea<sup>18</sup> call it God's activities (ἐνέργειαι). A less known fifth-century Alexandrian Presbyter, Ammonius, does the same.<sup>19</sup> Also Cyril of Alexandria speaks of the ἐνέργειαι of the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup> Maximus<sup>21</sup> follows St Cyril but speaks also of 'the works which God did not begin to do'.<sup>22</sup> Finally, Gregory Palamas—in a treatise entitled *On the number of ways there is divine union and distinction* in which he discusses Dionysius' *D.n. 2*—identifies Dionysius' processions, manifestations, and so on, with the ἐνέργειαι.<sup>23</sup> He, in fact, after quoting *D.n. 2.5* and *2.7* argues against Barlaam that it is the uncreated God himself who is both united and distinguished, and therefore the distinctions, that is, the activities must be uncreated.

Thus spoke the great Dionysius, and adding to what was said above he says 'thus we in our minds strive after both uniting and distinguishing the divine, even as the divine things themselves are both united and distinguished.' But Barlaam and Akindynos do not say so. They do not say that the divine things are united and distinguished in a way the God-bearing theologians declare. Instead, just as Arius, Eunomius and Macedonius who on account of the distinction of hypostases severed God into uncreated and created, so also now these on account of the distinction according to the common processions split God into created and uncreated.<sup>24</sup>

If we now draw together some of these threads, we shall have God who remaining unknowable in his innermost essence makes himself known through his manifestations or activities common to all the three hypostases: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Maximus expresses this same principle at the very end of one of the 'Monad and Triad' texts we have quoted earlier on.

[O]ne and sole godhead, undivided and without confusion, simple, undiminished and unchangeable, completely the same, one thing and the other in different ways, ... , being all Monad according to the essence and the same being all Triad in hypostases, uniformly shining forth one ray of threefold light.<sup>25</sup>

The Triad in Monad and Monad in Triad communicates itself to us by 'uniformly shining forth one ray of threefold light.' It is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit by

<sup>17</sup> See *Trin.*, GNO 3, part 1, 14-15; *Tres dii*, GNO 3, part 1, 52-53.

<sup>18</sup> *Ep. 234*, Deferrari III, 370-376.

<sup>19</sup> *Fragmenta in Joannem* 4.13-14, PG 85, 1421AB.

<sup>20</sup> *In Isaiah* 2.4., PG 70, 316A.

<sup>21</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 29, CCSG 7, 211.

<sup>22</sup> *Cap. theol.* I.48, PG 90, 1100C-1101A.

<sup>23</sup> See *Syggr.*, Mantzarides, 69ff.

<sup>24</sup> *Syggr.*, Mantzarides, 70:11-20.

<sup>25</sup> *Myst.* 23, Soteropoulos, 218:5-10 [= PG 91, 701AB].

nature shining forth a uniform essential ray of light. Consequently, the activity of God is—and this will become even clearer when we come to Christology—essential. It is a natural property common to Father, Son and Holy Spirit because it is natural or essential both to the Father as well as to the Son and to the Holy Spirit to be active. In Maximus much of God's activity refers to creation, providence and judgement, and in that context he says to the point that 'it is common both to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit to create as well as to judge and wisely to provide for the creatures.'<sup>26</sup>

But does Maximus actually call it ἐνέργεια in this context? In *Ambiguum* 67, he explicitly does so.<sup>27</sup>

The effective activity is disclosed by the number six, because the effective activity [of God] is the only perfect activity, activity which forms and guards perfect beings as they are in accordance with their *logoi*, and also because the number six is the only perfect and complete number between one and ten;<sup>28</sup> it is made up of its parts,<sup>29</sup> and includes both universal and uneven numbers, that is to say, even and odd numbers. For uneven are those things which move together with the extremities according to their ever-moving rest. ... While the extremities and the middle are uneven ... the divine activity creates and includes them both. And it is this activity, I think, in which the most wise Moses was mystically initiated and which he benevolently indicated to the rest of men when he wrote that God created the universe in six days.<sup>30</sup>

In various other contexts, such as Christology and ecclesiology, the term appears frequently. He says, for example, that the Prophet Isaiah 'calls the activities of the one and the same Holy Spirit "spirits",' and that the Apostle Paul 'calls the different activities of this same one Holy Spirit different gifts of grace.'<sup>31</sup> He also says that God's 'eternal power and divine majesty is the providence which preserves beings and the *activity* which in accordance with providence deifies the objects of providence.'<sup>32</sup>

At this point, we shall make a brief digression to discuss the links between Dionysius and Gregory Palamas. In his article 'Ideas and Energies in Pseudo-

<sup>26</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 28:88-90, CCSG 7, 207.

<sup>27</sup> See also the discussion on the divine energies in Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology*, pp. 174-238.

<sup>28</sup> A 'perfect number' in Greek arithmetic is a number which is the sum of its factors.

<sup>29</sup> The constituents of 6 are, of course, 1, 2 and 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ambig.* 67, PG 91, 1401AB.

<sup>31</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 29:5-10, 12-13, CCSG 7, 211. Cf. 1 Cor. 12:4. See also *Qu. dub.* 188 and 189, CCSG 10, 128-129.

<sup>32</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 13:15-17, CCSG 7, 95.



Dionysius the Areopagite',<sup>33</sup> Stephen Gersh challenges Vladimir Lossky for drawing the kind of connections I have presented above. Gersh bases his discussion on an epoch-making study of Eugenio Corsini on the Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Parmenides* and Dionysius the Areopagite. Gersh argues, following Corsini,<sup>34</sup> that Dionysius' presentation of the unions and distinctions can *only* be understood against the Neoplatonic background where they refer to the first (negative) and the second (affirmative) hypotheses of the *Parmenides* respectively. Dionysius, he says again drawing on Corsini, 'engineers a complete transformation by applying *both* hypotheses (negative and affirmative) to the Christian God'<sup>35</sup> and by so doing undercuts the Procline and Iamblichian doctrine of mediating henads.<sup>36</sup> On this basis Gersh argues against Lossky in the following way.

Lossky's interpretation of Gregory Palamas is not in itself controversial, but he goes on to argue that the same distinction is found in earlier theologians and especially in Ps.-Dionysius. Referring to the second chapter of the *DN*, he interprets the so-called 'unions' and 'distinctions' of the Thearchy, a dichotomy upon which the writer ostensibly constructs the theory of the divine attributes, as representing the contrasting elements within the Palamite doctrine, and argues that the same notions also underlie much of the speculation of Ps.-Dionysius' followers and especially St Maximus the Confessor.<sup>37</sup>

Corsini's argument, taken up by Gersh, is convincing from a philosophical angle, and in that respect Gersh, no doubt, is right. But he is not right in blaming Lossky for drawing a link between Palamas and Dionysius. Indeed, Palamas himself is quite explicit that Dionysius (alongside Maximus)<sup>38</sup> is one of his main authorities, as also the text cited above shows. Palamas extensively both quotes and comments on the second chapter of the *On the Divine Names*, clearly basing his argument on its principle of

<sup>33</sup> In *SP* 15/1 (TU 128, 1984), pp. 297-300.

<sup>34</sup> See his *Il trattato 'De divinis nominibus' dello pseudo-Dionigi e i commenti neoplatonici al Parmenide* (Torino: G. Giappicelli, 1962).

<sup>35</sup> Gersh, 'Ideas and Energies', p. 298.

<sup>36</sup> See Endre von Ivánka, 'La signification historique du "Corpus areopageticum"' in *RevSR* 36 (1949), pp. 23-24.

<sup>37</sup> 'Ideas and Energies', p. 297. Gersh finds support in Endre von Ivánka ('La Signification', pp. 22-24), Polycarp Sherwood (*The Earlier Ambigua*, p. 179) and Eugenio Corsini (*Il trattato*). For the other party see Vladimir Lossky, 'La Notion des "Analogies" chez Denys le Pseudo-Aréopagite', in *AHDL* 5 (1931), pp. 279-309; and his *Mystical Theology*, pp. 69ff. Also Alexander Golitzin, *Et Introibo Ad Altare Dei. The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to Its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Analecta Vlatadon 59, Thessalonica: Πατριαρχικὸν Ἰδρυμα Πατερικῶν Μελετῶν, 1994), p. 45.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, *Triads* III.2.7 and 9, Meyendorff, 655-657, 659-661.

union and distinction. This is the way in which Palamas himself read Dionysius, and it is a plausible reading, to say the least. Lossky in turn simply reads Palamas as it stands.

What Gersh seems to be saying is that one cannot understand Dionysius correctly in any other way except reading him against the Neoplatonic Parmenidian commentaries. This, in actual fact, means that, in Gersh's view, one cannot understand Dionysius correctly without knowing Corsini's argument, because Corsini is the first person ever to suggest this reading. Consequently, in this light nobody before the twentieth century has understood Dionysius. Corsini's study is, of course, most valuable, and if one sees Dionysius on a trajectory orientated with the Neoplatonic thinking Corsini is entirely right. But that can hardly be the whole story.

There is no trace of Dionysius in the Neoplatonic circles, as far as we know, whereas his influence on Christian authors from Maximus and Eriugena onwards is immense. Surely, this cannot be just a crude mistake and surely we cannot simply ignore the way in which Dionysius was read throughout the centuries, albeit in a variety of interpretations.

Corsini's point becomes, in fact, much more acute when Dionysius is read as a Christian apologist. One way of viewing him could be the following.<sup>39</sup> Dionysius was a Christian,<sup>40</sup> a monk or (even) a bishop, who became familiar with the fifth-century Athenian Neoplatonism of Proclus and maybe of Damascius (early 6th c.), probably through reading their works rather than through personal contact. He was fascinated by these texts but at the same time he was very conscious of the supremacy of the Christian truth. He attempted, successfully, to assume the figure of an educated Athenian convert of the first century (Dionysius the Areopagite), to write in the way such a man would

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<sup>39</sup> Of course, this interpretation is only one way of seeing the Dionysian corpus which still remains covered in a veil of mystery. For a summary of theories in relation to the identity of Dionysius see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 2: 'Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Style' (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd, 1984, original German ed. 1962, 1969<sup>2</sup>), pp. 145-147. See also Paul Rorem and J.C. Lamoreaux, 'John of Scythopolis on Apollinarian Christology and the Pseudo-Areopagite's True Identity', in *Church History*, 62/4 (1993) pp. 469-482 and Polycarp Sherwood, 'Sergius of Reshaina and the Syriac Versions of the Pseudo-Denis', in *SE*, 4 (1952), pp. 174-184.

<sup>40</sup> For this see, for example, Dionysius' account of the burial service in the *E.h.* 7.3-9, PTS 36, 122-130. No Platonist would regard a dead corpse as something sacred and place it inside the temple for the time of the burial rite.



have written, that is in ‘Platonic’ Greek—for learning in Athens was much associated with the fame of Plato<sup>41</sup> and the Academy—and to give a picture of the truth which was fundamentally Christian (based on the Scriptures and the liturgy).<sup>42</sup> Within this truth he also claimed the riches of the Greek wisdom. This kind of thinking was not unknown among Christian apologists. For example, Justin Martyr maintained that the Greek philosophers were disciples of Moses and that in Christ, who was the Logos himself, the Christians possessed the fullness of the *logos* of which the wise of the olden days only had had a share.<sup>43</sup> The sixth century commentator of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, John of Scythopolis, gives us a piece of evidence of such a reading when he says that many pagan philosophers and in particular Proclus, made use of Dionysius’ texts and even quoted them word for word, rather than *vice versa*.<sup>44</sup> If one wants to estimate the success of Dionysius’ ‘linguistic strategy’ in the East, all one needs to do is to consider Maximus the Confessor, John Damascene and Gregory Palamas. And if we consider Corsini’s point in this light, it actually becomes very strong indeed: the apologist Dionysius shows to the Platonists in their language why they are wrong and why the Christians are right.

Now, let me go back to Palamas’ reading of Dionysius. If we consider Dionysius as a Christian writer who drew on earlier Christian writers and who was read by later Christian authors in this light, we can place him on a trajectory extending from Gregory of Nyssa to Gregory Palamas. (The latter would of course have seen Dionysius at the far end of the trajectory, rather than in the centre as we do.) Gregory of Nyssa, in his Trinitarian theology, identifies the common with the substance or the nature (ἡ φύσις) but in addition to this he also identifies it with the activities to which he connects all the names and attributes common to the three hypostases. The attributes are seen in all the hypostases, ‘in so much as the Son abides wholly in the Father, and in turn has the

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<sup>41</sup> See Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), pp. 10-11.

<sup>42</sup> See Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto: PIMS, 1984).

<sup>43</sup> See John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea. The Formation of Christian Theology*, vol. 1 (Crestwood, New York: SVSP, 2001), pp. 108-109.

<sup>44</sup> *Schol.*, PG 4, 21D.

Father wholly in Himself'.<sup>45</sup> In a treatise on the Holy Trinity *Ad Eustathium*, he clearly states that from the community of names, such as 'godhead', follows the identity of activities which in turn indicates the oneness of nature.<sup>46</sup> And in another treatise, he maintains that, because the divine nature is infinite, indeterminate and incomprehensible, it cannot be defined by any name, but is above them. Therefore, since 'godhead' is a name, it obviously does not indicate that which is beyond all name, that is, the nature, but something which can be named, that is, the activity.<sup>47</sup>

From this it is not very far to arrive at Dionysius' 'unions of distinctions' which are the manifestations through which the God unknowable in his beyond beingness is made known, and on account of which he is named. And from there it is not a long way to Palamas. If, then, Palamas read Dionysius, and a number of other authorities, on a theological trajectory of this kind and in a way which does justice to Dionysius' intentions—a reading which Lossky recognized—I find it difficult to see what makes Palamas' theology so very innovative and problematic, and what makes its interpretation by Lossky, as drawing on Dionysius and highlighting the theological trajectory, fundamentally wrong.

But let us return to our question as to whether the activity of God is essential or personal. The modern problematic puts the question as follows. If the activities are essential, are they then not impersonal,<sup>48</sup> and does that not mean that the Trinitarian persons are totally dismissed? Are we not saved and sanctified by the Holy Spirit<sup>49</sup> rather than by some kind of impersonal uncreated 'radiation'?

Hopefully I have managed by now to make it clear that 'personal' in the patristic sense is not to be contrasted with impersonal but with universal. And 'universal' is something which is shared by the sum of the particulars, being in no way opposed to the particulars. In God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each and all, are endowed with

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<sup>45</sup> Ps-Basil, *Ep.* 38, Deferrari 1, 227.

<sup>46</sup> *Cf. Trin.*, GNO 3, part 1, 14.

<sup>47</sup> *Cf. Tres dii*, GNO 3, part 1, 52-53.

<sup>48</sup> See Stamoules, *Περὶ φωτός*, p. 29.

<sup>49</sup> See Wendebourg, 'From the Cappadocian', p. 196.



the natural capacity to act, and to act in a way which has a certain effect whether a creative, providential or deifying effect. It is a commonplace in both the Greek and the Latin Fathers, in Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria and Ambrose for example,<sup>50</sup> to argue for the consubstantiality of the hypostases from the unity and singleness of their activity. The activity is, as we have already said, essential.

Does this then mean that God's activity has nothing to do with the persons? Far from it, since the persons are instances of an active essence. The point is that activity is constitutive of essence and not of person. That is to say that activity is not a characteristic which individuates a particular from another particular, but a characteristic which differentiates one nature or essence from another. One example of this is the creative activity of God. The Father creates, not because he is Father, but because he is God, and the same is true of the Son and the Holy Spirit, too.

Is there, in that case, no differentiation between the persons in this respect? To elucidate that question Maximus has an interesting comment to make in *Opusculum* 10. He accuses Theodore of Pharan, the father of monenergism, of breaking the rules concerning person and essence 'in calling the activity hypostatic'.<sup>51</sup>

I read the book of Theodore of Pharan on essence and nature, hypostasis and person, and the rest of the chapters; and as an introduction it is perhaps not altogether useless. But in the chapter on person and hypostasis, rather than following the rules concerning them, he seems to be following himself, as he calls the activity hypostatic.

And it is in this that he has darkened the reason, namely, in giving to the person *qua* person the activity which characterizes nature; and not the mode (τρόπος) of 'how' and the 'what kind of mode' of its fulfilment, according to which is made known the difference as to whether those who act and their actions are according to nature or contrary to nature. For each one of us acts firstly as being *something*—that is, as a human being—, not as being *someone*. As someone, as Peter or Paul for instance, one forms the mode of activity (τρόπος τῆς ἐνεργείας) ... Consequently, the difference in person is made known through the manner (τρόπος) in the action, whereas the unchangeability of the natural activity is made known through the *logos*. For any one person is not more active or rational than another but we all possess the same *logos* and its respective natural activity.<sup>52</sup>

Consequently, it is the mode, the *tropos*, which indicates the individual differences in the actions of different persons, whereas the *logos* always remains undifferentiated as an ingredient of nature. The distinction between the universal *logos* and the particular

<sup>50</sup> See Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation*, p. 147; and *Doctrina patrum* 12.1-18, Diekamp, pp. 73-76.

<sup>51</sup> *Opusc.* 10, PG 91, 136D. See also *Disp. Biz.*, CCSG 39, 123-125.

*tropos* as expressing unity and difference respectively is evident. The Cappadocian formulation finds here a new level in Maximus' theology of the activity.

If we now, in conclusion, applied Theodore's term 'hypostatic activity' to the Trinity, what we would have is a God with three activities and, thereby, three essences; that is, we would have straightforward Tritheism. But as Maximus, interpreting the phrase *My Father works still, and I work*<sup>53</sup> as God's deifying activity through providence, says:

This he does until such time as he unites the self-willed urge of the particular parts to the more generic natural *logos* of rational substance through their movement towards well-being. ... In this way he demonstrates as effective the grace that deifies all. And it is on account of this grace that God the Word become man says *My Father works still, and I work*: the Father approving, the Son effecting and the Holy Spirit completing substantially the approval of the Father and the effecting of the Son, so that the God-in-Trinity may be one through all and in all—God entire being observed proportionally in each and in all of those made worthy by grace.<sup>54</sup>

### ***Energeia*: Activity or Actuality?**

Above we referred to some links between Dionysius and Gregory Palamas. Here I would like to address an opinion of Endre von Ivánka concerning St Maximus and Palamas. In an article entitled 'Le fondement patristique de la doctrine palamite'<sup>55</sup> as well as in his book *Plato Christianus*,<sup>56</sup> von Ivánka argues that St Maximus not only does not support Palamas' doctrine of distinction between essence and activity (or energy) but that he explicitly denies it. More precisely, in *Plato Christianus*, after discussing the question in the Cappadocian Fathers and Dionysius, von Ivánka writes: 'It is Maximus the Confessor above all who rejects with all rigour and without any ambiguity the application of the concepts of *dynamis* and *energeia* in a *proper* and objective sense—albeit that he makes use of it in several places in a *metaphorical*

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<sup>52</sup> *Opusc.* 10, PG 91, 136C-137A.

<sup>53</sup> Jn. 5:17.

<sup>54</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 2:14-16, 21-29, CCSG 7, 51.

<sup>55</sup> In *IXe congrès des études Byzantines 1953*, part 2, (1956), pp. 127-132.

<sup>56</sup> *Plato Christianus. La réception critique du platonisme chez les Pères de l'Église* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990; original German edition 1964).



sense.’<sup>57</sup> He then refers to St Maximus’ *Centuries on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation* I.3 and 4 to draw the conclusion that ‘the legitimacy of the doctrine of the divine uncreated activities, *taken in the sense of a metaphysical proposition*, is therefore by no means admitted but, on the contrary, strongly contested by the Fathers.’<sup>58</sup>

Let us first of all see what the two chapters referred to by von Ivánka say.

*Cap. theol. I.3*

Every being, as including in itself its own definition, is by nature the beginning of the movement by potentiality considered in it. Every natural movement towards actuality, understood as posterior to being and anterior to actuality, is the middle, since it is naturally embraced in the middle by them both; and every actuality, naturally limited by its *logos*, is the end of the essential movement anterior to it perceived by the mind.<sup>59</sup>

*Cap. theol. I.4*

God is not a being either in the general or in any particular sense of the word, hence he is not a beginning. Nor is he potentiality either in the general or in any specific sense, hence he is not a middle. Nor is he actuality either in the general or any particular sense, hence he is not an end of the essential movement by potentiality understood as being anterior to it. But he is the author of being and an entity beyond being; he is the author of potentiality and the establishment beyond potentiality; and he is the unending habit efficacious of actuality. In brief, he is the author of all being, potentiality and actuality; he is the author of every beginning, middle and end.<sup>60</sup>

Here Maximus is arguing that the two triads, being—potentiality—actuality (οὐσία—δύναμις—ἐνέργεια),<sup>61</sup> and beginning—middle—end (ἀρχή—μεσότης—τέλος) are categories which apply to created beings only and in no way to God. They present a certain pattern of ontological change in view of fulfilment. Movement and change characterize the creation alone. Furthermore, ‘being’ in this context has the Dionysian sense of that which is not ‘beyond being’, that is to say, ‘being’ is ‘created being’, something which God as uncreated transcends. In *Centuries on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation* I.2, Maximus says that ‘as far as we can know, God in himself is neither a beginning, nor a middle, nor an end, nor anything whatsoever which is

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<sup>57</sup> *Plato Christianus*, p. 143: ‘Mais c’est surtout Maxime le Confesseur qui refuse en toute rigueur et sans aucune ambiguïté l’application à Dieu des concepts de *dynamis* et d’*energeia* en un sens propre et objectif — même s’il s’en sert en de nombreux endroits de façon *metaphorique*.’ Italics his.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Le fondement’, p. 129: ‘La légitimité de la doctrine des énergies divines incréées, *prise dans le sens d’un énoncé métaphysique*, n’est donc nullement admise, mais au contraire fortement contestée par les Pères.’ Italics his.

<sup>59</sup> *Cap. theol. I.3*, PG 90, 1084AB.

<sup>60</sup> *Cap. theol. I.4*, PG 90, 1084BC.

considered naturally in those that come after him; for he is invisible, unmoving and infinite, since he is infinitely beyond every being, potentiality and actuality.’

Now the Greek for the triad ‘being—potentiality—actuality’ is οὐσία—δύναμις—ἐνέργεια.<sup>62</sup> This von Ivánka has taken, it seems, in the sense of the triad essence—power—activity, and has then drawn the conclusion that Maximus denies the application of the essence—activity distinction to God.<sup>63</sup> He emphasizes that this is so in the metaphysical sense of the word. What von Ivánka means by the ‘metaphysical sense’ is not clear, but it is obvious that what *Maximus* denies here is any process of actualization with respect to God. God is, as Maximus says, ‘infinitely beyond’ all such categories. He is, in terms of Thomas Aquinas, *actus purus*.<sup>64</sup> There is no distance between his ‘being’ and the ‘actualization’ of his being; he is pure actuality in his very being. Now this is all very well. But the problem is that the essence-activity distinction that Palamas promotes has nothing to do with the process of actualization, apart from the homonymous Greek words. One is bound to say once more that ‘the moral of *that* is “take care of the sense, and the sounds will look after themselves.”’ The ‘being—potentiality—actuality’ distinction and the ‘essence—activity’ distinction are two quite different things. And in Late Antiquity, this was not an idea preserved for theologians only, it was in the air in the philosophical discussions more widely. Samuel Sambursky has pointed out that during this period ‘[i]n this more technical meaning of activity, function, force or power, *energeia* and *dynamis* are often almost interchangeable, whereas they remain opposite concepts as the philosophical terms of actuality and potentiality.’<sup>65</sup> Admittedly, the difference between the two types of distinction is not

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<sup>61</sup> For a discussion on this triad see Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua*, pp. 101-123.

<sup>62</sup> Combefis’ Latin version in PG 90, 1083A-C translates the triad as *substantia—potentia—operatio*.

<sup>63</sup> In *Ambig.* 23, Maximus clearly applies the triad οὐσία—δύναμις—ἐνέργεια to God: ‘the perfect Triad in perfect Monad, that is, one essence and divinity and power and energy in three hypostases’ (PG 91, 1261A).

<sup>64</sup> In *Summa contragentiles* I, 28.264, Aquinas says: ‘Anything is perfect in so far as it is actualized [and] imperfect in so far as it is in a state of potentiality, lacking actuality. Therefore, that which is in no way in a state of potentiality but is pure actuality must be most perfect. But that is what God is. Therefore, he is most perfect.’ Quoted in Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism. Aquinas’s Natural Theology in Summa contra gentiles* I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 132.

<sup>65</sup> *The Physical World of Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), ch. IV.3 ‘Actuality and action’, pp. 110-117.



always that conspicuous owing to the fact that they are expressed in homonymous Greek words, and even some overlap may be observed.<sup>66</sup>

To clarify this issue it will prove helpful to consider *Mystagogia* 5, where Maximus makes use of both distinctions in one and the same argument. Here he speaks of the human soul as possessing two aspects: the mind (νοῦς), which is contemplative and static, and the reason (λόγος), which is practical and active. The soul, in both of its aspects, progressively develops and through various stages reaches its fulfilment in God. To describe this ‘process of becoming’, as one might call it, Maximus makes use of the first triad. Or to be more precise, he adds ‘habit’<sup>67</sup> to it so that the triad becomes a tetrad: being—potentiality—habit—actuality. On top of this there is still one more step which represents the soul’s ‘leap’ to God as the Truth and the Good. Here is what Maximus says:

The contemplative aspect the Old Man called ‘mind’ and the active he called ‘reason’ ... He used to say that to the soul belong, through its intelligent mind, wisdom, contemplation, knowledge, and enduring knowledge, all leading to the truth. Through its rational reason belong reasoning, prudence, action, virtue, and faith, all leading to the good.<sup>68</sup>

How these different stages are related to the tetrad is explained in the following. Here with regard to the mind.

The mind, he used to say, arrives at contemplation when it moves through wisdom, through contemplation it arrives at knowledge, and through knowledge at enduring knowledge, and through enduring knowledge at the truth. It is here that the mind finds the limit of its movement, for in it are circumscribed being, potentiality, habit and actuality (οὐσία—δύναμις—ἔξις—ἐνέργεια).<sup>69</sup>

Now he used to say that wisdom is the potentiality (δύναμις) of the mind ... and contemplation is its habit (ἔξις), knowledge its actuality (ἐνέργεια) and enduring knowledge is its perpetual and unceasing movement towards the knowable beyond knowledge, the end of which is the unerring knowable, the Truth.<sup>70</sup>

What we have here is a fine piece of Maximian teleology: there is movement from being through potentiality, habit and actuality to deification. This falls in with the same category as the *Centuries on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation* quoted above.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> See Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>67</sup> Sherwood argues that this addition goes back to John of Scythopolis (*The Earlier Ambigua*, p. 105).

<sup>68</sup> *Myst.* 5, Soteropoulos, 166:10-11, 14-18 [= PG 91, 673C].

<sup>69</sup> *Myst.* 5, Soteropoulos, 170:5-10 [= PG 91, 676CD].

<sup>70</sup> *Myst.* 5, Soteropoulos, 170:10-15 [= PG 91, 676D-677A].

<sup>71</sup> See also *Ambig.* 15, 1217D-1220A where Maximus identifies ἐνέργεια and στάσις.

Then there is the second distinction. This applies to the two aspects of soul, the static and the active.

The Truth and the Good, he used to say, signify God. When he is to be intimated from his *essence* it is done by the Truth—for truth is something simple, unique, one, identical, invisible ...; when he is to be intimated from his *activity* (ἐνέργεια) it is done by the Good; for the Good is beneficent, provident and protective of everything that comes from it.<sup>72</sup>

The Truth and the Good signify God as he is according to his essence and activity respectively, that is, as he is according to his static and his active aspects. The soul that desires to become like God, to be deified, is therefore to imitate him in both of these aspects.

The pair which signifies God is Truth and Goodness. When the soul is moved by them to make progress it becomes united to the God of all in imitating what is immutable and beneficent in his essence (οὐσία) and activity (ἐνέργεια) by means of its steadfastness in the good and its unalterable habit of choice.<sup>73</sup>

For reason is the activity and manifestation of the mind, related as effect to cause, and prudence is the activity and manifestation of wisdom, and action of contemplation, virtue of knowledge and faith of enduring knowledge ...<sup>74</sup>

The conclusion we can draw from this is that Maximus clearly makes use of two different distinctions, both of which include the terms οὐσία and ἐνέργεια. In the first one, οὐσία—δύναμις—(ἐξίς)—ἐνέργεια, applicable to created beings only, the terms are to be taken in the more Aristotelian sense of being, potentiality, (habit) and actuality. In the second distinction, which is also the one elaborated by St Gregory Palamas, οὐσία and ἐνέργεια should be taken as essence and activity (operation, energy). Consequently, von Ivánka's argument, that there can be found no support in the Fathers for this distinction and that it is Maximus who explicitly denies it, is not only entirely without foundation, but proves also a test case of a serious misinterpretation turning against itself.

<sup>72</sup> *Myst.* 5, Soteropoulos, 166:13-23 [= PG 91, 673CD].

<sup>73</sup> *Myst.* 5, Soteropoulos, 168:3-7 [= PG 91, 676A].

<sup>74</sup> *Myst.* 5, Soteropoulos, 174:12-15 [= PG 91, 677BC].



## Knowing the Trinity

SO FAR we have been discussing issues which are related to theological formulations and ideas. The bulk of Maximus' work, however, is concerned with spiritual life and the knowledge of God, and no attempt to describe his Trinitarian theology without some reference at least to this side of the matter would be complete. In this chapter, we shall, therefore, develop themes with spiritual interest emerging from Trinitarian texts.

### Moving from Monad to Triad

Our first theme has to do with important epistemological insights that Maximus develops in his exegesis of two difficult passages of St Gregory Nazianzen.<sup>1</sup> In these passages Gregory appears to be saying that there is movement involved in the eternal mode of existence of the Trinity, something which would be entirely incongruous with a theology which regards movement as a central feature of what it is to be created. We shall begin with Gregory's texts.

#### *Oration 29.2*

For this reason the Monad having from the beginning moved into the dyad stopped in the Triad.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Oration 23.8*

[I honour] a perfect Triad out of three perfect [hypostases]; the Monad has moved on account of richness, dyad has been transcended on account of matter and form (out of which also bodies are made), and the Triad has been defined on account of its perfection; for the first transcends the composition of dyad, ...<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, the texts refer to the Trinity in itself, and clearly 'movement' has a part to play here. But the question is: what is that part? We have already seen that 'movement' in

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<sup>1</sup> Maximus discusses these passages in four texts: *Ambig.* 1 (CCSG 48, 6-7), *Ambig.* 23 (PG 91, 1257C-1261A), *Qu. dub.* 105 (CCSG 10, 79-80) and *Ep. sec. Th.* (CCSG 48, 40-41). I mainly follow the sequence of *Ambig.* 23. For a discussion see Andrew Louth, 'St Gregory the Theologian and St Maximus the Confessor: The Shaping of Tradition', in *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine. Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles*, edited by S. Coakley and D.A. Pailin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 117-130.

<sup>2</sup> *Or.* 29.2:13-14, SC 250, 180.

Maximus' understanding belongs exclusively to the realm of the created. 'Everything that by nature is moving,' he says, 'necessarily moves for the reason of a cause; and everything that moves for the reason of a cause, necessarily also exists because of a cause....'<sup>4</sup> It is, therefore, puzzling to notice that Gregory, who is the 'mouthpiece of Christ', should attribute movement to the godhead. Maximus takes great care to interpret Gregory with due attention.

It is worth remarking at this point that Maximus, although sometimes seemingly drifting away from Gregory's original ideas, reads Gregory in a wider context, a context which is Gregory's work as a whole. In *Ambiguum* 40, after quoting several passages from different orations of the Nazianzen, he concludes: 'Thus the teacher [Gregory] himself has become an interpreter of himself to those who do not read his divinely inspired words in an improper way.'<sup>5</sup> This by no means implies that one cannot place Gregory in another wider context. In that context, Maximus would have included Dionysius whose work forms a part in his own interpretation process. This is particularly interesting when we bear in mind that, for Maximus, Dionysius was a first-century writer, whereas in actual fact being a much later figure Dionysius himself was influenced by Gregory, as we know today. Why Gregory requires interpretation is because his flowery rhetoric is, as it were, full of tempting, yet thorny, roses which, if taken individually, may cause real trouble—Origenism being a classic example (*cf. Ambig.* 7).<sup>6</sup> Maximus, who possesses a thorough knowledge of Gregory's work, can see the whole of the rose garden and is not shaken by his apparent discrepancies or rhetorical ploys. In this way he is in the position to interpret Gregory as a whole, faithfully yet dynamically.

But, let us now turn to the question itself. Maximus first of all makes it clear that movement has no place in the godhead as such: 'If what is without cause is certainly without movement, then the divine is without movement, as having no cause of being at

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<sup>3</sup> *Or.* 23.8:8-13, SC 270, 298.

<sup>4</sup> *Ambig.* 23, PG 91, 1257C.

<sup>5</sup> *Ambig.* 40, PG 91, 1304C.

<sup>6</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1068Dff.



all, but being rather the cause of all beings.’<sup>7</sup> He then suggests three different ways in which movement can be taken in relation to God. The godhead is said to move, he says, either:

1. ‘as the *cause* of our movement towards knowing it;’ or
2. ‘on *our* account who move towards it’;<sup>8</sup> or
3. on account of his gradual revelation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Speaking of God as the cause of movement Maximus first elaborates Dionysius’ idea of God as Desire and Love. In *Ambiguum* 23, he says: ‘As Desire and Love the Divine moves (κινεῖται); as Desired and Loved he moves (κινεῖ)<sup>9</sup> towards himself all those who are capable of desire and love.’<sup>10</sup> How God does this is that ‘he moves (κινεῖται) as installing an inward relation of desire and love in those who are receptive of them; and he moves (κινεῖ) as attracting by nature the desire of those who move towards him.’ In short: ‘He moves and is moved as thirsting to be thirsted, and as desiring to be desired, and as loving to be loved.’<sup>11</sup>

What is significant here is that it is God himself who first installs an inward disposition in us. He, as it were, creeps into our being to make us move towards knowing him. Yet, it is we who have to make the move. We move in relation to God rather than God in relation to us. We move as we deepen our knowledge in God; and yet God makes this movement possible. He first illumines us of the fact that he exists. (Maximus maintains that ‘to think of God without illumination is an impossibility.’)<sup>12</sup> ‘The godhead moved itself *in us*,’ Maximus says, ‘so that we might know that there is a certain cause of all.’<sup>13</sup> Once we have become aware of the fact *that* God is, he then helps us to move on to find out *how* he subsists. The ‘epistemological motion’ is from *that* to *how*, from *logos* to *tropos*. For this move God gives us ‘devout starting-

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<sup>7</sup> *Ambig.* 23, PG 91, 1260A.

<sup>8</sup> *Qu. dub.* 105:15-17, CCSG 10, 79.

<sup>9</sup> Note that the first form of the verb ‘moves’ (κινεῖται) is intransitive and middle, and the second (κινεῖ) is transitive and active.

<sup>10</sup> *Ambig.* 23, PG 91, 1260C.

<sup>11</sup> *Ambig.* 23, PG 91, 1260C.

<sup>12</sup> *Ambig.* 23, PG 91, 1260D-1261A.

<sup>13</sup> *Qu. dub.* 105:18-19, CCSG 10, 79.

points'<sup>14</sup> which we may discover through natural contemplation and which in turn will make it possible for us to reflect on God as Trinity.

'The Monad having from the beginning moved into the dyad stopped in the Triad': it has moved in the mind that is receptive of this, whether it be angelic or human, and through it and in it makes enquiries about it, and to speak more plainly, it teaches the mind, to begin with, the thought about the Monad, lest separation be introduced into the first cause, and immediately leads it on to receive its divine and ineffable fecundity, saying secretly and hiddenly to it that it must not think that this good is in any way barren of reason and wisdom or of sanctifying power, which are both consubstantial and truly subsistent (ἐνυπόστατα), lest the Divine be taken to be composite of these, as of things accidental, and not believed to be these eternally. The godhead is therefore said to move as the source of the enquiry as to the mode of its existence.<sup>15</sup>

We are now moving from the knowledge of the Monad to the knowledge of the Triad. The knowledge of the tri-hypostatic mode of existence of the Monad does not annul the first knowledge of the Monad as such, 'for the Triad is truly Monad for so it *is*, and the Monad is truly Triad, for thus it *subsists*; since there is one godhead being monadically and subsisting triadically.'<sup>16</sup> 'Therefore,' Maximus concludes, 'the "movement" of the godhead amounts to the knowledge regarding the fact *that* it is and *how* it subsists that comes about through revelation to those receptive of it.'<sup>17</sup>

The third kind of movement in relation to God is his gradual revelation as Trinity in history. Gregory himself advances this idea in the fifth *Theological Oration* where he says: 'The Old Testament proclaimed the Father openly, and the Son more obscurely. The New Testament manifested the Son, and suggested the divinity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit himself dwells among us, and supplies us with a clearer demonstration of himself.'<sup>18</sup> For Maximus this offers yet another opportunity to interpret Gregory through Gregory himself. The end of this gradual revelation according to Maximus is 'to lead those who are being taught to worship the perfect Triad in perfect Monad, that is, to worship one essence and divinity and power and energy in three hypostases.'<sup>19</sup>

## Natural Contemplation of the Trinity

<sup>14</sup> *Qu. dub.* 105:14, CCSG 10, 79.

<sup>15</sup> *Ambig.* 23, PG 91, 1260D; quoted in Andrew Louth, 'St Gregory the Theologian', p. 127.

<sup>16</sup> *Ambig.* 1:29-31, CCSG 48, 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ambig.* 1:36-38, CCSG 48, 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Or.* 31.26:4-7, SC 250, 326.

<sup>19</sup> *Ambig.* 23, PG 91, 1261A.



Let me now take us in a different direction. I shall take a few examples of Maximus' scriptural interpretation, all of which present an aspect of the spiritual life. We shall begin with an aspect of natural contemplation.

The creation and the universe are, as it were, a book in which the spiritually sensitive person can read God's own handwriting; and natural contemplation is precisely looking at nature in this kind of way: reading the creation as God's masterpiece. It involves observing principles and patterns, beauty and harmony in the fabric of the created order;<sup>20</sup> the purpose of such observation being to lead one's mind to the Origin of the creation and ultimately to his praise.

It is all very well to see the Creator behind the creation but 'can there be found,' as one of Maximus' questioners asks, 'a demonstration of the *Holy Trinity* in nature?'<sup>21</sup> In other words, by looking at creation and reading the 'book' of the universe can one be led to thinking of one God in three persons?

Maximus grapples with this question by referring to three different aspects in creation: being, difference and life.<sup>22</sup> The fact that things exist, that they possess being, suggests that there is a certain universal οὐσία, Maximus argues. Here οὐσία should be considered within the context of the Porphyrian Tree where it functions as the all-embracing most generic genus of created beings.<sup>23</sup> It is 'being' as the undifferentiated common factor shared by all within the universe. Created beings have their 'being' from the Creator who is Being *par excellence*. 'Being', then, in this context signifies the Father.

If we come down the Porphyrian tree and move from the most generic genus of *ousia* to the more specific categories of being, we find that the ramifications depend on differences.<sup>24</sup> Created beings are distinguished by means of differences, both in species and in number, and this, Maximus says, is something accomplished by Wisdom. 'For it belongs to Wisdom to distribute to each nature properties appropriate to it, and to pre-

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Ambig.* 10.35, PG 91, 1176BC.

<sup>21</sup> *Qu. dub.* 136, CCSG 10, 97.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Qu. dub.* 136, CCSG 10, 97.

<sup>23</sup> See a discussion on this, ch. 9: 'The Universe and the Tree of Porphyry'.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. ch. 1: 'Genus and Species'.

serve each of the created beings well-distinct and unmingled both with itself and with the rest of the creatures.’<sup>25</sup> Wisdom, then, signifies the Logos, the Son. Life or ‘essential motion’ of beings is clearly that which leads us to the ‘Breath of God’, the Holy Spirit, which is the truly subsistent (ἐνυπόστατον) eternal life principle, the source of life for every living being.

Maximus draws together all this in his answer to Thalassius as to the meaning of Romans 1:20, *For the invisible things of him are clearly seen by intellection from the creation of the world in the things that are made, even his eternal power and divine majesty.*

Or, perhaps, the invisible things of God are none other than his eternal power and his divine majesty, which have as their manifest heralds the supernatural majestic properties of creatures. For just as we believe from beings *that* God is—God who is the Being *par excellence*—in the same way, too, we are taught from the differences in essence and species among creatures, of his essentially innate and subsistent Wisdom which sustains the beings. And again, from the essential and specific motion of beings we learn of his essentially innate and subsistent Life which perfects beings. In this way, through wise contemplation of the creation we receive a word (λόγος) concerning the Holy Trinity, that is to say, concerning the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For God’s eternal power, as being consubstantial, is the Logos, and his eternal and divine majesty is the consubstantial Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Way to the Vision: ‘Why did Abraham see three angels but Lot only two?’**

Naturally, Scripture alongside creation provides material for contemplation. The most obvious places to go for Trinitarian reflection are those passages where God speaks in the first person plural (the creation of Adam, the condemnation of Adam, the tower of Babel)<sup>27</sup> or where he appears in a threefold form (hospitality of Abraham).<sup>28</sup> Maximus discusses all these cases in the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 28. His main hermeneutical principle here is that ‘the holy Scripture moulds God in accordance with the underlying condition of those for whom he cares in his providence,’ and that ‘accordingly, God is multiplied or unified in scriptural formulations in accordance with the underlying cause.’<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Qu. dub.* 136:7-10, CCSG 10, 97.

<sup>26</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 13:18-31, CCSG 7, 95.

<sup>27</sup> Gen. 1:26, Gen. 3:22 and Gen. 11:7 respectively.

<sup>28</sup> Gen. 18:2.

<sup>29</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 28:4-6 and 39-41, CCSG 7, 203-205.



In the same way in each place where Scripture moulds God in divers manners, if you carefully and with understanding examine the words, you will discover that the reason for the considerable variation of the divine images lies within the state of those who are the object of providence.<sup>30</sup>

This means that in the case of, for instance, the tower of Babel when God says *Come, let us go down, and confuse their tongues*, he, through the scriptural formulation, wants to show that the builders of the tower had fallen into polytheism. Maximus continues:

And since they placed together the *logoi* of each belief, like some bricks, and built, as it were a tower, their polytheist godlessness; reasonably then God, who disbanding the agreement of the evil concordance of the people who had been led astray, calls himself in the plural on account of the condition of those who were the object of providence; a condition fragmented and split into innumerable beliefs. By so doing God showed that while he was one, he had been divided into many parts in them.<sup>31</sup>

When, on the other hand, the underlying condition of those in question (Abraham, for instance) is good and holy, then Scripture refers 'to the most holy three hypostases mystically indicating the mode of existence of the most holy and beginningless Monad, since according to its essence the most sacred and worshipful Triad of hypostases is Monad.'<sup>32</sup>

This is clearly the case with Abraham receiving the visitation of three angels.<sup>33</sup> Later in the same narrative the angels appear to Lot.<sup>34</sup> Lot, however, saw only two angels, and this raises the question: 'Why was it that Abraham once saw three angels but Lot only two?'<sup>35</sup> as the questioner in *Quaestiones et dubia* 39 asks.

This question brings us back to the movement from Monad to Triad. In fact, it brings us to the middle term 'dyad' and the two angels seen by Lot. In his oration *For Peace*, St Gregory had said that 'dyad has been transcended on account of matter and form — out of which also bodies are made.'<sup>36</sup> 'Dyad,' therefore, in the first place has to do with composition, material things and, in general, things perceived through the

<sup>30</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 28:22-25, CCSG 7, 203.

<sup>31</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 28:30-37, CCSG 7, 203-205.

<sup>32</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 28:59-62, CCSG 7, 205.

<sup>33</sup> Gen. 18:2-33. See also the article of Lars Thunberg, 'Early Christian Interpretations of the Three Angels in Gen. 18', in *SP* 7 (TU 92, 1966), pp. 560-570.

<sup>34</sup> Gen. 19:1-26.

<sup>35</sup> *Qu. dub.* 39:1-2, CCSG 10, 32.

<sup>36</sup> *Or.* 23.8, SC 270, 298; and Maximus, *Qu. dub.* 105, CCSG 10, 79.

senses. It represents the phenomenal world and needs to be transcended if the noumenal or the divine realms are to be reached.

Now Lot with his vision of two angels represents the person who has not transcended the dyad; hence the two angels. He is someone who is still immature spiritually and who has no capacity to pass beyond the phenomenal.

In the case of Lot, who had not yet rendered his mind pure of the composition of bodies but was still attached to their generation from matter and form believing that God was the fashioner of the visible creation only, there God appeared as two (dually), not as three (triadically). He, thus, showed in the things through which He shaped Himself, that Lot had not yet detached his ascending mind from matter and form.<sup>37</sup>

Maximus does not see Lot negatively: Lot's mind *is* ascending. And even though his mind was still attached to matter and form (the dyad) and although he had in his mind at the level of contemplating the created order without reaching beyond this 'dyad', he nevertheless 'venerated the divine from visible things.'<sup>38</sup> Moreover, it was God who appeared to Lot, signified by two angels. Their duality was the symbol of his venerating God as the creator of the visible creation only. To come to the level of *theologia*, to reach the knowledge of Monad in Triad, one has to leave all that behind, not because it is bad in itself but because it is something 'after God' rather than God Himself. For that, one has to endeavour to become 'another Abraham'.<sup>39</sup>

But before we reach that point, let us consider one more text which has to do with the dyad and the Triad. In *Ambiguum* 10, Maximus interprets a passage from Gregory in which he speaks of the Saints passing through matter and the fleshly, becoming united to the divine light and being deified. This, Gregory says, 'is granted to those who genuinely live the philosophical life and transcend the material dyad for the sake of the unity the mind perceives in the Trinity.'<sup>40</sup> Here 'dyad', as Maximus interprets it throughout this long *Ambiguum*, stands not simply for what is perceived through the senses, but it also stands for the two passionate parts of the soul, that is the desiring

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<sup>37</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 28:15-21, CCSG 7, 203.

<sup>38</sup> *Qu. dub.* 39:9-10, CCSG 10, 32.

<sup>39</sup> *Ambig.* 10.21, PG 91, 1148A.

<sup>40</sup> *Or.* 21.2, PG 35, 1084C.



and the incensive parts, as well as for their negative and distorted aspects: attachment to the senses, passions and actual sin.

What the Saints, including Abraham, have done, is that

they have set aside the relationship of the soul to the flesh, and through the flesh to matter, or—to put it more generally—they have put off the natural conformity of sensible being with what can be perceived through the senses and genuinely acquired a desire for God alone, on account, as I said, of the unity the mind perceives in the Trinity.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, then, he who emulates Abraham in this respect, ‘he who through ascetic struggle overthrows the flesh, sense and the world, through which the relationship of the mind to the intelligible is dissolved, and by his mind alone through love comes to know God: such a one is another Abraham.’<sup>42</sup> Thus breaking away from the flesh, the passions and the senses themselves will emancipate the intellect from being fragmented by the multiplicity of the sensible reality. It becomes in this way unified and able to reflect the unity perceived in the Trinity. Abraham’s vision of God in the form of three men conversing with him as one shows Abraham’s spiritual perfection and that he who reaches such detachment and purity will know God as Monad and Triad.

Thus, when he appeared to Abraham, who was perfect in knowledge and had completely detached his mind from matter and its impressions, God taught him that the immaterial word (*logos*) concerning the Triad is *in* the word (*logos*) concerning the Monad. And it was for this reason that God then appeared as three and conversed as one.<sup>43</sup>

### The Image of the Archetype

With Abraham we have arrived at the final stage of knowing the Trinity: *theologia*. Maximus, drawing on Evagrius, calls this state the state of ‘pure prayer’ or ‘undistracted prayer’.<sup>44</sup> It is a state in which the mind, completely detached from ‘matter and its impressions’, desires God alone and is wholly united to him alone.<sup>45</sup> It is a state in which ‘the mind is rapt by the divine and infinite light and is conscious neither of it-

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<sup>41</sup> *Ambig.* 10.43, PG 91, 1193D; translation in Louth, *Maximus*, p. 147.

<sup>42</sup> *Ambig.* 10.21, PG 91, 1145D-1148A; translation in Louth, *Maximus*, p. 120.

<sup>43</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 28:10-15, CCSG 7, 203.

<sup>44</sup> *Carit.* II.4 (PG 90, 985A): ‘undistracted prayer’, II.6 (PG 90, 985AB): ‘pure prayer’. See also M. Viller, ‘Aux sources de la spiritualité de S. Maxime. Les Oeuvres d’Evagre le Pontique’, in *RAM* 11 (1930), pp. 250-251, 253.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. ch 12 below.

self nor of any other creature at all, save only of him who through charity effects such brightness in it.'<sup>46</sup>

The mind, when it knows things, somehow reflects them in its being; it is conformed to them. Knowledge of the Trinity has a similar effect. 'In contemplating him who is simple, it becomes simple ....'<sup>47</sup> God's unity becomes manifest in the soul, but also its triadic structure as mind, reason and spirit becomes a vehicle of understanding the Trinity.

The unification of the soul, its union with God, its knowledge of God as Unity and its conformity to this unity, are all reciprocally bound together. The more one detaches one's mind from the multiplicity of the material world, the more the soul becomes unified; and becoming more unified it is drawn closer to God. In this way the mind's knowledge increases and it is conformed to the object of its knowledge. Presenting Abraham as the example, Maximus takes the addition of the letter alpha to his name (from 'Αβραμ to 'Αβραάμ) as a symbol of such state.<sup>48</sup>

By faith he was mystically assimilated to the *logos* concerning the Monad, according to which he became unified, ..., magnificently and wholly drawn up alone to God alone, bearing on him no imprint of knowledge of any scattered things, which shows the power of the letter alpha given as an addition to his name.<sup>49</sup>

The same idea is behind the *Centuries on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation* II.8 and II.16 in which Maximus speaks of the knowledge of the divine Monad. In II.8 Maximus develops a succession of detachments which enables the person to overcome his inner division and in this way gain wholeness, reaching in the end the knowledge of the divine Unity itself.

If you are healed of the breach caused by the transgression, you are severed first from the passions and then from impassioned thoughts. Next you are severed from nature and the inner principles of nature, then conceptual images and the knowledge relating to them. Lastly, when you have passed through the manifold *logoi* relating to divine providence, you attain through unknowing the very *logos* of the divine Monad. By this *logos* the intellect, noticing its own immutability,

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<sup>46</sup> *Carit.* II.6, PG 90, 985B. It must be noted that Maximus speaks of two states of pure prayer in this chapter: the one concerns those of the active life, the other those of the contemplative. Our quotation refers to the latter.

<sup>47</sup> *Carit.* III.97, PG 90, 1045D.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Gen. 17:5. The letter alpha is number one (1) in Greek arithmetic. Hence the allusion to the One, the Only One etc. reminiscent of Plotinus' *Enn.* VI.9. Note also that the word μονάς (= monad) derives from the word μόνος (= the only one).

<sup>49</sup> *Ambig.* 10.45, PG 91, 1200B.



rejoices with an unspeakable joy because it has received the peace of God which transcends all intellect and which ceaselessly keeps him who has been granted it from falling.<sup>50</sup>

In II.16 Maximus places the knowledge of the Monad in the context of the transfiguration of Christ. There Elijah, Moses and Christ are, on the one hand, the symbols of virtue, natural contemplation and theology, and, on the other hand, they are the symbols of providence, judgement and the Monad.

He who to some degree has been initiated into the *logos* of the Monad, invariably discovers the *logoi* of divine providence and judgement conjoined with it. That is why, like St Peter, he thinks it good that three tabernacles should be made within himself for those who have appeared to him. These tabernacles represent three stages of salvation, namely that of virtue, that of spiritual knowledge and that of theology.<sup>51</sup>

The person who has attained the knowledge of the Monad, also reflects and contemplates the Triad in his own soul. He, in fact, becomes able to see the mystery of the three-in-one, of Triad in Monad, in his own being. The trinitarian image in man Maximus sees in the soul's being a unity of mind, reason and spirit (νοῦς, λόγος, πνεῦμα),<sup>52</sup> a triad which can be found also in Gregory Nazianzen, Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas, for example.<sup>53</sup> Of course, mind, reason and spirit are always there by nature, and there is therefore a natural analogy between the Trinity and the human soul: '[W]e determined the Son and Logos of God as wisdom [and] the Holy Spirit as life, since also our soul, which was created after the image of God, is beheld in those three, that is, in mind, in reason and in spirit.'<sup>54</sup> But seeing oneself in the *likeness* of God requires the unification of the soul and its union with God. The soul has a capacity by nature to be united to God through the mind—which is the fundamental meaning of the 'image'. This is a given. But being actually united to God, requires a free response aimed at fulfilling that which according to God's precepts is to be

<sup>50</sup> *Cap. theol.* II.8, PG 90, 1128CD.

<sup>51</sup> *Cap. theol.* II.16, PG 90, 1132BC. In his commentary on this chapter, Hans Urs von Balthasar points out that the origin of the triad Monad—providence—judgement was developed by Evagrius and that in his understanding the term *monas* meant 'the primordial unity of all creatures in God' (*Kosmische Liturgie*, p. 521). Gabriel Bunge has discussed this notion in Evagrius. See his 'Hénade ou monade? Au sujet de deux notions centrales de la terminologie évagrienne' in *Le Muséon* 102 (1989), pp. 69-91.

<sup>52</sup> See *Qu. Thal.* 32, CCSG 7, 225; *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1088A; *Ambig.* 10.43, PG 91, 1196A; *Qu. dub.* 105, CCSG 10, 79-80. See also *Qu. Thal.* 25, CCSG 7, 161-163.

<sup>53</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 23.11, SC 270, 320; Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymns* 44, SC 196, 70ff.; Gregory Palamas, *Capita CL* 40, Sinkewicz, 126-128.

in his likeness—and being in his likeness ultimately means being transfused by his light, making God visible through one's transfigured being and actions. This precisely was the state of the Saints, of whom Maximus spoke in *Ambiguum* 10. Being united to God, they reflected the archetype and came to be in the likeness of the Monad in Triad.

For since they knew that the soul is a middle being between God and matter, and has powers that can unite it with both—that is, it has a mind that links it with God and senses that link it with matter—they for that reason have completely shaken off the senses and everything perceived through them by means of the activity that relates and inclines it to them, and by the mind they have ineffably assimilated their soul to God and in it, being wholly united to the whole God in a marvellous manner possessing the image of the archetype according to the likeness in mind and reason and spirit, they beheld the resemblance so far as possible, and were mystically taught the unity understood in the Trinity.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Qu. dub.* 105:22-26, CCSG 10, 79-80.

<sup>55</sup> *Ambig.* 10.43, PG 91, 1193D-1196A; translation in Louth, *Maximus*, p. 147.



## Part III

### CHRIST

#### 6

#### Nature, Difference and Number

##### Introduction: Developing thought reflects the changing world of seventh-century Byzantium

THE COUNCIL OF Chalcedon 451 and its aftermath had left the Byzantine Empire fragmented. This fragmentation continued to harass its political and religious life into the seventh century and beyond. Unity was desperately needed because of the pressure that was coming from the Persians, the Avars and the Slavs, and from the 630's onwards also from the Arabs. Egypt, for example, was the main source of grain for the Byzantines and losing it would have had fatal consequences. But on both sides of Chalcedon people were convinced of their own orthodoxy and of the heresy of their opponents. The Chalcedonians knew that the *Acephaloi*, or the Severans, confused the two natures of Christ, and the Severans had no doubt of their opponents' separating the natures and therefore being Nestorians. Both claimed the authority of the Fathers, especially that of St Cyril of Alexandria, and both were certain of the correctness of their own interpretation.

How, then, could unity in Christ be understood correctly? And correctly in such a way as could be accepted by both sides? This was the question which awaited an answer. Such an answer, if successful, would unite the divided Christians and, by the same token, the empire.

For the Chalcedonian party Christ was *two* according to nature and *one* according to hypostasis. He was the Son and Logos of God, one of the Trinity, consubstantial with the Father according to his divinity and consubstantial with us according to his humanity. The Severans, for their part, could also see Christ's double consubstantiality

but they could not admit two natures in him. St Cyril had said that there was *one* nature: 'the one incarnate nature of God the Word'. This one nature was for Severus a 'composite nature', an expression which could accommodate natural diversity in Christ — so at least the Severans believed. For them there was no distinction between hypostasis and nature in the *oikonomia*. Thus accepting two natures meant automatically accepting two hypostases, which was the heresy of Nestorius.

There was no way out. In the sixth century, Justinian had tried to persuade the Severans to believe that the Chalcedonians were not Nestorian by condemning not only Nestorius himself, but also the so-called Three Chapters: Theodore of Mopsuestia, some works of Theodoret of Cyrus and a Letter of Ibas the Persian.<sup>1</sup> He also made it explicit that Christ was 'one of the Trinity', that he was one hypostasis, the Son and Logos of God made flesh.<sup>2</sup> The Severans were not persuaded, and the situation remained pending.

In the seventh century, as Heraclius came to restore the empire after the rather unsuccessful rule of Phocas, he, too, attempted to unite the divided Christians.<sup>3</sup> He did so by inaugurating new ways of looking at the problem. His first attempt was based on the idea that Christ had only one *activity*,<sup>4</sup> a 'theandric' activity. This idea had already been expressed a century earlier by Severus himself,<sup>5</sup> drawing on—or rather *misinterpreting*—the fourth *Letter* of Dionysius the Areopagite, and later by the less-known Theodore of Pharan. When in 633 in Egypt Heraclius with Cyrus of Phasis and Sergius of Constantinople drew up the Pact of Union (the document known as Cyrus' *Nine Chapters*) based on the doctrine of Christ's one activity, it was embraced by both sides. The long desired union was, quite suddenly, obtained. Even the Pope of Rome Honorius blessed the union—and was condemned for this reason as a heretic in the Council of Constantinople in 681. Unfortunately for the emperor, the monk

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<sup>1</sup> See John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions. The Church 450-680 A.D.* (Crestwood, New York: SVSP, 1989), pp. 235-245.

<sup>2</sup> See Grillmeier, *Christ*, vol. 2, part 2, pp. 338-343.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed account see Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity*, pp. 333-373.

<sup>4</sup> ἐνέργεια, also operation or energy.

<sup>5</sup> See his *Ep. 3 ad Johannem ducem*, in *Doctrina Patrum* 24, Diekamp, 309; and Grillmeier, *Christ*, vol. 2, part 2, p. 170.



Sophronius, the future Patriarch of Jerusalem, happened to be in Alexandria when Cyrus released the *Nine Chapters*. Sophronius noticed the phrase 'one activity' in chapter seven of the document and by so doing started a struggle against Monenergism.

Here is Sergius' account of what happened.

With Cyrus Sophronius examined the issues of these chapters, opposed and contradicted the chapter on the one activity, demanding that in every case one must teach the doctrine of two activities in Christ our God. ... Cyrus asserted that since at the present time too the salvation of so many thousands of people was at stake, it was imperative not to contend argumentatively at all on the subject of that chapter because, as was already said, an expression of this kind was also uttered by certain inspired Fathers, and the rationale of orthodoxy had not suffered from it at all. The aforementioned Sophronius, dear to God, in no way accepted this arrangement.<sup>6</sup>

In the sequel, Sophronius went to Constantinople to see Sergius and demanded the notorious phrase to be removed from the document. Sergius was not happy about this.

We [Sergius] thought that this was harsh. How was it not harsh and exceedingly onerous when it was going to dissolve and destroy that whole excellent concord and unity which had come about in Alexandria, and in all her provinces, which at no stage up to the present had accepted even the name of our blessed and renowned father Leo or had made mention of the holy, great, ecumenical council of Chalcedon, while now with clear, loud voice they were proclaiming it in the holy mysteries?<sup>7</sup>

Soon the issue developed into a controversy. Unity in the empire began to splinter. To stop the development, first, Patriarch Sergius published already the same year (633) the so-called *Psephos*<sup>8</sup> and half a decade later Heraclius released his famous *Ecthesis*,<sup>9</sup> both of which forbade any discussion either of one or two activities.<sup>10</sup>

The expression 'one activity', even if uttered by certain Fathers, nevertheless alienated and confused some who heard it, who supposed that it would lead to the destruction of the two natures which were hypostatically united in Christ our God. In a similar way the expression 'two activities' scandalized many, on the grounds that it had been uttered by none of the holy and approved spiritual leaders of the Church, but to follow it was to profess two wills at variance with one another, such that God the Word wished to fulfil the salutary suffering but his humanity resisted his will and was opposed to it, and as a result two persons with conflicting wills were introduced, which is impious and foreign to Christian teaching.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Copy of the Letter of Sergius of Constantinople to Honorius, Pope of Rome*, ACO ser. 2, vol. 2, part 2, 538:8-14; 538:18 -540:3.

<sup>7</sup> *Copy of the Letter of Sergius of Constantinople to Honorius, Pope of Rome*, ACO ser. 2, vol. 2, part 2, 540:7-13.

<sup>8</sup> See Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity*, pp. 348-356.

<sup>9</sup> For the text of *Ecthesis* see ACO ser. 2, vol. 1, 156:20 -162:13.

<sup>10</sup> A similar imperial compromise policy was executed twenty years after Chalcedon with the publication of the *Henoticon*. See Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, part 1, translation by J. Cawte and P. Allen (London and Oxford: Mowbray, 1987; original German edition 1985), pp. 247-288.

<sup>11</sup> *Ecthesis*, ACO ser. 2, vol. 1, p. 160:10-19.

With this the *Ecthesis* introduced the idea of one *will* in Christ. Also new people became involved in the controversy, such as Pyrrhus (later the Patriarch of Constantinople) on the emperor's side, and Maximus the Confessor and Pope Martin of Rome in the opposition. At one stage Maximus managed to convince Pyrrhus of the errors of the *Ecthesis* in a public debate in Carthage in 645, but only for a time. When things had developed dangerously far and Monothelitism had already become the content of the imperial policy in the form of the so called *Typos* (648), Martin convoked a council in Rome, at the Lateran, in 649. The council condemned Monenergism and Monothelitism along with their ecclesiastical promoters: Theodore of Pharan, Cyrus of Alexandria, and the Patriarchs of Constantinople Sergius, Pyrrhus and Paul. The end result was that Martin and Maximus (along with his disciples) were brought to trial in Constantinople and were sent into exile as heretics and traitors to the empire. (In Maximus' eyes the Monothelites were traitors to God.)<sup>12</sup> Both died in exile, Martin in 655 in Cherson in the Crimea and Maximus in 662 in Lazica, in present day Georgia.

The unity, which the emperors (first Heraclius, then Constans II) hoped to achieve, did not eventuate and is still waiting to be achieved to this day. Heraclius, in fact, a few months before his death admitted that the *Ecthesis* had been a failure and washed his hands of it by attributing its authorship to Patriarch Sergius.<sup>13</sup> The Chalcedonian side cleared the muddle the controversy had created only two decades later in the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 681. The heretics were condemned, the doctrine of the two natural activities and wills in the one Christ was established and holy orthodoxy was glorified. But the men who gave their lives for it, Maximus and Martin, were hardly mentioned in the proceedings of the council. There is only one reference to Martin as the pope who convoked the Lateran council 649, none to Maximus.<sup>14</sup> They, indeed, preferred treason to the emperor rather than to God and to receive glory from God rather than from men.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Opusc.* 7, PG 91, 72C-73B.

<sup>13</sup> See John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century. The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, revized edition 1997; first published in 1990), p. 302.

<sup>14</sup> ACO ser. 2, vol. 2, part 1, p. 130.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Opusc.* 7, PG 91, 72C-73B.



## Natural Difference and Number

Such then in broad lines is the historical setting within which Maximus expounds his Christology. As for the theological setting, for Maximus, what is logically and conceptually true of the Trinity, must be also true of Christ, since he is one of the Trinity. In other words, just as with the Trinity, so also with Christ, the distinction between the universal and the particular is fundamental. In the *oikonomia* this is mainly expressed by the terms nature (φύσις) and hypostasis respectively. The Monophysites rejected this distinction in the *oikonomia* on account that Christ had ‘renewed the natures’, and Leontius of Byzantium had argued against this already one century before Maximus, insisting on its necessity.<sup>16</sup> By making the distinction the Fathers were able to confess both unity and difference in the Trinity and in Christ. This is how Maximus sees it:

Just as with respect to the Holy Trinity difference and union are not expressed by the same words, but difference is confessed by declaring three hypostases and union by confessing one essence, so also with respect to the One of the Trinity; difference is confessed through acknowledging the two natures and union is confessed through proclaiming one composite hypostasis.<sup>17</sup>

In Chalcedonian theology it is very common to consider the universal and the particular in Christ in the reverse order with respect to how they are in the Trinity. In Christ there is difference at the level of the universal and unity at the level of the particular, whereas in the Trinity unity is at the level of the universal and difference at the level of the particular. Already Gregory Nazianzen in the fourth century spoke of *allo* and *allo* when referring to the diversity in Christ.<sup>18</sup> In Chalcedonian Christology, this is expressed by attributing hypostasis or person to the particular and nature to the universal. Thus one (composite) hypostasis is considered in two natures.

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<sup>16</sup> Brian Daley has made the following observations with regard to this issue: ‘He [Leontius] insists, throughout his works ... on clear definition and the consistent use of terms, tracing the origin of the major Trinitarian and Christological heresies to confusion about the difference between ὑπόστασις and οὐσία, ‘person’ (πρόσωπον) and nature (φύσις), and refusing to accept the argument of the Severan party that the very “newness” of the Incarnation justifies a new and singular use of terminology. All language about God, he admits, is equally inadequate; yet if the terms we use in speaking about the Trinity are not consistent in their meaning with those we use for the Incarnate Word and even for the subjects of our everyday discourse, all our argument about either is “a reduction to absurdity rather than a demonstration”.’ “A Richer Union”: Leontius of Byzantium and the Relationship of Human and Divine in Christ’, in *SP* 24 (1993), pp. 245-246.

<sup>17</sup> St Maximus, *Opusc.* 13, PG 91, 148B.

<sup>18</sup> See *Ep.* 101.21, SC 208, 44-46. Gregory also speaks of φύσεις in this sense in *Ep.* 101.19, SC 208, 44.

In Severan Christology, which makes no distinction between the universal and the particular in the *oikonomia*, it is not possible to speak of two natures as this would necessarily involve two hypostases.<sup>19</sup> Instead, Severus speaks of one composite nature and one composite hypostasis. Severus accepts, as genuinely Cyrillian, Christ's double consubstantiality, as well as natural difference in Christ, and much of post-Chalcedonian two-nature Christology challenges Severus at this particular point seeing him as inconsistent.<sup>20</sup> Often, as also the present day dialogue has shown, Chalcedonian and Severan Christologies seem to be saying virtually the same thing,<sup>21</sup> and yet, they could never be reconciled.

Here, I would like to look into this question through Maximus' understanding of it, and to elucidate the way in which Maximus viewed Severus' theology. It is sometimes thought that Maximus, and other Chalcedonian theologians like Leontius or Justinian, were not aware of Severus' actual teaching—*i.e.* that he spoke of double consubstantiality and natural difference, and made no distinction between hypostasis and nature—but this is certainly not the case, as we shall see.<sup>22</sup> In addition, I shall present an instance of Christological controversy which took place at the end of the sixth century within the Monophysite community. This, I believe, will shed some light on the Christology of the period.

Maximus discusses the Severan cause in a series of Christological *Letters* (12-19). I shall take as an example *Letter* 13 filling in some gaps from other texts. In this *Letter* addressed 'to Peter the Illustrious', a governor in North Africa, Maximus spills much ink on explaining why the refusal to confess two natures in Christ is wrong, and why it is necessary to say 'two natures'. According to Maximus, the Severans, while acknowledging the natural difference in Christ after the union, refuse to admit two natures in him in order not to split him into two Christs. They do this, Maximus says,

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<sup>19</sup> Whether they could do so by using the term οὐσία also in the *oikonomia*, is a question which remains open.

<sup>20</sup> See the article of Jean-Claude Larchet, 'La question Christologique. À propos de projet d'union de l'Église Orthodoxe et des Églises non Chalcédoniennes: problèmes théologiques et ecclésiologiques en suspens', in *MO* 134 (2000/2), pp. 56-76.

<sup>21</sup> See Larchet, 'La question Christologique', pp. 56-76.

<sup>22</sup> See *Ep.* 12, PG 91, 492BC, *Ep.* 13, PG 91, 513C and *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 565D-572B.



‘because, it seems, they do not know that every number according to its *logos* neither divides nor is divided, nor produces division or, indeed, union.’<sup>23</sup> Consequently, number as such seems to suggest division to the Monophysite mind. For Maximus, in contrast, number is simply ‘indicative of quantity’ or ‘the label of quantity’.<sup>24</sup> In itself number says nothing about the *relation* the things that are numbered have among themselves. Number, as it were, has nothing to do with their affairs. They can be united as well as separated, and in both cases their number remains, provided that their relation does not obliterate them as natures.<sup>25</sup>

The logic Maximus follows here is that where there is difference, there there is also quantity—and quantity can be expressed or acknowledged only through number. That is to say that if there is one ‘something’ with no differentiation at all, it is one in every respect and involves no quantity. If however there is difference of some kind, it follows that something is different from another, which in turn involves quantity. This quantity can be expressed only by counting the differentiated elements. They may be natures in the one Christ or colours in a single stone (or flower or an animal), an example we saw in chapter two.<sup>26</sup> If, then, one wishes to express the existence of diversity, one has to admit number. If one refuses the number, one then refuses quantity and with it the difference and the things of which the difference is predicated.

Maximus is careful to distinguish between difference and division. The former does not involve the latter but they both are independent concepts.

Difference, on the one hand, is a *logos* according to which the substrata differ one from another, and is indicative of πῶς εἶναι, that is, it is indicative of the flesh being by nature and essence *what* it is, it is indicative of God the Word being by nature and essence *what* it is. Division, on the other hand, is a cut right through which entirely severs the substrata and renders them to be ... separate from one another.<sup>27</sup>

In the case of Christ, if one admits difference of some kind in him, it follows that ‘he cannot be *one* in every respect (lit. according to every *logos* and *tropos*).’<sup>28</sup> There-

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<sup>23</sup> *Ep.* 13, PG 91, 513A.

<sup>24</sup> *Ep.* 13, PG 91, 513A.

<sup>25</sup> *Cf.* Leontius *Cap. Sev.* 8 and 10, PG 86, 1904BC.

<sup>26</sup> *Ep.* 12, PG 91, 476A-D.

<sup>27</sup> *Ep.* 12, PG 91, 469AB.

<sup>28</sup> *Ep.* 13, PG 91, 513D.

fore, he must be ‘*in some respect* at least two, or more’.<sup>29</sup> This again does not mean that he must be two or more in every respect—as he is one in hypostasis. He is two or more in the respect in which there is difference in him. And if Christ *is* two in some respect, we must confess this. Otherwise we ultimately deprive him of what he is and render him non-existent by our thinking. ‘Therefore, because they say that there is difference in Christ after the union, they cannot say that Christ is in every respect one after the union.’ Maximus gives the Severans two options.

For either, according to them, the natures are not destroyed after the union, and they exist and are preserved, and it is [therefore] fitting to confess them as preserved after the union, or since it is not fitting to confess them preserved after the union, it is not fitting, according to them, either to say that they exist or that they are preserved, and [therefore] the natures are destroyed.

So, either let them stop speaking of the *mere* difference, learning that difference is indicative of the quantity of certain differentiated things, or let them accept the confession of truth with us who in accord with the Fathers devoutly take the number by the *logos* of difference and only in order to make known that the things united have remained without confusion.<sup>30</sup>

Leontius is not less perceptive in *Capita triginta contra Severum* 5.

If they acknowledge that the things which have come together [remain] unconfused—and the things come together are two also according to them—how is it that they do not recognize the things, which in union are not confounded, [to be] two after the union? And if they do recognize two natures, why do they not confess [this]? And if they do confess, how do they refuse to count them, things of which they recognize the natural properties unconfounded after the union? For, as Saint Basil says, ‘what they confess let them also count.’<sup>31</sup>

What is implied here is that the Severans *do* admit natural difference, and consequently they should also admit number, but since they refuse the latter it logically follows that they also reject the natures and, by the same token, the whole mystery of Christ together with our salvation.

To the modern reader this kind of argumentation may, perhaps, sound somewhat off-putting: there seems to be no middle ground, no space for mutual understanding or dialogue. But in Late Antiquity doctrinal confession was something in which ultimate accuracy was required and the formulae used had to be able to endure every scrutiny. It was all or nothing. And in the latter case a *reductio ad absurdum* would follow the argument. This does not mean that the opponent was necessarily unaware of the positive

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<sup>29</sup> *Ep.* 13, PG 91, 513D.

<sup>30</sup> *Ep.* 12, PG 91, 492B.



aspects of the theology in question—Maximus regards such aspects in Severus' theology as 'mock piety' aimed at 'deceiving his audience'.<sup>32</sup> In this spirit, Severus' theology, despite its relative ingenuity, is according to Maximus 'hideous, full of stench and totally deprived of grace' and in the final analysis it 'completely denies the incarnation'.<sup>33</sup> Similar language one may find on the opposite side, too. Whether what Maximus says in general does justice to Severus' actual thought is difficult to say and goes beyond the scope of this study.

### A Sixth-century Controversy over Natural Difference

Natural difference and number had been the bone of contention also in the Christological controversy which took place within the Monophysite community in the 580's. The sources for the controversy are scanty and mainly in Syriac. Much remains unpublished. However, some description of the Syriac sources has been provided by Albert van Roey<sup>34</sup> and the Greek that survives has been published in article form by Karl-Heinz Uthemann<sup>35</sup> and José Declerck.<sup>36</sup>

The originator of the controversy was none other than Stephen the Sophist whom we have already met in part one. His basic thesis was that 'it is impossible to speak of difference in natural quality (διαφορὰ ὡς ἐν ποιότητι φυσικῇ) in Christ without admitting by the same token a duality of natures in him.'<sup>37</sup> This was regarded as seriously heretical within the Monophysite community. Stephen was first challenged by someone named Probus in a treatise *Against the impious doctrine of those who say that one must*

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<sup>31</sup> *Cap. Sev.* 5, PG 86, 1901D-1904A and St Basil, *Ep.* 214, PG 32, 789B.

<sup>32</sup> *Ep.* 13, PG 91, 512D.

<sup>33</sup> *Ep.* 13, PG 91, 512CD.

<sup>34</sup> Albert van Roey, 'Une controverse christologique sous le patriarcat de Pierre de Callinique', in *Symposium Syriacum 1976* (OCA 205, Roma: PIOS, 1978), pp. 349-357. Van Roey examines the Syriac manuscript tradition and the historical evidence from the histories of Denys by Tell-Mahre and Michael the Syrian. See also the brief account of the controversy given in R.Y. Ebied, A. van Roey and L.R. Wickham, *Peter of Callinicum. Anti-Tritheist Dossier* (Leuven: Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1981), pp. 6-8.

<sup>35</sup> Karl-Heinz Uthemann 'Syllogistik im Dienst der Orthodoxie. Zwei unedierte Texte Byzantinischer Kontroverstheologie des 6. Jahrhunderts', in *JÖB* 30 (1981), pp. 103-112.

<sup>36</sup> José Declerck, 'Probus, l'ex-jacobite et ses Ἐπαπορήματα πρὸς Ἰακωβίτας', in *Byzantion* 53/1 (1983), pp. 213-232. Declerck adds the testimony of Timothy of Constantinople concerning the doctrine of the Niobites (from Stephen the Sophist, surnamed Niobos, PG 86, 65A), pp. 219-220.

<sup>37</sup> Roey, 'Une controverse christologique', p. 350.

*not confess that the difference in natural quality is preserved after the (thought of) union.*<sup>38</sup> Probus also wrote a treatise *On Difference* in which he maintains that difference does not imply number<sup>39</sup>—something which Maximus would have completely disagreed with, as we have seen.

Probus was joined by an archimandrite called John Barbour, and together, so it seems from the course of the events, they went and met Stephen at Alexandria and instead of convincing Stephen they were convinced by him and eventually became his followers. In the sequel, Probus was excommunicated and exiled by the Monophysite Patriarch Damian of Alexandria, while John tried to settle the issue. In the end they both were condemned in the synod held sometime between 584 and 586 at the monastery of Gubba Baraya and presided over by the Patriarch Peter of Callinicus.<sup>40</sup> In the account of Denys of Tell-Mahre the outcome of the synod was this:

The Patriarch Mar Peter immediately composed in the name of the whole synod a letter or treatise in which he annulled and destroyed the opinion of the sophist and of Probus and established and proved, by means of testimonies from the doctors of the church that there really and actually is a difference between the natures which make up the Christ, and that this is still preserved after the thought of the union without there being any numbering or separation of the natures themselves.<sup>41</sup>

A few years later Probus and John joined Constantinople and the former was appointed metropolitan of Chalcedon. (Stephen was not mentioned in connection with the synod, and it may be that he had already taken the same step at an earlier date. Whatever the case may be, it is implied that he was a Chalcedonian Orthodox when he in the 610's was invited by Heraclius to teach philosophy in Constantinople.) In 595-596 by the order of the Emperor Maurice discussions were held between Probus and a group of Monophysite monks. Both parties produced eight *tomoi* in which they presented their views. An interesting paragraph from the seventh *tomos* of the Monophysites is given by van Roey. (In footnote 13, van Roey remarks that 'the synonymy of "nature" and "hypostasis" stated here reflects the terminology not of Probus but of the monks.')

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<sup>38</sup> Roey, 'Une controverse christologique', p. 351.

<sup>39</sup> Roey, 'Une controverse christologique', p. 352.

<sup>40</sup> A tritheist controversy between Damian of Alexandria and Peter of Callinicus took place two years after these events. See the account in Ebied, Roey, Wickham, *Peter of Callinicus*, pp. 20-43.

<sup>41</sup> *History*; quoted in Ebied, Roey, Wickham, *Peter of Callinicus*, pp. 11-12.





We say that one must confess that the difference in natural quality remains after the (thought of) union without there being at the same time a duality of natures or hypostases. You, on the contrary, say that he who confesses the preservation of the difference in natural quality, adding 'after the union', is constrained to affirm the natures or hypostases after the union.<sup>42</sup>

Why was it that the school of Stephen maintained that natural difference necessarily implied plurality of natures? Stephen, as we have seen earlier, was a philosopher in the lineage of such people as Ammonius, Olympiodorus, Elias and David. His school was a version of Neoplatonism in which Aristotle's logical works played a significant role in terms of fundamental philosophical categories. Porphyry's *Isagoge*, by the time of Stephen, formed a part of the body of texts which were not only studied but also commented on. Porphyrian logic, then, was the tool which helped not only philosophers to understand Aristotle but it also helped Christians to explicate their own doctrine.

We have seen in chapter one that the kind of 'difference' in Porphyrian logic which makes a difference in species is called the *idiaitata*-difference or the most specific difference. This is regarded as a constitutive difference of a species and as distinctive from the more generic. It is called 'most specific' because it produces the lowest species in the Porphyrian Tree, a species which is thus called the most specific. This species has no more subdivisions but only 'subsists in the individuals under it'. As we saw earlier on, it is this kind of difference that makes something ἄλλο<sup>43</sup> in the sense which agrees with the Cappadocian usage of the word. And this also is the 'difference in natural quality' Stephen and his adherents were dealing with. Consequently, when they maintain that if 'the difference in natural quality' of both the divinity and humanity are preserved intact and unconfounded in Christ, there are then two ἄλλο in him. Probus, after his conversion, puts it in the following way in his *Syllogistic Chapters* 10.

But there are two [kinds] of differences, 'accidental differences' and '*idiaitata* essential differences' which are constitutive of the essences and are themselves essences. If according to these differences Christ is two 'somethings' after the union, and if after the union Christ is two natures by a certain *logos*, how is it that he will not be also *in two natures* by a certain *logos* also after the union?<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Roey, 'Une controverse christologique', p. 355.

<sup>43</sup> See Porphyry, *Isag.*, CAG 4, 3a:25.

<sup>44</sup> Uthemann, 'Syllogistik', p. 112.

Probus' and John's move proved convincing enough to the Monophysites in the environment of Antioch, so much so that, according to Declerck, 'many people followed their example and whole villages passed from one camp to the other.'<sup>45</sup> Of course, not all of the Monophysites were convinced. And if one were to conjecture what the theological reasons for the Monophysite resistance to Chalcedon at this stage were, it would seem to me that there were two reasons which prevailed. First the fact that they make no distinction between the universal and the particular in the *oikonomia*, which makes it impossible for them to admit duality of any kind in Christ; and secondly, they were happy with their understanding of 'composite nature' which in their conceptual framework allowed them to speak of natural difference, and indeed double consubstantiality, in the one nature and hypostasis of Christ.

### Composite Nature or Composite Hypostasis?

The idea that Christ could be called a composite nature is based on the analogy of the human nature as composite of body and soul. St Cyril made a considerable use of the comparison and it seems to have been the touch-stone of Severan Christology. In a florilegium, Severus quotes Cyril:

We are composed of body and soul, and we see two natures, the one that of the body, the other that of the soul; but the human being is one from the two owing to the union. And the fact that he is composed out of two natures does not permit us to conclude that he who is one is two men, but rather one single man, as I have said, on account of the composition from body and soul.

And the man that we are may serve us as an example. For with regard to him we comprehend two natures, one that of the soul and the other that of the body. However, although in subtle reflection we distinguish or in the imagination of the mind perceive a distinction, we still do not juxtapose the natures and do not allow in them the power of the separation to exhaust itself entirely, but we understand that they belong to a single unique being in such a way that from then on the two are no longer two, but through the two a single living being has been formed.<sup>46</sup>

Maximus acknowledges that the human being is one composite nature, and that every instance of the human species is a 'composite hypostasis' on account of the underlying

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<sup>45</sup> 'Probus', p. 222.

<sup>46</sup> Severus, *Philaethes* 42, CSCO 134 (French translation), 214 (= Cyril, *Ep. ad Succensum I* (45), PG 77, 233A and *Ep. ad Succensum II* (46), PG 77, 245A); quoted in Grillmeier, *Christ*, vol. 2, part 2, p. 34. The Syriac can be found in CSCO 133, 260-261.



*eidos*.<sup>47</sup> He, however, does not think that it is correct to speak of Christ as a composite nature. For Maximus, Christ is composite at the level of hypostasis alone, that is, at the level of particular being, but not at the level of the universal.

The reasons why Maximus thinks like this can be summarized in the following.<sup>48</sup> Firstly, the union of divinity and humanity did not result in the generation of a single nature (universal) but in the generation of a hypostasis (particular) which participates in both divine being and human being. 'Christ' is not a name of a species or of a nature but of a hypostasis.<sup>49</sup> Human being, in contrast, is a species or a nature subsisting in a multiplicity of individuals. And why is it, then, that Christ as a divino-human being cannot be regarded as a species? The reason for this is very simple if we bear in mind the principles of the Porphyrian Tree. Porphyry himself points out that what is common about all the five terms in the *Isagoge* is that they are necessarily predicated of *many individuals*.<sup>50</sup> In the same sense the Cappadocians spoke of what is common to individuals or hypostases, in contrast to what is particular to each. One individual cannot make a species, that is, *a nature*. Christ is unique and single, and cannot fall into this categorization. He cannot be a generic nature since he is only one, nor can he be considered as a 'monadic nature' for then he would be like some mythological creature and would no longer be consubstantial either with God the Father or with us.<sup>51</sup> Maximus writes:

For this great and venerated mystery of Christ neither possesses as an individual the nature as a species predicated of it as of something generic and universal, nor however, is it a genus or a species predicated of the individuals which by nature are subordinate to it, so as to be able to fit into the above mentioned rules, because, indeed, [this mystery of Christ] does *not* possess, in the coming together by composition of God the Logos with the flesh, composition equal and of similar kind to the conjunction [the parts of] composite [natures] have with each other.<sup>52</sup>

Secondly, with composite natures the coming-into-being of their parts is necessarily contemporaneous. The moment of the union of body and soul is the moment they

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<sup>47</sup> See also ch. 1: 'Whole and Parts'.

<sup>48</sup> See also the argumentation in *Doctrina patrum* where the notion of 'composite nature' is seen as clearly Apollinarian, *Doctrina patrum* 9, Diekamp, 58-65.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, *Opusc.* 16, PG 91, 201C-202D.

<sup>50</sup> CAG 4, part 1, 4a:37.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 13, PG 91, 517D-520C.

<sup>52</sup> *Ep.* 13, PG 91, 528D-529A.

*both* come into being. With Christ this clearly is not the case since the Logos existed from before the ages and his humanity came into being only at the moment of conception. Also with Christ the union happens by assumption: the Logos assumes human nature. Instead, the union of body and soul 'is the simultaneous generation of the parts from non-being into being at the moment of their union with each other as they come into being.'<sup>53</sup>

And thirdly, with composite natures the union of the parts is involuntary. With Christ this would be blasphemous, Maximus maintains, since God willingly assumed the form of human being. Moreover, God became man not to complement a being—like soul complementing body to form the composite human nature—but he became man in order to restore and renew us. 'For in an unspeakable manner the Logos visited men through flesh by virtue of *tropos* of dispensation rather than by virtue of law of nature.'<sup>54</sup>

Let us, then, consider Maximus' understanding of 'composite hypostasis'.<sup>55</sup> First of all we must remind ourselves of what was said about hypostasis in part two, that a hypostasis is a particular and concrete instance of a nature. Reading a psychological notion of the person into Christology inevitably leads to some form of Apollinarianism in which Christ's human soul or intellect (as being the 'person') is annihilated and replaced by the Logos. In brief, modern personalism, it seems to me, could hardly accommodate the concept of 'composite hypostasis'—except, perhaps, to describe some schizophrenic form of being.

For Maximus it is self-evident that before the Incarnation the Logos was a complete hypostasis and that this complete hypostasis was simple. With the incarnation the Logos assumes to his own concrete and particular being another form of being; that of humanity. The concrete reality that results from this union by voluntary assumption is clearly composite in some respect. We have seen how Maximus rejects (as did Justin-

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<sup>53</sup> *Ep.* 13, PG 91, 532A.

<sup>54</sup> *Ep.* 12, PG 91, 492A.

<sup>55</sup> See the article of Nicholas Madden, 'Composite Hypostasis in Maximus the Confessor', in *SP* 27 (1993), pp. 175-197.



ian<sup>56</sup> and Leontius<sup>57</sup> before him) the notion of 'composite nature' to describe this end result. Christ, therefore, is composite according to hypostasis, not according to nature.

[Christ is], according to the Fathers, *one composite hypostasis*, according to which he, the same, with his humanity and owing to his divinity, is wholly God and one of the holy and all-praised Trinity, and he, the same, with his divinity and owing to his humanity, is wholly man and one of men.<sup>58</sup>

Here Maximus complements Justinian's favourite phrase 'one of the Trinity' by the very striking expression 'one of men'. If Christ is one of the Trinity and one of men, as Maximus says, then, one may wish to ask whether Christ is then not two hypostases. Is this not straightforward Nestorianism? To this Maximus' answer is clearly in the negative. And why?

Because, the Word himself was instead of the seed, or rather he was found willingly to be the seed of his own incarnation, and he, who is by nature simple and not composite, became composite according to hypostasis. He, one and the same, remained unchanged, undivided and unconfused in the permanence of the parts of which he was constituted ...<sup>59</sup>

With the Incarnation there does not emerge a new separate hypostasis, but the single and simple hypostasis of the Logos obtains a second level of being. And he is particular also at this new level. Therefore he, the same one, is also one of us. The Logos does not assume a human person but he does become a human person. The subtle point is that he, one and the same, is at once divine and human person or a divino-human person, a 'composite hypostasis'. He is a composite of parts, that is, of the two natures that are individuated in a single particular.

For we say that the one hypostasis of Christ—constituted of flesh and godhead through natural union, that is true and real union—has become the common hypostasis of flesh and godhead by the unspeakable union. I say 'common', because one and the same most particular hypostasis of the parts appeared from the union; or rather it was one and the same hypostasis of the Word, now as before. But earlier it existed without a cause (*ἀναίτιως*) [and was] simple and uncomposite, later for a cause it became truly composite without change through assuming a flesh animated by an intelligent soul.<sup>60</sup>

For Maximus what marks off one person from another are the hypostatic differences. This applies to Christ, too.

[B]y virtue of the hypostatic particularity of his own parts, he was distinguished from his extremities, I mean from his Father and mother, and he proved to have

<sup>56</sup> *Monoph.* 57, Schwartz, 16.

<sup>57</sup> *Cap. Sev.* 14 and 15, PG 86, 1904D-1905B.

<sup>58</sup> *Ep.* 13, PG 91, 525C.

<sup>59</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 553D-556A.

<sup>60</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 556CD.

kept the oneness of his own hypostasis totally undifferentiated and always unified in the utter personal identity of his own parts one with another.<sup>61</sup>

These are not simply logical niceties. Admittedly Maximus makes use of rather stiff logical jargon, but he does this in order to argue for deep soteriological concerns. The incarnate Logos, Christ, is a composite hypostasis ‘so that he may mediate according to hypostasis between the parts of which he was composed, closing in himself the distance between the extremities, making peace and reconciling, through the Spirit, the human nature with God and Father....’<sup>62</sup>

### Ἐνυπόστατον

Another concept closely related to composite hypostasis is that of Ἐνυπόστατον—a concept which during the last one and the half centuries has been almost exclusively misunderstood. As a result of this there emerged the doctrine of ‘enhypostasia’, as the essence ‘subsisting-in-the-hypostasis’ of another, attributed to Leontius of Byzantium as the cornerstone of sixth-century Christology. Thanks mainly to the careful work of Brian Daley on Leontius we are now becoming aware of the fact ‘that the theory that Christ’s personal unity was achieved through the “enhypostatization” of a full, but impersonal human nature into the person of the divine Logos ... has nothing to do with Leontius of Byzantium.’<sup>63</sup> Daley has conclusively argued (albeit reluctantly accepted by modern theologians)<sup>64</sup> that the prefix ἐν- in the word Ἐνυπόστατον is the opposite of the ἀν- privative, and has *no locative* sense of ‘in’ whatsoever. Daley has also demonstrated how the nineteenth-century German Patristics scholar Friedrich Loofs conceived the idea of *enhypostasia* through an erroneous etymology and a misreading of Leontius’ *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* 1 (where Ἐνυπόστατον is contrasted with

<sup>61</sup> Ep. 15, PG 91, 556B.

<sup>62</sup> Ep. 15, PG 91, 556A.

<sup>63</sup> Brian Daley, ‘The Christology of Leontius of Byzantium: Personalism or Dialectics?’, (unpublished paper read at the Oxford Patristic Conference in 1983), p. 1. See also his ‘“A Richer Union”’, pp. 239-65; and Matthias Gockel, ‘A Dubious Christological Formula? Leontius of Byzantium and the *Anhypostasis-Enhypostasis* Theory’, In *JThS* 51 (2000), pp. 515-532.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, U.M. Lang, ‘Anhypostatos-Enhypostatos: Church Fathers, Protestant Orthodoxy and Karl Barth’, in *JThS* 49 (1998), pp. 630-657.



‘accident’),<sup>65</sup> and how Loofs’ reading was elaborated first by Herbert Relton and ultimately by Stefan Otto in the direction of existential phenomenology ‘to be not merely a Christological theory but a term which describes the way *any* “concrete individual nature” is taken up into the “übergeordneter Selbststand” of “absolutes Fürsichsein”, the state which comprises the formal determination of the human individual as a person.’<sup>66</sup> This trend has inspired many Maximian scholars, too.<sup>67</sup> The summit has, perhaps, been reached by Eric Perl in his thesis *Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in Saint Maximus Confessor* where he states: ‘That he [Maximus] accepts the principle that the hypostasis of union which is Christ is the Logos and the idea of enhypostasization, and makes these central to his Christology, is so well known that we need not demonstrate it again here.’<sup>68</sup> And he maintains that ‘this is the Christology which Maximus adopts and develops *into a universal ontology*.’<sup>69</sup>

Let us now consider what Leontius and Maximus themselves have to say about this issue. Leontius, first of all, rather than creating a new ontological category is quite simply defending Chalcedon against Severan Monophysitism. The Severans argued that since, according to the commonly accepted dictum, ‘there is no *anhypostatos* nature’, it follows that those who admit two natures must also admit two hypostases. ‘For they say: “If you say two natures in relation to Christ, and as there is no *anhypostatos* nature, there will thereby be two hypostases.”’ As a response to this, Leontius makes a distinction between *hypostasis* and ἐνυπόστατον, as well as between *ousia* and *enousion*.

Ὑπόστασις signifies the particular being (τὸν τίνα), whereas the ἐνυπόστατον signifies the essence. Ὑπόστασις defines a person by means of characteristic properties, whereas ἐνυπόστατον signifies that it is not an accident which has its being in another and is not considered in itself. ... Therefore, he who says that

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<sup>65</sup> *Nest. et Eut.*, PG 86, 1277CD.

<sup>66</sup> Daley, ‘The Christology’, p. 13.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Eric Perl, *Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in Saint Maximus Confessor* (PhD thesis, Yale University, 1991) pp. 18-220; Larchet, *La divinisation*, pp. 331-332; and Alain Riou, *Le monde et l’église selon Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1973), pp. 103-104 (fn. 30!). See also Andrew Louth’s criticism in ‘Recent Research on St Maximus the Confessor: A Survey’ (review article), in *SVThQ* 42/1 (1998), pp. 73 and 81-82.

<sup>68</sup> Perl, *Methexis*, p. 188.

<sup>69</sup> Perl, *Methexis*, p. 188. Italics are mine.

there is no ἀνυπόστατος nature speaks the truth, but he does not draw the right conclusion if he deduces that that which is not ἀνυπόστατος is a ὑπόστασις.<sup>70</sup>

What Leontius is saying here is that to say there is no nature which is not individuated does not mean that one cannot make a distinction between nature and hypostasis. It is true that nature exists only instanced as individuals, that is to say as hypostases, but this does not mean that nature is hypostasis. Therefore, one can say that Christ is one hypostasis in two natures individuated in one composite particular, which is Christ.

Maximus in his turn gives two definitions of the term ἐνυπόστατον. Something is ἐνυπόστατον, he says,

1. 'which by no means subsists by itself, but is considered in others, as a species in the individuals subordinate to it,' or
2. 'which is put together with another, different by essence, to bring about a whole'.<sup>71</sup>

In the first definition we have many elements which could almost support the *enhy-postasia* theory, but not quite. What we have here is the Porphyrian Tree again—into which Christ does not fit because he is not an individual of a species. What Maximus is saying, is that ἐνυπόστατον is the species (εἶδος) which exists only in the form of individuated cases of it, that is to say 'in individuals', or perhaps *as* individuals would be a better way of putting it so as to resist the temptation of translating ἐνυπόστατον as in-subsistent, rather than simply as subsistent or real and concrete. Ironically, this is not the definition which can be applied to Christology. Instead, it is the second one which has no trace of the idea of in-subsistence. The second definition brings us back to Maximus' understanding of composite hypostasis, as a particular made up of two essentially different realities, 'that which is put together with another, different by essence, to bring about a whole.' And if, in conclusion, one wanted to make a connection with Leontius, one could repeat a line here concerning hypostasis from *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*: '[W]e can define as "hypostasis" either things which share a na-

<sup>70</sup> *Nest. et Eut.*, PG 86, 1277CD.

<sup>71</sup> *Ep.* 15, PG 91, 557D-560A.



ture but differ in number, or things which are put together from different natures, but which share reciprocally in a common being.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Nest. et Eut.*, PG 86, 1280A.

## Activities and Wills

### Activities

NATURAL INTEGRITY and salvation in Christ were at stake in the rather sophisticated controversy over Christ's activity and will. At the cost of being mutilated and exiled Maximus defended the doctrine that activity and will are constituents of the two natures of Christ and must therefore be confessed as two. Any compromise would lead to annulling our salvation according to St Gregory's principle: 'That which has not been assumed is not healed'.

Let us first consider the beginnings of Monenergism. In the *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, an account of the public debate which took place in 643 in Carthage between Maximus and the (then deposed) Patriarch of Constantinople Pyrrhus, Maximus refers to the correspondence between Theodore of Pharan and Sergius of Constantinople (638-641) as being the origin of this new doctrine.<sup>1</sup> Later, Theodore of Pharan was regarded as the father of the heresy. At the Lateran council of 649 eleven fragments from Theodore's texts were read out demonstrating his understanding of Christ's activity and will, that it is one and comes forth from the divinity of the Logos. It does not become altogether clear from the fragments what Theodore wants to say exactly, but he quite clearly is trying to establish the idea that because Christ is one, therefore also his activity is one. This could, then, serve as a bridge between the Chalcedonians and the Monophysites.

### *Fragment 10*

For our soul is not of such a power by nature so as to be able to repel the properties of the body either out of the body or out of itself, but nor has the rational soul proved to possess such a dominion over its own body, so as to have *both* mastery over the body's mass, fluids or colour (which are natural to the body) *and* to render the body outside these things at certain times; things which are both recorded in the Dispensation of our Saviour Jesus Christ and which have happened in his divine and life-giving body. For he came forth without mass and, so to speak, incorporeally without expansion from the womb and tomb and through the doors, and he walked on sea as on the floor.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There was also a middleman involved called Sergius Macaronas, bishop of Arsenoë. See *Pyrr.*, PG 91, 332B-333B.

<sup>2</sup> *Sermo ad Sergium*, ACO ser. 2, vol. 1, 122:32-39.



### Fragment 11

Therefore we must think and speak in this wise. All those things that are recorded of the Saviour Christ in his incarnation are to be understood as *one* activity of which the fashioner and creator is God the Word and the instrument is his humanity. Thus, the things that are said of him as God and the things which are said of him as referring to a man (ἀνθρωποπρεπῶς), are all an activity of the *divinity* of the Word.<sup>3</sup>

It is suggestive that Theodore, who was a Chalcedonian, drew on the themes which were very dear to the Monophysite heart, namely the virgin birth and walking on water. In the eyes of the Fathers of the council his treatment of these themes appeared alarming and was repudiated by quoting several patristic texts. Walking on water ‘without mass and incorporeally’ was refuted by two passages from Dionysius the Areopagite, one from *On the Divine Names* and the following one from *Letter 4*: ‘A sign of this that a virgin supernaturally give birth [to a child], and that unsteady water carried the *weight* of his *corporeal*, earthly feet, and did not yield but by virtue of supernatural power was firm.’<sup>4</sup>

Another source for the doctrine was this self-same *Letter* of Dionysius, or rather its interpretation. It included the well known phrase ‘a certain new theandric activity’. This too was discussed at the council. Its interpretation in the ninth chapter of Cyrus of Alexandria together with the commentary of Sergius of Constantinople were scrutinized. Cyrus had used the formula ‘*one* theandric activity’: ‘[O]ne and the same Christ and Son performed activities fitting for God and for a human being by one theandric activity, according to holy Dionysius.’ This falsified, as Pope Martin pointed out, Dionysius’ expression ‘*a certain new* theandric activity’. Sergius went even further and spoke simply of ‘*one* activity’. ‘We know several of the approved Fathers, and in particular the most holy Cyril, archbishop of Alexandria, who said in some of his writings that there was one life-giving activity of Christ our true God.’ Thus from ‘a certain theandric activity’ through ‘one theandric activity’ Sergius ended up saying ‘one activity’.

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<sup>3</sup> *Sermo ad Sergium*, ACO ser. 2, vol. 1, 124:2-7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ep.* 4, PTS 36, 160:12-161:2.

In the sequel, some texts of the Severan Themistius and of Severus himself were read out, and the conclusion was drawn that Cyrus and Sergius were in agreement with these heretics. Severus, though, had made it explicit that this one activity of the one Christ was *theandric* and not divine (θεοπρεπής) only. Maximus gives an interesting account of what his contemporary Severans thought of the question.

I remember, when I was staying on the island of Crete, that I heard from certain false bishops of the Severan party who disputed with me, that 'we do not say, in accordance with the *Tome of Leo*, that there are two activities in Christ, because it would follow that there were two wills, and that would necessarily introduce a duality of persons, nor again do we say one activity, which might be regarded as simple, but we say, in accordance with Severus, that one will, and every divine and human activity proceeds from one and the same God the Word Incarnate.'<sup>5</sup>

This, perhaps, gives us an idea as to how the doctrine actually emerged, and why, when the 'one activity' formula failed, the discussion moved on to 'one will'.

How, then, does Maximus argue against the idea of one activity? In the *Ison* of his letter to Bishop Nikandros<sup>6</sup> and in the *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*,<sup>7</sup> for example, Maximus defends the doctrine of two natural activities and wills. He argues following the same principles we have already seen several times that things are either natural (universal/common) or hypostatic (particular). (Here we should bear in mind that Maximus' opponents are followers of the Chalcedonian tradition and therefore the distinction between *theologia* and *oikonomia* is taken for granted.) Maximus lays out the options. If, he says, Christ's activity —and the same applies to his will—is one, it must be either natural or hypostatic. If it is natural, there are three options. It must be either divine only or human only, or neither divine nor human. It follows that Christ is, in such a case, either divine nature only, or human nature only, or neither of them.

If, on the other hand, the activity is hypostatic, then Christ is found to be different from his Father and mother according to his activity. This, however, introduces division in the divine essence since it is a commonplace that singleness of activity implies singleness of essence or nature also. In *Opusculum* 7, Maximus says:

If it [the activity] is said to be hypostatic, then this is a new idea: for who has ever spoken of possessing an hypostatic activity? Thus such an idea makes him foreign

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<sup>5</sup> *Opusc.* 3, PG 91, 49C-52A; translation in Louth, *Maximus*, p. 195. Still Maximus is quite unhappy about this. See the sequel of the *Opusculum*.

<sup>6</sup> *Opusc.* 8, PG 91, 89C-112B.

<sup>7</sup> *Pyrr.*, PG 91, 288A-353B.



to the Father in his activity, if he has an hypostatic activity, and not a natural activity, other than that of the Father. For in his hypostatic characteristics, the Word is clearly different from him.<sup>8</sup>

Christ, according to Maximus, acts because he is *by nature capable* of acting; and he is capable of acting both according to his divine nature (as creator, for example) and according to his human nature (when he eats, for example). Had he no such capacity, he would be a lifeless nature, such as a stone, for instance. Activity, Maximus maintains, is a capacity which a nature possesses; it is a natural property. And since we confess two natures in Christ, we must also confess the properties of those two natures. Otherwise they will be elliptic, and an incomplete nature is, in the final analysis, not a real nature at all.

Christ's activity is, then, twofold. Maximus' opponents were not too happy with this. Pyrrhus argued that what if one regarded as activity the effect of Christ's activity? Was that not one and single? Maximus' answer is intriguingly clear.

For although the activities of both fire and sword are united with each other, we nevertheless see the end result of fire to be burning and that of sword cutting, even when they are not divided from each other in the burning cutting or the cutting burning.<sup>9</sup>

One more challenge Maximus had to respond to were the expressions in Dionysius and Cyril where they speak of Christ's activity in 'monadic' terms. These Maximus regards as periphrastic expressions which imply a duality of natures and activities but which lay emphasis on their inseparable, yet unconfused, union. The hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ without confusion or separation is as true of the natural activities, as it is of the natures themselves. The appellation 'theandric' is clearly double and is indicative of the duality of natures. The fact that it is expressed 'monadically' does not denote the disappearance of the natural differences or the existence of single natural activity, but emphasizes the inseparable union according to the one hypostasis constituted of the two natures. In *Ambiguum* 5, comparing the Incarnation to the simile of sword plunged in fire, he says that

in the same way in the mystery of the divine Incarnation, too, the godhead and the humanity were hypostatically united, but neither of them departed from its natural activity on account of the union, nor possessed after the union its activity

<sup>8</sup> *Opusc.* 7, PG 91, 85B; translation in Louth, *Maximus*, p. 189.

<sup>9</sup> *Pyrr.*, PG 91, 341 B. See also *Ambig.* 5:272-277, CCSG 48, 33.

unrelated to or separated from its co-subsisting partner. For the Word made flesh, in virtue of an unbreakable union, possessed the capacity of his own humanity to undergo suffering. This he possessed attached as a whole to the entire active power of his own godhead; and thus, being God, he humanly performed wonders, accomplished through the flesh that is passible by nature, and being man, he divinely underwent the sufferings of nature, executed by divine authority. Or rather, in both he acted *theandrically*, being at the same time both God and man.<sup>10</sup>

Cyril's phrase 'the activity shown to have kinship with both' Maximus regards as an 'imitation of Denys' in different words. Again emphasis is on unity but without 'destroying the essential difference of the natural activities.'<sup>11</sup>

As he [Cyril] showed that the natural activities of Christ God, who is composed of both are perfectly preserved, that of his godhead through the almighty command, and that of his humanity through the touch, he proves them to be thoroughly united by their mutual coming together and interpenetration, showing that the activity of the Logos himself and his all-holy flesh is one on account of the union, not natural or hypostatic—for the teacher did not say any such thing—but akin by the parts (συγγενῇ τοῖς μέρεσι), through which, as was said, in accordance with his almighty command and the touch of his hand this kinship was manifested.<sup>12</sup>

## Wills

Let us then turn to the question of 'will'. In his *Ecthesis* of 638, Heraclius imposed on his people the doctrine of Monothelitism, or the doctrine of one will in Christ, on the grounds that Christ could not have two wills opposing one another. He argued that since even Nestorius, who divided the one Christ into two sons, professed *tautoboulia*, it was impossible for the orthodox to confess two contradicting wills in Christ. Here is Heraclius' own statement:

Therefore following the holy Fathers, in this case as in all, we confess *one will* of our Lord Jesus Christ, the true God, since flesh animated by an intelligent soul, at no one time [acted] its natural movement separately and of its own impulse, contrary to the indication (νεύμα) of God the Word, who was united to it, but [it acted its natural movement] as God the Word wanted, defining its time, kind and quantity.<sup>13</sup>

Maximus was well aware of the fact that the *Ecthesis* was designed to make imperial 'orthodoxy' acceptable to the Monophysites. Therefore any notion which could betray the doctrine of the two natures was to be uprooted. Since 'will' could be—and had to be—understood as the natural faculty of willing in the human nature, rather than

<sup>10</sup> *Ambig.* 5:280-291, CCSG 48, 33-34.

<sup>11</sup> *Opusc.* 7, PG 91, 85C.

<sup>12</sup> *Opusc.* 7, PG 91, 85D-88A; translation in Louth, *Maximus*, p. 189.

<sup>13</sup> ACO, ser. 2, vol. 1, p. 160.



simply as the object or the goal of willing, it was necessary to maintain that Christ had two wills.

Will, then, according to Maximus, is a natural property of the human (and also of the divine) nature.<sup>14</sup> It is a distinctive and constitutive feature of any rational or intelligent nature. Intelligent natures possess a certain 'self-governed movement' (αὐτεξούσιος κίνησις) or self-determination which Maximus calls 'will'. Such beings are not governed in their actions by senses or natural urges, but by a rational self-determination through which they express their freedom. They do certain things because they want to do them, in contrast to animals and plants which do not have this capacity. Maximus argues his point on the basis that will is not something that is taught, and that for this reason it must be natural.

[T]he usage of the uneducated has also affirmed that what is natural is not taught. So, if natural things are not acquired through teaching, then we have will without having acquired it or being taught it, for no one has ever had a will which was acquired by teaching. Consequently, man has the faculty of will by nature.

And again, if man by nature possesses the faculty of reason, and if rational nature is also self-determining, and if self-determination is, according to the Fathers, the will, then man possesses will by nature. ...

And again, if man was made after the image of the blessed godhead which is beyond being, and since the divine nature is self-determined, then he is by nature endowed with free-will. For it has been stated already that the Fathers defined 'will' as self-determination (αὐτεξούσιον).<sup>15</sup>

An existentialist type of understanding of personhood sees freedom as a property of the *person* as opposed to *nature*. Nature or essence is bound to necessity and must be transcended in the ecstasy of the person out of the impersonality of essence. In Byzantine theology, in contrast, freedom is an intrinsic element of certain natures or essences, of intelligent or rational natures, not to mention the divine nature itself. 'The natural things of intelligent beings are not under necessity,'<sup>16</sup> argues Maximus against Pyrrhus. God, angels and men are free by nature and by essence, and not because they are 'persons', that is, particular instances of their species. For St Maximus even a

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<sup>14</sup> For an account of the process of willing in Maximus see R.-A. Gauthier, 'Saint Maxime le Confesseur et la psychologie de l'acte humain', in *RThAM* 21 (1954), pp. 51-100.

<sup>15</sup> *Pyrr.*, PG 91, 304CD, translation in Joseph P. Farrell, *The Disputation with Pyrrhus of our Father among the Saints Maximus the Confessor* (South Canaan: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1990), pp. 24-25.

<sup>16</sup> *Pyrr.*, PG 91, 293C.

particular mouse, as we have seen, is a person or hypostasis. But a mouse is not free, because its nature possesses no freedom; it has no ‘self-governed movement’ or self-determination (αὐτεξούσιον). Yet, we must not forget that human beings are amphibians that have a twofold nature constituted of a rational and free part, and an irrational animal part. The latter is to be governed by the former but in the fallen man these two parts are somewhat confused. In this context Maximus does sometimes speak of the ‘law of nature’ (νόμος τῆς φύσεως)<sup>17</sup> and the need of being liberated from it. By this Maximus means detachment of the intellect—the seat of rationality—from the senses which are holding it captive. No sense of the ‘person’ emerging from the prison of the objective impersonality of nature can be determined here.

Having established that will is a natural property both of divine and of human natures, Maximus argues that although Christ has two wills, it does not follow that Christ has two *contradicting* wills. He makes a distinction between the natural and the *gnomic* will; the former is characteristic of nature, the latter of person. In *Opusculum* 3, Maximus demonstrates the consequences of confessing one will.

If this [one] will is *gnomic*, then it will be characteristic of his single hypostasis ... and it will be shown to be different in will from the Father and the Spirit, and to fight against them. If, furthermore, this will [is natural and] belongs to his sole godhead, then the godhead will be subject to passions and, contrary to nature, long for food and drink. If, finally, this will belongs to his sole human nature, then it will not be efficacious by nature.<sup>18</sup>

*Gnomic* will is, it seems, a characteristic of the fallen world.<sup>19</sup> It is the inclination away from the purpose of God for his creation, which is why it is so radically separated from the natural will. Natural will, in turn, is ‘the power that longs for what is natural’,<sup>20</sup> and ‘that nothing natural is opposed to God is clear from the fact that these things were originally fashioned by him.’<sup>21</sup> Christ has two natural wills, but not two *gnomic* wills, for his willing is not dominated by the blameable passions, as usually happens with us. ‘The willing of that one [*i.e.* Christ] is not opposed to God, but is

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, *Qu. Thal.* 54, CCSG 7, 443-455. The word πρόσωπον in the text clearly has the meaning of face only.

<sup>18</sup> *Opusc.* 3, PG 91, 53CD; translation in Louth, *Maximus*, pp. 196-197.

<sup>19</sup> See *Opusc.* 16, 193B-196A. See also below, Ch. 13: ‘Gnome’.

<sup>20</sup> *Opusc.* 3, PG 91, 48A.

<sup>21</sup> *Opusc.* 7, PG 91, 80A.



wholly deified,' Maximus maintains quoting St Gregory Nazianzen.<sup>22</sup> There is, therefore, no contradiction between the two wills of the two natures of Christ.

Moreover, Christ's agony in the garden of Gethsemane is indicative of his human will. As a man he begged the Father to *let the cup pass from him*<sup>23</sup> to show that he was truly human—and that he truly bore the consequences of the unblameable passions, voluntarily and without sin. Also, that Christ's human will was wholly deified is shown

in its agreement with the divine will itself, since it is eternally moved and shaped by it and in accordance with it. ... All that matters is a perfect verification of the will of the Father, in his saying as a human being, *Not mine, but your will be done*,<sup>24</sup> by this giving himself as a type and example of setting aside our own will by the perfect fulfilment of the divine, even if because of this we find ourselves face to face with death.<sup>25</sup>

Our ascetic struggle aims at this same end: to will and act naturally according to the divine order. Freedom of will, rather than being simply freedom to choose between things, becomes in Maximus' theology freedom to exercise that which is natural in God's unfallen reality. It is freedom from the blameable passions and freedom to act according to God's will—even when this may be utterly painful and difficult—with a clear vision and a certainty of the correctness of one's actions. If, then, freedom in this sense, is constitutive of what it is to be truly human, then liberation through ascetic struggle of the soul's rational powers and its self-determination (αὐτεξούσιον) from its irrational animal side becomes vital for men and women to be truly human.

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<sup>22</sup> *Opusc.* 3, PG 91, 48AB; Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 30.12, SC 250, 248.

<sup>23</sup> Matt. 26:39.

<sup>24</sup> *Cf.* Lk. 22:24.

<sup>25</sup> *Opusc.* 7, PG 91, 80D; translation in Louth, *Maximus*, p. 186.

## Union

SO FAR we have seen how unity and differentiation can be considered in Christ simultaneously at the level of the particular and of the universal, that is, at the level of hypostasis and nature. What has not been discussed yet is the role union and distinction have in the relation *between* the two natures in Christ. Here two notions of particular interest for Maximus' theology will be addressed: 'union without confusion' (ἀσύγχυτος ἔνωσις) and 'interpenetration' (περιχώρησις). The discussion begins with Porphyry's views on the union of body and soul and then moves on to consider how this features in the Christologies of Cyril of Alexandria and Maximus.

### Union Without Confusion

*Porphyry.* The Neoplatonist Porphyry found particularly important and challenging the question of the manner of union of body and soul. His conclusion, that this was a 'union without confusion' (ἀσύγχυτος ἔνωσις), was an innovation in Greek philosophy and was later taken up by the Christians to describe the union of the divine and human natures in Christ.

Porphyry's argumentation on the union of body and soul can be found in his *Miscellaneous Inquiries*<sup>7</sup>.<sup>1</sup> The discussion is primarily addressed to the Stoics. Starting from their language of mixture Porphyry argues against the Stoic concept of the corporeity of soul and shows that there must be 'another manner of union' (ἕτερος τρόπος

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<sup>1</sup> Porphyry, *Fragmenta*, Smith, 278-290; and Nemesius of Emesa, *Nat. hom.*, Morani, 38-42. An English translation is provided in Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa, *The Catechetical Lectures/ On the Nature of Man*, edited by W. Tefler (The Library of Christian Classics 4, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1955), pp. 293-298. The argument is attributed to Ammonius Sakkas by Nemesius of Emesa in the *De natura hominis* chapter three, but modern scholarship, especially H. Dörrie, has argued—albeit not conclusively—that the actual source was Porphyry. See Grillmeier, *Christ*, vol. 2, part 2, pp. 34-35 and 200-201; Pierre. Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1968), pp. 109-110; and Brian E. Daley, "A Richer Union": Leontius of Byzantium and the Relationship of Human and Divine in Christ', in *SP* 24 (1993), pp. 254-256. (I have not been able to consult Dörrie's study first hand.) A similar discussion can be found in Porphyry's *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes* 33, Lamberz, 35-38.



... κοινωνίας)<sup>2</sup> apart from those which the Stoics applied to material things. These were 'blending' (κρᾶσις), 'combination' (μίξις), 'joining' (σύννοδος), 'juxtaposition' (παράθεσις) and 'confusion' (σύγχυσις). For example, 'blending' (or 'mingling') happens when water and wine are mixed, and 'juxtaposition' is the way in which grains in a heap relate to one another. The strongest of the five terms is 'confusion'. It involves an erasure of the united elements as such (συμφθαρῆναι) and results in a third element with new qualities.<sup>3</sup> The union that Porphyry is after should somehow combine the density of confusion and the imperishability and the clear distinction of the elements in juxtaposition.

According to Porphyry, soul is an immaterial and intelligible being, and intelligible beings are by nature such that cannot suffer any alteration (ἀλλοίωσις). Hence their immortality. The soul, as the life-principle, is there to animate the body, to give life to it, and if the soul changed and thus ceased to be life, there could be no living human nature. Consequently, since any mixing of material things involves alteration, the Stoic materialistic terminology proves inadequate to express this 'divine and wondrous blending'<sup>4</sup> of body and soul. Porphyry, therefore, suggests that there is a special manner of union between an intelligible and a sensible thing.

It is in the nature of intelligible beings both to be capable of union with things adapted to receive them, just as much as if they were things that perish when they are united (τὰ συνεφθαρμένα), and to remain, nevertheless, unconfused (ἀσύγχυτα) with them while in union, and imperishable (ἀδιάφθορα), just as though they were merely juxtaposed (τὰ παρακείμενα).<sup>5</sup>

There is union but no change or annihilation. It is worth noting here that *sympathy* between body and soul is essential for Porphyry's argument: it proves that there is a union. On the other hand, soul's individual operation during sleep shows its distinctive-

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<sup>2</sup> *Sent.* 33, Lamberz, 38:2-4.

<sup>3</sup> For these terms see Grillmeier, *Christ*, vol. 2, part 2, pp. 39-40 and 205; and Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, vol. 1: Faith, Trinity, Incarnation (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 372ff.

<sup>4</sup> Porphyry, *Ad Gaurum* 10.5, quoted in Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, p. 89.

<sup>5</sup> Nemesius, *Nat. hom.* 3 (= Porphyry, *Miscellaneous Inquiries* 7), Morani, 39:17-20.

ness from the body. Porphyry's corollary is this famous 'union without confusion' which he illustrates by the metaphor of light blending with air.<sup>6</sup>

It follows of necessity that when intelligible beings are in union with bodies, they do not perish in company with those bodies. So the soul is united to the body, and, further, *united without confusion*. ... The soul is incorporeal, and yet it has established its presence in every part of the body, just as much as if it were a partner to union involving the sacrifice of its proper nature. Nevertheless, it remains uncorrupted by body, just as if it were something quite distinct from it. Thus, on the one hand, the soul preserves its own independent unity of being, and on the other, it modifies whatever it indwells, in accordance with its own life, while itself suffering no reciprocal change. For, as the presence of the sun transforms the air into light, making the air luminous by uniting light with air, at once maintaining them distinct and yet melting them together, so likewise the soul is united to the body and yet remains distinct from it.<sup>7</sup>

It is not at all surprising that the Fathers—St Cyril of Alexandria in the first place—were ready to make use of this idea in their Christology, especially if we bear in mind that soul for Porphyry was not just a created life-principle, but a νοητόν, an intelligible, eternal being, which originated from the divine world of Forms. The union of body and soul was one in which the sensible and the intelligible realities came together. It was not a union between two material objects but a union between incorporeal and corporeal natures. As the Neoplatonists drew the fundamental ontological divide between these two realities (the intelligible and the sensible)—something which the Christians drew between the created and the uncreated—a union of body and soul corresponded to no less than a union of God and man in Christian terms. A terminology which could bridge the ontological gulf and unite the realms on either side of the divide was very welcome to Christian theology, and, as is well known, the phrase 'union without confusion' became one of the key concepts of Chalcedonian orthodoxy.

The body-soul imagery, however, could serve only as an analogy for the Christian Fathers, because, on the one hand, in the person of Christ, God assumed both a human body *and* soul, and, on the other hand, the union of the two natures in Christ was to be sought at the level of person, rather than at the level of nature.

*Cyril of Alexandria.* The way in which Cyril discusses the question of the manner of union of the two natures is strongly reminiscent of Porphyry's analysis of

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<sup>6</sup> See E.L. Fortin, *Christianisme et Culture Philosophique au Cinquième Siècle. La Querelle de l'Âme Humaine en Occident* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1959), pp. 111-128; Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>7</sup> *Nat. hom.* 3, Morani, 40:9-11, 40:19-41:2.



the union of body and soul. Cyril definitely knew Porphyry's works. He quotes several of them in *Contra Julianum*<sup>8</sup> and his terminology of the manner of union draws on Porphyry's *Miscellaneous Inquiries* and *Sententiae*—even the structure of his argumentation betrays a certain familiarity with these texts. Also the body-soul analogy, of which Cyril makes considerable use in his Christology, creates a strong link between the two men. In the *Scholia de Incarnatione Unigeniti*,<sup>9</sup> he enumerates the terms—more or less the same as in Porphyry—which should not be used in relation to Christ, concluding that the only proper word to be used is 'union' (ένωσις).

Cyril compares this union to the human being which is one although made of body and soul. He admits the obvious defects of such an analogy and states that 'Emmanuel' is above every analogy. For example, compassion between body and soul, which in Porphyry's argument was the *sine qua non*, in the Christological context would lead to heresy. In this analogy soul represents the divine nature of Christ and body represents his human nature. If the soul *suffers with* the body at the human level, in Christ this would mean that his divine nature *suffered with* his human nature, which simply was incompatible with orthodoxy. Interestingly, Nemesius, in whose treatise *On the Nature of Man* the aforementioned discussion of Porphyry is preserved, in the same chapter comments on this particular weakness of the analogy.

The above arguments [concerning unconfused union] would apply even more exactly to the union of the divine Word with his humanity. For he continued thus in union, without confusion, and without being circumscribed, in a different manner from the soul. For the soul, being one of the things in process of completion, and because of its propriety to body, seems even in some way to suffer with it, sometimes mastering it, and sometimes being mastered by it. But the divine Word suffers no alteration from the fellowship which he has with the body and the soul. In sharing with them his own godhead, he does not partake of their infirmity. He is one with them, and yet he continues in that state in which he was, before his entry into that union. This manner of mingling or union is something quite new. The Word mingles with body and soul, and yet remains throughout unmixed, unconfused, uncorrupted, untransformed, not co-suffering but only co-acting with them, not perishing with them, nor changing as they change.<sup>10</sup>

Cyril rejects the use of the term 'blending' (κρᾶσις) in Christology on the grounds that it introduces 'confusion' (σύγχυσις). 'Confusion' would mean the destruction of the divine and the human in Christ and the coming-into-being of a *tertium quid*. Also

<sup>8</sup> See *Juln.*, PG 76, 645B, 781B, 817BC and 977B.

<sup>9</sup> *Schol. inc.*, PG 75, 1369A-1407B.

other terms such as ‘combination’ (μῖξις) and ‘juxtaposition’ (παράθεσις) Cyril regards as inadequate. In his view, the only really acceptable term is ‘union’ (ἔνωσις). Cyril clearly has in mind the kind of union of which Porphyry spoke, a union without confusion: ‘But we say that Jesus Christ is one and the same knowing the difference of natures (διαφορὰ φύσεων) and guarding them *without confusion* in relation to each other (ἀσύγχυτοι ἀλλήλαις).’<sup>11</sup> And in another place he says: ‘[A]lso after the Word was brought into a real union with the human nature, the things *united* have remained *without confusion* (ἀσύγχυτα μεμενήκασιν τὰ ἡνωμένα).’<sup>12</sup> It seems quite clear from all this that Cyril is here taking the concept of ‘union without confusion’ from Porphyrian anthropology, placing it in a new environment and in so doing prepares its way to Chalcedonian Christology.<sup>13</sup>

If the Council of Chalcedon received from Cyril the concept of ‘union without confusion’, it certainly was not the only thing which was common to Cyril and the council. Without having to refer to the *Formula of Reunion*, which was adopted by Cyril and which lent much of its language to Chalcedon, one can notice the presence of the Cyrillian theology in the famous section of the *Chalcedonian Definition*:<sup>14</sup> ‘one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-Begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.’<sup>15</sup> The identity and oneness of Christ and the Logos was the very issue for which Cyril was fighting against Nestorius. The phrase ‘without confusion’ in Cyril is connected with the concept of ‘blending’ which also is included in the *Definition*. As for the ‘without division’ a passage from *Contra Nestorium* 2 is revealing: ‘As soon as we bring in the mystery of Christ, then the rationale of the union allows for that of difference, but discounts any division (διαίρεσις), not confusing or mingling the natures....’<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Nat. hom.* 3, Morani, 42:9-22; translation in *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesis of Emesa*, edited by William Telfer (The Library of Christian Classics 4, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1955), pp. 300-301.

<sup>11</sup> *Schol. inc.*, PG 75, 1385C.

<sup>12</sup> *Schol. inc.*, PG 75, 1380D.

<sup>13</sup> See E.L. Fortin, ‘The *Definitio Fidei* of Chalcedon and its Philosophical Sources’, in *SP* 5 (1962), pp. 489-498.

<sup>14</sup> ACO, ser. 1, tome 1, vol. 2, part 1, 322-326.

<sup>15</sup> ACO, ser. 1, tome 1, vol. 2, part 1, 325:30-31.

<sup>16</sup> ACO, ser. 1, tome 1, vol. 1, part 6, 42:34-36. See Ruth Siddals, ‘Oneness and Difference in the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria’, in *SP*, 18.1 (1983), p. 207.



*Maximus.* Moving on to Maximus, we have seen earlier on that for Maximus integrity both of nature and person is of major importance. Since confusion is something which involves destruction of a nature, it is thereby something to be avoided at all cost. On the other hand, in Christology, separation is the monster that destroys personal unity. (Heretics in Maximus' ranking were always either 'confusers' or 'separators'. A good example of this can be found in the fifth session of the acts of the Lateran Council 649, a document inspired to a great extent by Maximus.)<sup>17</sup>

[I]t is altogether devout to confess two natures, dissimilar in essence, that have come together in an unspeakable union, and to hold the opinion that they have remained unconfused also after the union. To say that they remain unconfused does not introduce any division ... but signifies that the difference has remained unchanged. For difference and division are not the same thing.<sup>18</sup>

The greatness of this notion lies in the fact that it can accommodate at once both unity and differentiation within one being. 'No' to confusion means 'yes' to difference, and hence to natural integrity. 'Yes' to union means 'no' to separation, and hence also 'yes' to personal integrity. Maximus draws together a great deal of Christological insights in an allegory on Zacharias' prophetic vision of the flying sickle.<sup>19</sup> The sharp edge of the sickle serves as an image of the utter inviolability of unity and difference in Christ.

'Sickle' is, therefore, our Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son and Logos of God, who in himself is and ever remains simple by nature but who for my sake became composite by hypostasis, as he knows how, through assuming flesh animated by an intelligent soul. He neither accepted a fusion (σύγχυσις) into one nature on account of his utter hypostatic union with the flesh, nor was he severed into a duality of Sons due to his utter natural difference from the flesh. (By 'utter' [lit. 'edge' of the sickle] of the hypostatic union I mean the absolute undividedness, and by the 'utter' of natural difference the complete unconfusion and unchangeability.) ... For the union was of two natures into one hypostasis, not into one nature, so that the hypostatic oneness is shown to result by union from the natures which have come together, and the difference in natural particularity of the natures united in an unbreakable union is believed to remain free from every change and confusion.<sup>20</sup>

If there is something new in Maximus' treatment of 'union without confusion', it is its extension to include activity. What is true of the natures themselves is true of what belongs to them, activity being one essential constituent. Christ himself, Maximus concludes, is the unconfused union of the activities: 'By fitting these [divine and human] things one into the other he has demonstrated the natures, of which he was a hyposta-

<sup>17</sup> See ACO, ser. 2, vol. 1, 320-332 for the 'confusers' and 332-334 for the 'separators'.

<sup>18</sup> *Ep.* 12, PG 91, 469A.

<sup>19</sup> *Zach.* 5:1-4.

<sup>20</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 62, CCSG 22, 117:29-39, 44-50.

sis, and their essential activities, that is movements, of which he was a union without confusion.’<sup>21</sup>

### *Perichoresis*

The term περιχώρησις,<sup>22</sup> or interpenetration, was first made use of by Gregory Nazianzen among the Christians—though he used it only once, and the meaning even of this instance is disputed.<sup>23</sup> Maximus is the next person to have taken advantage of the notion, and it was he who established its place in Christology. St John of Damascus is the first person known to have applied it to Trinitarian theology. Through his *Expositio fidei* it became more widespread and eventually found its way to the fourteenth-century compilation *De pietate* of Joseph the Philosopher, more commonly known as *De sacrosancto Trinitate* of Ps.-Cyril,<sup>24</sup> a treatise which for long was regarded as a seventh-century text and the originator of the idea of trinitarian *perichoresis*.<sup>25</sup>

As a notion *perichoresis* is very similar to ‘union without confusion’. And normally where the term *perichoresis* appears in Maximus’ text, there also the phrase ‘union without confusion’ is present. Maximus uses *perichoresis* to describe the interpenetration of essentially different natures. With the interpenetration, natures are utterly united but do not alter *qua* natures. Maximus is careful to point this out by making it clear that there is a *perichôrêsis* but not a *metachôrêsis*, that is, a change of one nature into the other.

[A]nd this is truly marvellous and astounding to all, the same one is wholly among men remaining entirely within its own nature, and the same one being wholly among the divine remains completely unmoving from its natural properties. For this was an interpenetration (περιχώρησις) of the natures, and of their natural properties, one into the other, according to the teaching of our Fathers inspired by God, but not a change or declination (μεταχώρησις ἢ μετάπτωσις) on account of the union—which is proper to those who malevolently turn the union into confusion....<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Ambig.* 4:74-78, CCSG 48, 16.

<sup>22</sup> See Verna Harrison, ‘Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers’, in *SVThQ* 35/1 (1991), pp. 53-65; Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, pp. 418-428; and Thunberg, *Microcosm*, pp. 21-36.

<sup>23</sup> See Harrison, ‘Perichoresis’, pp. 54-57.

<sup>24</sup> PG 77, 1120ff. Vassa Conticello has shown that this treatise forms a part (*De pietate*) of Joseph the Philosopher’s (d. ca 1330) *Encyclopedia* and is a compilation from John’s *Expositio fidei* and Nicephorus Blemmydes’ (1197-1272) *Sermo ad monachos suos* (PG 142, 583-606). See V.S. Conticello, ‘Pseudo-Cyril’s “De SS. Trinitate”: A Compilation of Joseph the Philosopher’, in *OCP* 61 (1995), pp. 117-129.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1952), pp. 280-281.

<sup>26</sup> *Disp. Biz.*:531-538, CCSG 39, 121-123.



It has often been asked whether there is a mutual interpenetration of the natures or only a penetration of the human nature by the divine.<sup>27</sup> It seems to me that in Maximus this depends on the context in any given case. The metaphor he is fond of repeating is, as one might expect, that of incandescent iron, but there are also the metaphors of air permeated by light, of reason and conception,<sup>28</sup> and that of the union of body and soul.<sup>29</sup>

For mutual interpenetration Maximus employs the first three metaphors. The natures of fire and iron interpenetrate one into the other, and the result of this is seen in the double effect of cutting and burning of the red-hot sword.

Just as the utter and complete union and mixture with fire does not alter an iron sword from its own essential being, but the sword undergoes what belongs to the fire since it becomes fire by virtue of the union. It still weighs down and cuts, for it has suffered no maiming of its own nature nor has it at all changed from its natural activity—albeit that it exists with the fire in one and the same hypostasis and accomplishes the things that belong to its nature, that is cutting, without separation [from the fire]. And again it also does the things of the union, which is burning. For burning now belongs to it, as does cutting to the fire, by virtue of their utter interpenetration into each other and their exchange.<sup>30</sup>

Yet in another place, where he defends the doctrine of natural will and the deification of Christ's humanity and human will, he is perfectly happy to use the same metaphor to present a more one-sided penetration.

[C]onfirming the truth of the Incarnation, he became everything for our sakes and acted voluntarily on our behalf, in no way deceiving in respect to our essence or in respect to any of its natural and blameless passions, since he both deified the essence with all that belongs to it, like an incandescent iron, ..., penetrating it thoroughly and to the utter [degree] on account of the union, and becoming one with it without confusion according to one and the same hypostasis.<sup>31</sup>

The same is true of the metaphor of body and soul, 'the soul being united to the body entirely penetrating it without confusion according to the union.'<sup>32</sup>

If we now look at the context, we shall discover that in the last two examples Maximus speaks of the *deification* of the humanity of Christ by the Logos. There is, one might say, a vertical penetration. The Logos deifies the human nature; the Logos penetrates and the humanity is being penetrated, as the soul penetrates the body.

<sup>27</sup> See for example, Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus*, pp. 257-259. For a discussion see Larchet, *La divinisation*, pp. 335-346, and Thunberg, *Microcosm*, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> *Pyrr.*, PG 91, 337CD.

<sup>29</sup> *Ambig.* 42, PG 91, 1320B.

<sup>30</sup> *Opusc.* 16, PG 91, 189CD.

<sup>31</sup> *Opusc.* 4, PG 91, 60BC.

In the first example, in contrast, Maximus is defending the doctrine of the two natural activities. It is vital for him to show that they both are there and that they both are active and real, yet in an unbreakable union. This could be called a horizontal and symmetrical interpenetration. Two natures with their natural activities penetrate each other in such a way that their natural characteristics are preserved unharmed but are allowed to form one whole with a double effect. This, in conclusion, could be taken as the culmination of the principle of union and distinction in Maximus' Christology.

It is just like the way the cutting-edge of a sword plunged in fire becomes burning hot and the heat acquires a cutting-edge (for just as the fire is united to the iron, so also is the burning heat of the fire united to the cutting-edge of the iron) and the iron becomes burning hot by its union with the fire, and the fire acquires a cutting-edge by union with the iron. Neither suffers any change on account of the exchange [of properties] with the other in union, but each remains unchanged in its own [being] also in the identity that the one has with the other by virtue of the union. In the same way in the mystery of the divine Incarnation, too, the godhead and the humanity were hypostatically united, but neither of them departed from its natural activity on account of the union, nor possessed after the union its activity unrelated to or separated from its co-subsisting partner.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Ambig.* 42, PG 91, 1320B.

<sup>33</sup> *Ambig.* 5:272-284, CCSG 48, 33.



## Part IV

### UNIVERSE, SCRIPTURE, CHURCH

#### 9

#### The Creation Song

##### The Logos and the *Logoi*

THE CONNECTION between the universe and its cause, whether a Creator or a first principle, is an issue of primary importance for the understanding of any religious or philosophical system. Such a connection may be a direct continuum, or it may be one or another form of participation, or even just a fading link of a distant *deus otiosus* with the world he once created and then left to own its fate. In Neoplatonism, for example, the acute dilemma of the One and the many, central to its whole doctrine, is directly relevant to this question. In early Christianity in general, much of theological discussion revolves around the question of the relation between the uncreated and the created, and in Maximus' thought in particular, the connection between the uncreated and the created also includes a certain vision of the One God and the many beings. He expresses this connection between God and the creation in terms of *logoi* of beings, a theme very central to his cosmology. As a whole, his cosmology is a vast subject and has received a number of different interpretations,<sup>1</sup> but here we shall limit the discussion to aspects relevant to our subject matter.

*Proclus.* Let me first take one instance from Neoplatonic thought to illustrate the connection between the primary cause, the One, and the many. Proclus in his *Elements of Theology* speaks in terms of union and distinction when he expounds the idea that everything is produced by productive causes. All productive causes participate in the completeness of the Good, the supreme productive cause, and imitate the Good by being productive causes to other beings. Each product must somehow differ from its

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<sup>1</sup> The most recent discussions can be found in Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology*, pp. 83-173, and Perl, *Methexis*, pp. 147-179.

cause or else it will not be other than the cause. The product therefore *proceeds* from its cause and in this way becomes *distinct* from it. Nevertheless, the product cannot be altogether distinct from the cause because, Proclus says, ‘it is necessary that the effect should participate in the cause, inasmuch as it derives its being from the latter.’<sup>2</sup> And also, he continues, because ‘every producing cause brings into existence things like to itself before the unlike’.<sup>3</sup> Thus the product must be similar to its cause and united with it. The cause and the product are ‘at once united and distinguished’ (καὶ ἥνωται καὶ διακέκριται).<sup>4</sup> The product ‘both remains in the cause and proceeds, and the two relations are inseparable’.<sup>5</sup> In sum, what Proclus expresses here in terms of union and distinction, is the ontological identity and difference between a productive cause and a product.

Whether or not one wants to call this unfolding of the One into the many an emanation, it still remains a given that there is a continuum between the cause and the effect. The connection here is a continuum. The Christian notion of creation cannot accommodate such essential continuum. There is in Christian understanding an ontological gulf between the creator and the created. At the same time, however, there is a connection, too, a connection without which the universe would not exist.<sup>6</sup> In other words, in Christianity, too, there is union and distinction between the cause and the effect, but it is of a different order than that in Proclus.

*‘Aslan’ and Maximus.* For understanding the Christian view-point of creation an intriguingly vivid image is provided by C.S. Lewis in *The Magician’s Nephew* where God’s creative activity is presented as the creation song of the Lion Aslan. This, I think, will help us to approach Maximus’ vision.

All this time the Lion’s song, and his stately prowl, to and fro, backwards and forwards, was going on. ...

Polly was finding the song more and more interesting because she thought she was beginning to see the connection between the music and the things that were

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<sup>2</sup> *Inst.* 28, Dodds, 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Inst.* 28, Dodds, 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Inst.* 28, Dodds, 32.

<sup>5</sup> *Inst.* 30, Dodds, 34.

<sup>6</sup> The theology of Athanasius of Alexandria moves precisely along these lines. See the recent study by Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius. The coherence of his thought* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).



happening. When a line of dark firs sprang up on a ridge about a hundred yards away she felt that they were connected with a series of deep, prolonged notes which the Lion had sung a second before. And when he burst into a rapid series of lighter notes she was not surprised to see primroses suddenly appearing in every direction.

Thus, with an unspeakable thrill, she felt quite certain that all the things were coming (as she said) 'out of the Lion's head'.

When you listened to his song you heard the things he was making up; when you looked round you, you saw them.<sup>7</sup>

The connection between the creatures and the creator in this figure are the different musical notes. With the notes everything seems to proceed, as Polly puts it, 'out of the Lion's head.' Yet, it is clear that this is not a process of emanation but an act of creation. It is *not* the Lion, as it were, unfolding into the creatures. It is not his self-creation. Yet, it *is* the Lion's creation, a creation which expresses and realizes *his* will and ideas.

Aslan creates a manifold world. The beings there are different owing to the difference of their creative tones. Without this differentiation Narnia would have been a very monotonous place and the song a rather boring one, or not a real song at all. But, in fact, the end product of Aslan's music was a new world full of all kinds of creatures (often rather strange) which all had their particular gift and function there. Everything was very well thought through in advance.

If one now interchanges the musical notes of the Lion's song with Maximus' vision of the *logoi* of beings, the picture is strikingly similar. The *logoi* according to Maximus are God's intentions or wills. They pre-exist in the Logos of God eternally as his wills, and are actualized in time. That is to say that the *logoi* are not the beings themselves, but are, as it were, what God in his mind thinks he is going to create. The *logoi* are God's ideas or plans for the creatures, and when actualized they seem to be like things coming out of 'God's head'. In accordance with these *logoi* everything receives being, and everything is different owing to the differentiation of the *logoi*, just as the firs and the primroses followed different sounds in Aslan's song. '[It is] by means of these *logoi*, and even more so because of them, that the different beings differ [from

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<sup>7</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (Tales of Narnia, London: Diamond Books [HarperCollins Publishers], 1998; first published in 1955 by The Bodley Head), p. 101.

one another]. For the different beings would not differ from one another, had the *logoi*, by means of which they have come-into-being, no difference.’<sup>8</sup>

Maximus points out that ‘the *logoi* ... according to the holy Dionysius the Areopagite are called “predestinations” and “divine wills” in Scripture. Similarly, those around Pantaenus the teacher of the great Clement, the author of *The Stromata*, say that the Scripture is wont to name them “divine wills”.’<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, also the term ‘paradigm’ denotes the same thing.

How then does Maximus understand the connection between God and the creation through the *logoi*? In *Ambiguum* 7 (in which he discusses a difficulty from Gregory Nazianzen, the phrase ‘we are a portion of God’)<sup>10</sup> Maximus first of all makes it clear that ‘beings have been brought into existence by God from non-being through reason and wisdom’.<sup>11</sup>

In God the *logoi* of all are firmly fixed. And it is said that God knows all beings according to these *logoi* before their creation, since they are in him and with him, in God who is the truth of all [beings]. [This is so] even though all these very beings, those that are and those that are to be, were not brought into being together with their *logoi* or their being known by God, but each being was created at the appropriate time according to its *logos* in harmony with the wisdom of the creator, receiving thus its particular concrete being in actuality—since God is always creator in actuality whereas these do not yet exist in actuality but only in potentiality.<sup>12</sup>

For having the *logoi* of created beings existent before the ages in his benevolent will, he from non-existence established the visible and invisible creation in accordance with these *logoi*. By reason and wisdom he has made and continues to make everything both things universal and things particular in due time. For we believe that [there is] a *logos* of angels precedent to their creation, a *logos* of every essence and power which makes up the upper world, a *logos* of men, and—not to mention each separately—a *logos* of every being receiving existence from God.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the fact that Maximus does speak in terms of participation, reading into his thought the kind of participation Proclus represents is misleading. To accommodate such reading it has been argued that the ‘non-being’ out of which God creates is God himself, since he as ‘beyond-being’ can be called ‘non-being’. As an idea this draws on Dionysius the Areopagite and his interpretation of this apophatic expression—and

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<sup>8</sup> *Ambig.* 22, PG 91, 1256D.

<sup>9</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1085A.

<sup>10</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 14.7, PG 35, 865C.

<sup>11</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1077C.

<sup>12</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1081AB.



Dionysius' usage is perfectly legitimate. But to draw the conclusion that creation *ex nihilo* is, in actual fact, God's self-creation, can only be erroneous. Such a mistake was made already by Eriugena, and has been recently taken up by some modern thinkers.<sup>14</sup> Texts such as the following could easily be read in this light.

The same in itself, by virtue of its infinite superiority, is inexpressible and incomprehensible, and is beyond all creation and the difference and distinction which is and is understood in relation to it. And the same is made known and multiplied proportionately in every being which is from him. The same also recapitulates everything into himself. By this Logos there is being and remaining, and from this the creatures, in as much as they have come into being and on condition that they have come into being, they participate in God both remaining [still] and moving. For everything participates proportionately in God on account of coming into being from God, either according to intellect, reason, sense or vital motion, or according to essential and habitual fitness, as the great and God-revealing Dionysius the Areopagite maintains.<sup>15</sup>

Beings do participate in God through their *logoi*, and the Neoplatonic *scala naturae* does find its way into Maximus' cosmology, but it is language which Maximus takes from the Christian Dionysius the Areopagite and which he reads *within* the context of creation out of non-being. One is easily tempted to understand Maximus in a more directly Neoplatonic way because of this language, but the fundamental distinction between the created and the uncreated is so deeply embedded in his theology that such reading will inevitably lead to distortion.

Again, creation, although deriving from non-being, exists because of God, and it exists as God's creation. Creation participates in God as creation rather than as the unfolded many emanating from the One. While there is no essential continuum, there is a union between God and the creation; the ontological gulf is bridged without being violated.

Looking from another angle we have God's immanence in beings. Athanasius must have been one of Maximus' sources in this area. They both speak of God's being present in all things together and at once in each and every one in particular. For Maximus unity and difference with respect to God's presence in the universe is a cause for wonder rather than an intellectual dilemma.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1080A.

<sup>14</sup> See Philip Sherrard, *Christianity: Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), pp. 232-244, especially p. 239; and Eric Perl, *Methexis*, pp. 118 and 127.

<sup>15</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1080AB.

If, therefore, in accordance with truthful reasoning, every divine energy individually intimates through itself the whole God without partition in the *logos* by which each being exists, who, then, can understand and say, how God is both wholly in all beings in general and in each in particular, undividedly and without partition, neither being contracted according to the particular existence of one [of the beings] nor contracting the differences of beings according to the single wholeness of all, but being truly all in all and never departing from his own indivisible singleness?<sup>16</sup>

Maximus goes further to explain that the Logos and the *logoi* are in actual fact one and the same thing. He distinguishes three different levels in relation to the Logos. These could be designated as 'the apophatic Logos', 'the Logos of the *logoi*' and 'the *logoi* of the Logos'. Here all the levels become apparent:

Excepting the supreme and apophatic theology of the Logos, according to which he is not called or understood ... as the being beyond being, and according to which he is participated by no-one in any respect, excepting this, then, the one Logos is the many *logoi* and the many *logoi* are the one Logos. The one Logos is the many *logoi* according to the benevolent creative and preserving procession of the One towards beings. And the many *logoi* are the one Logos as bringing them all together according to the reference and providence which returns and guides the many into the One, like as into an all-governing principle or a centre which contains the beginnings of the radii that extend from it.<sup>17</sup>

At the level of the creation we see the differentiated *logoi* actualized in beings. 'The one Logos is the many *logoi* distinguished in the undivided difference of created things through their unconfused particularity in relation to one another and themselves.'

Then in the other direction:

The many *logoi* [are] the one Logos by virtue of reference of all to him, the essentially existing and truly subsistent God the Logos of God and Father. He exists by himself without confusion, as the principle and cause of all, and *by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and through him and for him.*<sup>18</sup>

The ultimate unity of the creation can be seen in this reference of all the *logoi* to the Logos. Once again we find a unity which is without confusion. Maximus goes as far as to say that the Logos 'exists by himself without confusion, as the principle and cause of all'.

This idea that the Logos is the *logoi* in a way that is without confusion is strongly reminiscent of the doctrine of the Universal Intellect of some Neoplatonists, such as Plotinus and Syrianus. Without wanting to go too far in comparing them with

<sup>16</sup> *Ambig.* 22, PG 91, 1257AB.

<sup>17</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1081BC. For a discussion on the metaphor of centre and radii see Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology*, pp. 86-104.



Maximus—who most likely had never read either—it will prove useful to see what they have to say. I shall take Plotinus as the example.

*Plotinus.* Plotinus explains how the Intellect and the Forms, which also are intellects, are one. Intellect is at the same time one and many, a unity-in-multiplicity.<sup>19</sup> It is one as the image of the One, it is one as the one Intellect, and it is one as the all-encompassing intelligible universe in which the true beings, the Forms, are in an undivided unity, yet without confusion. The Intellect preserves its unity not simply because it *has* the Forms in itself, as if they were something separate from it, but because it *is* the Forms. On the other hand, the Intellect is manifold on account of its being the Forms or the particular intellects, which are many.

Moreover, the Universal Intellect is identified with Being—Being, here, meaning the eternal beings, the Forms, all together in unity—and as such, too, it is manifold. How, then, are unity and multiplicity in the Intellect to be reconciled in Plotinus' thinking? The Intellect or the intelligible universe is, he says, 'a quiet and undisturbed movement, having all things in itself and being all things, a multiplicity which is undivided and yet again divided'.<sup>20</sup> The whole and the parts, although distinct categories, are united in the all-embracing Intellect.

The great Intellect exists by itself, and so do the particular intellects which are in themselves, and again the partial intellects are comprehended in the whole and the whole in the partial; the particular ones are on their own and in another, and that great Intellect is on its own and in those particular [intellects].<sup>21</sup>

The parts in the Intellect are not closed units, constituting a whole, but they are, as it were, cells of a living organism<sup>22</sup> each of which has its distinct existence—Plotinus compares the Universal Intellect to the ζῶον παντελές of Plato's *Timaeus* 31b1.<sup>23</sup> At the same time they encapsulate the whole and every other part in themselves, again without

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<sup>18</sup> *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1077C-1080A; Col. 1:16.

<sup>19</sup> See R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London: Duckworth, 1972), pp. 55-59; H. Crouzel, *Origène et Plotin. Comparaisons doctrinales* (Paris: Téqui, 1991), pp. 117-178.

<sup>20</sup> *Enn.* VI.9.5:14-16, Armstrong 7, 318; I have adopted Armstrong's translation in the same edition throughout this chapter. See also *Enn.* I.8.2, III.8.9, VI.6.7 and VI.7.14.

<sup>21</sup> *Enn.* VI.2.20:14-20, Armstrong 6, 166.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. K. Corrigan, 'Essence and Existence in the Enneads', in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 105-129.

<sup>23</sup> See *Enn.* VI.2.21.

confusion. Contemporary cosmologists, in discovering links between the nuclei of atoms and the formation of galaxies, would be fascinated by Plotinus' insights:

Each thing there has everything in itself and sees all things in every other, so that all are everywhere and each and every one is all; ... A different kind of being stands out in each, but in each all are manifest. Here [*i.e.* in the world of senses] one part would not come from another, and each would be only a part; but there [*i.e.* in the intelligible world] each comes only from the whole and *is part and whole at once*.<sup>24</sup>

Soul, the third primary hypostasis in Plotinus' system, reflects this unity-in-multiplicity at the level of the reality perceived by the senses and in turn projects it into the natural world by means of the forming principles, the *logoi*. There is a clear difference between Intellect and Soul. In terms of contemplation, which constitutes the framework of Plotinian metaphysics, Soul thinks of objects in time, separately, one by one, whereas Intellect 'embraces the whole Intelligible world in a single timeless vision'.<sup>25</sup> Soul is bound to discursive thought which entails otherness and separation between the subject and the object while Intellect contemplates itself and thus unites the subject and object by being both the one and the other at once. Also in this sense the Intellect can be understood as one and many.

Finally, Plotinus illustrates his understanding of the Intellect by two examples. He compares the Intellect to bodies of knowledge which exist without confusion in an individual human soul, and he also compares it to a seed.

Even soul has many kinds of knowledge in it but does not contain any confusion, and each kind of knowledge does its own work when the need arises without dragging in the others along with it, and each individual thought is clear of the other thoughts which remain within the mind when it comes into activity.<sup>26</sup>

All the parts are undistinguished in the whole and their rational forming principles are as if in one central point and all the same there is one principle of the eye and another of the hand known from the sense-object which is produced by it to be distinct.<sup>27</sup>

## Harmonious Universe

Let me go back to the idea of creation as a song or a piece of music. This is not uncommon in the Greek Fathers to reflect on the universe as a harmonious whole, and to

<sup>24</sup> *Enn.*, V.8.4:7-9, 11-12 and 22-24, Armstrong 5, 248-250; italics mine.

<sup>25</sup> R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 53.

<sup>26</sup> *Enn.* V.9.6:4-8, Armstrong 5, 300.

<sup>27</sup> *Enn.* VI.9.6:11-15, Armstrong 5, 302.



speak of it in terms of music. It is not the language Maximus makes use of in this context<sup>28</sup> but it does express the kind of vision of harmony he has in mind, and this has been described by, for example, Athanasius and Clement of Alexandria in such language.<sup>29</sup> Athanasius compares God and the universe to a musician and his lyre.

Just as a musician, tuning his lyre and skilfully combining the bass and the sharp notes, the middle and the others, produces a single musical piece, so the wisdom of God, holding the universe like a lyre, draws together the things in the air, and combines the whole with the parts, linking them by his command and will, thus producing in beauty and harmony a single world and a single order within it, while he himself remains unmoved with the Father but by his intrinsic being moves everything as seems good to the Father. The surprising thing about his divinity is the fact that by one and the same command he links and orders everything together according to its individual nature, not by intervals but all at once: the straight and the curved, the upper, middle and lower, the moist, the cold, the hot, the visible, and the invisible. ... Everything according to its own nature is given life and subsistence by him; and through him a wonderful and truly divine harmony is produced.<sup>30</sup>

Clement, in his turn, describes Christ as the new song and the minstrel.

See how mighty is the new song! ... It is this which composed the entire creation into melodious order, and tuned into concert the discord of the elements, that the whole universe might be in harmony with it. The ocean it left flowing, yet has prevented it from encroaching upon the land; whereas the land, which was being carried away, it made firm, and fixed as a boundary to the sea. It softened the rage of fire by air, as one might blend the Dorian mode with the Lydian; and the biting coldness of air it tempered by the intermixture of fire, thus melodiously mingling these extreme notes of the universe. What is more, this pure song, the stay of the universe and the harmony of all things, stretching from the centre to the circumference and from the extremities to the centre, reduced this whole to harmony, not in accordance with Thracian music, which resembles that of Jubal,<sup>31</sup> but in accordance with the fatherly purpose of God, which David earnestly sought.<sup>32</sup>

In what does this harmonious universe then consists? For Maximus the harmonious universe is seen in such things as order, proportion and permanence, and the mutual interrelation of wholes and parts which betrays the wisdom of their Creator.

So therefore when the Saints behold the creation, and its fine order and proportion and the need that each part has of the whole, and how all perfect parts have been fashioned wisely and with providence in accordance with reason that fashioned them, and how what has come to be is found to be not otherwise than good beside what now is, and is in need of no addition or subtraction in order to be otherwise good, they are taught from the things he has made that there is One who fashioned them. So, too, when they see the permanence, the order and

<sup>28</sup> He does utilize it when speaking of the soul and the virtues in *Myst.* 5, Soteropoulos, 168-174, and *Cap. theol.* II.100, PG 90, 1172D-1173A.

<sup>29</sup> See Boniface Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1993), pp. 47-50.

<sup>30</sup> *Gent.* 42:22-34, 37-39, Thomson, 116-118; translation in the same edition, pp. 117-119.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Gen. 4:21.

<sup>32</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Prot.* 1, GCS/Stählin, 5:30, 5:33-6:10; G.W. Butterworth's translation in Clement of Alexandria, *The Exhortation to the Greeks. The Rich Man's Salvation. To the Newly Baptized*, translated by G.W. Butterworth (Loeb, London: William Heinemann; New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1919), pp. 11-15.

position of what has come to be, and its manner of being, in accordance with which each being, according to its proper form, is preserved unconfused and without any disorder...

But the cosmic harmony consists also in natural phenomena.

... and the course of the stars proceeding in the same way, with no alteration of any kind, and the circle of the year proceeding in an orderly manner according to the periodic return of the [heavenly bodies] from and to their own place, and the equal yearly proportion of the nights and days, with their mutual increase and decrease, taking place according to a measure that is neither too small nor too great, they understand that behind everything there is providence, and this they acknowledge as God the fashioner of all.<sup>33</sup>

Another dimension to union and distinction in the universe is the relationship between the sensible and the intelligible universe. The visible creation and the *logoi* according to which it was created constitute two worlds which coinhere in each other.

Maximus compares this to the wheels in Hezekiel's vision:

Since according to the vision of Hezekiel *their action was like, as it were, that of a wheel in a wheel*,<sup>34</sup> through which is signified both the sensible and the intelligible universe the one existing in the other—for the intelligible universe is in the sensible by means of figures (τοῖς τύποις) and the sensible world is in the intelligible by means of *logos*—thus, what the apostle was shown, was everything that belongs to the sensible world. The words *which was lowered down knit at the four corners*<sup>35</sup> signify the universe which is constituted of four elements, and the universe is clean by virtue of the *logoi* inherent in the elements.<sup>36</sup>

It is the Logos himself who is revealed through the *logoi*. The idea that the universe is a book and the beings are letters that make up words is just another way of expressing the way in which the one Logos, as it were, shines through the universe in diverse forms. The 'Word becomes thick' Maximus explains

because having for our sakes hid himself unspeakably in the *logoi* of beings, he is intimated analogically through every visible being as if through some letters. He is whole in the wholes at once, most complete and entire in particular[s] [?]; whole and without diminution in beings that are different, he who is without difference and ever the same; in beings that are composite, he who is simple and non-composite; in beings that have a beginning, he who is without beginning; in things visible, he who is invisible, and in things touchable, he who is untouchable.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Ambig.* 10.35, PG 91, 1176BC; translation in Louth, *Maximus*, pp. 136-137. See also *Myst.* 1, Soteropoulos, 150:6-16 [=PG 90, 664D-665A].

<sup>34</sup> Ez. 1:16.

<sup>35</sup> Acts 10:11.

<sup>36</sup> *Qu. dub.* 116:1-13, CCSG 10, 85. See also *Qu. Thal.* 27, CCSG 7, 193-195.

<sup>37</sup> *Ambig.* 31, PG 91, 1285D.



*Judgement and Providence.*<sup>38</sup> Oneness of God and his providence go hand in hand with the harmony and differentiation in the universe. A harmonious whole is dependent on the differentiation of its parts and on a governing principle which organizes the different parts into a harmonious entity. In *Ambiguum* 10.19, Maximus explains this in terms of providence and judgement.

Movement is indicative of providence of beings. Through it we behold the unvarying essential identity of each of the created beings according to its kind, and similarly its inviolable manner of existence. And through it we perceive the One who preserves and protects all beings in accordance with the *logos* of each well distinct from one another in an ineffable unity.<sup>39</sup>

Difference is indicative of judgement. Through it we are taught that God is the wise distributor of the *logoi* of each particular being. This we learn from the natural potency in each being; potency which is commensurate to the underlying essence.<sup>40</sup>

When I [here] speak of providence (πρόνοια), I associate it with mind (νοῦς), and I do not mean the converting providence or the providence which, as it were, dispenses the return of things subject to it from what is not fitting to what is fitting. Instead, I mean the providence which holds together the universe and preserves it [unharmd] according to the *logoi* it was made in the first place. And when I speak of judgement, I mean, not the chastening or, as it were, punitive judgement of sinners, but the saving and defining distribution of beings, in accordance with which each created thing, by the *logos* in accordance with which it exists, has an inviolable and unalterable constitution in its natural identity, just as from the beginning the fashioner determined and established that it was to be, what it was to be, how and of what kind it was to be.<sup>41</sup>

It may be that Maximus is here working through the Origenist idea of judgement and providence which is an integral part of the Origenist cosmology. According to the version of Origenism which Maximus rebuts in his *Ambigua* 7 and 15, before the creation of the material world there was a primordial henad, or unity, of intellects, or the *logikoi*, united with God through contemplation. These were sated with contemplation and became lax, as a result of which they all moved and fell. At their fall they cooled down (ψύχομαι) thus becoming souls (ψυχή). To stop the fall God created bodies of varying density, each according to the degree the *logikoi* had relaxed their contemplation. This was the so-called first judgement. The bodies functioned as a punitive means through pain but also as a means of return to the henad through contemplation. The fi-

<sup>38</sup> See Blowers, *Exegesis*, p. 158, n. 45; Thunberg, *Microcosm*, pp. 69-72; Gersh, *From Iamblichus*, pp. 226-227; Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua*, pp. 36-37; von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, pp. 131 and 531; and George C. Berthold, 'History and Exegesis in Evagrius and Maximus', in *Origeniana Quarta* (Innsbruck, 1987), pp. 395-398.

<sup>39</sup> *Ambig.* 10.19, PG 91, 1133C.

<sup>40</sup> *Ambig.* 10.19, PG 91, 1133CD.

nal goal, the restoration and rest of all the *logikoi* in the primordial unity in which all differentiation, names and bodies are done away with, was the aim of providence.<sup>42</sup>

Because Maximus in the above text refutes the Origenist idea of converting providence and of punitive judgement, it is tempting to think that he in so doing rejects *any* idea such understanding of providence and judgement. But this would not be an accurate reading of the text. By saying that providence is that 'which holds together the universe and preserves it [unharmed] according to the *logoi* it was made in the first place' and that judgement is 'the saving and defining distribution of beings, in accordance with which each created thing, by the *logos* in accordance with which it exists, has an inviolable and unalterable constitution in its natural identity', Maximus certainly undercuts the Origenist principle according to which the world exists as subsequent to a pre-eternal fall. And he defines judgement and providence in this way in order to underline the fact that he is addressing a cosmological issue, and not a moral one. God is a judge and a provider even without the fall, and he has these two sides to him as the creator of a manifold universe which he has created to be intrinsically differentiated and at once harmonious. Differentiation is the condition of multiplicity on the one hand and of harmony on the other; this differentiation is created in view of constituting a harmonious whole and it shows God to be a wise judge who in the beginning gives to the beings what is proper to each. The preservation of this harmony is his task as the provider, but depends also on our free choice.

Once we have understood the positive side of judgement and providence, we can take into consideration their negative aspect. This is a different effect of the same thing. 'I do not for this reason think,' Maximus says, 'that there are two different kinds of providence and judgement. I recognize one and the same [judgement and providence] in potency, differentiated and many-formed in its effects in relation to us'.<sup>43</sup> The beings

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<sup>41</sup> *Ambig.* 10.19, PG 91, 1133D-1136B.

<sup>42</sup> See Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua*, pp. 72-102; Antoine Guillaumont, *Les 'Kephalaiia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'Origenisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1962), pp. 37-43. See also Gabriel Bunge, 'Hénade ou monade? Au sujet de deux notions centrales de la terminologie évagrienne' in *Le Muséon* 102 (1989), pp. 69-91. In opposition to Guillaumont, Bunge argues against the attribution of the doctrine of henad to Evagrius.

<sup>43</sup> *Ambig.* 10.19, PG 91, 1136AB.



which are endowed with free-choice can violate this harmony by transgressing against their own *logos*. The result of such a transgression is a natural punishment which from another angle appears as corrective or converting.

Since now providence and judgement, understood in the other sense, are connected with our chosen impulses: they avert us in many ways from what is wicked, and draw us wisely back to what is good, and by setting straight what is not in our control by opposing what is, they cut off all evil, whether present, future or past.<sup>44</sup>

Here punitive judgement and converting providence do not correspond to the Origenist idea of the soul (the ‘cooled-down’ fallen intellect) getting rid of the created world but rather they correspond to the idea of coming back to discover its true nature and meaning within a movement towards ever-well-being.

Through providence he is also working the likening of the particular parts to the universal wholes. This he does until such time as he unites the self-willed urge of the particular parts to the more generic natural *logos* of rational substance through their movement towards well-being, and thus makes them harmonious and of identical movement with one another and with the whole, so that the particular beings have no difference of will to universal beings, but that in all one and the same *logos* becomes apparent; a *logos* that is not severed by the modes [of action] of those of whom to an equal measure it is predicated. And in this way he demonstrates as effective the grace that deifies all.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, Maximus maintains that the Creator and the provider is one and the same God, and that this, too, we can learn from observing the universe, a universe which is a real union and distinction of all that is. He lists a whole host of things which prove that God’s providence maintains the cosmos, and in so doing Maximus gives us a beautiful and intelligent picture of the harmonious universe in which the saints contemplate God as the Creator and the provider. These things are:

[T]he permanence of beings, as well as their order, position and movement;

the holding together of the extremities one with another through the mediation of the middles, and their not being harmed on account of their contrariety;

the agreement of the parts with the wholes, and the union throughout of the wholes with the parts;

the unblurred distinction of the parts themselves one from another by virtue of the individuating difference of each, and their unconfused union by virtue of their indistinguishable identity in the wholes;

and—not to mention each individual case separately—the combination of all things with all things and their distinction from all things, and the ever preserved succession of each and every being in accordance with the species, so that no-one

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<sup>44</sup> *Ambig.* 10.19, PG 91, 1136A.

<sup>45</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 2:12-22, CCSG 7, 51.

suffers an alteration with respect to its *logos* of nature, or confuses or is confused with another being in this respect—all these things show that everything is held together by the providence of the Creator God.<sup>46</sup>

## The Universe and the Tree of Porphyry

This last quotation with its reference to ‘species’ and ‘difference’ brings us conveniently to the Porphyrian Tree. Here we shall see how Maximus handles unity and differentiation in the universe in relation to Porphyry’s logic.<sup>47</sup> Maximus gives us an account of this in the final section of *Ambiguum* 41a which follows a discussion on the well-known five divisions.<sup>48</sup>

Maximus draws to some extent on Gregory of Nyssa in his understanding of the distinctions between beings. Gregory’s basic pattern is summarized by Andrew Louth in the following way:

All beings can be divided into uncreated beings (consisting only of the blessed Trinity) and created beings. Created beings into celestial beings (= angels) and terrestrial beings (= human beings); and sensible beings into living beings and lifeless beings. Living beings can be divided into sentient and non-sentient beings; sentient beings into rational beings (= human beings) and irrational beings (= animals). And note that these successive divisions converge on the human being who embraces all the divisions to be found in created reality.<sup>49</sup>

For Maximus the divisions are slightly different and he sees them in the context of fall and restoration. The divisions between God and the creation, the intelligible and the sensible, heaven and earth, paradise and the inhabited world, and male and female were to be overcome by the human being as the crown and bond of unity of all creation. Man, however, failed to fulfil this task and for this reason God himself became incarnate in order to restore the universe.

With us and through us he encompasses the whole creation through its intermediaries and the extremities through their own parts. He binds about himself each with the other, tightly and indissolubly, paradise and the inhabited world, heaven and earth, things sensible and things intelligible, since he possesses like us sense and soul and mind, by which, as parts, he assimilates himself by each of the extremities to what is universally akin to each in the previously mentioned manner. Thus he divinely recapitulates the universe in himself, showing that the whole creation exists as one, like another human being, completed by the gathering together of its parts one with another in itself, and inclined towards itself by the whole of its existence, in accordance with the one, simple, undifferentiated and indifferent idea of production from nothing, in accordance with which the

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<sup>46</sup> *Ambig.* 10.42, PG 91, 1188D-1189A.

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion on the *logoi* in relation to the Porphyrian Tree see Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology*, pp. 104-118.

<sup>48</sup> For an extensive discussion on the five divisions see Thunberg, *Microcosm*, pp. 373-427.

<sup>49</sup> Louth, *Maximus*, p. 72. See also his notes on *Ambiguum* 41 on pp. 72-74 and 212-213.



whole of creation admits of one and the same indiscriminated *logos*, as having 'non-being' before its 'being'.<sup>50</sup>

Maximus then gives a logical demonstration of how all the created things are united according to the natural *logos* of having come into being from non-being. On this basis he argues that all the things in the universe necessarily have something in common. There is differentiation, no doubt, but there is also unity: 'For all those beings, that are distinguished one from another by their particular differences, are united by their universal and common identities, and pushed together towards oneness and sameness by a certain natural generic *logos*;' everything 'admits of one and the same indiscriminated *logos*, as having "non-being" prior to its "being".'<sup>51</sup> This is to say that everything within the universe from angels to daffodils and from stars to stones is created, and as such united.

This is where the Porphyrian Tree with its genera and species come into the picture. The various genera are united in the most generic genus, the species in the genus, the individuals in the species and the accidents in the subject. Maximus here follows Dionysius whom he in the sequel quotes: 'There is no multiplicity which is without participation in the One ... that which is many in its accidents is one in the subject, and that which is many in number or potentialities is one in species and that which is many in species is one in genus ....'<sup>52</sup>

The overall unity of the universe is produced by the most generic genus. We have not yet seen, however, what that genus is. What Maximus says in *Ambiguum* 41 is that 'the various genera are united one with another according to "being", and they are one and the same and undivided according to it.' Also in *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 48 describing various unions between parts and wholes, he says that there is 'the union of

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<sup>50</sup> *Ambig.* 41, PG 91, 1312AB.

<sup>51</sup> *Ambig.* 41, PG 91, 1312B.

<sup>52</sup> *D.n.* 13.2, PTS 33, 227:13-16/*Ambig.* 41, PG 91, 1313A. Clearly Dionysius in his turn draws on Proclus who says that, '[e]very multiplicity in some way participates in the One' (*Inst.* 1, Dodds). Cf. Plotinus' axiomatic statement, 'It is by the one that all beings are beings, both those which are primarily beings and those which are in any sense said to be among beings. For what could anything be if it was not one?' (*Enn.* VI.9.1).

the individuals with the species, that of the species with the genera and *that of the genera with “being”* (οὐσία).<sup>53</sup>

Thus, Maximus calls the most generic genus ‘being’ or οὐσία. But how are we to understand this? Is not also God a ‘being’? Does not also he have an essence or οὐσία? First of all we should say that Maximus is probably referring to the *example* Porphyry gives in *Isagoge* 8, an example in which the most generic genus is οὐσία. Porphyry, though, makes it quite clear that according to Aristotle there is no such all-embracing genus as ‘the being’, τὸ ὄν.<sup>54</sup> ‘Being’ (οὐσία in this case) is simply the highest genus of the particular example. For Maximus, in contrast, ‘being’ is an all-embracing genus. It is, nevertheless, qualified by one thing, and that is their being created.

If we add to this the fact that the whole discussion in the last section of *Ambiguum* 41 draws heavily on Dionysius, and the fact that for Dionysius οὐσία means ‘being’ in distinction from the ὑπερούσιον, ‘the God who is beyond being’ (that is to say, created and uncreated being respectively) then we may conclude that ‘being’ here means the same as ‘created being’. After all, the point in Maximus’ whole argument is that all beings have one thing in common which is ‘being created’. Consequently, we can conclude that the all-embracing and most generic genus in Maximus’ cosmology is ‘created being’.<sup>55</sup>

Maximus, then, discusses the question of the way in which unity exists between the generic and the specific. The generic must first of all remain what it is. Its being generic and its being the principle of unity go together. ‘For that which does not naturally unite what is separated, but is divided together with them and departs from its own singular unity, can no longer be generic.’<sup>56</sup> Simultaneously, however, there must be a mutual presence between the generic and the particular, in order that there can be unity. ‘[E]verything generic, according to its own *logos*, is wholly and indivisibly present, in

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<sup>53</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 48:82-84, CCSG 7, 341.

<sup>54</sup> *Isag.*, 2b:7-8, CAG 4/1, 6.

<sup>55</sup> Stephen Gersh points out about the Neoplatonists that ‘[a]mong texts dealing with the interrelation between Forms, one group expounds the doctrine of genus and species more or less in the Aristotelian manner. Thus the genus is “predicated of” its species, genera are “divided into” the various subaltern genera, and the species are “embraced” within the genus. In these passages the Neoplatonists are confining their attention to sensible Forms’ (Gersh, *From Iamblichus*, p. 97).



the whole of the subordinate species while remaining a unity, and the whole particular is observed in [the] generic.’<sup>57</sup>

One more approach to unity and differentiation in relation to genus and species is to see it in the context of movement; movement expressed in terms of expansion (διαστολή) and contraction (συστολή).<sup>58</sup> Again, one should note that Maximus is with this pattern proving that the universe is created and finite. Movement belongs to the created and finite realm, and since we can observe movement in the universe, it means that it is created and finite. The movement from the most generic genus towards the genera/species and the most specific species is seen as expansion, and the opposite movement as contraction.

For it (‘being’) is moved from the most generic genus through the more generic genera to the species through which and into which everything is naturally divided, proceeding as far as the most specific species, where its *expansion* ends; expansion which circumscribes its being in the downward direction,

and again, it is gathered together from the most specific species, retreating through the more generic up to the most generic genus, in which its *contraction* ends, limiting its being in the upward direction.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Ambig.* 41, PG 91, 1312C.

<sup>57</sup> *Ambig.* 41, PG 91, 1312CD. The text reads ἐνθεωρεῖται γενικῶς.

<sup>58</sup> See the articles of Paul Plass, ‘Moving Rest in Maximus the Confessor’, in *CM* 35 (1984), pp. 177-190, and ‘Transcendent Time in Maximus the Confessor’, in *The Thomist* (1980), pp. 259-277.

<sup>59</sup> *Ambig.* 10.37, PG 91, 1177C.

## Transparent Words

### The Unity of Scripture

SCRIPTURE IS another 'universe' in which we are called to detect the Logos. In its syllables and words the Word 'becomes thick' as he does in the beings that constitute the universe. Both the universe and Scripture are, as it were, a bridge by means of which we, when properly orientated, can arrive at the Logos himself. The Word enables this by coming down to our level and in so doing building the bridge.

The Word is said to 'become thick' ... because he for our sakes, who are coarse in respect to our mentality, accepted to become incarnate and to be expressed in letters, syllables and words, so that from all these he might draw us to him, as we closely follow him and are united by the Spirit. And that he might lead us up to the simple and incomparable thought about him[self], he has contracted us towards union with him for his own sake to the extent he has expanded himself for our sakes by virtue of coming down to our level.<sup>1</sup>

The Logos is the meaning of Scripture. In him everything finds unity and its true meaning; the old and the new; past, present and future. He is also the unity of the Scriptures; he himself is behind the multiplicity of the veil of the letter. Just as the soul penetrates every individual part of the body remaining one and single, so also the Logos penetrates the Scriptures without being fragmented with its words and syllables.

Every word of God is neither diffuse nor prolix but single constituted of diverse aspects, each of which is a part of the word. Thus he who speaks about the truth, even if he deals fully with his subject, he [always] speaks one word of God.<sup>2</sup>

It is through variegated and many-sided things that the Logos becomes approachable to us. Being bound to senses we need a prism which by refracting the single ray of light proceeding from the Logos makes it diversified and visible.

This dictates Maximus' approach to Scripture in general.<sup>3</sup> He can give several different interpretations to one single scriptural passage, but 'these various

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<sup>1</sup> *Ambig.* 31, PG 91, 1285B, 1285D-1288A.

<sup>2</sup> *Cap. theol.* II.20, PG 90, 1133C.

<sup>3</sup> On Maximus' Biblical interpretation see Paul M. Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy in Maximus the Confessor. An Investigation of the Quaestiones ad Thalassium* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); of the same, 'The Anagogical Imagination: Maximus the Confessor and the Legacy of Origenian Hermeneutics', in *Origeniana Sexta* (Leuven, 1995), pp. 639-



interpretations are,' as Polycarp Sherwood has said, 'but diverse representations of the one central mystery: the mystery of Christ and of our unity in Him.'<sup>4</sup> The letter of Scripture is then an invitation to go and find its spirit. In order to achieve this, Maximus makes a considerable use of the spiritual interpretation or contemplation.

This hermeneutical tradition<sup>5</sup> was already known to the classical Greek world in the form of commentaries on Homeric (or other) poems. It was taken up by the Jewish philosopher Philo and from there it found its way to Christian writers such as Clement and Origen. The earliest Christian authors, St Paul for example, made use of it. Origen himself bases his argumentation in the fourth book of the *De principiis* concerning scriptural interpretation largely on St Paul. Letter and spirit, symbol and *logos*, shadow and truth, all express the same idea of two levels, two realities, one natural and literal, one spiritual and going behind the veil of the letter.<sup>6</sup>

The main principles of the spiritual interpretation could be summarized in the following.

1. There is nothing superfluous in the Scriptures but everything has a meaning, either literal or spiritual.
2. There are passages which cannot be interpreted in a literal way. (Origen in *De principiis* 4.3.5<sup>7</sup> states that everything in Scripture has a spiritual meaning, but not necessarily a literal one.)
3. To remain at the level of the letter of the Old Testament shows carnal mentality.

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654; George C. Berthold, 'History and Exegesis in Evagrius and Maximus', in *Origeniana Quarta* (Innsbruck, 1987), pp. 390-404; and Polycarp Sherwood, 'Exposition and Use of Scripture in St Maximus as manifest in the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*', in *OCP* 24 (1958), pp. 202-207.

<sup>4</sup> Sherwood, 'Exposition', p. 204.

<sup>5</sup> See Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church. An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*, translated by John A. Hughes (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1994; original Italian edition 1981); and the monumental work by Henri de Lubac on Mediaeval interpretation of Scripture which is now being translated into English, *Medieval Exegesis. The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 1, translated by M. Sebanc, vol. 2, translated by E.M. Macierowski (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1998 and 2000; original French edition 1959).

<sup>6</sup> In *De principiis* 4 Origen argues for three levels of meaning in the Scripture which correspond to body, soul and mind. In general the twofold pattern is more dominant.

<sup>7</sup> *De princ.* 4.3.5., GSC/Koetschau, 331.

4. The etymologies of Hebrew names of people and places are interpreted allegorically.
5. Animals, objects and materials are interpreted allegorically.
6. Numbers are interpreted allegorically.
7. Feasts are interpreted allegorically.
8. Allegories are mainly anthropological, cosmological or ecclesiological, and Christological among the Fathers.

All this is there in St Maximus,<sup>8</sup> and although the same can be said of the great allegorist Origen, Maximus, who fiercely attacks the very heart of Origenism in his *Ambigua*, sees nothing exclusively Origenist in this approach to the Scriptures. It is the ‘what’ rather than the ‘how’ that has gone wrong with Origenism. The fact that Origen made a lot of allegory does not mean that it was his private property, nor does it make allegory an “Origenist” way of interpreting Scripture. In other words not everything Origen did, wrote or made use of was Origenist as such. We should not forget that he was also the father of the historical-critical study of Scripture.

Maximus saw allegorical interpretation as a part of a wider Christian tradition of which each and everyone made use of in a particular way, Origen in an Origenist way, Maximus in a Maximian way, so to speak. For example, Origen would make some characteristically ‘Origenist’ remarks on the way thus betraying his personal convictions. In the fourth book of the *De principiis*, for instance, he says in passing: ‘[B]y man I mean at present moment souls that make use of bodies.’<sup>9</sup> This is something Maximus would have never said.

In the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, a work mainly concerned with the interpretation of Scripture, Maximus frequently refers to questions of hermeneutics, such as, who is a

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<sup>8</sup> Examples in Maximus: (4) (proper names) *Qu. Thal.* 54, CCSG 7, 443; (place names) *Qu. dub.* 15, CCSG 10, 12; (5) (animals) *Qu. Thal.* 55, CCSG 7, 501-513; (objects) *Qu. Thal.* 63, CCSG 22, 145-181; (materials) *Qu. Thal.* 54, CCSG 7, 465-467; (6) (numbers) *Qu. dub.* 56, CCSG 10, 45; *Ambig.* 67, PG 91, 1396B-1404C, see the article of Peter van Deun, ‘La Symbolique des nombres dans l’oeuvre de Maxime le Confesseur (580-662), in *Byzantinoslavica* 53 (1992), pp. 237-242; (7) (feasts) *Qu. dub.* 10, CCSG 10, 9.

<sup>9</sup> *De princ.* 4.2.7., GSC.



true interpreter, what is a true interpretation and what these two imply.<sup>10</sup> For Maximus the author of Scripture is ultimately the Holy Spirit and its authentic interpreter can only be someone who has become worthy of the same Spirit,<sup>11</sup> that is, someone who has purified his soul and mind through ascetic struggle and practice of virtues, and who has in this way removed every obstacle between God and himself. Real knowledge and understanding, which a true interpreter needs, comes from engaging with God himself in a close relationship, from ‘experiencing’ (πάσχειν) the divine. Such engagement enables the interpreter to see in Scripture its spiritual meaning hidden in the letter.

The basic tenet of Maximus’ hermeneutics is the Pauline idea ‘the letter kills but the spirit gives life’.<sup>12</sup> Maximus sees that in Scripture there are, on the one hand, letters (γράμματα), and, on the other hand, spirit (πνεῦμα). These have as their counterparts in creation the external appearance and the *logoi*, and in the human being the senses and the mind. Letter, external appearance and senses go together, and spirit, *logoi* and mind go together.<sup>13</sup> One should perhaps add the pair carnal worship and worship in spirit.<sup>14</sup> This gives us two different approaches not only to the Scriptures but to life in general. On the one hand, there is the carnal minded sensual person, who takes pleasure only in external things which please the senses, and who reads the Scripture at the level of letter only and worships God accordingly. On the other hand, there is the spiritual person who strives after detaching his intellect from material things and from the power of the senses, who endeavours through natural contemplation to see the *logoi* in the created order and to read the Scripture and worship God ‘in spirit and in truth’.<sup>15</sup> These two approaches cannot coexist, Maximus says.<sup>16</sup> They are like two different roads leading to the opposite directions. The one leads to spiritual starvation, the other to deification. A true interpreter, of course, takes the latter direction.

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, *Qu. Thal.* 10, CCSG 7, 87; *Qu. Thal.* 11, 89; *Qu. Thal.* 17, 113-115; *Qu. Thal.* 55, 481-483.

<sup>11</sup> See *Qu. Thal.* 65, CCSG 22, 253.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Cor 3:6; *Qu. Thal.* 65, CCSG 22, 277-279.

<sup>13</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 32, CCSG 7, 225.

<sup>14</sup> See *Qu. Thal.* 65, CCSG 22, 481ff.

<sup>15</sup> Jn 4:23.

<sup>16</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 65, CCSG 22, 277-279.

Maximus is explicit about the fact that the Holy Spirit means something very precise by every word,<sup>17</sup> and that there is a reason why in the Old Testament there are statements which are historically untrue: 'To the historical narration has been mingled the paradoxical element in order that we should seek after the true meaning of what is written.'<sup>18</sup> Historical discrepancies, as Carlos Laga puts it, are for Maximus starting-points: 'Pour lui, un passage difficile, une "aporie", est en somme un point de départ pour une pensée spéculative qui nous introduit au mystère même de la Révélation: la déification de l'homme dans le Christ.'<sup>19</sup> Finally, the fact that the author of the Scriptures is the Holy Spirit implies that, since he is uncircumscribable, the word that he speaks also is uncircumscribable, at the level of *spirit*. At the level of *letter*, however, it is confined to the limits of historical contingency.

### The Word of the Age to Come

Going beyond the historical confines is pivotal to Maximus' biblical hermeneutics. He is intensely eschatological. Everything within the created order could, in fact, be put on a trajectory extending from the times of the Old Testament, through the present time, to the age to come. The truth and the fulfilment lies in the future, and it is this dynamic towards the truth of the age to come that penetrates Maximus' thought. Passing over from the literal and historical to the spiritual within an eschatological dynamic, is a constant theme in his exegetical works. There is a tension between the past, present and future, a tension which could be described as the relationship of all things with their own truth: 'For it is by shadow and image and truth that the whole mystery of our salvation has wisely been arranged.'<sup>20</sup> Everything in Maximus' understanding of the world and Scripture ultimately points to this one end: Christ in glory, the Logos that the world cannot contain.

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<sup>17</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 55, CCSG 7, 481-483.

<sup>18</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 65, CCSG 22, 275. Origen says much the same thing in *De principiis* 4.2.9.-4.3.5, GSC/Koetschau, 321-331.

<sup>19</sup> *Maximi Confessoris, Quaestiones ad Thalassium* I (Quaestiones I-LV), text edited by C. Laga and C. Steel with a Latin translation by John Scotus Eriugena (CCSG 7, Turnhout: Brepols, 1980), p. XII.

<sup>20</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1253C. See also *Ambig.* 48, PG 91, 1361A-1364A; and *Qu. Thal.* 36, CCSG 7, 243-245.



The Logos is like an infinite lighthouse towards which everything is heading, having the human being as its helmsman. Maximus, of course, sees the value of the present age but at the same time he is very much aware of its limitations. 'Every form of providence and mystery around man that belongs to the present age, even if it be great, is somehow preparing in advance and prefiguring the things to come.'<sup>21</sup>

I shall take an example of Maximus' eschatologically orientated exegesis from *Ambiguum* 21 in which he interprets, not a biblical text, but a patristic one. Its theme, however, is biblical, and by means of it Maximus unfolds his understanding of the relation the present age has to the age to come and in it he manages to present a panoramic vision of the interpretation of Scripture, cosmos and man, in a perspective of an eschatological fulfilment.

The text Maximus is asked to interpret runs as follows: '... and which John, the forerunner of the Word and great voice of the truth, declared even this very "lower" world could not contain.'<sup>22</sup> Here Maximus is faced with the apparent historical discrepancy that St Gregory calls John the Divine a 'forerunner'.<sup>23</sup> To an English speaker 'forerunner' does not necessarily suggest any particular person in Scripture and thus the discrepancy may not be so evident, but to a Greek speaker 'forerunner' is exclusively the epithet, if not a synonym, of John the Baptist and therefore Gregory's appellation begs for an explanation.

Maximus begins his interpretation by stating that he will set about the problem by 'contemplation' (θεωρία). This alone, he says, 'is the resolution of things which at the literal level seem contradictory, since it can exhibit the truth, which is incorporeal in all things, to be simple by nature and not becoming "thick" together with words or bodies.'<sup>24</sup> If the Logos 'becomes thick' in words and syllables for our sakes, as we saw above, he does this in order to give us a gateway to him as he is. Again, he does not become 'thick' by nature in the sense that he remains what he was. In other words,

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<sup>21</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1256B.

<sup>22</sup> *Or.* 28.20.

<sup>23</sup> *Or.* 28.20:17, SC 250, 142.

<sup>24</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1244B.

the fact that he comes down to our level does not mean that he ceases to be God invisible and incomprehensible in himself.

‘Contemplation’ will then be Maximus’ hermeneutical method. The extraordinary thing one notices reading Maximus and Gregory together is that Maximus manages to see Gregory’s actual point through these kinds of difficulties. Maximus also knows to choose the right way of reading him, a way which does justice to the text he interprets. He does not begin by wondering how Gregory could possibly have made such a blunder as to confuse between John the Baptist and John the Evangelist (and in this particular case it seems quite clear at first glance that Gregory must have simply made a mistake). Maximus has a different approach. His task is not that of a hasty critic, but rather he takes his task to be that of a very careful ‘literary critic’ who wants to find out what the truth behind Gregory’s rhetorical ploys is. There is great sensitivity towards the whole in Maximus’ approach. The same is true of his approach to the Scriptures, too, and in our text these two constantly blend.

Maximus realizes that what we have here is, one might say, the kind of ‘deliberate discrepancy’ which has as its purpose to draw the reader’s attention to somewhere else, that is, somewhere beyond historical limitations. This, then, is to be approached through contemplation if one wants to get it right. Let me first quote St Gregory so that we can see the wider context of the question.

If it had been permitted to Paul to utter what the third heaven contained, and his own advance, or ascension, or assumption thither, perhaps we should know something more about God’s nature, if this was the mystery of the rapture. But since it was ineffable, we too will honour it in silence. Thus much we will hear Paul say about it, that we know in part, and we prophesy in part. This and the like to this are the confessions of one who is not rude in knowledge, who threatens to give proof of Christ speaking in him, the great doctor and champion of truth. Wherefore he estimates all knowledge on earth only as through a glass darkly, as taking its stand upon little images of the truth. Now, unless I appear to anyone too careful, and overanxious about the examination of this matter, perhaps it was of this and nothing else that the Word himself intimated that there were things which could not now be borne, but which should be borne and cleared up hereafter, and which John, the forerunner of the Word and great voice of the truth, declared even the whole world could not contain. The truth then—and the whole word—is full of difficulties and obscurity.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Or.* 28.20:1-21:1, SC 250, 140-142; translation in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, edited by E.R. Hardy and C.C.R. Richardson (The Library of Christian Classics 3, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1954), pp. 149-150.



The tone is strongly eschatological, and Maximus rightly contextualizes both his approach to the question and his answer to it. The unity of Scripture, which is the Logos himself, goes beyond history and is therefore above all historical inconsistency, and the only way to reach this realm in hermeneutical terms is by reading the Scripture (and in this case Gregory, too) beyond the letter, that is, by spiritual contemplation. And this is what Maximus does. Contemplation or allegory is not for Maximus a means for arbitrary speculation but the vehicle that carries one over to the actual truth and meaning which lies beneath the surface of the text. Here is how Maximus sees Gregory's point in context.

The evangelist has said *And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.*<sup>26</sup> Through these words he has manifested to us that what he has written is a preparation of a more perfect and hitherto uncontainable word. Should anyone call the holy evangelist John a 'forerunner' in this sense, by virtue of his gospel which prepares the mind for the reception of the more perfect word, he will not miss the mark.<sup>27</sup>

This is a very truthful interpretation of Gregory. Maximus, however, develops it further. He sees the whole created order within a certain movement or tension between shadow, image and truth. The different shadows and images that point to the truth are united in it as their archetype. Unity and difference in relation to scriptural personages, such as John the Baptist, Elijah and John the Divine for our example, find a stunning resolution in Maximus' interpretation. Interchange between the biblical saints ceases to be a problem or a discrepancy.

For every saint up to this day, it would be true to say, by heralding in advance the archetypes of the things which he suffered, acted and spoke, was a forerunner of the mystery disclosed and prefigured through him.

For this reason every saint can be taken in place of another without error, and all can be taken in place of all, and each in place of each, and the saints can be named in place of the books written by them just as the books can be named in place of the saints, as it is customary in Scripture. Clearly the Lord indicates this when he both renders and calls John the Baptist 'Elijah' ...<sup>28</sup>

For if the one announced through them is one, then those who announce him may also be considered as one, and each may be taken in place of all, and all may be rightly taken in place of all—both those who served the mystery of the old covenant and those who have believed the proclamation of grace in the gospel.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Jn. 21:25.

<sup>27</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1252BC.

<sup>28</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1252D-1253B.

<sup>29</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1253B.

By virtue of the reference of all to the Logos everything is unified, like in the simile of a central point and radii. The saints are one because their archetype, that is Christ, is one. But there is a sequence here which we must not forget. One thing follows another, and one thing points to another as its truth. To be a 'forerunner' is to refer to the truth of one's self which lies ahead, and it is to function as an instructor to this truth. The Old Testament introduces one to 'Christ in flesh', Maximus explains, and the New Testament introduces one to 'Christ in Spirit', and Maximus adds 'that every concept which is capable of leaving an impression on the intellect is nothing else than an elementary introduction to the things beyond it to which it refers.'<sup>30</sup>

In this sense, the four gospels are seen as 'an elementary introduction' to the eschatological word. Maximus makes a connection between 'elementary introduction' (στοιχείωσις) and 'elements' (στοιχεία). He, thus, links the fourfoldness of the gospels with the sensible reality and its four elements (fire, air, water and earth), but also with the four cardinal virtues (sagacity, courage, chastity, justice) which are the 'elements' of a certain spiritual world. All these, the gospels, the senses, the elements and the virtues are there to lead and prepare us for the future age, for the reception of the word of the age to come.

For this reason there are four gospels, as being comprehensible to those who are bound to senses; even while being still under corruption. For this is also the number of the elements of the universe. The virtues, again, which constitute the spiritual world of reason, are four so that the word of truth would circumscribe the intelligible universe at present within us and the universe in which we are, and that he would unite them with each other in a union without confusion and would, again, distinguish them from each other without separation by the similarities of the elements that constitute them.<sup>31</sup>

The 'outer' and the 'inner' universes, the material and the spiritual one, Maximus here explains, are to be united without confusion and distinguished without separation. He, then, goes on to expound the links between the elements in both universes, and on what correspondences there are between the gospels, the elements and the virtues.

The gospel according to Matthew mystically holds the *logos* of earth and of justice, as speaking in more natural terms.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1244D-1245A.

<sup>31</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1245A.



The gospel according to Mark holds the *logos* of water and of chastity, as beginning from the baptism of John and the repentance preached by him in which chastity consists.

The gospel according to Luke holds the *logos* of air and of courage, as being the more periodic and full of historical accounts.

The gospel according to John holds the *logos* of ether and of sagacity, as being the highest of them all and as mystically introducing the faith in and the understanding of God as simple.<sup>32</sup>

To this list Maximus adds the faith and the triad practical, natural and theology (philosophy).

[T]he symbol of faith is the gospel of Matthew, as introducing the faithless magi worshipping [Christ] with gifts. The symbol of practical [philosophy] is the gospel of Mark, as beginning with repentance by which there is virtuous *praxis*. The symbol of natural [philosophy] is the gospel of Luke, as containing a more periodic account and making use of ways of narration proper to teaching. The symbol of theology is the gospel of John from which the [New Testament] begins and with which it in a godly manner ends.<sup>33</sup>

Matthew	earth	justice	faith
Mark	water	chastity	praktike
Luke	air	courage	physike
John	ether	sagacity	theology

Maximus then takes a different turn. He applies the idea of elementary introduction or instruction also to the faculties of the soul and the bodily senses. The sensible world by means of the senses leads the soul to the knowledge of itself. But when the senses discern the *logoi* in sensible objects, they become, Maximus says, ‘instructive for the faculties of the soul, calmly instructing them to activity by means of their own perceptions of the *logoi* that are in beings; *logoi* through which, as through some letters, those who are sharp-sighted to perceive the truth, read the word of God.’<sup>34</sup> Maximus then draws links between the bodily senses and the faculties of the soul. He says that the senses are called ‘the exemplary images of the faculties of the soul, since every sense together with its means, that is the sense organ, has naturally been assigned

<sup>32</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1245CD.  
<sup>33</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1245D-1248A. I am not entirely certain of whether this is the meaning of the last sentence. It should be noted that the Byzantine rite lectionary begins on Easter Sunday with the reading of Jn 1:1-17.  
<sup>34</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1248AB.

beforehand to each faculty of the soul analogously to a certain more mystical *logos*.<sup>35</sup>

These are the correspondences:

the image of the intellect is vision or eye;  
 the image of reason is hearing or ear;  
 the image of anger is smell or nose (nostril);  
 the image of desire is taste, and  
 the image of life is touch.<sup>36</sup>

Then the soul by means of its faculties ‘reaches out through the senses to sensible things.’ If the soul acts wisely it ‘has voluntarily created in its reason a most beautiful and spiritual universe.’<sup>37</sup> ‘This the soul does’, Maximus continues, ‘by combining the four virtues one with another like as elements in view of constructing from them a spiritual and intelligible world, and, indeed, by establishing every virtue from the activity of its faculties in an intertwining relation to the senses.’<sup>38</sup> Here is, then, how Maximus sees the union and distinction of the material and the spiritual world, and we must not forget that the creation of this world of virtues, intertwined with the sensible universe, is creating something which makes one able to receive the word of the age to come.

Thus, **sagacity** is formed from the interweaving of the contemplative and cognitive activity belonging to the intellective and rational faculties with the senses of seeing and hearing, which are directed towards the sensible objects appropriate to them.

**Courage** is formed from the interweaving of the incensive aspect with the sense of smell, that is, with the nostril, in which the incensive aspect is said to dwell as breath, this aspect being directed in a highly controlled way towards the appropriate sensible objects.

**Chastity** is formed from the interweaving of the appetitive faculty with the sense of taste, directed in a moderate way towards its own sensible object,

and **justice** is formed from the even and well-ordered and harmonious application of the activity of the vivifying faculty through the sense of touch to virtually all sensible objects.<sup>39</sup>

In the sequel, following a kind of ‘Porphyrian telescope logic’ the soul combines the four virtues into two, meekness and wisdom, and eventually joins also these two into one and the most generic virtue which, of course, is love. Love, then, is ‘the

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<sup>35</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1248B.

<sup>36</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1248C.

<sup>37</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1248C.

<sup>38</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1248CD.

<sup>39</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1248D-1249A.



producer *par excellence* of deification,'<sup>40</sup> and that is the consummation of the movement from shadows and images to the truth: 'to become living images of Christ, or rather to become identical with him or a copy, or even, perhaps, to become the Lord himself, unless this seems blasphemous to some.'<sup>41</sup> Here we are coming to the end, and Maximus draws things together.

In this way the soul moving wisely and acting in harmony with the divine *logos* according to which it is and has come into being, usefully through the senses perceives sensible things, appropriating the spiritual *logoi* in them. As for the senses, already having been infused with reason through the plenitude of reason (*logos*), the soul uses them as some rational vehicles of its faculties. And the faculties themselves it unites with virtues, and through the virtues the soul unites itself to the more divine *logoi*, inherent in virtues. And the divine *logoi* of the virtues conjoin the soul to a spiritual intellect hidden in them inscrutably, and this spiritual intellect of the divine *logoi* in virtues tears away from the soul every natural and voluntary relation which it has to things temporal, presenting it wholly as simple to the whole God. God in turn embraces it throughout together with its connatural body and proportionately likens them [both] to himself, so that it will be possible for God to become wholly manifest through the entire soul.<sup>42</sup>

In the end, it is Christ himself, the unity and the truth of Scripture and of the entire 'lower world', who in the Scriptures is the 'forerunner' of himself instructing and leading us through himself to himself as he is.

Consequently, compared to the more mystical word to be granted to the disciples in to coming age, the containable one which the Lord had given earlier, is a forerunner of itself. The same is true if you compare the first and the second coming of the Lord. In himself he has intimated [this word] dimly in proportion to the capacity of those who receive it. But he has not yet revealed the mysteries he in silence has hidden in himself owing to the fact that for the time being they are entirely uncontainable to the created order.<sup>43</sup>

We, therefore, fall silent in expectation of his second coming and the age to come when he, the Word hitherto uncontainable, will be 'everything to every being on account of the superabundance of his goodness'.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1249B.

<sup>41</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1253D.

<sup>42</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1249BC.

<sup>43</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1256BC.

<sup>44</sup> *Ambig.* 21, PG 91, 1256B.

## ‘Spiritual Hierarchy’

### Introduction

TO SAY THAT the Church has a structure would hardly raise any objections, but to define this structure as hierarchical would in contrast stir the minds of many today. Yet, it is obvious on the basis of the Pauline epistles alone that from the very beginnings of its existence the Church has had ranks or orders which define the position and, to some extent, the function of each Christian: *And God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues.*<sup>1</sup>

At the same time the Church is conceived as a unity, as a body, to use the Pauline term. Unity is what the Church is supposed to be. As L. Cerfaux in his classic study on Pauline ecclesiology has said: ‘Harmony and solidarity must reign among the members of the Christian society as it does in the human body.’<sup>2</sup>

Again diversity of members is constitutive of the body and their similarity would make the body’s existence impossible: *If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.*<sup>3</sup>

Unity in the Church can be viewed from different standpoints. The two elementary ones are unity in Christ and unity in the Holy Spirit both of which are fundamental in the thought of St Maximus. In the first view point, the unity in Christ, the Church is seen as Christ’s body of which he is the head, or else Christ as the Logos is presented as the point of reference to which everything leads and in which everything is united. In the view point, the unity in the Holy Spirit, the one Spirit is considered as bestowing on

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 12:28.

<sup>2</sup> *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*, translated by G. Webb and A. Walker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959; original French edition 1947), p. 266. See further his chapters on the unity of the church (II/5) and on the notion of the ‘Body of Christ’ (II/6) in *ibid.*, pp. 228-261; 262-286.



Christians diverse gifts which enable them to fulfil their particular function within the one body. These two view points then are closely bound together since it is Christ who is seen as the giver of the Spirit to his Church, and on the other hand the Spirit is viewed as the one who makes the faithful the body of Christ.

As for Maximus, it would not be too far reaching to say that his understanding of the Church springs forth from a reading of Paul's address in Romans 12 where Paul expounds the unity and diversity of the members of the Church in terms of functions, gifts and virtues: *For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.*<sup>4</sup>

### Gifts and Ranks

Maximus discusses the diversity of gifts in *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 29,<sup>5</sup> a text which deals with an incident in the Acts of the Apostles. It refers to St Paul's travelling through Syria to Jerusalem and meeting some disciples who *through the Spirit told Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.*<sup>6</sup> Paul of course ignored this and went, which also was the reason for Thalassius to ask Maximus: 'Why did Paul disobey the Spirit and go?'

This alleged disobedience of Paul gives Maximus an occasion to expound on the way in which oneness of the Spirit and diversity of functions in the Church should be understood. He makes a distinction between the Spirit and the 'spirits', which he interpretes as the Holy Spirit and its activities or operations. The latter, he says, St Paul also calls 'gifts'. This distinction he sees in the prophecy of Isaiah where it says: *the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*<sup>7</sup> This text had

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 12:17-20.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. 12:4-6.

<sup>5</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 29, CCSG 7, 209-213. See also, *Ambig.* 68, 1404D-1406C.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 21:4.

<sup>7</sup> Is. 11:2.

been interpreted earlier by Cyril of Alexandria in a way which recognizes such a distinction.

To the one Spirit he has given a multiplicity of operations. For there is not one Spirit of wisdom and another of understanding or of counsel or of might, and so on. On the contrary, just as the Word of God the Father is one but is called, according to his various operations, life and light, and power, so it is too with regard to the Holy Spirit. He is one but is regarded as multiform because of the way in which he operates. That is why the most wise Paul lists for us the various kinds of gifts: *All these, he says, are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each individually as he wills.*<sup>8</sup>

Maximus in his interpretation quite clearly draws on Cyril.

In his prophecy the holy prophet Isaiah says that seven spirits rested upon the Saviour who grew out of the root of Jesse.<sup>9</sup> He says this, not because he knows of seven spirits of God and teaches others, too, to accept such a doctrine, but because he calls the activities of the one and the same Holy Spirit 'spirits', owing to the fact that the actuating Holy Spirit exists wholly and complete in each activity proportionately. On the other hand the divine apostle calls the different activities of this same one Holy Spirit different 'gifts', which of course are actuated by this one and the same Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

The gifts which the Spirit actuates have been listed both by Isaiah and by Paul (in different versions).<sup>11</sup> These lists do not of course coincide, but that is less important. What is more important is that in each case one and the same Spirit is their source and that they are diversified in those who receive them. The underlying condition of each faithful defines the gift he can receive and the way in which the Spirit can operate on him.

If, therefore, the manifestation of the Spirit is given according to the measure of each person's faith, then each of the faithful in partaking of such a gift of grace—in proportion, to be sure, to his faith and to the disposition of his soul—he receives in due measure the activity of the Spirit, which activity endows him with the habit that enables him to put into practice a particular commandment.<sup>12</sup>

The gift in Paul's case is 'perfect love for God' which in accordance with 1 Corinthians 13:13 is the greatest gift in the Church and at the same time the most important commandment. The commandment of love is of course twofold, and there is an order within it. Maximus highlights this order in his answer with implications to ecclesiology.

Consequently, as one receives wisdom, another knowledge, another faith and another something else from among the gifts enumerated by the great apostle,<sup>13</sup> in like manner one receives through the Spirit in proportion to his faith the gift of

<sup>8</sup> *In Is.*, PG 70, 316AB; translation in Russell, *Cyril*, p. 83. *Cf. In Is.*, PG 70, 313A; 1 Cor. 12:11.

<sup>9</sup> *Cf. Is.* 11:1-3.

<sup>10</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 29, CCSG 7, 211; *cf.* 1 Cor. 12:4.

<sup>11</sup> See *Is.* 11:2; 1 Cor. 12:8-10, 13:13-14:1; Rom. 12:6-8.

<sup>12</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 29:15-21, CCSG 7, 211.

<sup>13</sup> *Cf.* 1 Cor. 12:8ff.



love which is perfect and immediate in relation to God having no trace of anything material in it, and someone else receives through the same Spirit the gift of perfect love for his neighbour.<sup>14</sup>

Thus the truly great Paul, a minister of mysteries that pass human understanding, who immediately received the spirit of the perfect grace of love for God in proportion to his faith, disobeyed those who had the gift of perfect love for him [*i.e.* Paul] and who through the spirit told him not to go up to Jerusalem. The 'spirit' in this case is the gift of love for Paul actuated by the Spirit, for the 'spirit' is the same as a gift, as I said above following the prophet. Paul disobeyed them because he regarded the love which is divine and beyond understanding as incomparably superior to the spiritual love which the others had for him.<sup>15</sup>

From this already we may at this point draw the conclusion that the gifts of the Holy Spirit as well as the commandments are not only diversified but also hierarchically arranged. Maximus does not provide us with a map to this structure but the principle is clear.

He then moves on to the more functional gifts. There too there is a clear order.

Again, if the prophetic gift is far inferior to the apostolic gift, it was not fitting with respect to the Logos, who directs everything and ordains everyone his due place, that the superior should submit to the inferior, but rather that the inferior should come after the superior. For those who prophesied through the prophetic spirit—and not the apostolic one—revealed the way in which Saint Paul would suffer for the Lord.<sup>16</sup>

Here Maximus speaks in far more explicit terms of ranks and their order—something which, he says, has a divine origin. Maximus' own conclusions are that 'the alleged disobedience of the great apostle is a guardian of the good order which arranges and directs all that is divine and which keeps everyone from falling away from his own position and establishment,'<sup>17</sup> and that 'the Church's ranks which the Spirit has well ordained must not be confused one with another.'<sup>18</sup>

The latter confirms a whole sequence of things: Firstly, that there are ranks in the Church; secondly, that these ranks are defined by certain gifts which are actuated by the one Holy Spirit; thirdly, that these ranks and gifts form an orderly hierarchy arranged by the Spirit, and consequently, that this order must be respected and kept owing to its divine origin; and finally that the ranks must not be confused one with another. (It is interesting to notice that the 'bugword' once again is 'confusion'.)

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<sup>14</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 29:22-29, CCSG 7, 211.

<sup>15</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 29:35-45, CCSG 7, 213.

<sup>16</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 29:54-61, CCSG 7, 213.

<sup>17</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 29:67-70, CCSG 7, 215.

In *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 63, Maximus gives a little more detailed account of the gifts. There he interprets the prophet Zechariah's vision of a lampstand and its seven lamps.<sup>19</sup> The lampstand signifies the Church and the lamps 'the operations of the Holy Spirit, that is to say the gifts of the Spirit which the Logos grants to the Church.'<sup>20</sup> He then quotes the key text from Isaiah and a little later on explains what the seven spirits or gifts do.

Consequently, wisdom removes foolishness and understanding does away with stupidity. Counsel destroys lack of discernment and strength cuts down weakness. Knowledge makes ignorance vanish, devotion chases impiety and the foulness of its works, and fear expels the hardheartedness of contempt. After all, not only are the statutes of the Spirit a light but also its operations.<sup>21</sup>

He then goes on to say that the 'lamps' also signify the ranks of the Church. 'Again, "lamps" are the ranks (βαθμοί) which constitute the good order of the Church and which through it enlightens every living thing with the light of salvation.'<sup>22</sup> In this case he sees the ranks as made up of the bearers of the seven gifts mentioned in Isaiah 11:2-3(LXX): wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of God.

For example, he who is a wise teacher of divine and lofty doctrines and mysteries is a 'lamp' that discloses to the many what had formerly been hidden from them.

He who with intelligence and understanding listens to the wisdom spoken by the perfect ones is another 'lamp' being a sagacious listener who guards within himself the light of truth of what was spoken.

He who with counsel discerns times fittingly in relation to events and who understands the modes that are to be added to the general principles without allowing them to be confused in unsuitable mixtures, he too being a 'wondrous counsellor' is shown to be another 'lamp'.

And he too is a strong 'lamp' who with unshakeable mind bears the attacks of involuntary temptations, as did the blessed Job and the brave martyrs. He guards the light of salvation inextinguishable in the manner of bravely keeping to patience, having the Lord as his strength and song.<sup>23</sup>

He who knows the devices of the evil one and who is not ignorant of the tricks of the invisible enemies, he too is another 'lamp' as being illumined by the light of knowledge. With the great apostle he says: *For we are not ignorant of his devices.*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 29:71-72, CCSG 7, 215.

<sup>19</sup> Zech. 4:2-3.

<sup>20</sup> *Qu. Thal.*, 63:148-151, CCSG 22, 153-155.

<sup>21</sup> *Qu. Thal.*, 63:175-182, CCSG 22, 155-157.

<sup>22</sup> *Qu. Thal.*, 63:183-185, CCSG 22, 157.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Ps. 177:14LXX.

<sup>24</sup> 2 Cor. 2:11.



He who leads a devout life according to the commandment, that is a life directed by virtues, is yet another 'lamp', since he is devout and proven through devout manners.

He who on account of the judgement has by means of abstinence blocked the passions' entrance into his soul, he is another 'lamp'. He has earnestly by means of the fear of God purified the destructive stains of passions and has made his life bright and radiant through rejecting unnatural pollutions.<sup>25</sup>

All this reflects Maximus' ever iconic reading of Scripture: he sees in it an image of the Church. The life of the Church is presented as a life of virtue in its manifold forms.<sup>26</sup> He makes no direct link with the Church hierarchy as he himself would have known it, which may mean that this also reflects his iconic reading of the Church itself. In the *Chapters on Love*, for example, he writes:

He who anoints his mind for the sacred contests and drives bad thoughts from it has the characteristics of a deacon; of a priest, however, if he illumines it with knowledge of beings and utterly destroys counterfeit knowledge; of a bishop, finally, if he perfects it with the sacred myrrh of knowledge of the worshipful and Holy Trinity.<sup>27</sup>

In yet another *Quaestio* in which he expounds on 'the seven eyes of the Lord' (again from Zechariah)<sup>28</sup> Maximus sees the seven gifts from the fear of God to wisdom as successive stages in one's spiritual ascent to God.<sup>29</sup> Here, however, he makes no specific reference to the Church but discusses the relationship of faith and deeds. His conclusion is, nevertheless, worth quoting.

Through the eyes of faith, therefore—that is, through the illuminations of faith—we ascend higher and higher to the divine monad of wisdom. By ascending higher through the practice of particular virtues, we gather together the division of gifts [bringing them] to their cause ...<sup>30</sup>

If I now concluded that the one thing certain of Maximus' ecclesiology is that it is a hierarchical one, a careful reader of Maximus might argue against this by saying that Maximus never uses the term 'hierarchy' when speaking about the Church. That certainly is true. There is, however, quite a simple answer to this question. The word *ἱεραρχία* had been coined by Dionysius the Areopagite probably in the early sixth

<sup>25</sup> *Qu. Thal.*, 63:185-214, CCSG 22, 157-159.

<sup>26</sup> See also *Qu. Thal.* 10, CCSG 7, 83 and *Qu. dub.* 116, CCSG 10, 85.

<sup>27</sup> *Carit.* II.21, PG 90, 989D-992A. Maximus draws here on Dionysius' *On Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 5.3-7, PG 3, 504-509.

<sup>28</sup> Zech. 3:9.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion on this see the article of Joseph A. Spiritu Sancto, 'The Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost in Early Greek Theology', in *The Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 26 (8/May 1926), pp. 820-827 and (9/June 1926), pp. 930-938.

century, and although it had to do with the Church and its ranks, its meaning was far wider than what we understand by 'hierarchy' today. For Dionysius this term, when used in ecclesiological context, covered the whole of the Church life including the sacraments and the ranks. Consequently, as the term had not yet been established as a technical term, it was only natural that Maximus should have preferred different vocabulary.

Another question we might like to ask here is if, as we have seen, the Church for Maximus is a collection of gifts given by the Spirit, in whom they find their ultimate unity, does not his ecclesiology then run the risk of being taken, in terms of contemporary systematic theology, a product of an unbalanced 'pneumatomonism'. To address this question we must go back to the interpretation of the 'lampstand'. Maximus there states that '[i]f Christ is the head of the Church, to use the simile of human being, it follows that the Church has been given the one who, as God, has by nature the Spirit [and] the activities of the Spirit.'<sup>31</sup>

This already creates a very strong connection between Christ and the Spirit, but that is not all. Maximus in the sequel brings forward a theological principle which forms the foundation for his understanding of the Church.

For the Holy Spirit, just as it essentially belongs to God and Father according to nature, so also it essentially belongs to the Son according to nature, since it essentially proceeds from the Father through the begotten Son, and since it gives its operations like as it were 'lamps' to the 'lampstand', that is, to the Church.<sup>32</sup>

What we have here is a 'through-the-Son'<sup>33</sup> pneumatology leading to a 'synthetic' (Christ-Spirit) ecclesiology. The *essential* unity which exists between the Son and the

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<sup>30</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 54:347-351, CCSG 7, 463.

<sup>31</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 63:156-159, CCSG 22, 155.

<sup>32</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 63:167-172, CCSG 22, 155.

<sup>33</sup> The question of the *filioque* in relation to Maximus is one which requires a special study. Here we can say only that he was not an advocate of the *filioque*-clause understood as double-procession, which he explicitly rejects (PG 91, 136AB). He only defended what he saw as the contemporary Roman position in accordance with which this expression (not yet included in the creed) meant that the Spirit proceeded from the Father *through* the Son, which in turn implied the consubstantiality of the three divine persons. This does not mean that Maximus regarded as *unorthodox* those who did not speak in terms of *filioque*—this would have included himself, too—but that he saw how this expression could admit of an orthodox interpretation, as well as of an unorthodox one (*cf. Opusc.* 10, PG 91, 136AB). This explains how the council of Hatfield 679, chaired by Theodore of Tarsus, the Greek Archbishop of Canterbury, could without any difficulty say in its definition 'glorificantes Deum Patrem ..., et Filium ..., et Spiritum Sanctum procedentem ex Patre et Filio inerrabiliter' (Bede, *Hist. eccl.* 4.17, PL 95,



Spirit is extended to the Church, too. Consequently, not only ‘pneumatomonism’ is avoided, but also a subordinationist type of ecclesiology in which the ‘charismatic’ is suffocated by the institutional. Yet, even here, one can say, there is hierarchy, not however subordination.

### Diversity of Members

We have seen in several areas how for Maximus the integrity of the differences of the parts that form a whole is so very important. This is to safeguard the particular parts intact and ‘without confusion’ in their union. In *Mystagogia* 1, Maximus presents such an understanding of the Church, the Church being an image of God, the Creator of a manifold universe.

Thus, as has been said, the holy Church of God is an image of God because it realizes the same union of the faithful which God realizes in the universe. As different as the faithful are by language, places, and customs, they are made one by it through faith. God realizes this same union among the natures of things without confusing them but in lessening and bringing together their distinction, as was shown, in a relationship and union with himself as cause, principle, and end.<sup>34</sup>

The Church creates unity between people who otherwise may have nothing in common. Maximus enumerates a whole list of differences that distinguish people one from another. These differences are overcome in the Church and by the Church, yet without being annulled.

[T]he holy Church of God will be shown to be working the same effects as God, as the image reflects its archetype. For numerous and of almost infinite number are the men, women, and children who are distinct from one another and vastly different by birth and appearance, by nationality and language, by customs and age, by opinions and skills, by manners and habits, by pursuits and studies, and still again by reputation, fortune, characteristics, and connections: All are born into the Church and through it are reborn and recreated in the Spirit. To all in equal measure it gives and bestows one divine form and designation, to be Christ’s and to carry his name.<sup>35</sup>

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199B). See also, Maximus, *Quaestiones et dubia* I.34, CCSG 10, 151; Jean-Claude Larchet, *Maxime le Confesseur, médiateur entre l’Orient et l’Occident* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998), pp. 11-75; Berthold, George C., ‘Maximus the Confessor and the *Filioque*’, in *SP* 18/1 (1985), pp. 113-117; Alexander Alexakis, ‘The *Epistula ad Marinum Cypri Presbyterum* of Maximus the Confessor (CPG 7697.10) Revisited: A Few Remarks on Its Meaning and Its History’ in *BZ* 94/2 (2001), pp. 545-554; Michael Lapidge, ‘The Career of Archbishop Theodore’, in *Archbishop Theodore. Commemorative Studies on his Life and Influence*, edited by M. Lapidge (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), p. 24; and in the same volume Henry Chadwick, ‘Theodore, the English church and the monothelite controversy’, pp. 88-95.

<sup>34</sup> *Myst.* 1, Soteropoulos, 154:13-154:20 [= PG 91, 668BC].

<sup>35</sup> *Myst.* 1, Soteropoulos, 152:9-19 [= PG 91, 665C].

Christ and faith in him becomes the point of reference which unites those who are named after Christ.

In accordance with faith it gives to all a single, simple, whole, and indivisible condition which does not allow us to bring to mind the existence of the myriads of differences among them, even if they do exist, through the universal relationship and union of all things with it. It is through it that absolutely no one at all is in himself separated from the community since everyone converges with all the rest and joins together with them by the one, simple, and indivisible grace and power of faith. *For all, it is said, had but one heart and one mind.*<sup>36</sup>

The Neoplatonic image of a centre and radii serves Maximus to illustrate his point of a harmonious unity-in-diversity which both the universe and the Church are.

It is he who encloses in himself all beings by the unique, simple, and infinitely wise power of his goodness. As the centre of radii that extend from him he does not allow by his unique, simple, and single cause and power that the principles of beings become disjoined at the periphery but rather he circumscribes their extension in a circle and brings back to himself the distinctive elements of beings which he himself brought into existence. The purpose of this is so that the creatures and products of the one God be in no way strangers and enemies to one another by having no reason or centre for which they might show one another any friendly or peaceful sentiment or identity, and not run the risk of having their being separated from God to dissolve into non-being.<sup>37</sup>

## The Temple

In the following chapter of the *Mystagogia*, Maximus describes the Church as an image of the universe. This time the universe is understood as being composed of visible and invisible realities, and the Church is seen from the viewpoint of its construction, that is, of its being divided into a nave and a sanctuary. The image relationship is based on the way in which these two realities relate to each other: they are at once united and distinct. 'On a second level of contemplation he [= the Old Man] used to speak of God's holy Church as a figure and image of the entire world composed of visible and invisible essences because it admits of the same both union and distinction as the world.'<sup>38</sup>

For Maximus the church building is first of all a 'hypostatic union' of the nave and the sanctuary.

For while it is one house in its construction it admits of a certain diversity in the disposition of its plan by being divided into an area exclusively assigned to priests and ministers (= deacons), which we call the sanctuary, and one accessible to all the faithful, which we call the nave. Still, it is one according to hypostasis (κατά

<sup>36</sup> *Myst.* 1, Soteropoulos, 152:19-26 [= PG 91, 665D-668A]; Acts 4:32.

<sup>37</sup> *Myst.* 1, Soteropoulos, 154:2-12 [= PG 91, 668AB].

<sup>38</sup> *Myst.* 2, Soteropoulos, 156:3-6 [= PG 91, 668CD].



τὴν ὑπόστασιν)<sup>39</sup> without being divided with its parts by reason of the differences between them, but rather by their relationship to the unity it frees these parts from the difference arising from their names.<sup>40</sup>

Unity becomes somehow more vivid when it is approached from the aspect of what *happens* in the church building, from the aspect of the liturgy. There is a movement from the nave to the sanctuary during the celebration of the Eucharist. This is the movement from the visible to the invisible, from the sensible to the intelligible, and from potentiality to actuality and fulfilment. The unity between the nave and the sanctuary is a relationship of what one might call 'liturgical becoming'; the sanctuary is the actuality of the nave and the nave is the sanctuary in potentiality. Both are the same, yet not the same: they are at once both united and distinct.

It shows each one to be by reversal what the other is for itself. Thus, the nave is the sanctuary in potency by being consecrated by the relationship of the sacrament toward its end, and in turn the sanctuary is the nave in actuality by possessing the *logos* of its own sacrament. In this way the church remains one and the same in its two parts.<sup>41</sup>

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As in the universe so also in Scripture as well as in the Church the spiritual blends with the material and sensible. One reflects the other in a relationship of reciprocal interdependence. The visible and contingent receives its meaning in the invisible, and the visible provides a bridge to the invisible.

Again multiplicity and diversity characterize all the three realms. The many discover their unity, without losing their particularity, in the divine that lies behind them all. The divine Logos gives coherence and harmony to the many in their mutual relationships, in their union without confusion, and as the source and end of all he is the point of reference by virtue of which beings, people, words and syllables find their ultimate unity in an eschatological fulfilment.

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<sup>39</sup> That is to say 'as a concrete and particular entity'.

<sup>40</sup> *Myst.* 2, Soteropoulos, 156:7-14 [= PG 91, 668D-669A].

<sup>41</sup> *Myst.* 2, Soteropoulos, 156:15-19 [= PG 91, 669A].

## Part V

### SPIRITUAL LIFE AND HUMAN ARCHITECTURE

#### 12

#### The Twofold Commandment of Love

ST AUGUSTINE in his treatise *On Christian Teaching* writes: 'Anyone who thinks that he has understood the divine Scriptures or any part of them, but cannot by his understanding build up the twofold love of God and neighbour, has not yet succeeded in understanding them.'<sup>1</sup> This, in a nutshell, is all we need to know about the Scriptures and the Christian life in general; without love we have nothing. As Andrew Louth, commenting on St Augustine, has put it: 'The message of the Scriptures is of the utmost simplicity: love.'<sup>2</sup>

But what kind of love is it that we are talking of here? Love can be understood in so many different ways.<sup>3</sup> (We have already seen an example of such a difficulty in chapter three.) This is a question we might ask in the words of the great Elizabethan lutenist and songwriter John Dowland, who towards the end of his turbulent career wrote:<sup>4</sup>

*Tell me, true Love, where shall I seek thy being,  
In thoughts or words, in vows or promise-making,  
In reasons, looks, or passions never seeing,  
In men on earth, or women's minds partaking.  
Thou canst not die, and therefore living tell me  
Where is thy seat, why doth this age expel thee?*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I.86 (xxxvi 40), Green, 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Discerning the Mystery. An essay on the nature of theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p.130.

<sup>3</sup> See Catherine Osborne, *Eros Unveiled. Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> See Diana Poulton, *John Dowland* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, second and revised edition, 1982; first published in 1972). On the song 'Tell me true Love' see pp. 298-299.

<sup>5</sup> 'Tell me, true Love' in *A Pilgrimes Solace. Wherein is contained Musically Harmonie of 3. 4. and 5. parts, to be sung and plaid with the Lute and Viols* (The English Lute-songs I/12&14, London: Stainer & Bell Ltd, 1969; first published in London: William Barley, 1612), p. 20.



Dowland, no doubt, had seen much in his life and had come to realize that love is something far higher than merely a passing human emotion. On the pages that follow we shall see what answer St Maximus gives to Dowland's question. As always we shall move within the parameters of unity and diversity, beginning with unity of virtues and commandments.<sup>6</sup>

### **Love: The Most Generic of the Commandments and Virtues**

There are different ways unity of virtue or unity between virtues has been viewed. Plato, for example, asks in the *Protagoras* whether individual virtues are parts of a single virtue or whether they are simply different names of one and the same thing,<sup>7</sup> and in the *Republic* he expounds the idea that the three cardinal virtues (wisdom, temperance and courage) assigned to each one of the parts of the soul (the rational, the desiring and the incensive part) are drawn together into a harmonious whole by a fourth virtue, that is, justice.<sup>8</sup> Didymus the Blind and Evagrius have seen virtue as being essentially one but differentiated in the different parts of the soul of those who put it into practice.<sup>9</sup> The metaphor they use is that of light which penetrating through glass takes the form of glass, or as Gabriel Bunge puts it, they 'compare the essence of virtue to the phenomenon of light, which in itself is single and colourless but, when refracted through glass, bursts into a multitude of colours.'<sup>10</sup> Mark the Ascetic expresses the same principle in different metaphors. 'All material wealth', he says, 'is the same, but acquired in many different ways; similarly, virtue is one, but is many-sided in its operations.'<sup>11</sup> And in another treatise he makes use of the imagery of water and plants: 'When rain falls upon

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<sup>6</sup> More general surveys on Maximus' spirituality can be found in Thunberg, *Microcosm*; Larchet, *La divinisation*; Walther Völker, *Maximus Confessor als Meister des geistlichen Lebens* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1965); Louth, *Maximus*; and Blowers, *Exegesis*.

<sup>7</sup> *Prt.*, OCT/Burnet III, 329c-336b.

<sup>8</sup> *R.* 4, OCT/Burnet IV, 441c-444e.

<sup>9</sup> See *Cap. prac.* 89 and 98, SC 171, 680-688 and 706. See also Gabriel Bunge's commentary on these two chapters in his *Évagre le Pontique. Traité pratique ou le moine. Cent chapitres sur la vie spirituelles*, translated by P. Peternell (Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1996; original German edition 1989), pp. 253-255, 275-276.

<sup>10</sup> Bunge, *Évagre*, p. 276.

<sup>11</sup> *On the Spiritual Law* 196, SC 445, 126; translation in *The Philokalia. The Complete Text*, vol. 1, compiled by St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth, translated and edited by

the earth, it gives life to the quality inherent in each plant: sweetness in the sweet, astringency in the astringent; similarly, when grace falls upon the hearts of the faithful, it gives to each the energies appropriate to the different virtues without itself changing.’<sup>12</sup>

Also Cyril of Jerusalem has made use of this metaphor:

One and the same rain comes down on all the world, yet it becomes white in the lily, red in the rose, purple in the violets and hyacinths, different and many-coloured in manifold species; thus it is one in the palm tree and other in the vine, and all in all things, though it is uniform, and does not vary in itself. For the rain does not change, coming down now as one thing and now other, but it adapts itself to the things receiving it and becomes what is suitable to each. Similarly the Holy Spirit, being one and of one nature and indivisible, imparts to each man his grace *as he wills*. ... Though the Spirit is one in nature, yet by the will of God and in the name of Christ, he brings about many virtuous effects.<sup>13</sup>

Although these ideas have influenced Maximus, in ecclesiology for example (*cf.* ch. 11), he treats the question of unity of virtue in his own peculiar way. The Porphyrian Tree with its genera and species is once again lurking at the back of his mind when he speaks of love drawing ‘the individual commandments into a universal *logos*’<sup>14</sup> and being ‘the most generic of virtues’.<sup>15</sup>

In case of love, or charity, seen as something all-embracing and fundamentally as the source of all virtue, Maximus only elaborates the key principle of the Scriptures. What he in some other texts expresses in logical terms, Maximus puts in more practical terms in the dialogue *Liber asceticus* where a young brother asks ‘the old man’ about keeping the commandments.

The brother said: ‘But the Lord’s commands are many, Father, and who can keep them all in mind, so as to strive for all of them?’ ... The old man replied: ‘Though they are many, brother, yet they are all summed up in one word: *You shall love the Lord your God with your whole strength, and with your whole mind, and your neighbour as yourself*. And he who strives to keep this word succeeds with all the commandments together.’<sup>16</sup>

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G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1979), (ch. 195) p. 123.

<sup>12</sup> *On Those who suppose Justification is from Works* 109, SC 445, 160; translation in *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, (ch. 116) p. 134.

<sup>13</sup> *Catech.* 16.12, PG 33, 933AB; translation in Cyril of Jerusalem, St., *Works*, vol. 2, translated by L.P. McCauley and A.A. Stephenson (The Fathers of the Church 64, Washington: The Catholic University of America Press), p. 82.

<sup>14</sup> *Ep.* 2, PG 91, 393C.

<sup>15</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 40:61, CCSG 7, 269.

<sup>16</sup> *Ascet.*:92-100 (6), CCSG 40, 15. The critical edition does not have paragraph numbers. I have put inside brackets those used in PG 90 and adopted by Sherwood in his translation quoted here.



To say, then, that the commandment of love includes all the others is nothing else than saying *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. ... and... you shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.*<sup>17</sup> Or as the apostle Paul puts it: *The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,'<sup>18</sup> and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'*<sup>19</sup> *Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*<sup>20</sup>

In *Letter 2*, which in itself is an entire treatise on charity, Maximus speaks of the 'the mystery of love'<sup>21</sup> in which the whole of the Old Testament finds its fulfilment, truth and unity.<sup>22</sup> The law and the prophets are succeeded by this mystery of love which 'out of human beings makes us gods, and draws the individual commandments to a universal *logos*.'<sup>23</sup>

Love as something all-embracing represents, in terms of Porphyrian logic, the most generic genus of commandments. Here the Porphyrian Tree grows, as it were, downwards, from the universal *logos* to the individual commandments. The individual commandments are seen simultaneously as an unfolding and differentiation of the *logos* of love in time: 'All the individual commandments come uniformly under this universal *logos* according to God's good pleasure, and from it they are dispensed in diverse ways in accordance with God's economy.'<sup>24</sup>

Being the universal *logos* of virtue, love possesses a whole range of 'species of good things' which Maximus in the sequel enumerates: faith, hope, humility, meekness, mercy, self-control, patience, peace, joy, and so on.<sup>25</sup> 'And simply,' he says, 'to

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<sup>17</sup> Mt. 22:34-40.

<sup>18</sup> Dt. 6:5.

<sup>19</sup> Lv. 19:18.

<sup>20</sup> Rom. 13:8-10.

<sup>21</sup> *Ep. 2*, PG 91, 393C.

<sup>22</sup> See also ch. 10 above.

<sup>23</sup> *Ep. 2*, PG 91, 393C.

<sup>24</sup> *Ep. 2*, PG 91, 393C.

<sup>25</sup> *Ep. 2*, PG 91, 393C-396A.

put it briefly, love is the consummation of every good thing (being the highest of goods with respect to God) and the source of every good thing.’<sup>26</sup>

In another text, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 40, where Maximus interprets the meaning of the six jars in the wedding at Cana of Galilee, Porphyrian logic becomes explicit. Here Maximus speaks of love as ‘the most generic of virtues’.

The six jars Maximus takes as ‘the capacity of the human nature to do the divine commandments.’ Number six is associated with creative activity on account of the six days of creation, but it is also seen as the number of perfection being the only ‘perfect’ number (*i.e.* the sum of its factors) between one and ten. This Maximus transposes to his discussion on the generic virtue and its division, as well as on the faculty in human nature capable of producing this virtue and its differentiation.

He first summons Thalassius to think about the following:

[H]ow is the generic faculty of nature, productive of good things, divided into six generic modes of virtue? and

[W]hat is the faculty of nature that produces the universal virtue, a virtue which is universal and more generic than other virtues, and which is divided into six species, and these generic ones, so that after having been set in order by this natural faculty it may through its modes advance in a six-fold manner into species?<sup>27</sup>

What Maximus’ question entails is that the generic *logos* of virtue is differentiated by means of the different ways in which the faculty operates, of its *tropoi*. Having first posed the question, Maximus then answers it himself. ‘The most generic of virtues,’ he says, ‘is love and the most generic faculty of the [human] nature capable of realizing it, is reason.’<sup>28</sup> Here we have the most generic genus of the Porphyrian Tree. ‘Reason,’ Maximus continues, ‘as it operates, holding fast onto its own cause, is distinguished into six (more) generic modes’. Now we are half way down the Tree; the most generic genus is divided into genera having still species subordinate to it. (The non-Porphyrian element is that the dividing principle, instead of being a specific *differentia*, is the mode or *tropos*.) Further down the generic modes ‘include the species into which the *logos* of

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<sup>26</sup> *Ep.* 2, PG 91, 396B.

<sup>27</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 40:40-47, CCSG 7, 269.

<sup>28</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 40:61-63, CCSG 7, 269.



love is intrinsically divided.’<sup>29</sup> These are the most specific species. The content of these is dictated by six biblical ideals of love for one’s neighbour: ‘looking after both the bodily and the spiritual needs of those who hunger and thirst, of those who are strangers or naked or in sickness, and of those who are in prison.’<sup>30</sup> (Love, of course, is not exhausted in these particular six ‘species’ of virtue.)

‘Consequently,’ Maximus concludes, ‘the most generic faculty of the [human] nature is capable of differentiating the most generic virtue into species [of virtue]. It divides virtue by means of its own six modes into six species, and through these [species of virtue] the human nature is united in singleness of inclination (γνώμη).’<sup>31</sup>

All this rather intellectual elaboration is nothing else than Maximus’ way of answering the question of true love. It is precisely the kind of reading of Scripture St Augustine has in mind in the passage quoted above. And here by, as it were, drawing from the hidden meaning of ‘the six jars’ Maximus builds up a whole system of love for neighbour. This, then, is one aspect in finding where the being of *true Love* is.

### ***Logos and Tropos of Commandments***

Before we move on to see what implications the keeping or transgressing the commandment of love are, I would like to draw our attention to the distinction between *logos* and *tropos* in this particular context. As we have already seen, it is the *tropos* which differentiates the more generic *logos* of virtue into particular species.

In *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 27, Maximus presents a similar idea with respect to individual commandments. The question here is about the need of a particular revelation concerning the application of a commandment. Thalassius asks: ‘Since the Lord after his resurrection had explicitly commanded to *make disciples of all nations*,<sup>32</sup> why did Peter need a revelation for the nations in the case of Cornelius? And why did the apostles, as they heard of this, criticize Peter?’<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 40:63-66, CCSG 7, 269-271.

<sup>30</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 40:66-68, CCSG 7, 271.

<sup>31</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 40:71-74, CCSG 7, 271.

<sup>32</sup> Mt. 28:19.

<sup>33</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 29, CCSG 7, 191.

Thalassius' query gives Maximus an opportunity to expound on the *logos-tropos* distinction. He first emphasizes the fact that the apostle necessarily needed a revelation: He had not known that in accordance with faith circumcision made no difference, nor had he yet learnt that there was no distinction between Jews and Greeks, for which reason he also had a hard time with the apostles in Jerusalem. Maximus writes:

For this grace of preaching was an introduction of a divine life and a new kind of worship, different from the forensic worship [of the Old Covenant], and it was a teaching about the soul voluntarily releasing itself from the body by *gnome*. For this reason those to whom this grace of preaching was entrusted needed to be taught about each word (*logos*) by him who had given the command.<sup>34</sup>

As a corollary, Maximus once again turns the given example into a universal principle: '[E]very word (*logos*) of a divine commandment necessarily requires teaching and revelation as to the definite mode (*tropos*) of its realization. For there is no such person who can exactly discern the mode (*tropos*) of a word (*logos*) without a revelation from him who has spoken the word.'<sup>35</sup> Despite the difficulty in rendering the Greek with its multi-levelled meanings of *logos* into English, the idea becomes clear: a divine commandment is a general principle which covers a great range of situations and circumstances. Its application in a particular case requires further knowledge. In other words, it requires divine inspiration to discern what the best way of putting it into practice is. Thus, unity and differentiation with respect to commandments is in their *logos* and *tropos*.

How often we find ourselves in situations where we are unable to discern what is right, even if we know the principles? In such cases, we may either consult some more experienced person who may be more discerning than we are, or else we may follow the example of the apostle Peter who 'although he already had received the word (*logos*) concerning preaching to the nations, did not attempt to do so but waited until he was taught the mode (*tropos*) of this word (*logos*) by him who gave it.'<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 27:20-26, CCSG 7, 191.

<sup>35</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 27:28-32, CCSG 7, 191.

<sup>36</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 27:32-35, CCSG 7, 191-193.



## The Purpose of the Incarnation

Let us now turn to consider how Maximus views the relationship between the Incarnation and the twofold commandment of love. In the *Liber asceticus*, one of the Greek answers to *cur deus homo* alongside Athanasius' *De Incarnatione*, Maximus relates the purpose of God's incarnation to the twofold commandment. He, at the very outset of the dialogue, sets the question of the motives of the incarnation into the perspective of an arch extending from creation and fall to redemption and deification. Here is his virtually credal statement expressed by the mouth of the 'old man'.

The old man replied: 'Listen: man, made by God in the beginning and placed in Paradise, transgressed the **commandment** and was made subject to corruption and death. Then, though governed from generation to generation by the various ways of God's providence, yet he continued to make progress in evil and was led on, by his various fleshly passions, to despair of life. For this reason the only-begotten Son of God, ..., taking flesh by the Holy Spirit and the holy Virgin, he showed us a godlike way of life; he gave us holy **commandments** and promised the kingdom of heaven to those who lived according to them. Suffering his saving Passion and rising from the dead, he bestowed upon us the hope of resurrection and eternal life. From the condemnation of ancestral sin he absolved by obedience; by death he destroyed the power of death, so that *as in Adam all die, so in him all shall be made alive*. Then, ascended into heaven and seated on the right hand of the Father, he sent the Holy Spirit as a pledge of life, and as enlightenment and sanctification for our souls, and as help to those who struggle to keep his **commandments** for their salvation. This, in brief, is the purpose of the Lord's becoming man.'<sup>37</sup>

Clearly the initial human failure, according to Maximus, was the transgression of the commandment, the inability to love and obey God. This then led to corruption and death, to the increase of evil and the rule of the devil in the world. The incarnation, the passion, the resurrection, the ascension and finally the sending of the Holy Spirit restored the possibility for man once again to find salvation through keeping the commandments.

The dialogue goes on to discuss the commandments and how he who imitates the Lord is able to do them, and again how he who separates himself from 'every fleshly attachment' and 'worldly passion' will be given power, that is the grace of the Holy Spirit, to do this. The fact that the commandments are summed up in the twofold commandment of love, and that love for God and love for neighbour are interdependent, are made explicit. Maximus continues:

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<sup>37</sup> *Ascet.*:7-31 (1), CCSG 40, 6-7. Emphasis mine.

‘Love for every man must be preferred above all visible things. This is the sign of our love for God, as the Lord himself shows in the Gospels: *He that loves me*, he says, *will keep my commandments*. And what this commandment is, which if we keep we love him, hear him tell: *This is my commandment, that you love one another*. Do you see that this love for one another makes firm the love for God, which is the fulfilling of every commandment of God?’<sup>38</sup>

In reality, when there is mutual love between people, it all seems quite easy, but when it comes to loving one’s enemies, things begin to look rather different. Love for one’s enemies seems, in fact, to be something humanly speaking impossible. For this end one needs to know, Maximus explains, the ‘purpose (σκοπός) of the Lord’. And here comes the connection between the Incarnation and the twofold commandment. The Lord’s purpose, he says, was the following.

‘Our Lord Jesus Christ, being God by nature and, because of his love for mankind, deigning also to become man, was born of a woman and made under the law, as the divine apostle says, that by observing the commandment as man he might overturn the ancient curse of Adam. Now the Lord knew that the whole law and the prophets depend on the two commandments of the law—*You shall love Lord your God with your whole heart, and your neighbour as yourself*. He, therefore, was eager to observe them, in human fashion, from beginning to end.’<sup>39</sup>

The Lord’s purpose was to observe the twofold commandment of love as a human being—something we too need to bear in mind if we wish to imitate Christ and love our enemies.

Keeping the commandment of love is a matter of spiritual warfare, and that is how Maximus sees it in Christ’s personal life. The devil attempts to cast Christ down in this warfare through different kinds of temptations or trials. The devil’s purpose is the opposite of that of Christ’s: to make him transgress the commandment of love.

The temptations are twofold just as the commandment is twofold. Love for God is the devil’s first target when he tempts Christ in the wilderness. He hopes to make Christ prefer some created thing to God which he does tempting him with pleasurable things. These kind of temptations are described as being ‘within our power’, that is to say that it is a matter of our own free choice as to what we make of them.

The devil failed in this first enterprise but did not give up his mission, instead he tried to win Christ with respect to the other half of the commandment. Maximus, or the ‘old man’, continues:

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<sup>38</sup> *Ascet.*:120-128 (7), CCSG 40, 17-19.



'So making use of the wicked Jews and his own machinations, he strove to persuade him, on returning to society, to transgress the commandment of love for neighbour. For this reason while the Lord was teaching the ways of life, and actually demonstrating the heavenly manner of life, ..., that vindictive wretch stirred up the wicked Pharisees and Scribes to their various plots against him in order to bring him to hate the schemers. He thought that Christ would not be able to bear up under their plots; and so the devil would be attaining his purpose by making Christ a transgressor of the commandment of love for neighbour.'<sup>40</sup>

To the devil's disappointment Christ was not persuaded. Being God he knew the devil's designs, and instead of turning his love for his own people (including those who rejected him) into hatred, he fought back against the devil who instigated the Scribes and the Pharisees. 'He admonished, rebuked, reproached, berated, ceaselessly did good to those who were egged on, who, though able to resist, yet through sloth had willingly borne with the instigator.' By goodness and love Christ fought against evil and hatred. 'It was for this reason that he endured such evils from them; rather, to speak more truly, on their account he, as man, contended until death on behalf of the commandment of love.'

But Christ's example is not simply a codex of moral behaviour. It is something more fundamental, something more, as we would say today, existential or ontological. Following his example means labouring with him for the restoration of the whole of humanity, of each and all. Christ's victory over evil opened the way for us to learn to live again in accordance with *true Love* which we once lost. The process of integrating this love is one of transformation both at the level of the individual human person and at the level humanity as a whole. In the two final chapters, we shall examine the results of the initial human failure and the way back to integration.

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<sup>39</sup> *Ascet.*:178-186 (10), CCSG 40, 23-25.

<sup>40</sup> *Ascet.*:201-215 (11), CCSG 40, 25-27.

## Confusion and Fragmentation

THE FALLEN world is characterized by conflict and fragmentation. War and isolation, the two poles between which the pendulum of human history oscillates, are a painfully enduring presence both between people and within each human person. Individuals, communities and whole nations are constantly being reminded of a tension which seems never to allow peace to exist simultaneously at all these levels. Where there is external peace and well-being, there one discovers inner conflict and the loneliness of the city-dweller. Communities, rather than possessing unity naturally, gain and preserve it only through serious effort, whereas war between nations is hardly an issue one needs to call in mind at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

John Dowland's line in the song quoted earlier on, *true Love ... why doth this age expel thee?* strikes the right note, and that a sad one. Why indeed is it that conflict is so inevitable, and that peace is only reached through struggle? Why is it that the love that 'makes the world go round' seems to amount to 'everybody minding their own business', to refresh Alice's saying in our minds? These are questions which go right to the heart of human existence as such, and no simple answer, especially within the limits of a general survey such as this, would do justice to the seriousness of the issue. Nevertheless, there are answers which do not leave us empty and hopeless in this drama, and the answer Maximus is able to provide, is one well worth consideration.

### Human Architecture

In order to understand Maximus' view of what the state of fallen humanity amounts to and what we can do about it, we need to be aware of the basics of his anthropology. Following the common practice in the Greek world of his time, Maximus speaks in terms of the platonic tripartite division of the soul. In accordance with this conception three parts, the rational, the incensive and the desiring part (or reason, anger



and desire) make up the intellective, reasonable and sentient soul which animates and holds together the body. In his Christological,<sup>1</sup> as well as anti-Origenist,<sup>2</sup> works Maximus argues that soul and body come into being simultaneously. He very carefully excludes any idea of pre-existence of soul, or indeed of pre-existence of body:<sup>3</sup> body and soul are united in a union without confusion at the moment of their coming-into-being. In this union, the soul, and more precisely the mind, observes the material world by means of its senses through the body's sense-organs.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the tripartite division, Maximus makes use of another distinction, perhaps more characteristic of Aristotle (found also in the *De natura hominis* by Nemesius of Emesa, a treatise which Maximus frequently quotes).<sup>5</sup> In accordance with this distinction the soul is first divided into two parts, the rational and the irrational. The irrational part is then divided into that which obeys reason and that which cannot be influenced by it, the former being the desiring and the incensive parts, and the latter the nourishing and the living parts. There are further divisions to the irrational part, but these are too detailed and less important for our purposes here.<sup>6</sup>

What is more important, is the distinction Maximus makes in *Mystagogia* 5 with respect to the rational part.<sup>7</sup> This he divides into intellect (*νοῦς*) and reason (*λόγος*). First, intellect is a contemplative faculty through which the soul can be united to God. It is a static and receptive faculty at the summit of the human construct, being a kind of landing area for God. Through the intellect the soul becomes luminous when in communion with God, and the soul in turn illumines the body. But this can happen only when the human architecture is restored to its right hierarchical structure.

Reason, again, is a practical faculty which governs the activity of the soul. It is the charioteer which drives the two horses, that is, the desiring and the incensive parts of

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<sup>1</sup> See *Ep.* 15, 552D.

<sup>2</sup> See *Ambig.* 42, PG 91, 1325D-1336B.

<sup>3</sup> See *Ambig.* 42, PG 91, 1336C-1341C; and *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1100CD.

<sup>4</sup> See *Qu Thal.* 58, CCSG 22, 33-35. Cf. ch. 10 above: 'The Word of the Age to Come'.

<sup>5</sup> Particularly in the long *Ambiguum* 10, PG 91, 1105C-1205C. See the references in Louth, *Maximus*, pp. 205-212; and in the critical edition of *Nat. hom.* by M. Morani, *Nemesii emeseni de naturahominis* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, 1987), p. 141.

<sup>6</sup> See *Ambig.* 10.44, PG 91, 1196D-1197D.

<sup>7</sup> *Myst.* 5, Soteropoulos, 164-180.

the soul.<sup>8</sup> Reason is the faculty which seeks after goodness in practice, in the soul's, as it were, external relations.

Why this distinction is of such interest, is because it provides a clear anthropological structure in which the twofold commandment of love finds its proper place. Love for God through the intellect in contemplation attracts divine grace which in turn enables the soul to express love for neighbour in activity governed by reason. Here we are, of course, speaking of spiritual love which includes the love of enemies, too. It is only by means of this double love that the human being is able voluntarily to move from the image to the likeness of God and reach deification. In the opposite case we have what basically is the fallen humanity, fragmented and at once confused, like a wine-glass smashed on a stone floor.

## Fall

Maximus was very much aware of the global disintegration. The picture he gives of fallen humanity in *Letter 2* is rather grim.

The deceitful devil in the beginning contrived by guile to attack humankind with self-love, deceiving him through pleasure, and separated us in our *gnome* from God and from one another turning us away from rectitude. In this way he divided the [human] nature, fragmenting it into a multitude of opinions and ideas. With time he established a law for the means and discovery of every vice making use of our powers to this end, and he installed in all a wicked cause of discord for the continuance of evil, namely, irreconcilability of *gnome*. By this he has prevailed on humankind to turn it from what is permitted to what is forbidden. Thus humankind has brought into being from itself the three greatest, primordial evils and the begetters of, simply, all vice: ignorance, I mean, and self-love and tyranny, which are interdependent and established one through another.<sup>9</sup>

One could tell the story of how we have arrived at this state in many different ways by reading Maximus. One way of doing this is by relating the adventures of the intellect, in other words, by describing the 'intellectual' history of mankind, which is what we shall attempt to do here.

In *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 61, Maximus explains the role of the intellect and that of pleasure at the beginning of human history.

When God created human nature, he did not create pleasure or pain along with it as regards its sensibility. Instead, he furnished it with a certain intellectual capacity

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Ambig.* 15, PG 91, 1216AB.

<sup>9</sup> *Ep.* 2, PG 91, 396D-397A.



for pleasure, whereby humanity would be able to enjoy God ineffably. But at the creation the first man forfeited this intellectual capacity (I mean the natural desire of the mind for God) to sense. Indeed at his very first movement he unnaturally produced in himself, by the medium of sense a pleasure in sensible things (for which he had not received the capacity).<sup>10</sup>

The beginning of the whole story, then, was that the intellect, or the mind, was directed, not upwards to God, as it was meant to do, but downwards to sensible things. In its desire to take pleasure in sensible things, the intellect, as it were, 'got stuck' with the senses. Evidently, *true Love* was not found there. This was the first step, and there began the downhill of the human story: Adam was deceived by the devil through pleasure; he fell away from the knowledge of, and essentially communion with, God, and seeking to satisfy his existential hunger through the pleasure given from sensible things he ended in self-love and tyranny of his neighbour.

The initial wrong move of the intellect leads into a disorder in the human construct. The hierarchical order of the parts of the soul is shattered and thus the whole being becomes distorted. The human construct is not altogether destroyed with the Fall but somehow convoluted. Maximus characteristically calls this state 'confusion' or 'evil confusion of passions'.<sup>11</sup>

The intellect, as it were, sinks in the lower parts of the soul and is thus mingled or confused with the irrational. In biblical language (where 'Israel' takes the place of the intellect) this is seen as the captivity of Israel. But there are other imageries Maximus makes use of. In *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 16, he interprets the 'molten calf', that spectacular idol smelted and worshipped by the Israelites in the wilderness, as 'the mixing or the confusion of the natural powers one with another'.<sup>12</sup>

It is of importance to us to note that the post-lapsarian state is one of distortion of elements which are and remain fundamentally good. Evil comes about from their faulty association which violates their true nature. In Maximian terms, the 'mess' is in the *tropos* rather than in the *logos*. In this *Quaestio*, all the various types of jewellery that

<sup>10</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 61, CCSG 22:8-16, 85. Translation in Blowers, *Exegesis*, pp. 171-172 (n. 154).

<sup>11</sup> See *Qu. Thal.* 54, CCSG 7, 443; *Qu. Thal.* 16, CCSG 7, 105-107.

<sup>12</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 16, CCSG 7:38-39, 107.

were gathered for producing the calf, Maximus interprets as good elements of the human nature or its activity.

‘Earrings’ are the *logoi* concerning God which naturally exist in the mind from devout understanding of beings. ‘Necklaces’ are the right doctrines about beings obtained through natural contemplation. ‘Bracelets’ are the practice of virtues in action. Or again, ‘earrings’ are the inborn reason (for ear is the symbol of reason). ‘Necklace’ is the incensive power of the soul (for neck is the symbol of eruption). ‘Bracelets’ are the desiring power of the soul disclosed through pleasurable action.<sup>13</sup>

Or in another version:

The mind which according to [the figure of] Israel comes out of Egypt, that is, out of sin, and which has as its companion the imagination, ... this mind, then, as soon as it neglects and leaves rational discernment even for a little while—as Moses left Israel in the olden days—it sets up, as it were a calf, an irrational habit, the mother of all vices. It smelts—like earrings—the *logoi* concerning God which it had naturally received from devout understanding of beings; like necklaces it smelts the godly beliefs concerning being which it had gained from natural contemplation; like bracelets it smelts the natural activity of the practice of virtues. This the mind does in, as it were a furnace, in the burning heat of the impassioned attitude of anger and desire, and in accordance with the imagination and form of evil stored up in advance in reason it accomplishes sin in action.<sup>14</sup>

The fact that the intellect is displaced from its seat, introduces, not only a disorder in the human hierarchy as a whole, but also a distortion of the parts or faculties of the soul themselves. As the intellect is subdued to the irrational parts of the soul, it becomes a slave to irrational habits, and as a result, the soul’s faculties, instead of producing virtues (which is their natural task) become begetters and servants of passions and vice.

Maximus regards passions as an end result of confusion: ‘Every passion always comes about by mixing some perceived object, a sense faculty and a natural power, diverted from the natural—the incensive power, desire or the intelligence, as the case may be.’<sup>15</sup> Thus, the intellect’s wrong move causes a disorder in the human architecture, this leads into the distortion of the natural state of the individual parts of the soul, which in turn is expressed in unhealthy and sinful activity.

Confusion, come about through turning away from God and through attachment to temporal things, has its turning side, too. St Athanasius in his *Contra gentes* says: ‘As soon as they stopped attending to what is one and true (that is, to God) and stopped longing for him, all that was left to them was to launch themselves upon variety and

<sup>13</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 16:53-62, CCSG 7, 107.

<sup>14</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 16:1-21, CCSG 7, 109.



upon necessarily fragmentary desires of the body.’<sup>16</sup> Attachment necessarily leads to fragmentation. The mind which is entangled in the senses is bound to the multiplicity of sensible things. This is not to say that the variety and multiplicity in the created order is bad and fragmenting in itself. It becomes such to the unhealthy soul that relates to the world in an unhealthy manner. In other words, the mind which has become captive of the senses, and the irrational parts of the soul, rather than curbing the latter, enables them to satisfy their insatiable irrational hunger. *True Love* was, therefore, not found residing in *passions never seeing*, as Dowland sings.

The mind which has abandoned its correct way of relating to the world and which ‘gets stuck’ with the multiplicity of things cannot retain its wholeness and unity. It becomes like someone who is constantly dragged to different directions at one and the same time. ‘Sin is ever scattered,’ Maximus says, ‘and with itself it ever scatters the mind which has committed it. It cuts the mind off the singular identity of truth and sets up the irrational habit that disperses the mind about many and unsteady imaginations and opinions concerning beings.’<sup>17</sup>

### *Gnome*

Fragmentation does not remain at the level of the individual only. It has also a universal dimension. The biblical grounding for this could be found in, for example, St James’ sharp statement:

What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. Unfaithful creatures! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.<sup>18</sup>

For Maximus it is primarily ‘self-love’ that engenders conflict. ‘Self-love,’ he says in *Letter 2*, ‘is, and is known to be, the first sin, the first progeny of the devil and the mother of the passions that come after it.’ Self-love is, it could be argued, the generic

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<sup>15</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 16:72-75, CCSG 7, 109.

<sup>16</sup> *Gent.* 3:22-25, Thompson, 8.

<sup>17</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 16:21-25, CCSG 7, 105.

vice in a similar way as love is the most generic of virtues.<sup>19</sup> Maximus enumerates some of its ingredients: ‘pride, the monstrous, composite evil, and the mark of vain opinion that opposes God’; ‘the falling glory which casts down with itself those who are puffed up by it’; ‘envy’; ‘anger, bloodthirstiness, wrath, guile, hypocrisy, dissembling, resentment and greed’; in brief—and most importantly—‘everything by which the one humanity is divided up’.<sup>20</sup> And in *Letter 3*, he says: ‘Human self-love and craftiness ... severed the one nature into many pieces.’<sup>21</sup>

Maximus names the actual ‘weapon’ which realizes this cutting into pieces of the one humanity, *gnome*.<sup>22</sup> *Gnome* is one of those terms in Maximus’ vocabulary which is extremely difficult to render into any other language. Maximus himself is not always very consistent in its usage, and I shall not venture to map all his variations.<sup>23</sup> Instead, I want to focus simply on its negative aspect in accordance with which *gnome* is the principle which divides the one humanity. In general, *gnome* is associated with freewill, opinion, deliberation, inclination, individual attitude, and so on. In its negative role, we could name it ‘the individualistic will’.

When the soul’s powers have become unbalanced and wrongly orientated, they begin to require things in an unhealthy way. This leads to an egocentric existence in which the soul makes use of its rational capacities to satisfy its irrational desires. The necessary consequence is what Maximus calls ‘tyranny’ of one’s neighbour. The common good of the one humanity is no longer important, but only the apparent individual good. That it is only apparent, Maximus points out in a practical example:

Should anyone, who is wealthy enough to do so, ignore those in need, he clearly proves to have cast them away from himself and cast himself from God, since he has ignored the nature on account of his *gnome*, or rather, since he has ruined the good things which belong to his nature. This applies to those who deliberately (γνωμικῶς) have preferred cruelty to charity and who have judged their kin and compatriot to be of less value than money and who yearning after gold have blocked the way from God to enter themselves.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> James 4:1-4.

<sup>19</sup> See Thunberg, *Microcosm*, pp. 232-233.

<sup>20</sup> All quotations are from *Ep. 2*, PG 91, 397CD.

<sup>21</sup> *Ep. 3*, PG 91, 408D.

<sup>22</sup> *Ep. 3*, PG 91, 409A.

<sup>23</sup> Sherwood has a brief but comprehensive survey on the subject in *St. Maximus*, pp. 58-63.

<sup>24</sup> *Ep. 3*, PG 91, 409B.



Acting according to one's (fallen or distorted) *gnome* is acting unnaturally. It is activity which reveals the distortion of one's nature, and it is deviation from what is natural and as such already it severs the one humanity. But also its end results have a separating effect, as Maximus speaking about evil in general says: 'The plural form *these are your gods, o Israel*<sup>25</sup> is said because evil by nature is scattering, unsteady, multiform and dividing. For since good unifies and holds together what has been divided, clearly then evil divides and corrupts what is united.'<sup>26</sup> *True Love* does not apparently feel very comfortable *in thought or words* either, it seems, or *in men on earth, or womens minds partaking*.

Consequently, *gnome*, to conclude, in the context of the fall, represents the sharp knife which cuts whatever it touches and whenever it acts,<sup>27</sup> and fallen humanity ever suffers from the irreconcilability of this cutting edge. Only if we rise above our 'individualistic wills', can we hope to achieve restoration and unification of humanity both at the personal and the universal level.

But there is another aspect to *gnome*. Much of Maximus' understanding of the Christian life, as an ascetic endeavour, consists in reforming the *gnome*.<sup>28</sup> The purpose is to bring it back home, to unite it with nature. Uniting the *gnome* with nature brings about also the unification of humanity as a whole: it means giving up one's individual desires for the benefit of one's neighbour, in other words, loving them as oneself. 'God in his love for mankind prescribed the saving commandments to us wishing thus to unite us one with another not only by nature but also by *gnome*,' Maximus reminds us. In fact, when this unification takes place, *gnome* becomes the vehicle of voluntary action. It becomes the characteristic constituent of the rational human being who of his free choice expresses love for his neighbour and moves towards God in love. Uniting the *gnome* with nature, reaching the likeness of God and ultimately deification, one could argue, are but different aspects of one and the same reality.

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<sup>25</sup> Ex. 32:4.

<sup>26</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 16:47-52, CCSG 7, 107.

<sup>27</sup> See also Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, p. 267.

<sup>28</sup> See Sherwood, *St. Maximus*, pp. 81-83.

For this reason anyone who by chaste thinking and noble sagacity has been able to put an end to this deviation from nature has shown mercy above all to himself, because he has rendered his *gnome* to be in one accord with nature and because he by *gnome* has advanced to God for the sake of nature. In this way he has shown in himself what is the *tropos* and the *logos* of the image and how God in a manner proper to him created our nature in the beginning similar to his own nature and a manifest likeness of his goodness, and how God made it the same throughout in every respect, namely, non-combative, peaceable, non-factious, and tightly bound both with God and with itself through love, by which love we cleave to God in desire and to one another in sympathy. Such a person has shown mercy to those to whom mercy was to be shown, not only by supplying them, but also by teaching them how the hidden God makes himself manifest through those who are worthy.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Ep.* 3, PG 91, 409AB.



## Distinction and Unification

### Distinction

IF THE FALL is associated with attachment to the sensible, then also the opposite is true: upward movement and integration requires detachment from the sensible. Once again, this is a matter of love, or more precisely, it is a matter of *true Love*. As Maximus puts it in one of his centuries:

The blameworthy passion of love engrosses the mind in material things; the laudable passion of love binds it even to divine things. For usually where the mind has leisure there it expands; where it expands there it directs its desire and love, whether this be in divine and intelligible things (which are properly its own), or in the things of the flesh and the passions.<sup>1</sup>

What we need here, is to continue the ‘intellectual journey’ and to begin an ascent in search of *true Love*. Let me quote the third stanza of John Dowland’s song:

*Mount then my thoughts, here is for thee no dwelling,  
Since Truth and Falsehood live like twins together:  
Believe not sense, eyes, ears, touch, taste, or smelling,  
Both Art and Nature’s forc’d: put trust in neither.  
One only she doth true Love captive bind  
In fairest breast, but in a fairer mind.*<sup>2</sup>

*Mount then my thoughts*; the mind’s journey from the ‘confusion of passions’ to union with God is one of veritable ‘intellectual asceticism’. It requires the liberation of the intellect from the realm of the irrational, and a *diabasis*, a passing through the sensible to the intelligible and ultimately to God. Much of Maximus’ writing is concerned with this journey (as Paul Blowers, among others, has demonstrated).<sup>3</sup> Also true philosophy for Maximus consists in such ‘intellectual asceticism’.<sup>4</sup> True

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<sup>1</sup> *Carit.* III.71, PG 90, 1037CD.

<sup>2</sup> Dowland, ‘Tell me’, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> See his *Exegesis*, pp. 95-183.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. his *Ambiguum* 10, PG 91, 1105C-1205C; introduced and translated in Louth, *Maximus*, pp. 94-154.

philosophy for him is, as it was for the philosophers of antiquity, a way of life.<sup>5</sup> It is literally 'love of Wisdom', and for Maximus this involves striving after the mind's union with God (who is Wisdom itself and the only true source of wisdom) but it also involves the governing through reason of the irrational parts of the soul and their activity.<sup>6</sup> A true 'wisdom-lover' is, therefore, both united with the Logos and Wisdom of God, and makes manifest wisdom in action in accordance with the commandments. He loves both God and his neighbour as himself. Interestingly, deification, which can be said to be the goal of human existence, as the union with God through love, was defined in almost exactly the same words by Dionysius the Areopagite as the Platonists defined philosophy: 'Philosophy is likening to God to the extent this is possible to a human being./Deification is likening and union to God to the extent this is possible.'<sup>7</sup>

As an example of the 'wisdom-lover's' *diabasis* to God, we could take Maximus' allegory on Zerubbabel the basic meaning of which according to Maximus is 'the wisdom-loving mind'. Maximus interprets this Hebrew name in a number of ways in his allegory and by doing so gives a direction for the mind's spiritual journey. He gives five different renderings of 'Zerubbabel':<sup>8</sup> 'sowing of confusion', 'dawn of confusion', 'dawn in confusion', 'dawn of dispersion' and 'he is rest'. In each case, 'Zerubbabel' is a 'wisdom-loving mind', or a 'philosophical intellect' that brings about a change in the state of affairs. This is that of fall in which the nature is keeping the mind captive through the senses. Thus Zerubbabel in Maximus' interpretation becomes:

1. a wisdom-loving mind 'sown' through repentance by virtue of righteousness in the confusion of the captivity to senses;
2. a wisdom-loving mind, a 'dawn of confusion', which reveals the shame of confused passions;

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<sup>5</sup> See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, edited and with an introduction by A.I. Davidson, translated by M. Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, English ed. 1995). Parts of this work were first published in French as *Exercices spirituelles et philosophie antique* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1987<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Ambig.* 10.1, PG 91, 1108A-1112A.

<sup>7</sup> Elias [?], *In Porphyrii Isagogen, Prolegomena* 7, CAG18/1, 18:3-4; Dionysius, *E.h.* 1.3, PTS 36, 66:12-13.

<sup>8</sup> See Antoon Schoors, 'Biblical Onomastic in Maximus Confessor's *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*' in *Philohistôr. Miscellanea in honorem Caroli Laga septuagenarii*, edited by A. Schoors and P. van Deun (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1994), pp. 257-272.



3. a wisdom-loving mind, a 'dawn in confusion', which through knowledge gives light in the confusion (caused by the senses in their activity towards sensible things), and which does not allow the senses irrationally to be attached to the sensible;
4. a wisdom-loving mind, a 'dawn of dispersion', which produces the dawn of deeds of righteousness to the powers of soul dispersed with sensible things. By virtue of this dawn, reasonable πράξις is put together. This has its share in γνωστικὴ θεωρία which brings the dispersed powers [of soul] back to intelligible things.
5. a wisdom-loving mind, and 'he is rest', for he made all peaceful by uniting the active aspect [of the soul] to that which is good by nature and the contemplative aspect to that which is truth by nature.<sup>9</sup>

Here already we can see the basic sequence of events. Repentance lays the foundations. A ray of the rising sun breaks the darkness, and one begins to see one's wretched state. The intellect takes control over the faculties of the soul and nourishes them through its contemplative activity. Gradually, the soul begins to move towards integration. In practical life, virtues emerge, and through prayer or contemplation one's spiritual powers are united and directed to God. In God, then, 'the wisdom-loving mind' finds its final repose.

But let us not go too far yet. Detachment from the senses is the first step on the way to integration. The confusion needs to be sorted out and the hierarchical structure of the soul restored, and this can only take place when the intellect is lifted up out of the lower parts of the soul. The intellect must be freed from the irrational before there can be any restoration. *Mount then my thoughts, here is for thee no dwelling, since Truth and Falsehood live like twins together: Believe not sense, eyes, ears, touch, taste, or smelling*, as Dowland reminds us.

As we said in the previous chapter, passions came about through a wrong kind of union, a union with confusion, so to speak. The healing of passions, then, Maximus

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Qu. Thal.* 54, CCSG 7, 443-445.

sees as depending on distinguishing between the confused elements: a sensible object, a sense faculty and a faculty of the soul. In his allegory on the 'molten calf', which we saw in the previous chapter, Maximus explains this process of distinction.

Thus, if the intellect, as it investigates the final compound of these three interrelated factors, is able to distinguish each from the other two, and to refer each back to its specific natural function, if it is able, in other words, to view the sensible object in itself, apart from its relationship to the sense faculty, and the sense faculty in itself, apart from its connection with the sensible object, and the natural power—desire, for example—apart from its impassioned alliance with the sense faculty and the sensible object, the intellect in so doing 'grinds to powder' the constitution of the 'calf', that is, of whatever passion, and 'scatters it upon the water' of knowledge. The intellect has then made even the slightest imagination of passions completely to vanish by restoring each of its elements to its natural state. May we too 'grind to powder' the 'molten calf' of our soul and make it vanish, so that our souls may have in them the image of the divine unadulterated, and unblemished by any external thing whatsoever.<sup>10</sup>

Similar distinction is required between the different parts of the soul which have undergone an interchange with the fall. They must be first distinguished one from another (especially the intellect from the incensive and the desiring parts) and then restored to their proper places.<sup>11</sup> 'The molten calf', must be dealt with.

The coming of the divine *logos* 'grinds [the irrational habit] to dust' and 'scatters it upon the water'. By means of the 'thinness' of contemplation, it 'grinds to dust' the 'thickness' of reason which it had in its superficial relation to the senses in virtue of passions, and it makes the distinction between the natural powers clear—powers which had suffered an interchange and confusion between one another—and it brings the mind to its proper source of knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

It is impressive to notice how the principle of simultaneous unity and distinction, the master theme of this study, can be traced even in Maximus' psychology. And it is only natural that this should be so, since union without confusion is all about integrity and its restoration. In this case, we have the integrity of the soul both as a whole and parts. If the parts are confused, they lose their wholeness, and as a consequence the whole soul loses its integrity. The healing of a 'confused' soul, its salvation in other words, requires therefore both distinction and unification.<sup>13</sup>

A different way of presenting the process of detachment from the senses can be found in *Chapters on Love* III.38-44. Just as the whole treatise, so also this

<sup>10</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 16:75-93, CCSG 7, 109.

<sup>11</sup> *Cf. Qu. Thal.* 16:65-71, CCSG 7, 109.

<sup>12</sup> *Qu. Thal.* 16:26-32, CCSG 7, 105-107.

<sup>13</sup> See also ch. 5 above.



presentation is distinctively Evagrian.<sup>14</sup> The three basic factors in this scheme are: a thing, its mental representation and a passion. A fourth one, the demons, is referred to in III.41. Thus, in Maximus' words:

Thing, representation, passion—all differ. A thing is, for instance, a man, woman, gold, and so on; a representation is a mere recollection of one of these things; passion is unreasonable affection or senseless hate for one of the foregoing.<sup>15</sup>

Maximus is careful to point out that the spiritual warfare is not directed against the things or their images, but the passions and the demons who instigate them.

The God-loving mind does not war against things nor against their representations, but against the passions joined with these representations. Thus he does not war against the woman, nor against him who offends him, nor against their images, but against the passions that are joined with the images.<sup>16</sup>

The monk's whole war is against the demons, that he may separate the passions from the representations. Otherwise he will not be able to look on things with detachment.<sup>17</sup>

Maximus calls the wrong kind of union 'an impassioned representation'. What goes in the mind, and images one carries in one's mind are all right, as long as the mind does not 'get stuck' with the passions. If that happens, and it happens more often than not, the warfare against impassioned representations, or separating images from passions, becomes necessary:

An impassioned representation is a thought compounded of passion and representation. Let us separate the passion from the representation: the thought alone will remain. If we but will, we make this separation by means of spiritual love and self-mastery.<sup>18</sup>

## Unification

But what role does detachment actually play with respect to unification? As we saw earlier on, fragmentation resulted from 'getting stuck' with the senses. The mind was led in different directions with things and unless the mind did something about its impassioned relationship with those objects, it was entirely torn into pieces. *Since Truth and Falsehood live like twins together: Believe not sense, eyes, ears, touch, taste, or smelling, Both Art and Nature's forc'd: put trust in neither.* Now, the pattern in

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<sup>14</sup> See especially his *On Thoughts* 2-3, SC 438, 154-162.

<sup>15</sup> *Carit.* III.42, PG 90, 1029A.

<sup>16</sup> *Carit.* III.40, PG 90, 1028D-1029A.

<sup>17</sup> *Carit.* III.41, PG 90, 1029A.



spiritual life in Maximus' understanding, as we have been presenting it here, is really very symmetrical: fragmentation follows attachment; unification follows detachment.

Detachment enables the mind to observe things simply, as they are. The fragmenting effect of attachment is thus removed. Moreover, detachment makes it possible for the mind to engage in what is called 'natural contemplation', to detect the natural *logoi* in the beings, without being distracted by their material usefulness, for example. In chapter five, we have briefly discussed how the contemplation of nature leads the soul to the source of the *logoi* and the source of unity, who is God himself. Natural contemplation is not a mystical union *per se*, but it certainly has a strong unifying effect on the soul. In *Quaestiones et dubia* 64, Maximus writes:

We, too, must first be lifted up to God and having steeled the soul extend its whole desire to him and then, accordingly, descend to search after beings and regard each one in terms of its own nature, and through them, again be drawn up by contemplative knowledge to their creator. Such a person 'gathers the winds in his bosom,' for he gathers into the bosom of his own heart the diverse *logoi* of beings—which are named figuratively as 'clouds'. Consequently, ... one ought to realize that in gathering the diverse *logoi* in the productive and contemplative part of the heart one brings to birth the one Word of God. For the many *logoi* of beings are gathered into one.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the unifying effects of natural contemplation, detachment allows the intellect to establish itself as the sole governing principle of the soul. In this restored state, the soul is not moved by irrational impulses, but is instead navigated by the rational pilot which can, being detached from the desiring and the incensive parts of the soul, make use of these for the benefit of the whole being.

Reason, instead of being ignorant, ought to move through knowledge to seek solely after God; and through the desiring power, pure of the passion of self-love, it ought to yearn for God alone; and through the incensive power, separated from tyranny, it ought to struggle to attain God alone. and from these [powers of soul] reason ought to create divine and blessed love for which they exist; love which unites a God-loving person to God and manifests him to be God.<sup>20</sup>

Here again we see that the whole matter is about *true Love* and the realization of the twofold commandment of love. 'Love is, as Maximus defines it, 'a good disposition of the soul, according to which one prefers no creature to the knowledge of God.'<sup>21</sup> It is love that unites one to God and manifests him to be God. Deification is quite obviously

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<sup>18</sup> *Carit.* III.43, PG 90, 1029B.

<sup>19</sup> *Qu. dub.* 64:16-30, CCSG 10, 50-51; translated by Adam Cooper.

<sup>20</sup> *Ep.* 2, PG 91, 397AB.



the summit of the mind's journey, and this can be regarded as the end of the first half of the twofold commandment. What deification amounts to, could be summarized in the following.<sup>22</sup>

Human nature in itself is not productive of deification, but rather the deification of man is effected by divine operation. It is something the human person undergoes or 'suffers' (to use the literal meaning of the Greek *πάσχειν*), in other words, deification is something that happens to you. Man who is being deified, has become the receptacle of the divine activity, he has become the material on which God works.

Participation in the divine by the human person, draws him beyond and above the confines of his own nature, which 'going beyond' is often characterized as an 'ecstasy', an ecstasy out of one's nature. This is to be understood as an ecstasy out of, or going beyond, the limitations of the created being, since the participation that makes this possible is participation in the uncreated which is beyond those limitations. (No idea of 'person' emerging out of the necessity of nature can be included in Byzantine usage of the notion of 'ecstasy'.)

Deification is a union of God and man without confusion and without change in essence. Man participates in divine attributes by grace alone and his nature is not turned into the divine nature. The metaphors for deification Maximus makes use of are already familiar from Christology: air transfused by light and incandescent iron.<sup>23</sup> Deification according to the Greek Fathers is a process of transfiguration and sanctification, and not one of transubstantiation. If the Greek Fathers made use of the language of their ancestors—which is only natural—they certainly were quite clear about the difference in content of notions such as *θέωσις*. No Greek Father would claim that the Christian is to become God in the classical sense of becoming Hermas or Zeus from a mortal man, or becoming an object of worship.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Carit.* I.1, PG 90, 691A.

<sup>22</sup> Here I have drawn on Jean-Claude Larchet's extensive study on the topic, *La divinisation de l'homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996), pp. 527-640.

<sup>23</sup> See *Ambig.* 7, PG 91, 1088D. Whether or not the *logos-tropos* distinction is applicable in this context, is discussed by Larchet in *La divinisation*, pp. 605-608.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Acts 14:11-15.



When the movement of the human deification reaches its end, then, Maximus says, the infinite splendours inherent in this nourishment are revealed to the soul, and it becomes God by participation in divine grace, ceasing from all activity of intellect and sense, and at the same time suspending all the natural operations of the body. For the body is deified along with the soul through its own corresponding participation in the process of deification. Thus God alone is made manifest through the soul and the body, since their natural properties have been overcome by the superabundance of his glory.<sup>25</sup>

## Unity of Humanity

The other half of the twofold commandment of love complements the first. It is the active counterpart accomplished through reason of the contemplative love for God of the intellect. Again, this is a matter of serious spiritual warfare: 'For the sake of love, the saints all resist sin continually, finding no meaning in this present life, and they endure many forms of death, that they may be gathered from this world to themselves and to God, and unite in themselves the fractures of nature.'<sup>26</sup> Passions, individual desires, and sin, all divide the one humanity, and it will have become clear by now that *true Love* does not have its seat *in reasons, looks, or passions never seeing, in men on earth, or women's minds partaking*. But *true Love*, that *cannot die* and which *this age expels*, still remains the sole source of unity for the fragmented humanity.<sup>27</sup>

What, then, does this *true Love* consist in? In *Letter 2*, Maximus writes:

These are the marks of love, which binds human beings to God and to one another. ... You, who have become blessed and most genuine lovers of this divine and blessed way, fight the good fight until you reach the end, clinging fast to those qualities that will assure your passage to love's goal. I mean: love of humankind, brotherly and sisterly love, love of the poor, compassion, mercy, humility, meekness, gentleness, patience, freedom from anger, long-suffering, perseverance, kindness, forbearance, goodwill, peace towards all. Out of these and through these the grace of love is fashioned, which leads one to God who deifies the human being that he himself fashioned.<sup>28</sup>

Much of what love amounts to, therefore, has to do with what might be regarded as personal asceticism, consisting in struggle against passions, fasting, individual prayer, and so on. This is something that is often regarded as individualistic, as opposed to the ecclesial and eucharistic forms of devotion. Within the context of the twofold

<sup>25</sup> *Cap. theol.* II.88, PG 90, 1168AB.

<sup>26</sup> *Ep.* 2, PG 91, 404D.

<sup>27</sup> Dowland, 'Tell me', p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> *Ep.* 2, PG 91, 404D-405A; translation in Louth, *Maximus*, pp. 91-92. See also *Carit.* II.9, PG 90, 985CD, where Maximus enumerates the five causes for which human beings love one another.



commandment of love, however, it becomes an entirely necessary means for the reunification of humanity, and an expression of *true Love*.

He who is perfect in love and has attained the summit of detachment knows no difference between 'mine and thine,' between faithful and unfaithful, between slave and freeman, or indeed male and female. Having risen above the tyranny of the passions and looking to nature, one in all men, he considers all equally and is disposed equally towards all. For in him there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither male nor female, neither slave nor freeman, but everything and in all things Christ.<sup>29</sup>

Eucharistic union is in no way in contrast to this but is, on the one hand, the source of invigorating power which becomes the driving force for loving even one's enemies, and on the other hand, it is an iconic fulfilment of the unity of all in Christ. In the *Mystagogia*, Maximus is especially concerned with what the divine grace, present in the Eucharist in a particular way, enables the individual soul to achieve and undergo, and in the *Liber Asceticus* he speaks of a 'power both to imitate Christ and to do well in all his commandments' which Christ gives to those who strive after detachment from the world.

Ascetic struggle and the Eucharist are, we might say, the two poles—opposite war and isolation—between which the pendulum of the human deification oscillates. As long as the pendulum moves, there is time for the *true Love* to find space in those who are still in this world, and who struggle in truth to love God and their neighbour for the sanctification of both soul and body, as well as of the whole of the circumference that their actions cover.

*True Love*, then, that which makes us able to love truly, cannot ultimately be but this power which makes us gods and which at the same time makes us one with God and with one another. It enables a union without confusion and without separation. Also the true philosopher can be no-one else but he whose 'intellectual journey' has led him to become the receptacle of this power. Ultimately, the philosopher becomes a lover of God, who is the only *true Love* and the source of the spiritual love for one's neighbour. The philosopher is, then, a lover of *true Love*, and he becomes a source of love to his neighbours, a kind of luminous tree of Paradise on whose branches those

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<sup>29</sup> *Carit.* II.30, PG 90, 993B.

who are weary shall find rest, whose fruits nourish and sustain them, and whose foliage gives them shelter and consolation.

This is the Saint's mind with which Dowland closes his song on *true Love*:

*O fairest mind, enrich'd with Love's residing,  
Retain the best; in hearts let some seeds fall,  
Instead of weeds Love's fruits may have abiding;  
At Harvest you shall reap increase of all.  
O happy Love, more happy man that finds thee,  
Most happy Saint, that keeps, restores, unbinds thee.*<sup>30</sup>

May the 'intellectual history' of humankind inherit even a fraction of the happiness of the Saint who unbinds the true Love, and may we, each and every one, become true philosophers, 'wisdom-loving minds', possessing and being possessed by the *true Love*, united with God and with one another in a union which knows no confusion or separation.

Many have said much about love. Looking for it among the disciples of Christ will you find it for they alone held the true Love, the teacher of love, of which it is said: If I should have prophecy and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, ... and have not love, it profits me nothing. He then that possesses love, possesses God himself, for God is Love. 'To Him be glory through the ages. Amen.'<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Dowland, 'Tell me', p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> *Carit.* IV.100, PG 90, 1073A.



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<sup>1</sup> *Diversa capita*, PG 90, 1177-1392, is a later compilation of five hundred extracts drawn mainly from Maximus' *Qu. Thal.*, as the editors of the critical text have demonstrated. A number of the chapters come from the scholia on *Qu. Thal.* written literally around the main body of the text in the earliest surviving manuscripts (See, Kirsopp and Silva Lake, *Dated Greek Minuscule Manuscripts to the Year 1200*, vol. 10, [Boston: The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1939], plates 723-725; and Ruth Barbour, *Greek Literary Hands A.D. 400-1600* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981], p. 2.)

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