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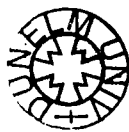
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**Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified:
The Place of the Body in the Theological Vision
of Saint Maximus the Confessor**

Adam Glyn Cooper

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**PhD Thesis
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Abstract

Maximus the Confessor is increasingly being recognised as a theologian of towering ecumenical importance. Here I put to him a question which from the origins of Christian thought until the present constitutes an interpretative crux for catholic Christianity: what is the nature and function of the material order and, specifically, of the human body, in God's creative, redemptive, and perfective economies?

The thesis unfolds in five chapters under the rubrics of epistemology, cosmology, christology, ecclesiology, and spirituality. Each specifies an integral dimension in the Confessor's theological vision through which I engage his central motif: God the Word wills always to be embodied in all things. By virtue of their respective teleological orientation to Christ the incarnate Word, creation, history, and the virtuous life each functions as a pedagogical strategy by which the transcendent God simultaneously conceals and reveals himself with the aim of leading all creation, including the body, into deifying union with himself by grace. Apart from this orientation material diversity possesses a diffuse, divisive character. The insubordination of the sensible and irrational leads to personal and cosmic disorder and the eventual dissolution of spiritual well-being. By virtue of the hypostatic union, the deification of Christ's body and its participation in supernatural modalities do not simply present the pinnacle of moral perfection, but constitute the paradigmatic and definitive renewal of fallen creation. The particular bodily events suffered by Jesus, culminating in his death, form the concrete, causative loci of redemptive, universally effective divine activity. Ritual and ascetic participation in this activity certainly entails intellectual abstraction, but only in conjunction with purification from defiling attachments and ecclesial engagement in the social realisation of divine love.

I conclude that Maximus affirms a constitutive but contingent place for the corporeal relative to its subordination to the divinely instituted primacy of the intelligible.

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Declaration

No part of this thesis has previously been submitted by me for a degree in this
or any other university.

Signed:


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Date:

.....5/3/02.....

Preface and Acknowledgements

Included in the present thesis in revised form are materials I have previously published in a number of periodicals: 'Maximus the Confessor and the Structural Dynamics of Revelation', *Vigiliae Christianae* 55 (2001), 161-186; "Sufferings Wonders' and 'Wonderful Sufferings': Maximus the Confessor and his fifth *Ambiguum*', *Sobornost* 23:2 (2001), 45-58; and 'St. Maximus the Confessor on Priesthood, Hierarchy, and Rome', *Pro Ecclesia* 10 (2001), 346-367. While I have felt free to adopt and adapt existing translations of all the sources, I have on the whole based my quotations from Maximus upon the Greek text.

The production of this thesis has from its inception been a collaborative effort, though all the customary caveats regarding its remaining weaknesses apply. My sincere thanks go first to my spiritual and academic mentors Doctors Vic Pfitzner, John Kleinig, and Elmore Leske of Luther Seminary, South Australia, and to my supervisor at the University of Durham, Professor Andrew Louth. I have also benefited immeasurably from input along the way from Professor Robert Wilken of the University of Virginia, Professor Stephen Sykes of St John's College, Durham, Dr Richard Price from Heythrop College, London, and research colleagues in Durham Mika Törönen and Augustine Casiday.

Leisure to engage in research was made possible by leave granted to me by the College of Presidents of the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA), as well as by generous financial aid from many quarters: the Standing Committee on Scholarships (LCA); the J.G. Rechner Scholarship (Luther Seminary); the Van Mildert, Evans, and De Bury Scholarships (Department of Theology, University of Durham); an anonymous benefactor from the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, and many other generous friends and parishes. Mention must be made of my parents and parents-in-law for their abiding moral support. Last but

by no means least, I should like to acknowledge the faithful love of my wife Lizzy and son Benjamin, whose companionship on this journey has been for me a source of profound joy.

Advent, 2001

Durham, England

Stammering, we echo the heights of God as best we can....

Pope Gregory the Great

List of Abbreviations

Works by Maximus

<i>Amb.Io.</i>	<i>Ambigua ad Ioannem</i>
<i>Amb.Th.</i>	<i>Ambigua ad Thomam</i>
<i>Cap. XV</i>	<i>Capita XV</i>
<i>Car.</i>	<i>Capita de caritate</i>
<i>DP</i>	<i>Disputatio cum Pyrrho</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Ep.Max.</i>	<i>Maximi Epistola ad Anastasium monachum discipulum</i>
<i>LA</i>	<i>Liber asceticus</i>
<i>Myst.</i>	<i>Mystagogia</i>
<i>Opusc.</i>	<i>Opuscula theologica et polemica</i>
<i>Or.dom.</i>	<i>Expositio orationis dominicae</i>
<i>Th.Oec.</i>	<i>Capita theologica et oeconomica</i>
<i>QD</i>	<i>Quaestiones et dubia</i>
<i>Q.Thal.</i>	<i>Quaestiones ad Thalassium</i>

Works related to Maximus' life

<i>DB</i>	<i>Disputatio Bizyae cum Theodosio</i>
<i>Ep.Anast.</i>	<i>Anastasio Apocrisiarum epistola ad Theodosium Gangrensem</i>
<i>Hypom.</i>	<i>Hypomnesticum</i>
<i>RM</i>	<i>Relatio motionis</i>

Other Ancient Authors and Works

<i>Ath.</i>	Athanasius
<i>Ath.Ar.</i>	<i>Orationes contra Arianos</i>
<i>Ath.Inc.</i>	<i>De incarnatione</i>
<i>Aug.</i>	Augustine
<i>Aug.Conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones</i>
<i>Aug.Serm.</i>	<i>Sermones</i>
<i>Bas.</i>	Basil of Caesarea
<i>Bas.Spir.</i>	<i>De spiritu sancto</i>
<i>Bas.Hex.</i>	<i>Homiliae in hexaemeron</i>
<i>2 Clem.</i>	2 Clement
<i>Clem.</i>	Clement of Alexandria
<i>Clem.Paed.</i>	<i>Paedagogus</i>
<i>Clem.Prot.</i>	<i>Protrepticus</i>
<i>Clem.Str.</i>	<i>Stromateis</i>
<i>Cyp.</i>	Cyprian of Carthage
<i>Cyp.Ep.</i>	<i>Epistula</i>
<i>Cyr.</i>	Cyril of Alexandria
<i>Cyr.Job.</i>	<i>Commentarii in Iob.</i>

	Cyr. <i>Luc.</i>	<i>Fragmenta commentarii in Luc.</i>
Diad.		Diadochus of Photike
	Diad. <i>Cap.</i>	<i>Capita gnostica</i>
Dion.Ar.		Dionysius the Areopagite
	<i>De coel.hier.</i>	<i>De coelesti hierarchia</i>
	<i>De div.nom.</i>	<i>De divinis nominibus</i>
	<i>De ecc.hier.</i>	<i>De ecclesiastica hierarchia</i>
	<i>De myst.theol.</i>	<i>De mystica theologia</i>
	<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
Eus.		Eusebius of Caesarea
	Eus. <i>H.e.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
Evag.		Evagrius Ponticus
	Evag. <i>Keph.</i>	<i>Kephalaia gnostica</i>
	Evag. <i>Mel.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Melaniam</i>
	Evag. <i>Prak.</i>	<i>Capita practica ad Anatolium [Praktikos]</i>
Greg.Naz.		Gregory Nazianzen
	Greg.Naz. <i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
	Greg.Naz. <i>Or.</i>	<i>Orationes</i>
	Greg.Naz. <i>Praec.</i>	<i>Praecepta ad virgines</i>
Gr.Pal.		Gregory Palamas
	Gr.Pal. <i>Tr.</i>	<i>Triads</i>
Greg.Nyss.		Gregory of Nyssa
	Greg.Nyss. <i>Anim. et res.</i>	<i>De anima et resurrectione</i>
	Greg.Nyss. <i>Cant.</i>	<i>Homiliae in Cant.</i>
	Greg.Nyss. <i>Opif.</i>	<i>De hominis opificio</i>
	Greg.Nyss. <i>Or.cat.</i>	<i>Oratio catechetica</i>
	Greg.Nyss. <i>Tres dii</i>	<i>Quod non sint tres dii</i>
	Greg.Nyss. <i>Virg.</i>	<i>De virginitate</i>
	Greg.Nyss. <i>V.Mos.</i>	<i>De vita Moysis</i>
Herm.		Hermas
	Herm. <i>Vis.</i>	<i>Visiones pastoris</i>
Ign.		Ignatius of Antioch
	Ign. <i>Polyc.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Polycarpum</i>
	Ign. <i>Rom.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Romanos</i>
Iren.		Irenaeus
	Iren. <i>Haer.</i>	<i>Adversus haereses</i>
Joh.D.		John Damascene
	Joh.D. <i>Imag.</i>	<i>De sacris imaginibus orationes</i>
Justn.		Justinian I
	Justn. <i>Conf.</i>	<i>Confessio rectae fidei</i>
Leo		Leo I (Pope)
	Leo. <i>Tom.</i>	<i>Epistula 28 (ad Flavium)</i>
Nem.		Nemesius of Emesa
	Nem. <i>Nat.hom.</i>	<i>De natura hominis</i>
Or.		Origen
	Or. <i>Cant.</i>	<i>Commentarius in Cant.</i>
	Or. <i>Cels.</i>	<i>Contra Celsum</i>
	Or. <i>Gen.</i>	<i>Homiliae in Gen.</i>
	Or. <i>Herac.</i>	<i>Dialogus cum Heraclide</i>
	Or. <i>Joh.</i>	<i>Commentarii in Ioh.</i>
	Or. <i>Lev.</i>	<i>Homiliae in Lev.</i>

Or.Matt.	<i>Commentariorum in Matt.</i>
Or.Princ.	<i>De principiis</i>
Tert.	Tertullian
Tert.Prax.	<i>Adversus Praxean</i>
Tert.Res.	<i>De resurrectione mortuorum</i>

Periodicals, Collections and Reference Works

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
CCSA	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum</i>
CCSG	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca</i>
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Latina</i>
CCT, 1	A. Grillmeier, <i>Christ in Christian Tradition</i> , vol. 1
CCT, 2.1	A. Grillmeier, <i>Christ in Christian Tradition</i> , vol. 2, part 1
CCT, 2.2	A. Grillmeier, <i>Christ in Christian Tradition</i> , vol. 2, part 2
CH	<i>Church History</i>
CS	Cistercian Studies
GCS	<i>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte</i>
GNO	W. Jaeger et al., <i>Gregorii Nysseni Opera</i>
J ECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
J EH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
J TS NS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies, New Series</i>
Lampe, PGL	G.W.H. Lampe, <i>A Patristic Greek Lexicon</i> .
LCL	<i>The Loeb Classical Library</i>
LXX	<i>The Septuagint</i>
NPNF	P. Schaff, <i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series</i> , 14 vols.
OCP	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i>
PG	J.-P. Migne, <i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca</i> , 161 vols.
RAM	<i>Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique</i>
Riedinger, ACO ser. II.1	R. Riedinger, <i>Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum, series II, vol. 1: Concilium Lateranense a. 649 celebratum</i>
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
Schwartz, ACO I.1.i	E. Schwartz, <i>Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum, tomus I, vol. 1, pars i: Concilium Universale Ephesenum</i>
Schwartz, ACO II.1.i	E. Schwartz, <i>Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum, tomus II, vol. 1, pars i: Concilium Universale Chalcedonense</i>
Schwartz, ACO II.2.i	E. Schwartz, <i>Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum, tomus II, vol. 2, pars prior: Concilium Universale Chalcedonense</i>
SP	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TS	<i>Theological Studies</i>
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>

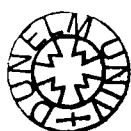
INTRODUCTION

Caro salutis est cardo. The flesh is the hinge of salvation. By these words with their recognisably Johannine ring, Tertullian testifies in his *De resurrectione mortuorum* to a priority of the corporeal over the spiritual in the Church's primary sacramental acts.¹ For the Fathers who followed him, whether Latin or Greek, the corporeal was likewise regarded as occupying a constitutive place not only in the sacramental realm, but in the whole soteriological order as well. Alexandrian christology in particular, which in the Third and Fourth Ecumenical Councils was to achieve normative status for all catholic christendom, was marked by the soteriological principle that 'that alone is redeemed which is taken by Christ in the Incarnation',² a principle extending to the very material dust from which man was formed in Eden by God. In Christ's very flesh, itself the flesh of God the eternal Word, lies the world's healing and salvation.

This distinctly incarnational character of Christian faith and life has to a great extent always been recognised and vigorously defended by adherents of the catholic tradition as somehow constitutive of Christianity. In recent decades however, perhaps in view of a resurgence of neo-gnostic and reductionistic trends in the modern period in general and in contemporary ecclesial life in particular, we are noticing an increasingly urgent movement that seeks in continuity with mainstream tradition to define and locate catholic Christianity by external, bodily means. The 'Theologies of the Body' inspired by the personalist and incarnational emphases in the teaching of Pope John Paul II suggest

¹ *Tert.Res.* 8.2 (CCSL 2, 931.6-7).

² *CCT*, volume 1, 366. Cf. *Iren.Haer.* 2.22.4; 5.14.1-4; *Or.Herac.* (SC 67, 70.35-37): 'The whole human being would not have been saved if he [the Saviour and Lord] had not assumed the whole human being'; *Greg.Naz.Ep.* 101 (SC 208, I.32).



themselves as one example of such a response.³ In her book especially dedicated to the Holy Father entitled *Toward a Theology of the Body*, Franciscan Mary Timothy Prokes argues that ‘the genuineness and the intrinsic meaning of Christ’s embodiment touches each of the central tenets of faith.’⁴ She concurs with Cipriano Vagaggini’s claim that ‘the physical body of Christ possesses a function *that is always active and permanent and even eternal*.’⁵ It follows that ‘when the *corporeal* reality of Christ’s life, death and resurrection is open to vague interpretations the basic meaning of Christianity disintegrates.’⁶

Prokes’ is not a lone voice. Her concerns laudably echo the anti-docetic and anti-gnostic sentiments of nearly two millenia of Christian thought. Yet it may plausibly be advanced that there is equally discernible throughout the Church’s life what has been called a ‘tradition of inwardness’, a fundamental intuition that ‘inwardness qualifies the external dimensions of Christianity.’⁷ What exactly is this ‘inwardness’? Is it the inwardness of a Friedrich Schleiermacher, who conceived Christian redemption in terms of a subjective, inward ‘feeling of dependence’ and a consequent actualisation of God-consciousness?⁸ Is it the inwardness of an Adolf von Harnack who, like Schleiermacher, idealised adherence to an inner gospel essence purged from all formal, external, historically conditioned criteria?⁹ Is it even the inwardness of much of what passes these days for ‘mysticism’ – perhaps the kind promulgated by Aldous Huxley in *The Perennial Philosophy* which suspects sacramental Christianity of ‘an idolatrous preoccupation with events and things in time – events and

³ See Benedict Ashley, *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (Braintree, MA: The Pope John Center, 1985).

⁴ *Toward a Theology of the Body* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 63.

⁵ *Toward a Theology of the Body*, 62, quoting Cipriano Vagaggini, *The Flesh Instrument of Salvation: A Theology of the Human Body* (Staten Island, NY: Society of St Paul, 1969), 16.

⁶ *Toward a Theology of the Body*, 139.

⁷ Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth* (London: SPCK, 1984), 35-44.

⁸ *The Christian Faith*, trans. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989).

⁹ *What is Christianity?*, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1957).

things regarded not merely as useful means, but as ends, intrinsically sacred and indeed divine’¹⁰ If so, then it is no wonder that those committed to realising the fully-rounded contours of sacramental Christianity might be wary of any talk of a ‘tradition of inwardness.’ With its abstract, idealistic appeals to disincarnate foundations for the spiritual life, this kind of inwardness is increasingly being identified as symptomatic of a post-Cartesian dualism that dominates modern Protestant thought. Not surprisingly we are noticing not a few Protestants themselves issuing a call to return to externals, to reformulate the very definition of *spiritual* theology by resurrecting its visible, concrete, *carne* roots. According to Episcopalian Owen Thomas, such a renewal ‘will involve an emphasis on the outer life as the major source of the inner life and, thus, a renewed stress on the body and communal and public life as well as a renewed focus on participation in the reign of God as the center of the Christian life, including a renewed emphasis on moral and liturgical practice in Christian formation.’¹¹

Where does early Christianity feature in this tension or indeed, in this contemporary cry for the retrieval and concrete realisation in ecclesial life of the incarnational mystery in its fullness? We saw above that for Tertullian and the normative christological tradition the reality of God’s external enfleshment in Christ, Church and sacraments determines the very validity of the ‘inner’ spiritual quest. Yet in the view of some contemporary thinkers the Fathers cannot be taken as entirely unambiguous proponents of the full-blooded, somatic Christianity needed in our time. For some the Fathers appear to exemplify that ‘tradition of inwardness’ in a way which subverts the primacy of the external order established by the Incarnation and so threatens the integrity

¹⁰ (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), 63.

of bodily life. In an essay originally published in 1939 but only recently translated into English (1997), no less-devoted a student of the Fathers than Hans Urs von Balthasar, once described by Henri de Lubac as ‘perhaps the most learned man of our time,’¹² spoke critically of what he saw as a movement evident in the Greek Fathers especially that ‘proceeds unambiguously away from the material to the spiritual.’ In his view a dogma as basic to incarnational Christianity as the resurrection of the body, while ‘formally confessed and maintained’ by the Fathers, sits uneasily within a worldview in which the flesh occupies at best a liminal plane. ‘Spiritualization,’ he summarises disapprovingly, ‘presented in a thousand different colorations, is the basic tendency of the patristic epoch.’¹³

In response we want only to affirm at this stage the fact that in the writings of the great catholic doctors of the ancient Church and in those Christian spiritual and intellectual traditions whose springs run as deep, there appears an ordering - equally sensitive to the perils of docetism or dualism - in which the spiritual *does* have priority over the material, and indeed *must* do so, if theology and with it all reality is to avoid plunging into a nihilistic, materialist chaos. What should be noted, however, and this might cause us to stop and revisit at least some of our assumptions, is that the Fathers pose this priority not primarily in terms of a strict opposition between the spiritual and material *per se*, but in terms of an eschatologically oriented order (*taxis*) in which the external and material dimensions become charged with efficacious, performative potency precisely and *exclusively* in their subordinate relation to the ‘internal’, spiritual sphere.

¹¹ Owen C. Thomas, ‘Interiority and Christian Spirituality,’ *The Journal of Religion* 80 (2000), 60; see also George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984), 33-41; David S. Yeago, ‘Sacramental Lutheranism at the End of the Modern Age,’ *Lutheran Forum* 34:4 (2000), 6-16.

¹² Henri de Lubac, *Un témoin dans l’Eglise: Hans Urs von Balthasar, Paradoxe et Mystère de l’Eglise* (Paris, 1967), 186, quoted by Angelo Scola, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Theological Style* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 14.

¹³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, ‘The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves,’ *Communio* 24 (1997), 375. Originally published in *Theologie der Zeit* 3 (1939), 65-104.

This brings us to the scope and parameters of this study. It began some years ago in my mind in the form of a simple question: what happens to *the body* when it becomes a co-participant in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4)? This appears, at first glance, a somewhat naive query, until one discovers that bound up with it is the whole question as to the status and function of the material order in God's creative and redemptive economies, and thus the question as to the status and function of the sacraments, symbols, and structures which have come definitively to characterise the speech and life of the 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.' In what follows I bring this question to a learned monk who is undoubtedly one of the profoundest of Byzantine saints and perhaps the most faithful and fertile representative of the entire Greek patristic tradition: Maximus the Confessor (580-662). Contemporary scholarship almost universally recognises the genius and towering ecumenical significance of this man: he is 'the real father of Byzantine theology,'¹⁴ 'the leading theologian of his era in the Greek East, probably in the entire church,'¹⁵ 'one of the outstanding thinkers of all time,'¹⁶ 'a *defensor fidei*, both with a singular intellectual perspicacity and with an invincible firmness of character,'¹⁷ whose work 'synthesises and condenses the essential heart of the spiritual and doctrinal experience of the great patristic era.'¹⁸ Moreover, Maximus is also acknowledged to have afforded a particularly positive place for the body and the material world in his theological vision. He demonstrates 'a

¹⁴ John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), 131.

¹⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, 'Council or Father or Scripture': The Concept of Authority in the Theology of Maximus Confessor', in David Neiman and Margaret Schatkin (eds.), *The Heritage of the Early Church: Essays in Honor of the Very Reverend George Vasilievich Florovsky* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 195, Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1973), 277.

¹⁶ Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 7.

¹⁷ C.J. de Vogel, 'Platonism and Christianity: A Mere Antagonism or a Profound Common Ground?', *VC* 39 (1985), 38.

¹⁸ I.-H. Dalmais, quoted by Alain Riou, *Le Monde et L'Église selon Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1973), 33.

positive evaluation of the empirical man as such',¹⁹ 'a healthy appreciation of the nature of created realities',²⁰ an appreciation which attains its 'culminating point' in his soteriologically motivated insistence upon the full integrity of Christ's human nature.²¹ According to Orthodox scholar Panayiotis Nellas, even 'dust' is no longer simply 'matter' for Maximus, but 'carries in actual fact the "principle" and the "form" of man.'²² 'Beyond a theology and mysticism which is all too alien to the world,' Maximus' synthesis of the sensible and spiritual in the human being is said to amount to nothing less than a recovery of 'the tradition of genuine hellenistic humanism.'²³ These contemporary commendations could be ratified by even the most cursory evaluation of Maximus' integral influence on the subsequent Greek theological tradition. It is on the basis of Maximus' dyophysite christology that John Damascene could point to the physical body of Christ as the concrete means of bodily participation in God.²⁴ It is Maximus whom Gregory Palamas cites with approval against the intellectualists of his own day when he affirms, 'the body is deified along with the soul.'²⁵

But if Maximus is thought to contribute so unambiguously to the affirmation of the constitutive status and function of the material order in God's scheme of bringing the universe to perfection, what are we to make of his equally unambiguous ascetic austerity and esoteric mysticism in which, in Balthasar's early view, 'he relapses in many respects into

¹⁹ Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Chicago: Open Court, 2nd ed. 1995), 95.

²⁰ George C. Berthold (trans.), *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings* (Classics of Western Spirituality, New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 98 fn195.

²¹ See the commentary of Dumitru Staniloae on *Amb.Io.* 42 in Emmanuel Ponsoye (ed. and trans.), *Saint Maxime le Confesseur. Ambigua* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Ancre, 1994), 502.

²² Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: The Nature of the Human Person*, trans. Norman Russell (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), 65.

²³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie: Das Weltbild Maximus' des Bekenner* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 2nd ed. 1988), 289.

²⁴ *Joh.D.Imag.* 1.19; 2.14.

²⁵ *Gr.Pal.Tr.* 1.iii.37.

a Monophysite-tinged spiritualism?’²⁶ There can be no mistaking the severity of Maximus’ purificatory program in which he calls on his readers to ‘subject the flesh to the spirit, mortifying and enslaving it by every sort of ill-treatment.’²⁷ The active contempt for visible phenomena exercised by the true Christian gnostic must extend ‘even [to] his own body.’²⁸ The monk must be on vigilant guard against the constant inducement by the passion of self-love ‘to have mercy on his body’ (ἐλεεῖν τὸ σῶμα).²⁹ Do not these few examples of what Polycarp Sherwood once referred to as ‘excessive spiritualisation’³⁰ indicate an inconsistency regarding the claims made about Maximus, or worse, an inconsistency within the Confessor’s own theological and spiritual vision? Are they not indicative of deep-seated sympathies with an intellectualist ascetico-theological tradition that in recent years has been popularly dubbed as ‘iconoclastic’?³¹

Our answers to these questions will depend largely not only on the evidence we discover in Maximus’ writings themselves, but also on the manner in which we approach that evidence and the hermeneutical tools we employ to interpret it. It is our purpose from here on in our introduction to provide the barest prolegomenon that will help us situate Maximus’ thought within its historical, intellectual, and social contexts. Only with these basic presuppositions in place can we hope to deal fairly and intelligently with what he has to say about the material order, and so offer any judgement with respect to the claims made about him and the traditions he so conscientiously struggled to embody.

²⁶ ‘The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves’, 376.

²⁷ Ὑποτάξωμεν τὴν σάρκα τῷ πνεύματι, ὑποπιάζοντες καὶ δουλαγωγούμεντες διὰ πάσης κακοπαθείας. LA 41 (CCSG 40, 109.927-928). References to critical editions are by volume, page, and line number.

²⁸ Car. 1.6.

²⁹ Car. 2.60.

³⁰ Polycarp Sherwood, ‘Exposition and Use of Scripture in St Maximus as manifest in the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*’, OCP 24 (1958), 207.

³¹ Elizabeth A. Clark, ‘New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy: Human Embodiment and Ascetic Strategies’, CH 59 (1990), 152-154.

Let us begin by citing Balthasar yet again, who in his acclaimed *magnum opus* highlighted the continuity of Christian thought with its cultural context in Late Antiquity, casting the ancient philosophy of the Greek world in the mould of a ‘theological aesthetic.’³² Neoplatonist and Christian stand side by side when they maintain in contemplating the visible world that, for all its inherent vulnerability and transience, it is ‘the epiphany of divine glory.’³³ Both recognise in creation a mysterious, divine quality that precludes any kind of simple, outright rejection of material reality as evil. It should come as no surprise, then, that there emerged throughout the course of Late Antiquity strong and certain relations between Christian and pagan accounts of the metaphysical structure of reality. For it was precisely that which the intellectual traditions of classical culture valued as vital and lasting and real that contributed to the Church’s ability to forge solid intellectual and philosophical foundations for its lived experience of faith – a faith that sees the cosmos as the arena of divine salvation.³⁴ From a purely historical perspective, Plato’s *Timaeus* and Plotinus’ *Enneads* served as vital a role as Moses’ *Genesis* and Solomon’s *Wisdom* in the development and reception of the Christian doctrine of creation. Indeed many of the greatest Christian thinkers, much to the chagrin of anti-Christian polemicists like Celsus, Julian and Porphyry, understood the Christian faith as somehow completing or perfecting the wisdom of the philosophers. Origen’s magisterial apology against Celsus often involves the Alexandrian doctor in a playful championing of Plato against the would-be Platonist.³⁵

³² *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, volume 4: *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, trans. Brian McNeil *et al.*, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 323.

³³ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, volume 4, 323. Gerhart B. Ladner refers to the common ‘experience of a world pervaded by the divine’ in *God, Cosmos, and Humankind: The World of Early Christian Symbolism*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), 2.

³⁴ See de Vogel, ‘Platonism and Christianity’, 1-62; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

³⁵ *Or.Cels.* 4.62; 7.42-43.

Not all modern scholars have proved as confident as Balthasar in championing this shared belief about the epiphanic character of the cosmos as the fertile ground for the development of what came definitively to characterise catholic Christianity. For Harnack, whose influence remains pervasive, the Fathers' readiness to think within the terms and framework provided by classical culture provides sure evidence that the original evangelical *kerygma* had become corrupted and an absolutist, intellectualist system of natural religion established in its stead.³⁶ With reference to what he calls 'Greek Catholicism' for example he writes:

In its external form as a whole this Church is nothing more than a continuation of the history of Greek religion under the alien influence of Christianity, parallel to the many other alien influences which have affected it. We might also describe it as the natural product of the union between Hellenism, itself already in a state of oriental decay, and Christian teaching; it is the transformation which history effects in a religion by "natural" means.... [T]his official ecclesiasticism with its priests and its cult, with all its vessels, saints, vestments, pictures and amulets, with its ordinances of fasting and its festivals, has absolutely nothing to do with the religion of Christ.³⁷

Yet the nearly universal Christian self-adaptation to Greek culture was by no means indiscriminate. Throughout the Church's early life there can be witnessed a broad range of responses towards non-Christian philosophy, ranging from far-going acceptance to outright hostility. Nor was such critical tension confined to the first few centuries. In the sixth and seventh centuries, right at the threshold of the decline in formal education in

³⁶ *What is Christianity?*, 210-245.

³⁷ *What is Christianity?*, 221, 241.

classical culture in all but elite circles,³⁸ there can still be observed a noticeable discomfort felt by certain Christian groups – particularly by monastic communities in Syria and Palestine - towards any kind of proximity between Christian doctrine and non-Christian ('Hellenic') intellectual culture and categories of thought.³⁹ In the mind of many orthodox monks and bishops, there *were* limits to the intellectual and conceptual continuities between Christian and non-Christian thought. Nor were these sentiments confined to the Greek east. In the famous utterance of Saint Augustine, the Platonists indeed taught that 'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,' but they said nothing about the fact that this Word 'became flesh and dwelt among us.'⁴⁰ Plato's eternity of the soul; Aristotle's necessity of being; the Stoics' dissolution and rebirth of all things: each involved assumptions and included implications at no uncertain odds with data reaching back to a tradition predating Plato or Socrates, yet relatively 'new' in form in the *kerygma* of the Church: a creation out of nothing; a God made flesh; a resurrected body.⁴¹

At the heart of this tension lay the status of material and temporal reality – whether cosmic or bodily. Throughout the patristic era the Incarnation, or more specifically, 'the *logos* of the cross', retained its character as 'a scandal to Jews and folly to Greeks' (1 Cor 1:18-25). And it was within this tension that, six centuries after Saint Paul, Saint Maximus himself lived and wrote. And as it was for the Apostle so it was for the Confessor a fruitful, productive tension. For it is specifically within the context of his works directed to a bishop directly involved in conflicts arising from this tension that we find the fundamental

³⁸ Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity AD 150-750* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 172-187; Averil Cameron, 'The Language of Images: The Rise of Icons and Christian Representation', in Diana Wood (ed.), *The Church and the Arts* (Studies in Church History 28, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 2-3.

³⁹ See Cyril Mango's comments in John Meyendorff, 'Byzantium as Center of Theological Thought in the Christian East', in Patrick Henry (ed.), *Schools of Thought in the Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 66.

⁴⁰ *Aug. Conf.* 7.9.13.

⁴¹ Georges Florovsky, 'Eschatology in the Patristic Age: An Introduction', *SP* 2 (1957), 235-250.

elements of his cosmic ontology - elements that allow us to trace in his theology the *constitutive* place of the corporeal in God's work of deifying all creation.

Having mentioned his monastic context, we must not overlook the profoundly material dimensions inherent to the intellectual milieu in which Maximus' moved. Monasticism was not only nor even primarily a *negative* movement. Even the early eremitic movements of the fourth century were as much about embracing a certain social and spiritual reality as they were about rejecting the false conditions imposed on them by political and worldly existence. The monks could commit themselves to a life of spiritual and bodily struggle and impose severe limitations upon their bodies, not because they held any kind of gnostic contempt for materiality as such, but, as Peter Brown observes, 'because they were convinced that they could sweep the body into a desperate venture... – the imagined transfiguration of the few great ascetics, on earth, spoke to them of the eventual transfiguration of their own bodies on the day of the Resurrection.'⁴² Here is hinted at the forcefully eschatological focus of monasticism: the prophetic orientation of the whole person – soul and body – toward a perfection only fully realised in another realm. But as Brown points out, albeit somewhat sceptically, for a rare few this transfigured, perfect state had already been realised here on earth.⁴³ In continuity with the monasticism of the desert tradition preserved over the centuries in monastic literature and practice, Maximus looked to the great saints of the past – Abraham, Moses, Elijah, the Apostles – as prototypical monks who had experienced this transfiguration 'while still in the flesh.'⁴⁴ For those who through divine grace and personal effort become 'another

⁴² Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 222.

⁴³ Kallistos Ware provides both ancient and contemporary testimonies of bodily transfiguration in 'The Transfiguration of the Body', in A.M. Allchin (ed.), *Sacrament and Image: Essays in the Christian Understanding of Man* (London: The Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, 1967), 17-32.

⁴⁴ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1124B).

Abraham' or 'another Moses' there is effective in the soul *and the body* the deifying presence of God. Indeed, through *askesis* the body becomes an instrumental player and crucial participator in human redemption - in Brown's words, 'the discreet mentor of the proud soul.'⁴⁵ 'Seldom, in ancient thought,' he remarks,

had the body been seen as more deeply implicated in the transformation of the soul; and never was it made to bear so heavy a burden. For the Desert Fathers, the body was not an irrelevant part of the human person, that could, as it were, be "put in brackets." ... It was, rather, grippingly present to the monk: he was to speak of it as "this body, that God has afforded me, as a field to cultivate, where I might work and become rich."⁴⁶

There is more we could add to fill out the picture. Maximus' life, much more than ours, would have been affected by the fragile variabilities of day and night, cold and heat, seasons and harvest, war and peace. How much more then would the steady rhythms of the monastic *ordo* – fasting, feasts, vigils, almsgiving, psalmody, prayer, *lectio divina* – have penetrated and transformed and given stability to his existential experience of transience and flux.⁴⁷ For all his heady profundity, here is a man immersed in the earthy conditions of monastic life with its ascetic discipline, social obligations, sacramental rites, veneration of icons and the relics of departed saints, hierarchical ecclesiastical government, not to mention the intricate and intriguing connections with the world of international politics.

Turning to evaluate Maximus' writings as a whole, we notice that they are predominantly occasional, such that 'it is the rhythm of spiritual life rather than a logical

⁴⁵ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 237.

⁴⁶ *The Body and Society*, 236.

connection of ideas which defines the architectonics of his vision of the world....⁴⁸ His works therefore exhibit those literary forms whose roots lie deep in monastic sapiential, pedagogical, and exegetical tradition: questions and responses, chapters, scriptural and liturgical commentary, letters, and later, when the need demanded, polemical dogmatic treatises. These forms do not dictate his thought, but are woven together with pedagogical, pastoral, and dogmatic concerns within a heuristic approach that never loses sight of its pragmatic purpose.⁴⁹

All these factors which for the most part must be presumed constitute 'the living *praxis*'⁵⁰ from which the Confessor's philosophical theology emerged. They suggest further that however deep the level of intellectual speculation Maximus attained, however high his estimation of intelligible over sensible reality, both his feet, like Socrates', were firmly planted on the ground.⁵¹ Yet it is, perhaps, the certain *liminality* which Burton-Christie regards as so characteristic of the monastic life⁵² that best accounts both for Maximus' keen sense of the simultaneously contingent yet necessary place of the corporeal in the ascent towards perfection, and so too for our fascination with the material and structural dimensions of his doctrine of deification that form the subject of this study.

One or two final points may be noted. Our theme provides us with the advantage of being a unique and relatively accessible angle of approach to Maximus' frequently

⁴⁷ For a reconstruction of details in the (earlier) monastic office in the east, see Paul F. Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church: A Study of the Origin and Early Development of the Divine Office* (London: Alcuin Club/SPCK, 1981), 93-110.

⁴⁸ Georges Florovsky, *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, volume 9: *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century* (Vaduz: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 213.

⁴⁹ This fact is demonstrated in Paul M. Blowers' outstanding thesis, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy in Maximus the Confessor: An Investigation of the Quaestiones ad Thalassium* (Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 7, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

⁵⁰ Pierre Hadot, quoted in the Introduction to his *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. and ed. Arnold I. Davidson and Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 19.

⁵¹ *Phaedo* 61d.

⁵² Douglas Burton-Christie, 'Into the Body of Another: Eros, Embodiment and Intimacy with the Natural World', *Anglican Theological Review* 81 (1999), 22.

impenetrable theological mind. While the human body has formed the focus of other, more narrowly anthropological studies in Scripture,⁵³ Paul,⁵⁴ Athanasius,⁵⁵ Gregory of Nyssa,⁵⁶ the Greek Christian tradition,⁵⁷ the Latin Christian tradition,⁵⁸ and in early Christian theology in general,⁵⁹ never has the deification of the body been the primary focus of any single study in Maximian scholarship, nor the catalyst for a wider consideration of the epistemological, ontological, christological, liturgical, and ascetical significance of corporeality and the material order in Maximus' overall theological vision. Primarily to avoid introducing issues extrinsic to Maximus' immediate range of thought, I have in this thesis deliberately omitted discussion of contemporary questions raised about the body in social anthropology, gender studies, and the new school of 'radical orthodoxy'. It is, nevertheless, at one and the same time a technical study in historical theology and a spiritual-theological apology, on the one hand offering detailed contextual and material analysis of relevant texts and the structure of Maximus' thought, and on the other appealing to the abiding import – spiritual and intellectual – of the patristic tradition as mediated via one of its most erudite exponents.

Due simply to the overall coherence of Maximus' thought - his ability to contain the whole of his immense vision within each of its parts - the five chapters in which this thesis has been arranged function as mere windows through which we shall attempt to view discrete themes that he would have considered inseparable from one another. What holds

⁵³ John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000).

⁵⁴ J.A.T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1952).

⁵⁵ Alvyn Pettersen, *Athanasius and the Human Body* (Bristol: Bristol Press, 1990).

⁵⁶ Reinhard M. Hübner, *Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa: Untersuchungen zum Ursprung der Physischen Erlösungslehre* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974).

⁵⁷ Kallistos Ware, "My helper and my enemy": the body in Greek Christianity', in Sarah Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 90-110.

⁵⁸ C.W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

them together will hopefully become most apparent in our chapter on *Corporeality and Christ* which, standing at the centre of the entire study, occupies a symbolic place that may well have pleased the Confessor himself. For it is Christ who, in all his concrete, bodily glory, stands as the unifying centre of all Maximus' own thought. Indeed, Maximus did not simply think *about* Christ, but referring all he experienced and knew to him, regarded him as his very life, in whom he hoped to come to participate in the concrete reality of the blessings to come, and whom alone he acknowledged together with the Father and the Holy Spirit to be glorified by all creation.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Margaret R. Miles, *Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Asceticism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981).

⁶⁰ *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 73.829-834).

CHAPTER ONE

Corporeality and Revelation

*A man that looks on glass
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heav'n espy.¹*

Towards the evening of his philosophical and literary career, Plato put forward a proposal in his *Timaeus* that for many centuries after him came increasingly to possess the force of an epistemological axiom: "To discover the maker and father of this universe is indeed a hard task, and having found him it would be impossible to tell everyone about him."² Later generations of philosophers found encapsulated in these words two vital principles. The first expressed the fact of God's relative inaccessibility to human modes of rational inquiry. The second concerned the inadequacy of human modes of discourse to convey knowledge of God should such knowledge become available. The problem these two principles present for the 'lover of wisdom' is not simply one of communication. It is rather one of communion. To know God is not to know about him but to be united to him, and to be united to him one must be like him. But God is infinite, while humans are evidently finite. God is immortal; humans are mortal. God is spirit: simple, incorporeal; humans are corporeal composites: rational souls mingled with the dust of the earth. God is holy and

¹ George Herbert, *The Elixir*, lines 9-12, in John N. Wall (ed.), *George Herbert: The Country Parson, The Temple* (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1981), 311.

² *Timaeus* 28c.

impassible; humans are impure - subject to all kinds of impulses from without and within. The pursuit of union with God presupposes that the yawning gulf between knower and known can be bridged. But can it?

In this opening chapter we shall explore further the implications this epistemological problem suggests for the status and function of the material universe and, more specifically, for the status and function of the human body. In Platonist philosophies both these entities, on account of their inherent plurality, share an ambivalent status in the human quest to know God. Yet in the vision of Saint Maximus the Confessor – whose theology is rightly regarded as being dominated by the theme of divine revelation³ - the whole intelligible-sensible universe presents itself as the corporeal medium for the self-manifestation of God. Behind this understanding of cosmic theophany we recognise several sources: at a distance, Plato's *Timaeus* – enhanced in Neoplatonism by further reflection on the idea of a divine world-soul which pervades and supports the universe. This was an idea present in ancient sapiential literature of both the Oriental and Hellenic worlds, as we find it expressed for instance in Wisdom 13:1-9 and later explicitly echoed in Romans 1:20 where Saint Paul claims, 'for since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine majesty – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made....' The whole universe, in the words of the Psalmist, can properly be said to 'declare the glory of God.'⁴ More immediately to hand we detect the cosmic vision of Dionysius the Areopagite.

Central to Maximus' foundation for such a steadfast conviction is the person of Christ Jesus, the Son of God made flesh. In him, God the Word has fulfilled in a definitive

³ Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, 215-216.

⁴ Ps 18:2. All OT references are to LXX. Maximus introduces this verse in an exposition of Romans 1:20 in *Q.Thal* 13 (CCSG 7, 95.1 – 97.41).

yet mysterious way his will 'always and in all things to effect the mystery of his embodiment.'⁵ Whether God's revelation in Christ simply parallels what happens in creation – albeit at a quantitatively greater or even qualitatively different level, or in fact constitutes or fulfils it, is a question we shall need to pursue in due course. For now we can affirm that for Maximus what can be known and said of God has itself been given by God who presents himself for apprehension in the symbolic structures of his pluriform incarnate economies.

At the same time, Maximus, like his orthodox predecessors, is under no illusions about the fundamental ontological dissimilarity of this universe to God, and the inadequacy of rational discourse when it comes to speaking of divine matters. God so far transcends the created realm that there is nothing in it that approximates to him or can serve as a fitting analogy by which to approach him. Moreover, on account of its inherent instability, material creation possesses a potentially deceptive character that blinds the observer to its true nature – that is, its true purpose. Creation therefore not only reveals God; it also hides or conceals him. Whatever one can predicate of God by way of analogy and affirmation – whether intelligence, or goodness, or being itself, is in fact more accurately denied of him. So we shall find Maximus speaking in a way anticipated by Origen and the Cappadocian Fathers and shared with Dionysius the Areopagite of a 'double' way of doing theology. It is the paradoxical, dialectical way of affirmation (*kataphasis*) and negation (*apophasis*); paradoxical, because it is by affirmation that God is concealed, and by negation that he is revealed; dialectical, because the Christian life involves a continual movement between the two.

⁵ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1084D).

What then are we to make of the sensible world, and what are we to do with our own human senses? While the answers to these questions will only become more patent towards the end of our whole study, we shall at least offer some preliminary observations within the bounds of this first chapter. For a start, it may be wiser to ask what *God* makes of the sensible world. For Maximus, the shifting, diffuse tendencies of the material universe serve God's providential and pedagogical economies whereby he condescends to human weakness and leads the human soul via sensible symbols to penetrate through to the intelligible realities that lie hidden beneath and beyond – beyond, that is, in the eschatological sense. The sensible realm must be transcended. Maximus repeats this with relentless resolve throughout his ascetic writings. In itself it is not evil, for everything God has created is good. But to stop short with it is idolatry: it is to 'worship and serve created things rather than the creator' (Rom 1:25). Precisely in rising upon it as on a ladder, one is able to reclaim it, to reorder it, to recognise its true God-given purpose and worth as an arena for the display of ineffable divine glory. Consequently the spiritual life is a constant *diabasis* – a 'passage' from the sensible to the intelligible, from the flesh to the Spirit, from the active life to the contemplative, from earthly to heavenly, from temporal to eternal. Christian *askesis* involves the elimination from the soul of carnal and idolatrous attachments, the re-ordering of our sensible, emotional, rational, and intelligible faculties, and the orientation of the whole person – body, soul, and mind - to God. To characterise the dualism implied by the categories mentioned such as flesh/spirit and sensible/intelligible as 'an endogenous neurosis, an index of intense and widespread guilt-feelings'⁶ would be to fail utterly to understand not only the spiritual impulse of the entire catholic patristic tradition, but the eschatological anthropology of Saint Paul. The dualism

⁶ So E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius*

proposed in the tradition Maximus receives, lives, and hands on is the dualism of Adam and Christ, the dualism of the outer man and the inner, the earthly man and the heavenly, the dualism of the mortal body and the immortal body, the dualism of 'now' and 'not yet'.⁷ It is the dualism of the baptismal, deified life, in which one may concur with both Saint Maximus and the Apostle, 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God' (Gal 2:20).

Affirmation and Negation: the two modes of theology

For the Fathers of the Church, Plato's words cited above only echoed Moses' and the prophets' confession of God's transcendence over against creation. Saint Paul too, faced with the insurmountable mystery of God's inscrutable acts of judgement and salvation with Israel, was led to praise him with a doxology inspired by words from the prophet Isaiah:

Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgements, and his paths beyond tracing out!
Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?
Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?
For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen (Rom 11:33-36).

to Constantine (Cambridge University Press, 1965), 35-36.

⁷ 1 Cor 15:35-57; 2 Cor 4:16 – 5:10.

If anything, in the Fathers' view, Plato had not gone far enough in asserting the inaccessibility, incomprehensibility, and utter independence of the divine nature. Origen's treatment of the passage in the *Timaeus* in his response to the pagan critic of Christianity, Celsus, is well-known.⁸ Origen's epistemology deserves closer attention since it represents a very early working out of concerns that were to remain primary in the mainstream intellectual, exegetical, and ascetic traditions of the Church of the Fathers. According to Henri Crouzel, the starting point of knowledge in Origen is the symbol.⁹ As the embodiment of the (divine) mystery they express, symbols bridge the gap between subject and object and bring about a participation of one in the other.¹⁰ Origen's discussion of the *Timaeus* passage cited by Celsus provides a useful example of some of the main points in his thought. He explains how Celsus had falsely characterised Christians as seeking to know God through sensual perception alone. Celsus, apparently disgusted at what he considered to be Christianity's gross materialism and preoccupation with carnal things, argued that if Jesus' followers truly wanted to be able to see God, they should close the eyes of their flesh and open instead those of the soul. It is in this context that Celsus had advocated Plato's dictum about how difficult it is to discover God, and having done so, how impossible it is to make him known to all. Knowledge of God, in Celsus' book, is evidently a human enterprise for an intellectual elite, far beyond the powers of the mundane masses.

Origen refutes his opponent on several points. Celsus is of course wrong if he regards Christians as materialists, for, having come to learn of the invisible and incorporeal God, their life and purity of worship bear ample witness to their willingness to mortify the

⁸ Or.*Cels.* 7.36-45 (SC 150, 94.29 – 122.34).

⁹ 'The School of Alexandria and Its Fortunes', in Angelo Di Berardino and Basil Studer (eds.), *History of Theology*, volume 1: *The Patristic Period*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 162.

¹⁰ Crouzel, 'The School of Alexandria and Its Fortunes', 162-164.

flesh. He is wrong too, to think that Christians do not acknowledge the limitations of sensible means of apprehension. Citing Romans 1:20, Origen affirms that ‘though earthly human beings must begin by applying their senses to sensible objects in order to ascend (ἀναβαίνειν) from them to a knowledge of the nature of intelligible realities, yet their knowledge must not stop short with objects of sense.’¹¹ Thus, while Christians do *not* claim that it is impossible to know intelligible realities apart from sense, they might well ask who *is* able to know them apart from sense. On yet another point, Origen wryly points out Christianity’s familiarity with the Greeks’ idea of two kinds of vision, one bodily and the other intellectual. It is an idea borrowed from Moses and used by the Saviour who says, ‘For judgement I came into this world, that those who do not see might see, and that those who see might be made blind’ (Jn 9:39).

Arriving at last at Celsus’ appeal to Plato, Origen decries Celsus’ inability to come to terms adequately with both the transcendence of God and his benevolence. Here Origen drives home three main points. First, in contrast to Plato’s disregard for the lowly populace, the revelation of God in the Word made flesh is a *universal* revelation, potentially accessible to all. Secondly, Plato’s language implies (wrongly) that while knowledge of God is indeed difficult to attain, it is not beyond natural human powers. But ‘we maintain’, counters Origen, ‘that human nature is in no way able to seek after God, or to attain a pure knowledge of him without the help of him whom it seeks.’¹² Thirdly, Celsus’ application of the name ‘the unspeakable’ to God disregards Plato’s implicit acknowledgement that, while it is impossible to make God known to *all*, he can be made known to *some*. This last argument appears somewhat disingenuous until we learn that by it Origen is seeking to

¹¹ *Or.Cels.* 7.37 (SC 150, 100.20-25). The ‘intelligible realities’ are for Origen a subtle assimilation of the Platonic ideas to prophetic, eschatological realities. Ultimate reality, for him, equates to ‘the inheritance of the eternal life to come’ (*Or.Lev.* 5.1 [SC 286, 206.24-25]).

uphold an even stricter *theological* principle and at the same time to introduce a *christological* one. God the Father is indeed ‘unspeakable’, as are many other beings inferior to him. Yet it is possible to ‘see’ him on the basis of his own revelation in the Logos. ‘He who has seen me,’ says Jesus, ‘has seen the Father’ (Jn 14:9). To know God is to see him, a possibility opened up to the pure in heart by the gracious Incarnation of the Word, the only-begotten Son, the visible image of the invisible God.¹³

Origen’s primary goal in all this is to show that Celsus’ and even Plato’s arguments finally rest on nothing more than ‘philosophical agnosticism.’¹⁴ Their claims to know God were clearly false, for such knowledge had failed to become manifest in their worship and piety: they still treated man-made idols and creatures as God. True knowledge of God begins not with human reasoning, but with God, and with what he has presented of himself to be seen.¹⁵ From there it leads to the transformation of one’s life, to the ascent from sensible phenomena to intelligible realities, and from there to union with the simple, incorporeal, invisible God. As Origen concludes,

The disciples of Jesus regard these phenomenal things only that they may use them as steps to ascend to the perception of the nature of intelligible realities.... And when they have risen from the created things of this world to the invisible things of God, they do not stay there; but after they have sufficiently exercised their minds upon these, and have

¹² Or.*Cels.* 7.42 (SC 150, 114.28-31).

¹³ Crouzel notes also the connection Origen makes between knowledge and image (‘The School of Alexandria and Its Fortunes’, 161). Maintaining the rule that only like knows like, ‘the pure in heart’ is the *logikos* who, having recovered by the Spirit the purity of the soul made according to the image of God, is capable of assimilation to the image of God itself, the *Logos*.

¹⁴ Robert L. Wilken, ‘No Other Gods’, in *idem.*, *Remembering the Christian Past* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 55.

¹⁵ Wilken, ‘No Other Gods’, 55-56.

understood their nature, they ascend to the eternal power of God: in a word, to his divinity.¹⁶

Throughout Origen's argument we are able to detect themes constantly reiterated in the Fathers, and especially the affirmation that the proper way to acknowledge God's incomprehensibility is not with rational conjecture, nor yet with agnostic skepticism, but with 'silence' - a transfigured life issuing in humble and holy reverence and praise. Divine revelation is not a bare demonstration from the divine side, but a dialectical engagement, a transformative process that starts and ends in God – or more precisely, in God the Father.¹⁷ It is not difficult to see how advocates of this recognisably trinitarian structure of revelation and illumination could adapt Neoplatonist categories such as procession and return, descent and ascent, diffusion and union, all of which imply a descent from simple unity towards material multiplicity and an ascent back to immaterial union with the One. At the outermost extension of the movement lie sensible, corporeal phenomena. Knowledge of God is impossible without the corporeal realm.¹⁸

Maximus too is concerned with the transformative character and doxological goal of the apophatic way to union with God. As he seems keen to demonstrate in his *Chapters on Theology and the Economy*,¹⁹ all true spiritual progress necessarily begins with an

¹⁶ Or.*Cels.* 7.46 (SC 150, 124.34 – 126.42).

¹⁷ Herein lies the classic trinitarian structure of epistemology adumbrated by Origen (Or.*Princ.* 1.3.4-8; Or.*Joh.* 19.6.33-38 [SC 290, 66-70]) and later enunciated by Basil of Caesarea (Bas.*Spir.* [PG 32.153B]). Knowledge of God is knowledge of God the Father through the Son from the Spirit, by whom are conferred being, rationality and holiness respectively. In turn the ascending *via* of theognosis leads from purification through wisdom/*gnosis* to the blessed vision of the Father in glory. See further Karen Jo Torjesen, 'Hermeneutics and Soteriology in Origen's *Peri Archon*', *SP* 21 (1989), 338-339; Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 20-21; Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 15-17.

¹⁸ Greg.*Naz.Or.* 28.12. The question about the status of the sensible in epistemology and revelation remained alive and well into the 7th and 8th centuries in connection with the iconoclastic controversy. See Cameron, 'The Language of Images', 1-42.

¹⁹ *Capita theologica et oeconomica* [Th.*Oec.*] (PG 90.1084 – 1173). Hereafter called *Chapters on Theology*.

epistemological crisis. Human reason stands before God speechless, for in himself he is beyond all knowing and speculation. While we may learn from the analogy of created being *that* God is (τὸ εἶναι), creation itself says nothing about *how* (πῶς εἶναι) or *what* (τὸ τί εἶναι) he is.²⁰ He is neither subject or object, he neither thinks nor is thought, for these are categories that necessarily involve relating to some extrinsic entity. God, however, is utterly independent and perfectly self-contained.²¹

This epistemological impasse - itself the immediate correlate of an ontological fact - is a fundamental theological presupposition throughout Maximus' thought. Arising as it does in the distinct unit formed by the opening ten paragraphs of the *Chapters on Theology* (1.1-10), it confronts the would-be contemplative with shocking force. In the light of the likelihood that the century form of the *Chapters on Theology*, in which is collated a broad collection of highly condensed spiritual axioms, is especially designed for easy retention and performative application in the monastic life,²² such deliberate placement invites our closer scrutiny. George Berthold has drawn attention to the almost credal form of these chapters,²³ a form mirrored in the opening paragraph of the second set of centuries as well:

God is one, because there is one divinity; monad, without beginning, simple and beyond being, without parts and undivided; the same is monad and triad, entirely monad, and entirely triad; wholly monad in substance, wholly triad in *hypostases*.²⁴

²⁰ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1133C; 1180D).

²¹ *Th.Oec.* 2.2.

²² Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 482-484.

²³ 'The Cappadocian Roots of Maximus the Confessor', in Felix Heinzer and Christoph von Schönborn (eds.), *Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur. Fribourg, 2-5 septembre 1980* (Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1982), 55.

²⁴ *Th.Oec.* 2.1.

The conspicuous presence of the alpha privative - the prefix of negation - throughout this passage and its parallel credal set in the unit formed by 1.1-10 confirms their strongly apophatic character. But we also notice that these negations are couched in the form of a confession. Then at the end of 1.1-10, strangely enough, the negations give way to quite a clear affirmation, or at least, an affirmation interwoven with the doxological utterance we heard earlier from Saint Paul in Romans 11:36:

God is the beginning, middle, and end of beings as active, but not as passive, like everything else named by us. For he is beginning as creator, middle as provider, and end as encompasser, *for, as it says, from him and through him and to him are all things.*

Has Maximus here abandoned the primacy of the *via negativa*? Is it in fact possible to say something of the God of whom nothing can properly even be denied, let alone affirmed? Let us remember that by this time, the negative theology articulated by Origen had undergone a noticeable metamorphosis. Before him, Clement of Alexandria - in his own engagement with Plato's *Timaeus* dictum - had drawn together central biblical motifs demonstrating God's ultimate inaccessibility: Moses' entry into the darkness of God's dwelling place on Sinai; Saint Paul's exclamation from Romans 11:33 on the depths of divine *sophia* and *gnosis*; and the possibility of knowing the invisible Father through the only-begotten Word and Son.²⁵ After him, and faced with the bold and blasphemous claims of the Eunomians to be able to describe accurately the true nature of God's essential being (οὐσίᾳ), all three Cappadocians had exercised more urgently both Alexandrians' inclination

²⁵ Clem.*Str.* 5.12.78-82 (SC 276, 152.1 – 160.19).

towards theological apophaticism.²⁶ Saint Gregory Nazianzen's rebuttal of Plato's dictum was even swifter and stronger than Origen's. While the Greek divine had spoken of the difficulty in perceiving God and the impossibility of expressing him, Gregory agreed on the impossibility of expressing him but argued for the even greater impossibility of perceiving him.²⁷ Commenting on a passage further on in Gregory's same sermon,²⁸ Maximus himself states how the great Cappadocian doctor preferred throughout his teaching 'to speak about God by privations and negations' in order to preclude any heretical presumption.²⁹

In Saint Gregory of Nyssa's mysticism of darkness especially we are provided with a clear example of a rigorous apophaticism at work in the spiritual life modeled on Moses' ascent into the 'gloom' or darkness (εἰς τὸν γνόφον) on Mount Sinai's hidden summit:

For leaving behind all visible realities, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intellect thinks it sees, it keeps on penetrating deeper until, by the intellect's yearning for understanding, it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God. This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness.³⁰

This darkness on Gregory's Mount Sinai, says Jean Daniélou, 'is the radical transcendence of God with respect to all nature and all possibility of intelligibility.'³¹ Here even the intellect (νοῦς) becomes blind as a new kind of seeing emerges that is by faith.

²⁶ See Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 40-56.

²⁷ Greg.Naz.Or. 28.4 (SC 250, 106.27 – 108.6).

²⁸ Greg.Naz.Or. 28.9.

²⁹ *Amb.Io.* 17 (PG 91.1224BC).

³⁰ Greg.Nyss. *V.Mos.* 2.163 (GNO VIII.1, 254.24 – 255.3).

³¹ *Platonisme et théologie Mystique. doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse* (Aubier: Éditions Montagne, 1944), 194.

In the fifth century, such apophaticism became even more strongly underlined by Dionysius the Areopagite in a powerful crescendo. Dionysius is unequivocal in expressing the fact that God not only transcends our affirmations, but that he far exceeds our negations as well.³² With a liturgico-biblical emphasis reminiscent of Henry Vaughan's line, 'There is in God (some say) / A deep, but dazzling darkness', Dionysius refers to the divine darkness (ὁ θεῖος γνόφος) as the 'unapproachable light' (1 Tim 6:16) where 'God is said [by holy Scripture] to dwell.'³³ Elsewhere in a specifically liturgical context³⁴ he speaks of an immersion into 'the darkness beyond intellect'.³⁵ More generally, 'to know God' is to know that he is *beyond* all that can be known or perceived. According to Dionysius, this is precisely what Saint Paul meant in Romans 11:33.³⁶ And in his famous first *Letter* he writes:

His transcendent darkness (τὸ ὑπερκείμενον αὐτοῦ σκότος)³⁷ remains hidden from all light and concealed from all knowledge. Someone beholding God and understanding what he saw has not actually seen God himself but rather something belonging to him that has being and is knowable. For he himself utterly transcends mind and being. He is completely unknown and non-existent. He exists beyond being and is known beyond the mind.³⁸

Maximus' pedagogical strategy in the *Chapters on Theology* betrays a close acquaintance with this entire apophatic tradition in both its theological and liturgico-

³² *Myst.theol.* 1.2 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 143.5-7).

³³ *Ep.* 5 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 162.3-4).

³⁴ For the argument that Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* is to be interpreted with a concrete liturgical context in mind see Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 100-101.

³⁵ ... εἰς τὸν ὑπὲρ νοῦν ... γνόφον. *Myst.theol.* 3 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 147.9).

³⁶ *Ep.* 5 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 162.11 – 163.2).

³⁷ H.-C. Puech suggests that γνόφος and σκότος in Dionysius bear two reciprocally-related meanings. The former signifies the subjective ignorance of the knowing subject; the latter signifies the objective inaccessibility of God. See his 'La ténèbre mystique chez le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite et dans la tradition patristique', *Études Carmelitaines* 23 (1938), 36.

³⁸ *Ep.* 1 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 156.7 – 157.5).

mystical forms – the former most thoroughly worked out by Gregory Nazianzen, the latter having deeply Platonic roots and universally realised in the lived spiritual experience of darkness, deprivation and unknowing in the presence of God.³⁹ But contained in this ‘negative’ theology is also an impulse towards affirmation in the form of praise. It is only *after* Moses has laid down his will and understanding ‘outside’ visible phenomena that he begins to adore God. Only after he has entered the darkness (εἰς τὸν γνόφον) - ‘the formless and immaterial place of knowledge’ – does he ‘remain, performing the most sacred rites.’⁴⁰ Following the pattern set by the Pauline exclamation in Romans 11, the experience of negation gives rise to a positive state of hidden nearness to God and mystical praise. As Berthold puts it, ‘... the revelation of God as Trinity is one which both reduces the human mind to apophatic silence and calls it to a life of divine intimacy.’⁴¹

The answer then to our question posed earlier surely lies in pointing out that for Maximus the *via negativa* is not so much an intellectual theory as a necessary experience, indeed, the characteristic experience of the Christian life that leads the (un)knowing subject towards the μυστικὴ δοξολογία, the eschatological and theological⁴² culmination of the spiritual pilgrimage ‘from strength to strength’ and ‘glory to glory.’⁴³ Only when he has fully *denied* the possibility of any natural means of access to God – sensual or intellectual – and actually brought about the sharp awareness of that fact in his readers, is Maximus able to introduce the possibility of faith which, as a divine gift - a seeing with the spiritual eye of

³⁹ Daniélou (*Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 191) traces this tradition back to Philo. Referring to the whole Greek philosophical tradition Hadot proposes that ‘it is mystical experience that founds negative theology, not the reverse.’ Quoted in Davidson and Chase, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 29. For further references indicating the terminological correspondences between the apophatic expressions in Maximus, Dionysius, and Gregory of Nyssa, see Walther Völker, *Maximus Confessor als Meister des geistlichen Lebens* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1965), 336-342.

⁴⁰ *Th.Oec.* 1.84.

⁴¹ ‘The Cappadocian Roots’, 58.

⁴² In the strict, trinitarian sense of the word.

⁴³ *Th.Oec.* 2.77-78.

the intellect, an actual experience of God - gains access to the unknowable God in a way that far transcends discursive knowledge.⁴⁴ It is for us no different than it was for Moses, for whom this drawing near to the hidden God takes place 'by faith alone' (πίστει μόνῃ).⁴⁵

In another passage, this time in response to a query from the priest Thalassius, Maximus once again explicitly links the way of negation to this *experiential* (non)knowledge of God. 'Knowledge of divine things', he begins, 'is double' (διπτῆν):

The first kind is relative, since it resides in reason and intellectual ideas alone and possesses no actual perception through experience of its object. Through this kind of knowledge we dispose ourselves in the present life. The second, properly true kind of knowledge that consists in actual experience alone - apart from reason or intellectual ideas - brings about by participation ~~to~~ the complete perception ^{of} its object by grace. Through this kind of knowledge we receive that supernatural deification due in the future, a deification that is unceasingly effective. They say that the relative way of knowing by reason and intellectual ideas stirs up desire for actual knowledge by participation, whereas the effective kind of knowledge that brings about via participation the perception of the object of knowledge through experience is a deprivation (ἀφαίρετικῆν) of the other way of knowing residing in reason and intellectual ideas.⁴⁶

Again there can be no doubt about Maximus' clear debt to Dionysius, who exalts experiential knowledge of God over that which is 'learned';⁴⁷ certainly there is no basis to

⁴⁴ By 'experience' here and elsewhere I have in mind Louis Bouyer's reference to the Fathers' emphasis upon the objective, actual aspect of experience rather than the modern preoccupation with its subjective, emotive dimensions. See his discussion in *The Christian Mystery: From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism*, trans. Illtyd Trethowan (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 278-287.

⁴⁵ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1148D); cf. *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1188AB); *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1057A).

⁴⁶ *Q.Thal.* 60 (CCSG 22, 77.63-76).

⁴⁷ Dionysius in *De div.nom.* 2.9 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* I, 134.1-2) praises Hierotheus as one who οὐ μόνον μαθῶν ἀλλὰ παθῶν τὰ θεία.

speak of any dramatic departure from him.⁴⁸ The Areopagite also speaks of a ‘double’ (διπλήν) tradition of ‘the theologians’ (that is, the divinely-inspired writers of Scripture): ‘the manifest and more evident,’ which employs philosophical argument and rational demonstration, and ‘the ineffable and hidden,’ which, by more experiential and sacramental means, ushers the subject directly into the presence of God. Both, nevertheless, are ‘inextricably entwined.’⁴⁹ The dialectic inherent in this approach finds expression in the Areopagite’s symbolic theology, in which ‘unlike’ symbols in Scripture, such as rock or wind or fire, are more fitting for God than ‘like’ symbols such as ‘Word’ or ‘Mind’ or ‘Being’, all of which falsely suggest a real correspondence between themselves and the God who is beyond being.⁵⁰

This dialectic reaches further yet into the strong and ordered distinction which developed in the fourth century between *theologia*, knowledge of God in himself, and *economia*, knowledge of God as he engages with creation. Describing the dimension of *theologia*, Dionysius writes,

Many scripture writers will tell you that the divinity is not only invisible and incomprehensible, but also *unsearchable and inscrutable* (Rom 11:33), since there exists no trace for anyone who would reach through into the hidden depths of this infinity.

⁴⁸ While I largely concur with Ysabel de Andia’s argument that Maximus posits a far more christocentric relation than Dionysius between negative and affirmative theology, I would argue that her contrasts are drawn rather too sharply. See her ‘Transfiguration et Théologie Négative chez Maxime le Confesseur et Denys L’Aréopagite’, in Ysabel de Andia (ed.), *Denys l’Aréopagite et sa Postérité en Orient et en Occident. Actes du Colloque International. Paris, 21-24 septembre 1994* (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes), 293-328. For a more balanced appraisal, see Janet Williams’ three studies, ‘The Apophatic Theology of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite I’, *The Downside Review* 408 (1999), 157-172; ‘The Apophatic Theology of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite II’, *The Downside Review* 409 (1999), 235-250; ‘The Incarnational Apophasis of Maximus the Confessor’, *SP* 37 (2001), 631-635.

⁴⁹ *Ep.* 9 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 197.9-12).

⁵⁰ *De coel.hier.* 2.2-3 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 10.13 – 13.23). In *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984), 87-90, Paul Rorem observes that

This is the apophatic way characterised by negation and deprivation of all rational and intellectual means of knowledge. But having said as much, Dionysius immediately goes on to speak of the kataphatic way, the way made possible by God's philanthropic, revelatory economy, the way which itself leads to mystical, experiential union with the triune God:

On the other hand, the Good is not absolutely incommunicable to everything. By itself it generously reveals a firm, transcendent beam, granting enlightenments proportionate to each being, and thereby draws sacred minds upward to its permitted contemplation, to participation and to the state of becoming like it. What happens to those that rightly and properly make an effort is this: they do not venture towards an impossibly daring sight of God, one beyond what is duly granted them. Nor do they go tumbling downward where their own natural inclinations would take them. No. Instead they are raised firmly and unswervingly upward in the direction of the ray which enlightens them. With a love matching the illuminations granted them, they take flight, reverently, wisely, in all holiness.⁵¹

It is important to point out that Dionysius' rather abstract-sounding language here is actually aimed at substantiating a theological method that requires strict adherence to the boundaries of biblical revelation. To assert the primacy of the apophatic way does not imply the abandonment of revelation for the sake of some higher, alternative, esoteric *gnosis*. Dionysius is no 'mystical iconoclast', as Balthasar so rightly perceived.⁵² Rather this

the movement from affirmations to negations is not sequential so much as logical. Affirmation and negation denote two ordered but contemporaneous epistemological approaches to a single reality.

⁵¹ *De div. nom.* 1.2 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* I, 110.11 – 111.2).

⁵² Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, volume 2: *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh and Brian McNeil, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1984), 179.

paragraph directs us to conceive of *revelation as an interactive dialectic* that heads towards the re-unification of both divine and human subjects. Inherent to this dialectic is the paradoxical nature of revelation. God reveals himself by hiding himself, and in hiding himself, makes himself known. In this sense, we can never speak of revelation without also speaking of concealment.⁵³

The coordination of the apophatic and kataphatic dialectic with that of *theologia* and *economia* is only strengthened in Maximus for whom, as Andrew Louth has suggested, '[t]he movement between apophatic and kataphatic is not a matter of a dialectic between two kinds of human logic in speaking of God; rather, it is a movement between God's own hidden life and his engagement with creation....'⁵⁴ Denial and affirmation, like *theologia* and *economia*, are antithetical yet complementary registers in which one and the same God gives himself to be acknowledged to be who he is by the removal of every illusion of what he is not.⁵⁵ To Maximus' mind, the 'double' character of divine revelation and human apprehension is demonstrated most concretely and paradigmatically in the Transfiguration of Christ as recorded in the synoptic Gospels. Here the 'vertical' configuration of Dionysius is woven into a hermeneutic more strongly eschatological and anagogical in character. It is with specific reference to the Transfiguration as τὰ θεοπρεπῆ δραματουργήματα that we find him referring to 'the two universal modes of theology.'⁵⁶ The hidden (uncreated) and symbolic (created) are united in a paradoxical dialectic: the Word's concealment in flesh, garments, and cloud is seen to be the very means of his self-manifestation. Like Gregory Nyssa's Sinai, Tabor is 'the mountain of theology', up to

⁵³ See Dion.Ar. *De coel.hier.* 2.2; *Ep.* 3; Maximus *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1049A); *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1129BC).

⁵⁴ Andrew Louth, 'Apophatic Theology and the Liturgy in St. Maximos the Confessor', in *idem.*, *Wisdom of the Byzantine Church: Evagrius of Pontus and Maximos the Confessor*, 1997 Paine Lectures in Religion, ed. Jill Raitt, (Columbia, Missouri: Department of Religious Studies, University of Missouri, 1997), 42.

⁵⁵ *Amb.Io.* 34 (PG 91.1288C).

which the Word ascends with Peter, James and John – those who have acquired faith, hope and love respectively. There ‘he is transfigured before them,’ which, as Maximus explains, means that he is ‘no longer referred to kataphatically as *God* and *holy* and *king* and suchlike, but is spoken of apophatically according to the terms *beyond-God* and *beyond-holy* and all the terms of transcendence.’⁵⁷ For the disciples, whose bodily and spiritual senses have been purified, and who have passed over (μετέβησαν) from flesh to spirit, it is the moment of recognition whereby Christ’s true identity as the eternally begotten Word of the Father becomes apparent. His shining face radiates the unapproachable brightness of his divinity,⁵⁸ ‘the characteristic hiddenness of his *ousia*’⁵⁹ which he shares with the Father and the Spirit. In the transfigured Word-made-flesh, Maximus comprehends a miraculous matrix where *theologia* and *economia*, *apophasis* and *kataphasis*, unknowing and knowing intersect in a universal, salvifically effective economy:

For it was necessary⁶⁰ for him without any change in himself to be created like us, accepting for the sake of his immeasurable love for humankind to become the type and symbol of himself, and from himself symbolically to represent himself, and through the manifestation of himself to lead to himself in his complete and secret hiddenness the whole creation; and while he remains quite unknown in his hidden, secret place beyond all things, unable to be known or understood by any being in any way whatever, out of his love for

⁵⁶ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1165B).

⁵⁷ *QD* 191 (CCSG 10, 134.41-46).

⁵⁸ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1125D – 1128A).

⁵⁹ *QD* 191 (CCSG 10, 134.48).

⁶⁰ Reading Ἔδει in place of Εἶδει with Karl-Heinz Uthemann, ‘Christ’s Image *versus* Christology: Thoughts on the Justinianic Era as Threshold of an Epoch’, in Pauline Allen and Elizabeth Jeffreys (eds.), *The Sixth Century: End or Beginning?* (Brisbane: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1996), 204.

humankind he grants to human beings intimations of himself in his manifest divine works performed in the flesh.⁶¹

What we are seeing at work here is a dynamic, paradoxical engagement whereby the purified and receptive human subject comes to penetrate with the eye of faith the corporeal, symbolic structures that veil the substance of the Word in order to apprehend him in the hidden, undisclosed, radiant reality of his pre-incarnate (theological) state. Such radiance is of course blinding, and as such can only be experienced as darkness. The movement of the Word from his radiant hiddenness to his veiled manifest form involves then an act of loving condescension on his part. As the φιλόανθρωπος, the Word initially gives himself to people according to their limited, sense-oriented means of apprehension. Thus in the *Chapters on Theology* Maximus says that the ‘first encounter’ (πρώτη προσβολή) with the Logos is with his flesh – with his incarnate, veiled form.⁶² The reference occurs within a series of chapters that meditate on the contrast between the Lord’s presence and absence experienced respectively as ‘face to face’ vision and vision ‘as in a mirror’ (1 Cor 13:12).⁶³ Maximus considers these categories in turn in connection with the progression from the active to the contemplative life.

The Lord is sometimes absent, sometimes present. He is absent in terms of face to face vision; he is present in terms of vision in a mirror and in enigmas.

To the one engaged in ascetic struggle the Lord is present through the virtues, but absent from him who takes no account of virtue. And again, to the contemplative he is

⁶¹ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1165D – 1168A).

⁶² *Th.Oec.* 2.60; also 2.61.

⁶³ *Th.Oec.* 2.57-61.

present through the true knowledge of the things that are, but absent to him who somehow misses it.⁶⁴

We might also draw attention to the marked *tactility* of this first, gracious encounter established by divine initiative. The terms Maximus uses recall the way in which sacramental initiation is grounded in sense experience. Left to itself, the soul would be utterly powerless to ascend to God, ‘*unless God himself*, having drawn near to it, *touch* (ἄψηται) it by condescension and lead it up to himself; for the human mind has no such power to ascend, to apprehend any divine illumination as it were, *unless God himself* draw it up - as far as it is possible – and himself illumine it with divine brightness.’⁶⁵ The resulting apprehension of the Lord, even by dim reflection, is however conditioned by the spiritual state and progress of the subject. The manifestation of the Logos is not univocal. It is, crassly put, personally tailored according to the receptivity of the human person in such a way as to advance him from knowledge of the Logos’ flesh to knowledge of his ‘glory’. On this we shall say more in due course.

In following Maximus’ distinctions between various levels or stages in the revelatory process, we must keep in mind the integrative unity between the two dimensions of the hidden and symbolic, the apophatic and the kataphatic, a unity Maximus repeatedly asserts in his insistence on the unity of *praxis* and *theoria* over against an unhealthy preoccupation with one to the exclusion of the other. In *Chapters on Theology* 2.37-39 for instance, he makes a point he demonstrates more fully elsewhere⁶⁶ concerning the essential

⁶⁴ *Th.Oec.* 2.57-58.

⁶⁵ *Th.Oec.* 1.31.

⁶⁶ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1145AB); *Amb.Io.* 57 (PG 91.1380D-1381B); *Q.Thal.* 3 (CCSG 7, 55.17-22); *Q.Thal.* 58 (CCSG 22, 31.64-69).

co-inherence of the ascetic and contemplative dimensions of the spiritual life.⁶⁷ He links them respectively with our two epistemological categories of *kataphasis* and *apophasis*, which in turn are aspects of the self-manifestation of the Word in the flesh on the one hand, and the *transitus* from the Word-made-flesh to the spiritual Word in his pre-incarnate form on the other:

In the active life, the Word - becoming thick by means of the virtues - becomes flesh. Whereas in the contemplative life - becoming lean by spiritual thoughts, he becomes what he was in the beginning: God the Word.

He makes the Word flesh who, by the thicker words and examples, applies the teaching of the Word the moral practice according to the corresponding potential of the hearers; and again, he makes the Word spirit who expounds mystical theology through sublime visions.

He who theologises kataphatically with affirmations makes the Word flesh – having nothing other than what can be seen or felt in order to know God as cause. But he who theologises apophatically with negations makes the Word spirit, as *in the beginning* he *was God* and *was with God* (Jn 1:1) – working from absolutely nothing of what can be known, [yet] knowing well the utterly unknowable.

We may conclude this section by adding a number of summary observations. As a revelatory economy the Incarnation is still a trinitarian event.⁶⁸ The Christian ascent from flesh to spirit, earthly to heavenly is not cosmic or spatial but *theological*: it is a movement

⁶⁷ This principle surfaces repeatedly in the *Chapters on Theology*. See *Th.Oec.* 1.98; 2.32; 2.37; 2.40; 2.51; 2.64; 2.74; 2.80; 2.87.

⁶⁸ See also *Q.Thal.* 2 (CCSG 7, 51.22-28); 60 (CCSG 22, 79.94-114); *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 31.87-97); *Amb.Io.* 61 (PG 91.1385D); *Opusc.* 7 (PG 91.77BC); 20 (PG 91.240C). The Father approves (εὐδοκῶν) the Incarnation; the Son personally effects it (ἀντιουργῶν); the Spirit co-operates in it (συνεργῶν). Cf. *Greg.Naz.Or.* 28.1 (SC 250, 100.13-15).

from fallen creaturely existence to participation in the mysterious communion of the holy Trinity. It is therefore the implicitly trinitarian structure of revelation, centred upon the revelation of the Word in the flesh, that shapes Maximus' understanding of the need to advance through the flesh of the incarnate Word to lay hold of the 'naked' Word himself. For the whole Spirit and the whole Father are substantially united with the Word.⁶⁹ Repeatedly in the *Chapters on Theology* we come across the phrase 'the Word/the Son of the Father'.⁷⁰ The bodily manifestation of the Word-Son has as its ultimate object *the revelation of the Father*, who is 'by nature completely inseparable from the whole of his Word.'⁷¹ In apprehending the Word, a person receives, or better, is received by the complete holy Trinity. It is not finally the vision of the glory of the Son to which the worthy attain, but the vision of the glory of the Father – in the Son – through the Spirit.⁷²

This never detracts from Maximus' strongly christocentric and essentially incarnational vision. In fact it strengthens it, for there can be no *vision* of the hidden Father except in the visible incarnate Son. But there are different levels of apprehension of the divine Word that appear to be conditioned by the corresponding level of knowledge of the inner meaning and salvific purpose of the incarnation. That is why, argues Maximus, the divine apostle Paul knew only 'in part', whereas the great evangelist John saw the glory of the only-begotten Son of the Father.⁷³ Paul's partial knowledge is the knowledge of the Word through ascetic activity; John, it seems, pierces through the visible flesh of the Word

⁶⁹ *Th.Oec.* 2.71. On the fundamentally trinitarian shape of revelation in Maximus, see further Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, 32; Felix Heinzer, 'L'explication trinitaire de L'Économie chez Maxime le Confesseur', in Heinzer and Schönborn, *Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium*, 161-164.

⁷⁰ See, for example, *Th.Oec.* 2.21; 2.25; 2.71.

⁷¹ *Th.Oec.* 2.71. Also *Th.Oec.* 2.22: 'Just as our human word which proceeds naturally from the mind is the messenger of the secret movements of the mind, so does the Word of God - who knows the Father in essence, as Word knows the Mind which has begotten it (since no created being can approach the Father without him) - reveal the Father whom he knows.'

⁷² *Th.Oec.* 2.73.

⁷³ *Th.Oec.* 2.76.

and beholds the hidden yet revealed λόγος and σκοπός of the Incarnation, that is, its specifically and inherently salvific (δι' ἡμῶς) dimension, viewed teleologically. This dimension has as its ultimate author and source not the Son, but the Father. It is the Father's glory which the only-begotten has made known (Jn 1:18). It is God's μεγάλη βουλή of which the incarnate Word is ὁ ἄγγελος. In the overall fulfilment of that plan through the Incarnation lies the accomplishment of our deifying adoption as sons of God.⁷⁴

Three Laws and Four Incarnations

We have already indicated the centrality of the Transfiguration in Maximus' theological vision. In the transfigured body of Christ he recognises an archetypal locus in which the human union with God by faith and the reciprocal, corresponding universal theophany of divine glory is proleptically demonstrated.⁷⁵ Two accounts in the Gospels (Mt 17:1-8; Lk 9:28-36) occupy his attention in a number of contexts,⁷⁶ but nowhere more fully than in the tenth *Ambiguum*.⁷⁷ Having already seen the importance of the 'double' way of theology, we must now explore further Maximus' application of this hermeneutic to the synoptic narrative where Christ's 'garments' and 'flesh' serve as a paradigmatic analogy of how 'God gives himself to be beheld through visible things.'⁷⁸ Each represents one of the two

⁷⁴ *Th.Oec.* 2.21-25. The christological titles of Isaiah 9:6 are attributed to the ἄγγελος μεγάλης βουλήs of Isaiah 9:5. Origen had also applied this office to Christ (*Or.Job.* 1.38 [SC 120, 198.278]). Dionysius links it with John 15:15 as an aspect of Jesus' revelation of the Father (*De coel.hier.* 4.4 [*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 24.1-4]). Maximus treats the topic further in *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 28.39 – 29.49); *Q.Thal.* 60 (CCSG 22, 73.5 – 75.48).

⁷⁵ On the place of the Transfiguration in the patristic tradition in general, see John A. McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition* (Lewiston/Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 99-143.

⁷⁶ *QD* 190-193 (CCSG 10, 131.1 – 136.23); *Th.Oec.* 1.97; 2.13-16.

⁷⁷ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1125D – 1133A; 1156B; 1160C – 1169B).

⁷⁸ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1129A).

dimensions - visible and invisible, kataphatic and apophatic - by which God conceals and reveals himself in the economy of creation.

It is in this connection that we find Maximus expounding his understanding of the ‘two laws’ – the ‘natural’ and the ‘written’ (τὸν τε φυσικὸν καὶ τὸν γραπτὸν), each of which corresponds to the respective incarnate economies of the divine Word in cosmos and Scripture. While both Origen and Evagrius knew of the cosmos as a vast book, it has been recognised that the co-ordination of cosmos and Scripture as equally valuable and equally effective economies represents Maximus’ own development.⁷⁹ Both laws are equally necessary for spiritual advancement, for they are ‘of equal honour and teach (παιδεύοντα) the same things as one another.’⁸⁰ Indeed, the one is ‘the same’ (ταύτῳ) as the other.⁸¹ What also becomes especially interesting in Maximus is his co-ordination of these two incarnate economies with the historic Incarnation in Christ. There are in fact ‘three laws’: the natural, the written, and the ‘spiritual law’ or ‘law of grace’. While Maximus recognises their respective integrity as ‘different modes of a divine way of life’ (τοὺς διαφόρους βίους δρόμου τοῦ κατὰ θεόν),⁸² he also knows them together to constitute a single law which converges (συνάγεται) in Christ who as creator (δημιουργός) is the author of natural law, and as provider and lawgiver (προνοητῆς καὶ νομοθέτης) is the giver of the written law.⁸³ Or as Balthasar writes, ‘the third law, which is ushered in and embodied in Christ, perfects both the first and the second laws, and unites them for good,

⁷⁹ ‘Maximus envisions creation and scripture as objective economies of divine relation that stand in a perfect analogous relation to the Logos-Revealer... The written law is thus no longer an intermediate degree between natural revelation and the revelation of Christ; rather, nature and history are equal poles that complement one another eschatologically.’ Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 102; see also Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 288-300; Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 77-78.

⁸⁰ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1128CD).

⁸¹ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1152A).

⁸² *Q.Thal.* 64 (CCSG 22, 233.730-731).

⁸³ *Q.Thal.* 19 (CCSG 7, 119.7-22); 39 (CCSG 7, 14-17); 64 (CCSG 22, 233.738 – 237.793).

since at the same time it eliminates their limitations.⁸⁴ Turning to Maximus' meditation on the Transfiguration, we find his synthesis of the sensible and intelligible dimensions of these three economies situated under the rubric of concealment and revelation:

For just as, when calling the words of holy Scripture the garments of the Word, and interpreting its intelligible realities (τὰ νοήματα) as his flesh, we conceal him in the first case and reveal him in the second, so too when calling the external forms and visible shapes of created beings garments, and interpreting the hidden principles (τοὺς λόγους) in accordance with which these forms and shapes have been created as flesh, we likewise conceal in the first case, and reveal in the second. For the Word, who is the creator of the universe and the lawgiver and by nature invisible, in appearing conceals himself, and in concealing himself is made manifest....⁸⁵

Judging by the emphasis upon interpretative actions – ‘we conceal... we reveal’ - Maximus' seems to be making his point on the interpretative, existential plane, though it is based on an economic reality. Just as the garments which veil the Lord become in the eschatological moment of sight transparent to the flesh concealed beneath, so do the words of Scripture and the corporeal forms of the ordered universe become translucent to ‘the intelligible realities’ and ‘hidden principles’ embedded in them. The entire scheme including the economy of Christ can be represented diagrammatically as follows overleaf:

⁸⁴ *Kosmische Liturgie*, 289.

⁸⁵ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1129B).

Three Economies	'We conceal'	'We reveal'
Christ	Garments (ἱμάτια)	Flesh (σάρκας) ⁸⁶
Written law (Scripture)	Words (τὰ ῥήματα)	Intelligible realities (τὰ νοήματα)
Natural law (created beings)	Forms and shapes (τὰ εἶδη τε καὶ σχήματα)	Hidden principles (οἱ λόγοι)

Perhaps what is most striking about the above schema is that the 'fleshes' of Christ is ordered together with *invisible, intelligible* realities. While the visible dimensions constitute indispensable elements in each economy, Christ's transfigured flesh is seen already to take part in another order again, that is, the theological order. The relation between the sensible and the intelligible dimensions is best understood, as I.-H Dalmats has observed, as one controlled by the dialectic of preparation-realisation rather than by an antithesis between figure and reality.⁸⁷ Nor do these two dimensions merely sit side by side. On the contrary, Balthasar has referred to a mutual *perichoresis* – a reciprocal interpenetration - that takes

⁸⁶ The use of the plural is somewhat mysterious. One proposal, suggested to me by Andrew Louth, is that the plural designates flesh that is to be consumed as food. We find precisely that use in *Clem.Str.* 5.10.66.2 (SC 276, 134.6-10) where, having spoken of 'milk' for infants as catechesis and 'meat' for the perfect as mystic contemplation, he refers to both as 'the fleshes and blood of the Word (σάρκες αὐται καὶ αἷμα τοῦ λόγου), that is, the apprehension of divine power and essence.' Could it be that Maximus, in contemplating the transfigured body of Christ, is led to equate it with his eucharistic flesh?

⁸⁷ I.-H. Dalmats, 'La Manifestation du Logos dans l'Homme et dans L'Église: Typologie anthropologique et typologie ecclésiale d'après *Qu.Thal.* 60 et *la Mystagogie*', in Heinzer and Schönborn, *Maximus Confessor: Actes du Symposium*, 21.

place between them on account of their mutually shared ‘universal principle’ (γενικὸς λόγος).⁸⁸ Despite their natural ontological differences, both sensible and intelligible share the fact of having been created out of nothing, and therefore the capacity of being united as a single, dynamic medium of divine glory.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, only the intelligible realities share with God an intelligible nature, and thus the visible, sensible elements clearly remain subordinate to them, just as *kataphasis* is subordinate to *apophasis*, *economia* to *theologia*, concealment to revelation, *praxis* to *theoria*.

Our next question must be to ask further about the relation between these three incarnate economies. We have seen that Maximus stresses the *equality* of the natural and written laws – what Blowers refers to as their ‘fundamental reciprocity’ on account of a common underlying symbolic structure, and thus ‘their common access to the intelligible mystery of the incarnate Logos.’⁹⁰ Indeed, Maximus applies to all three economies a metaphor originally used by Gregory Nazianzen in a sublime sermon preached for the festival of Theophany (Epiphany) with explicit reference to the enfleshment in Christ of the incorporeal Word.⁹¹ In each economy, the visible, sensible, symbolic dimensions designate the realm in which the Word, who is ‘subtle’ (λεπτός) by nature,⁹² has ‘thickened himself’ (παχυθέντα).⁹³ In *Ambiguum* 33 Maximus is called upon to deal with Gregory’s statement that ‘the Word became thick’.⁹⁴ Perhaps it was thought to sound suspiciously Origenist, for Evagrius in his *Kephalaia Gnostica* had accounted for the ‘thickness’ attaching

⁸⁸ *Kosmische Liturgie*, 170-171, 231; see also *Amb.Io.* 17 (PG 91.1228C); Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 29.

⁸⁹ *Q.Thal.* 2 (CCSG 7, 51.15-30); see further Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 398-401; Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 98-99.

⁹⁰ Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 106.

⁹¹ *Greg.Naz.Or.* 38.2 (SC 358, 106.16-20).

⁹² *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1129C).

⁹³ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1129D).

⁹⁴ *Amb.Io.* 33 (PG 91.1285C – 1288A).

to pre-existent intellects by referring to their fall and subsequent punitive embodiment.⁹⁵ Yet following the most natural meaning of the phrase in its context in Gregory, Maximus first supplies a christological interpretation:

The Word is said to be ‘thickened’ by the inspired teacher... because the Word, who is simple and incorporeal and feeds spiritually all the divine powers in heaven in succession, deemed it worthy also to thicken himself through his incarnate coming from us, for us, and like us yet without sin, and fittingly to expound to us through words and patterns a teaching concerning the ineffable which far transcends the power of all rational discourse. For it is said that everything has been taught through parables, and that nothing is explained without a parable (cf. Mt 13:34). For so it pleases teachers to use parables whenever their pupils do not understand things spoken in archetypal form (πρωτοτύπως)⁹⁶ and to lead them on to true perception of the things said.⁹⁷

The transition Maximus records here from *theologia* to *economia* is exactly as one finds it in Gregory. The eternal and transcendent Word becomes a true flesh-and-blood human being in order to draw humanity in himself up to God. Especially notable in Maximus’ exposition is the phrase ‘through his incarnate coming from us, for us, and like us’ (διὰ τῆς ἐνσάρκου αὐτοῦ παρουσίας ἐξ ἡμῶν δι’ ἡμᾶς καθ’ ἡμᾶς), by which he emphasises the mutual interdependence of the soteriological and realistic dimensions of the Word’s enfleshed presence. We may note also the parallel he draws between the Incarnation and Jesus’ use of parables. As the true pedagogue, the Word presents himself symbolically in order to lead us to a true perception (συναίσθησιν) of the archetype.

⁹⁵ Evag. *Keph.* 4.6.

Next Maximus follows with two alternative interpretations of Gregory's phrase regarding the Word's 'thickening' himself. The first represents the Word's cosmic economy:

Or [it could be said that the Word 'becomes thick' in the sense that], having ineffably hidden himself in the defining sub-structures (τοῖς λόγοις) of created beings for our sake, he indicates himself by analogy through each visible being, as through certain letters, wholly present in his utter fullness in the whole universe and at the same time wholly present in individual things. He is wholly present and undiminished. Remaining, as always, without difference, he is present in different things; simple and uncompounded, he is in the compounded; without beginning, he is in things that have a beginning; invisible, he is in visible things; intangible, he is in tangible things.⁹⁸

Finally Maximus presents the Word's scriptural economy:

Or [it could be said that the Word 'becomes thick' in the sense that], for our sake who are dense in disposition, he consented to embody himself for us and to be represented through letters and syllables and sounds so that, with us following him little by little from these things, he might lead us to himself, joined by the Spirit, and make us ascend into subtle and non-relative understanding of him who contracted us for his sake into his own union to the same extent that he expanded himself for our sake by the principle of condescension.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Blowers (*Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 120) I think tends to obscure the full import of this adverb by translating τοῖς πρωτοτύπως λεγομένοις as 'what they originally said'.

⁹⁷ *Amb.Io.* 33 (PG 91.1285C).

⁹⁸ *Amb.Io.* 33 (PG 91.1285D).

⁹⁹ *Amb.Io.* 33 (PG 91.1288A). The Greek of the final phrase is especially difficult to render: τοσοῦτον ἡμᾶς δι' ἑαυτὸν πρὸς ἕνωσιν ἑαυτοῦ συστείλας, ὅσον αὐτὸς δι' ἡμᾶς ἑαυτὸν συγκαταβάσεως λόγῳ διέστειλεν. Stephen Gersh has: 'he brings us for his own sake into union with himself by contraction to the same extent that he has for our sake expanded himself according to the principle of condescension' (*From*

Much could be said about the cosmic and scriptural dispensations in which the Word ‘thickens’ himself, but in view of Maximus’ strongly cosmological ontology which we shall be examining in greater detail in the next chapter, we shall here concentrate primarily on his understanding of the written law, that is, the Word’s incarnate economy in Scripture. How are the scriptural and christological economies related? We recall our discussion above about Maximus’ symbolic identification of Christ’s ‘garments’ with the ‘words’ of Scripture and his ‘flesh’ with their intelligible contents or meaning. Through his historic Incarnation as Christ, the divine Word – who ‘remains quite unknown in his hidden, secret place beyond all things, unable to be known or understood by any being in any way whatsoever’ - lovingly condescends to become ‘a type and symbol of himself’ thereby granting human beings ‘intimations of himself in the manifest divine works performed in the flesh.’¹⁰⁰ In like manner we find Maximus positioning the scriptural economy in a marked dialectic with theological inaccessibility, explaining that ‘it is customary for Scripture to represent unspeakable and hidden intentions of God in corporeal terms (σωματικῶς), so that we may be able to perceive divine realities through the words and

Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978], 255). But the Greek does not speak of a ‘union with himself’ but of ‘his own union/unity’ (πρὸς ἑνωσιν ἑαυτοῦ), indicating either the union of the divine and human natures in Christ or the theological unity of the divine Word. Blowers renders it a little differently again: ‘Thus the more he drew us together into union with him for himself, the more for our sake he would expand himself by reason of his condescension’ (*Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 120). This unfortunately fails to render accurately the meaning of the *tantum-quantum* formula. Both scholars recognise the importance of bringing out the Neoplatonic dialectic of expansion and contraction (διαστολή–συστολή), which Thunberg (*Microcosm and Mediator*, 60-61) identifies as a metaphysical law describing the movement from unity into differentiation (διαστολή) and back to unity (συστολή). He rightly concludes ‘that in Maximus’ view the movement of διαστολή, of differentiation, as the movement of God’s condescension in creation, comes very close to the incarnation, and the movement of συστολή, consequently, comes close to deification.’

¹⁰⁰ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1165D – 1168A).

sounds that are conformable to our nature, since God is unknowable Mind and ineffable Word and inaccessible Spirit....'¹⁰¹

It is apparent then that the scriptural and the christological economies share as a whole the same structure and purpose. In what way then, we may ask, are they distinct? Is there any *qualitative* difference between them?¹⁰² Once again it will be useful to look back to Origen as the spiritual father of the anagogical hermeneutical tradition which Maximus inherits. Origen knows no division between Christ and the divine Word who is the true but hidden content of Scripture – its mind (νοῦς) or spirit (πνεῦμα). For him ‘Christ and Scripture are identified, the latter being already an incarnation of the Word in writing, which is analogous to flesh; nor is it another and different incarnation, since it is completely related to the one incarnation....’¹⁰³ Anagogical exegesis presupposes this identification: Christ is Scripture’s sole object. He is, in de Lubac’s splendid phrase, its ‘whole exegesis.’¹⁰⁴ Anagogy is the integration of the reader via the material symbol of the text into its divine content.¹⁰⁵ Scripture’s purpose has been fulfilled when through *askesis* the believer himself *becomes* Scripture - a living symbol of Christ.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, for Maximus as for Origen, holy Scripture contains its own intra-structural dimensions that are to be distinguished and not confused. The first of these, as we have mentioned, is the distinction between the letter and the spirit.¹⁰⁷ Parallel to this is

¹⁰¹ *Q.Thal.* 28 (CCSG 7, 205.42-46).

¹⁰² Blowers pursues this question at some length, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 117-130. See also Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 73-79.

¹⁰³ Crouzel, ‘The School of Alexandria and Its Fortunes’, 166-167.

¹⁰⁴ Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, volume 1, trans. Mark Sebanc (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 237.

¹⁰⁵ See further Karen Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen’s Exegesis* (Patristische Texte und Studien 28, Berlin, 1986), 124-138.

¹⁰⁶ On this distinctive feature of monastic exegesis, see Douglas Burton-Christie, “Practice makes Perfect”: Interpretation of Scripture in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, *SP* 20 (1989), 213-218.

¹⁰⁷ *Th.Oec.* 1.91; *Q.Thal.* 32 (CCSG 7, 225.17-33).

the distinction between the Old Testament and the New, the Law and the Gospel.¹⁰⁸ The New Testament inheres and is mysteriously hidden in the letter of the Old. In turn the Law is the shadow of the Gospel, and the Gospel the image of the good things to come. And the Old Testament is again divided into the Law and the Prophets, the former a shadow and the latter an image of the divine and spiritual benefits contained in the Gospel. Still another tripartite scheme in holy Scripture becomes evident in its partial or progressive revelation (ἡ κατὰ μέρος φανέρωσις) of the trinitarian mystery, in that it moves from a confession of the Father to the Son to the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁹ Each 'component' possesses a carefully schematised, irreducible function in the overall scriptural and historical dispensation. The fact that Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets, appear with Christ on the mountain of Transfiguration is highly significant in this regard. In themselves the written media of the old covenant are 'dead' - destined to pass away like the body. But co-ordinated with Christ, they are able to fulfil a saving, revelatory, pedagogical function, which is no less than their true (teleological) 'mind' or purpose. That true purpose is to testify to the 'law of grace', to the Gospel - to the Christ who 'unfolds eschatologically'¹¹⁰ their intelligible contents. In a kind of reversal of its own progressive trinitarian order, Scripture's true purpose is to lead us in the Spirit from its multiple 'words' to the singular 'Word' in whom we come finally to the Father.¹¹¹ So Maximus can say:

¹⁰⁸ *Th.Oec.* 1.89-93; *Myst.* 6.

¹⁰⁹ *Amb.Io.* 23 (PG 91.1261A). The passage bears strong echoes of the ancient doctrine of three orders or eras in which God progressively reveals himself as Father (Israel/OT), Son (Christ/NT), and Holy Spirit (Church). Maximus probably drew it directly from *Greg.Naz.Or.* 31.26. This tripartite arrangement arises also in *Amb.Io.* 21 (PG 91.1241D – 1256C). Just as the Old Testament was a 'forerunner' of the Gospel, so too is the written Gospel, like the proclamation that takes place in the words and deeds of the saints, a 'forerunner' of the Word's final, 'more perfect' revelation in the eschatological consummation. The entire scheme of salvation is thus arranged in an unfolding prophetic triad (PG 91.1253C): shadow (Old Covenant and its worship), image (New Covenant and its worship), truth (the coming age).

¹¹⁰ Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 124.

Whenever the Word of God becomes bright and shining in us, and his face becomes dazzling like the sun, then also are his clothes more radiant, that is, the words of the holy Scripture of the Gospels are clear and distinct and contain nothing hidden. Moreover, both Moses and Elijah stand beside him, that is, the more spiritual meanings of the Law and the Prophets.¹¹²

Returning now to *Ambiguum* 33, we may offer some final remarks on the relationship between the ‘three laws’. The syntactical structure of the whole passage undergirds Maximus’ regard for the structural and effective equality of all three economies. Each is introduced as a valid alternative (ἢ ὅτι... ἢ ὅτι... ἢ ὅτι) with an equally effective soteriological thrust (δι’ ἡμᾶς... δι’ ἡμᾶς... δι’ ἡμᾶς). In the summary sentence enclosing Maximus’ classic *tantum-quantum* (τοσοῦτον... ὅσον) formulation,¹¹³ again with an explicit soteriological marker (δι’ ἡμᾶς), we are given a glimpse of his overarching incarnational, revelatory metaphysics. The ‘thickening’ or ‘expansion’ of the Word is simultaneously the ‘thinning’ or ‘contraction’ of the ‘density’ of human nature – its opacity to divine things. The movement is not temporally sequential, nor does it imply the dematerialisation of human nature. It is rather a two-dimensional description of the Word’s self-expansion into and penetration of the universe and the reciprocal, simultaneous transfiguration of and contraction of the universe into him. In this respect Blowers’ comments are instructive: ‘The natural law and the written law, creation and scripture, are grounded in the preexistent and transcendent Logos. In Maximus’ thought, however, the

¹¹¹ *Th.Oec.* 2.20-22.

¹¹² *Th.Oec.* 2.14.

¹¹³ See Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 277-278; Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 31-32; Jean-Claude Larchet, *La divinisation de l’homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996), 376-382.

transcendent Logos is never conceptually separate from the *historically* incarnate Christ.¹¹⁴

And turning to Thunberg we also find a fitting analysis:

The cosmological (ontological), the providential and the historical Logos are not separate elements in Maximus' theology, but consciously depicted as one and the same: Christ, the Son of God the Father, and the Lord of the Church. He is the centre of the universe in the same manner as he is the centre of the economy of salvation.... [T]he Logos, on account of his general will to incarnate himself, holds together not only the λόγοι of creation but also the three aspects of creation, revelation (illumination) and salvation.¹¹⁵

By his Incarnation the eternal Word establishes in time a single, universal, theophanous economy by which the natural and written economies which we experience as distinct are constituted as effective revelatory and saving dispensations. Only on this basis can Maximus posit the equal revelatory efficacy of the two laws. In other words, they have no independent metaphysical or salutary status apart from the Word who is none other than the crucified and risen incarnate Saviour Jesus Christ:

The mystery of the Word's incarnation contains the force of all the hidden meanings and types in Scripture, and the understanding of visible and intelligible creatures. The one who knows the mystery of the cross and tomb knows the true nature (τοῦς λόγους) of these aforementioned things. And the one who has been initiated into the ineffable power of the resurrection knows the purpose for which God originally made all things.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 118.

¹¹⁵ *Microcosm and Mediator*, 77.

¹¹⁶ *Th.Oec.* 1.66.

On the other hand, as Blowers has demonstrated, the two laws cannot be reduced or collapsed into one as though their specific functions in the progressive, revelatory enactment of the eternal divine plan were of no account.¹¹⁷

Alongside these three economies in which the Word is said to become thick, Maximus hints at yet a fourth, equally important economy - one we have already encountered with Gregory Nazianzen's 'thickening' metaphor in the *Chapters in Theology*. It is, namely, the life of the virtues: 'In the active life, the Word – becoming thick by means of the virtues – becomes flesh.'¹¹⁸ As the caption heading this section suggests, Maximus envisages the life of the virtues as an incarnation of the Word no less real and effective than his three incarnate economies in cosmos, Scripture, and Christ. The texts we could adduce are many, and will come up for closer analysis later during the course of our whole study. Here we shall simply try to focus upon the *revelatory* character of this incarnation with a view to discerning its impact upon the body.

Behind Maximus' thinking on this point there lies his fully developed understanding of the direct and mutual reciprocity between divine incarnation and human deification. In the traditions represented by Saints Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Augustine this reciprocity was expressed in the well-known phrase, 'God became man that we might become God.'¹¹⁹ With Gregory Nazianzen we notice a shift related to his soteriological principle *quod non est assumptum non est sanatum* – what is not assumed is not healed.¹²⁰ He introduces to the traditional phrase the *tantum-quantum* formula which we met above in Maximus. United to God in Christ, human nature became one with God, 'so that I might

¹¹⁷ Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 118-119.

¹¹⁸ Ἐν μὲν πρακτικῶ, τοῖς τῶν ἀρετῶν τρόποις παχυνόμενος ὁ λόγος (*Th.Oec.* 2.37).

¹¹⁹ *Iren.Haer.* 3.19.1; *Ath.Inc.* 54; *Aug.Serm.* 192.1.1.

¹²⁰ 'What is not assumed is not healed' (τὸ γὰρ ἀπρόσληπτον, ἀθεράπευτον). *Greg.Naz.Ep.* 101 (SC 208, I.32).

be made God *so far as* he is made man' (ἵνα γένωμαι τοσοῦτον Θεός, ὅσον ἐκείνος ἄνθρωπος).¹²¹ Man's deification is not only reciprocally related, but directly and quantifiably proportionate to the extent of God's humanisation, and dependent upon it. Maximus however takes this proportionate dependence of human deification upon God's incarnation one step further by asserting the dependence of God's incarnation upon human deification. God takes bodily form in man *to the extent that man deifies himself* through the cultivation of virtue. The widely acknowledged *locus classicus* for this doctrine is found in *Ambiguum* 10:

For [the Fathers] say that God and man are paradigms of one another: God is humanised to man through love for humankind to the extent that man, enabled through love, deifies himself to God; and man is caught up spiritually by God to what is unknown to the extent that he manifests God, who is invisible by nature, through the virtues.¹²²

What Maximus is depicting here is less 'another' incarnation distinct from Christ so much as the progressive and proleptic incorporation of the Christian into the revelatory and deifying dynamic of the Word's one glorious Incarnation. The same dynamic is apparent when we consider another crucial passage in *Ambiguum* 7 where omitting the τοσοῦτον–ὅσον formula Maximus describes the three-fold result of having actively 'engraved and formed' (ἐντυπώσας τε καὶ μορφώσας) God alone in oneself entirely:

¹²¹ Greg.Naz.Or. 29.19 (SC 250, 218.9-10). Catherine Osborne also detects in Origen the presence of an 'inverse symmetry' between human assimilation to God through love and God's love for humankind. See her important study *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 182.

¹²² *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1113BC). I follow Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and his Refutation of Origenism* (Studia Anselmiana 36, Rome: Herder, 1955), 144 fn35, in reading τὸ ἄγνωστον in place of τὸ γνωστόν.

The result is that he too is and is called ‘God’ by grace, that God by condescension is and is called man for his sake, and that the power of this exchanged condition is demonstrated in him. This is the power that deifies man to God on account of love for God, and humanises God to man on account of God’s love for humankind, and which, according to this wonderful exchange, makes God man by the deification of man, and makes man God by the humanisation of God.¹²³

A number of repeated features are worthy of note. First is the foundation of this transformative reciprocity in divine love for man (φιλανθρωπία) and human love for God (ἀγάπη, φιλόθεον). Love fills out or ‘gives body’ at the level of actuality to the union potentially realised in faith. Secondly, correlative to the reciprocal effects of deification and incarnation, expressed by the adoption of Gregory’s ‘wonderful exchange’ (καλὴ ἀντιστροφή),¹²⁴ we observe the *bodily* manifestation of divine power in the deified subject. In the words that follow the first passage from *Ambiguum* 10, Maximus makes passing reference to the impact of the reciprocal exchange upon ‘the nature of the body’. ‘[A]ccording to this philosophy,’ he writes, ‘the nature of the body is necessarily ennobled (εὐγενίζεται)¹²⁵ - that is, it becomes subject to and endowed with reason.¹²⁶ The person ‘caught up’ in the process of deification becomes in the ordered totality of his corporeal

¹²³ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1084C).

¹²⁴ *Greg.Naz.Or.* 38.4. The phrase occurs in Gregory’s appeal to keep the Feast of the Theophany replete with baptismal imagery: ‘This is our present Festival; it is this which we are celebrating today, the coming of God to man, that we may go forth, or rather (for this is the proper expression) that we may go back to God – that putting off the old man, we may put on the New; and that as we died in Adam, so we may live in Christ, being born with Christ and crucified with him and buried with him and rising with him. For I must undergo the wonderful exchange (τὴν καλὴν ἀντιστροφήν), and as the painful succeeded the more blissful, so must the more blissful come out of the painful. For where sin abounded, grace abounded much more yet; and if a taste condemned us, how much more does the passion of Christ justify us? Therefore let us keep the Feast....’ On the development of the idea of the *admirabile commercium* in the Fathers, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume 4: *The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 246-254.

¹²⁵ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1113C).

¹²⁶ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1116D).

human nature – a composite unity of intellect (νοῦς), reason (λόγος), and sense (αἴσθησις), an agent of divine manifestation. And because God’s deifying presence in his body is incarnate as love, it is sacramentally effective: capable of binding both himself and other human beings to God. In other words, the deified subject himself, as God by grace, becomes a means of deifying others. Thus it is speaking of love experienced *through another person* that Maximus says that ‘nothing is more truly Godlike than divine love, nothing more mysterious, nothing more apt to raise up human beings to deification.’¹²⁷

Now at last we may be in a better position to understand Maximus’ co-ordination of ourselves, the cosmos and Scripture as ‘three human beings’.¹²⁸ In their common and essential bipartite structure (sensible-intelligible) all three possess a potentially divisive character, contingent upon their orientation to the ‘greater and more mystical economy’ of the universal consummation. Insofar as cosmos and Scripture *are* a human being, through the reciprocal deification of man and incarnation of God this future ‘more hidden economy’ (μυστικωτέρα οἰκονομία)¹²⁹ becomes already concretely manifest in space (cosmos) and time (Scripture). Only in deified humanity do cosmos and Scripture attain their proper status and goal. Through the deified person’s life of virtue, that is, through faith active in love, both cosmos and Scripture lose their obscuring and concealing and divisive character, and instead their intelligible and divine qualities become manifest. This is what Maximus means when he speaks of a time when ‘the body will become like the soul and sensible things like intelligible things in dignity and glory, when the unique divine power will manifest itself in all things in a vivid and active presence proportioned to each

¹²⁷ *Ep.* 2 (PG 91.393B); see also *Myst.* 24: ‘nothing is either so fitting for justification or so apt for deification and nearness to God, if I may speak thus, than mercy offered with pleasure and joy from the soul to those who stand in need’ (Sotiropoulos 236.22-25).

¹²⁸ *Myst.* 7 (Sotiropoulos 188.10-12).

¹²⁹ *Myst.* 7 (Sotiropoulos 186.25).

one....¹³⁰ We shall encounter even more explicit statements to the same end towards the latter stages of this chapter.

Revelation as Symbolic Pedagogy

In several places we have mentioned the specifically *pedagogical* function of sensible symbolic media as they occur in the three incarnate economies of God the Word. Cosmos, Scripture, and Christ are carefully schematised and symbolic pedagogies through which the divine Word, employing a whole range of pedagogical skills – from teaching to training, concealment to correction - brings about deifying illumination. Werner Jaeger has demonstrated that for the dominant tradition of spiritual anthropology to which Maximus was heir – that of Gregory of Nyssa - *paideia* was primarily understood in terms of *morphosis* or formation.¹³¹ Gregory's 'constant repetition of this basic image, which implies the essential identity of all educational activity and the work of the creative artist, painter, and sculptor, reveals the plastic nature of his conception of Greek *paideia*.¹³²

This is a significant detail for our discussion, for it brings to the fore the positive view of materiality this metaphor assumes. Interestingly it is an aspect of *paideia* that is common to Christian and Neoplatonist alike. In the first book of the *Enneads*, Plotinus provides the famous illustration of this 'plastic' dimension of *paideia* at work in the sculptor whose basic task is to model his own statue:

¹³⁰ *Myst.* 7 (Sotiropoulos 188.5-8).

¹³¹ *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 86-87.

¹³² *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, 87.

Just as someone making a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away here and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another till he has given his statue a beautiful face, so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright, and never stop 'working on your statue' till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you, till you see 'self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat.'¹³³

Maximus, familiar with this very 'plastic' image of formation from both Gregory of Nyssa¹³⁴ and Dionysius,¹³⁵ also adopts and develops it in a number of contexts. In some instances it serves as a metaphor of the critical first stage in the pursuit of Christian perfection. In the purgative process of human ascent to God, one must disengage the body from its association with defiling practices and passionate attachments, cutting away from the soul the vices and passions that bind it to transient materiality:

Some of the passions are of the body, some of the soul. Those of the body take their origin in the body; those of the soul from exterior things. Love and self-control cut away both of them, the former those of the soul, the latter those of the body.¹³⁶

In another passage, Maximus' use of the image recalls Plotinus' idea of the discernment of an inner beauty of the soul. *Paideia* leads to clearer vision of the beauty of the divine image. For Maximus, however, that beauty is constituted by the presence of Christ in the heart by baptismal faith:

¹³³ *Enneads* 1.6.9.

¹³⁴ *In inscriptiones Psalmorum* 2.11 (GNO V, 115.22 – 116.26).

¹³⁵ *De myst.theol.* 2 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 145.3-7).

¹³⁶ *Car.* 1.64. See also *Th.Oec.* 2.17 where the process of cutting away material attachments is explicitly linked as a first stage to progress towards the beatific vision.

If, according to the Apostle, *Christ dwells in our hearts by faith* (Eph 3:7), and *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in him* (Col 2:3), then all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in our hearts...

This is why the Saviour says, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Mt 5:8), because he is hidden in the heart of those who believe in him. They will see him and the treasures in him when they purify themselves by love and self-control, and the more intensely they strive the fuller their vision will be.¹³⁷

Developing further the plastic dimension of the image of *morphosis*, Jaeger goes on to speak of the analogy with physical development implied by Gregory's understanding of *paideia*. Spiritual development mirrors physical growth, but differs from it in that the former is not spontaneous, but requires constant care and nurture.¹³⁸ If anything, left to itself the soul tends towards change and fragmentation. It is this decline that divine *paideia* corrects and transforms.¹³⁹

Again we find this analogy between physical and spiritual nourishment developed by Maximus in his answer to a query as to whether the perfect human state is static or involves change.¹⁴⁰ His answer leads us to recognise that while physical food cannot give spiritual nourishment, spiritual food nourishes both soul *and* body. *Paideia* does not eliminate the body. It transfigures it by giving it a form befitting union with God. The remarkable final stage of the discussion bears close resemblance to passages discussed above in which we observed the reciprocal correspondence between human deification, divine incarnation, and the attendant corporeal revelatory implications:

¹³⁷ *Car.* 4.70, 72.

¹³⁸ Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, 87.

¹³⁹ See, for instance, Greg.Nyss. *V.Mos.* 2.1-3.

¹⁴⁰ *Th.Oec.* 2.88.

When [the soul] receives through this food the eternal well-being inherent to it, it becomes God by participation in divine grace, having ceased all activities of mind and sense, and having given rest together with itself to the natural activity of the body joined to the soul by virtue of the body's own commensurate participation in deification. The result is that God alone is made manifest through the soul *and the body*, their natural characteristics having been overwhelmed by the excess of glory.¹⁴¹

So far we have presented examples of *paideia* as an ascetically applied purificatory process that leads towards giving form to the sensible so that it may function as a transparent vehicle of divine theophany. But in the light of our analysis of God's incarnate economies as the fulfilment of his will 'always and in all things to effect the mystery of his embodiment', an understanding of divine revelation as a symbolic pedagogy leads us to consider further Gregory of Nyssa's conception of *paideia* 'in metaphysical terms that project its continuation into cosmic dimensions.'¹⁴² Andrew Louth has drawn out the implications of such a view. By including *paideia* within his treatment of the 'tacit' nature of tradition, Louth shows how, on the basis of the fact that '*paideia* involves taking seriously the nature of man as a social being', gnostic Christian traditions rejected *paideia* as fundamentally opposed to their individualist, anti-material view of human nature and the world.¹⁴³ The function of *paideia* as the formative operation of the Holy Spirit on human nature and as the cementing force in Christian society carries with it a positive evaluation

¹⁴¹ *Th.Oec.* 2.88. The 'natural characteristics' primarily refer to the features of empirical life bordered by mortality and penetrated by corruption: sexual reproduction, passionate attachment, corruption and death (*Myst.* 24 [Sotiropoulos 226.6]; *Or.dom.* [CCSG 23, 50.401; 66.697]). But they also refer to the natural, bodily and material characteristics of creation insofar as they are the locus of these corruptive influences and thus bear a divisive character that obscures their true nature and purpose.

¹⁴² Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, 89.

¹⁴³ *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 76.

of material, social, historical existence – an ‘underlying vision of the healthy and thoroughly profitable diversity of material symbols....’¹⁴⁴ These contingent material and historical elements - cosmos, Scripture, Church, liturgy, and ascetic *praxis* - constitute the basic symbolic tools God uses in the pedagogic formation of human nature.

This view is confirmed in the last of Maximus’ *Ambigua* to John of Cyzicus in which he treats a passage from one of Gregory Nazianzen’s poems that invites an interpretation of the cosmos as the arena of divine *paideia*:

For the high Word plays (παίζει) in every kind of form,
Mixing, as he wills, with his world here and there.¹⁴⁵

Carlos Steel has noted how John of Cyzicus must have been startled by Gregory’s ascription of ‘play’ to the divine Word, since Gregory usually confines the term to the activity of the devil.¹⁴⁶ While Maximus provisionally proffers four interpretations of Gregory’s poem, it is possible to discern a common thread: play characterises the pedagogical interaction of the transcendent God in his cosmic and incarnate economies with what is inherently weak, transient, and unstable. Initially Maximus’ focus is more apparently christological. Citing ‘the great and fearful mystery of the divine descent of God the Word to the human level accomplished through the flesh’, Maximus equates Gregory’s sense of the word ‘play’ (παίγνιον) to Saint Paul’s talk of God’s ‘foolishness’ and

¹⁴⁴ So Blowers concludes with more specific reference to Maximus’ exegetical method, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 254.

¹⁴⁵ *Amb.Io.* 71 (PG 91.1408C – 1416D). The poetic passage is from Greg.Naz.*Praec.* (PG 37.624A – 625A). Text-critical questions related to this passage are treated by Carlos Steel, ‘Le Jeu du Verbe. à propos de Maxime, *Amb. ad Iob.* LXVII’, in A. Schoors and P. van Deun (eds.), *Philohistor: Miscellanea in Honorem Caroli Laga Septuagenarii* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 60, Leuven, 1994), 281-282. I have followed his amended text which reads: Παίζει γὰρ λόγος αἰπὺς ἐν εἴδει παντοδαποῖσι / Κιρνάς, ὡς ἐθέλει, κόσμον ἐὼν ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα.

‘weakness’ in 1 Corinthians 1:25. By predicating of this mystery what in human terms are privations – play, foolishness, and weakness – both theologians are actually affirming God’s possession of transcendent prudence, wisdom, and power.¹⁴⁷

In his more difficult second conjecture Maximus however seems to move beyond an exclusively christological interpretation. By ‘play’ he suggests Gregory means ‘the distance or kind of equidistant projection of mediating beings from the extremes’ (τὴν τῶν μέσων τυχὸν προβολήν, κατὰ τὸ ἴσον ἀπὸ τῶν ἄκρων ἔχουσιν ἀπόστασιν).¹⁴⁸ The ‘mediating beings’ refer to visible, transient phenomena; the ‘extremes’ to the invisible realities at the beginning and end of human existence. ‘Play’ then refers to the bridging of the gap, the uniting of opposites which, as Maximus suggests, is precisely what occurs in the Incarnation where the ontological gulf between the divine and human realms is bridged.¹⁴⁹ But quoting Dionysius Maximus also depicts it as a *cosmic* reality brought about by God’s loving and ecstatic ‘going-out-of-himself’ to be present providentially in all creation, the object of his love.¹⁵⁰ The whole ‘historical nature’ of visible creation, then, is the means by which the transcendent Word stoops playfully like a parent to our limited, childish level of understanding with a view to lead us on to understand reality *sub specie aeternitatis*.¹⁵¹ In comparison with divine reality, empirical existence is indeed ‘play’ – or even folly. Only by recognising its inherently phantasmic, unstable character are we made wise to transfer our confidence to what is permanent, stable, and real.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ ‘Le Jeu du Verbe’, 282-283.

¹⁴⁷ *Amb.Io.* 71 (PG 91.1409A - 1409C).

¹⁴⁸ *Amb.Io.* 71 (PG 91.1412B).

¹⁴⁹ *Amb.Io.* 71 (PG 91.1413A).

¹⁵⁰ *Amb.Io.* 71 (PG 91.1413AB). Cf. *Dion.Ar.De div.nom.* 4.13.

¹⁵¹ *Amb.Io.* 71 (PG 91.1413B - 1413D).

¹⁵² *Amb.Io.* 71 (PG 91.1416A - 1416D).

As can be observed throughout our chapter so far, divine revelation is not simply a one-sided divine display but God's adaptive and progressive engagement with the believing subject in an effective *paideia* leading to union with himself. In this respect it is appropriate to speak of Maximus' notion of *proportionate* revelation, one he shares with a tradition found in Clement of Alexandria and mediated through Origen in which there is provided an account of 'the economic variability'¹⁵³ of the Word in Scripture and cosmos.¹⁵⁴ Origen repeatedly refers to the fact that the incarnate Word is perceived under a variety of forms, without any alteration in himself, according to the varying measure of spiritual capacity found among perceiving subjects. Some look at Christ and see only a man 'without form or beauty'. Others, whose perception has been purified and transformed, look at Christ and see his higher nature – the eternal Word and Son of God the Father.¹⁵⁵ It would be nearsighted to evaluate this principle of proportionate, restricted access to divine knowledge as an expression of some kind of elitist esotericism. On the contrary, it is essentially soteriological: the Logos empties himself so that, becoming 'all things to all, he may save all' (1 Cor 9:22).¹⁵⁶ Origen, who like Saint Paul and Clement of Alexandria knew knowledge to be dangerous,¹⁵⁷ recognised in the Lord a wise pedagogue who sometimes deliberately veiled his teaching, 'so that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand' (Lk 8:10), and who praised his Father for hiding divine things from the wise and learned and revealing them instead to children (Mt 11:25).

¹⁵³ John A. McGuckin, 'The Changing Forms of Jesus', in Lothar Lies (ed.), *Origeniana Quarta: Die Referate des 4. Internationalen Origeneskongresses Innsbruck, 2. - 6. September 1985* (Innsbruck-Wien: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), 215-222.

¹⁵⁴ On the differences between Clement and Origen, see Karen Jo Torjesen, 'Pedagogical Soteriology from Clement to Origen', in Lies, *Origeniana Quarta*, 370-378.

¹⁵⁵ *Or. Matt.* 12.37; *Or. Cels.* 2.72; 4.15-17; 6.67-68; 7.42-44 *et al.*

¹⁵⁶ See *Or. Job.* 1.31 (SC 120, 166.217); Maximus *Q. Thal.* 47 (CCSG 7, 325.211-227); *Th. Oec.* 2.27.

¹⁵⁷ 1 Cor 8:7; *Clem. Str.* 1.9.45; 1.12.55; 4.25.160; 6.15.124; *Clem. Paed.* 3.12.97. Cf. *Ecc* 1:18.

Even so, in addition to the need to regulate the disclosure of sacred truth in order to guard it from desecration¹⁵⁸ Dionysius poses as a reason for proportionate, symbolic revelation our own incapacity to perceive divine things directly.¹⁵⁹ Once again the dual ability of symbols to reveal and conceal is seen to serve a pedagogical purpose. The dizzying multiplicity in the cosmic order and salvation-history which confronts the contemplative constitutes in fact a soteriological function of the Word's symbolic pedagogy in which, by assuming different forms, he reveals himself proportionately and incrementally in a measure commensurate to a person's spiritual state.¹⁶⁰ This doctrine of course presumes the reciprocal and progressive engagement of the knower with the known, the pupil with the pedagogue via these symbolic media.

Maximus draws these ideas together by means of a number of varying metaphors used mainly in the context of forming in his monastic readership a sensitivity to the multivalence inherent to the world of Scripture.¹⁶¹ Looking upon Scripture's various verbal forms, themselves analogously related to the multiple aspects of the *logoi* in creation,¹⁶² 'the masses' (οἱ πολλοί) see there only 'flesh' and not its singular Logos. Its true 'mind' or inner meaning (ὁ νοῦς τῆς Γραφῆς), which is actually contrary to appearance (ἕτερον παρά τὸ δοκοῦν), eludes them.¹⁶³ And even among believers there are differing levels of spiritual maturity, and therefore of revelation. As the bread of life, the Word nourishes all

¹⁵⁸ The biblical text customarily cited in this connection is Matthew 7:6.

¹⁵⁹ *De coel.hier.* 2.2 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 11.11-20).

¹⁶⁰ See *Or.Matt.* 12.36-38; *Or.Job.* 1.20; *Or.Gen.* 1.7; *Or.Lev.* 1.1; *Or.Cels.* 1.55; 2.65; 4.16-18; 6.68; 6.77.

¹⁶¹ See Paul M. Blowers' detailed treatment in 'The Anagogical Imagination: Maximus the Confessor and the Legacy of Origenian Hermeneutics', in G. Dorival and A. le Boulluec (eds.), *Origeniana Sexta. Origène et la Bible. Actes du Colloquium Origenianum Sextum, Chantilly, 30 août – 3 septembre 1993* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovansensium 137, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 639-654.

¹⁶² Again we refer to another of Blower's fine studies, this time 'The Analogy of Scripture and Cosmos in Maximus the Confessor', *JP* 28 (1993), 145-149.

¹⁶³ *Th.Oec.* 2.60.

who ask, but not all in the same way.¹⁶⁴ Maximus distinguishes between ‘two forms’ of the Word’s manifestation: a ‘common and more public’ appearance and one ‘more hidden’ and accessible only to a few. Those who encounter him according to the first represent the ‘initiates’ or ‘beginners’ (οἱ εἰσαγόμενοι, οἱ νηπίοι), while those who encounter him according to the second are ‘the perfect’ (οἱ τελειώθεντοι, οἱ τελεῖοι). It is a distinction he sees as mirroring the scriptural distinction between those who see Jesus ‘in the form of a servant’ and those who ascend the mountain of Transfiguration and see him in his transcendent divine glory.¹⁶⁵ The two groups are determined not so much by categories suggesting the relative inferiority or superiority of one to the other than by their respective and subjective orientation to the final eschatological mystery. ‘The infants’ are evidently still being led towards ‘the age of perfection’, whereas ‘the perfect’ are living prophetic types in whom the Word already – though at a hidden level (κρυφίως) - ‘is delineating in advance (προδιαγράφων) as in a picture the features of his future coming.’¹⁶⁶

As we shall see more clearly in the next and final section of this chapter, the movement from initiation and spiritual infancy to perfection lies within the power of the believing subject who must devote himself to the imitation of Christ in an ascending program of *askesis*, contemplation, and finally adoration of the holy Trinity. Followers of Christ are not simply neutral or passive recipients of a proportionate revelation tailored to their spiritual or intellectual capacities. In Balthasar’s memorable phrase: ‘Revelation is a battlefield.’¹⁶⁷ The divine gift – whether it be spoken of as faith, vision, grace, adoption –

¹⁶⁴ *Th.Oec.* 2.56. The metaphor is widely used in Origen.

¹⁶⁵ *Th.Oec.* 1.97; 2.13; 2.28. Cf. Eph 4:13-14.

¹⁶⁶ *Th.Oec.* 2.28.

¹⁶⁷ *Theo-Drama*, volume 4, 12.

must be engaged, acted upon, put to work, exercised, guarded, and invested.¹⁶⁸ Continual and progressive passage from flesh to spirit, from *kataphasis* to *apophasis*, from *praxis* to *theoria* is both a moral and theological imperative in response to and in co-operation with the divine initiative:

Therefore, the need for further understanding is such that we must first pass through the veils of the letters that surround the Word, and thereby with a naked intellect behold the pure Word himself as he exists in himself – as the one who clearly shows forth the Father in himself – as far as humanly possible. It is necessary for him who piously seeks after God not to hold fast to the letter, lest he unwittingly take words about God in place of God, that is, in place of the Word – precariously being content with the *words* of Scripture, while the *Word* escapes the mind through its holding fast to the garments, all the while thinking it has the incorporeal Word, like the Egyptian woman who took hold not of Joseph, but of his clothes, and also like those men of old who, remaining only in the beauty of visible phenomena, unwittingly worshiped the creation instead of the creator.¹⁶⁹

In conclusion then, what has been said of Origen's hermeneutical pedagogy is equally applicable to Maximus' reading of both the cosmic and scriptural worlds: the relationship between the sacred text and its reader is viewed 'not statically, as the passive apprehension of something given, but dynamically as an effort by the exegete to penetrate ever more deeply into the inexhaustible depths of God's Word, according to his own skill

¹⁶⁸ This does not imply that revelation is simply what the knowing subject makes of it. On this point I do not concur with Marguerite Harl's otherwise magnificent thesis in *Origène et la Fonction Révélatrice du Verbe Incarné* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1958), 342-343, when she suggests that the notion of proportionate revelation renders the incarnate Word little more than a 'une aide, une aide peut-être décisive' which merely enables the striving subject to acquire divine knowledge himself in such a way that ultimately 'ce n'est pas le Verbe incarné qui donne lui-même l'illumination.'

¹⁶⁹ *Th.Oec.* 2.73. The incident from Genesis 39:12 is utilised in the same way in the context of Maximus' exposition of the Transfiguration in *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1129A – 1133A).

and capacity.¹⁷⁰ It is on account of both Scripture's divine content and the necessary development of the Christian's spiritual capacity that scriptural interpretation and natural contemplation are never finally definitive but involve recognising the symbolic plasticity of the economic orders: their 'somehow expansive signification, which stretches along with the understanding of the reader.'¹⁷¹

Sensual *taxís* and Intellectual *diabasis*

As one ascends the progressive steps of the spiritual life one moves from dependence upon material symbols to a more direct apprehension of the subject they disclose. Indeed, 'the saints' represent the highest way of apprehending divine knowledge when it is said of them that 'they do not acquire the blessed knowledge of God only by sense and appearances and forms, using letters and syllables, which lead to mistakes and bafflement over the discernment of the truth, but solely by the mind, rendered most pure and released from all material mists.'¹⁷² The words 'solely by the mind' (μόνῳ νοῦ) may suggest to our way of thinking that Maximus is advocating an entirely disincarnate, intellectualist form of gnostic speculation. Yet we must remind ourselves that underlying his epistemology is a vast and intricate metaphysical network that connects and at the same time preserves as fundamentally integral the absolute transcendence of the divine nature, the threefold incarnate economies of the second person of the Trinity, and the natural (created) composition of the corporeal human being. On this score Maximus' thinking is on par with

¹⁷⁰ Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*, trans. John A. Hughes, eds. Anders Berquist and Markus Bockmuehl (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 43.

¹⁷¹ From the description of biblical symbol in the work of 19th century French bishop Olymphe-Philippe Gerbet, *Esquisse de Rome Chrétienne*, quoted by Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, volume 2, trans. E.M. Macierowski (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 204.

that of the Cappadocians, whose worldview, as Jaroslav Pelikan once prudently pointed out,

should not be characterized as some sort of doctrine of absolute idealism that rejected the testimony of the senses in the name of the supremacy of spirit. They were critical of a philosophical theology that claimed to be able to “overleap” the data provided by the senses. For the testimony of the senses was, within its appropriate sphere, both trustworthy and necessary, and it was proper for the human mind to rely on sense experience. It was by the senses, and by the experience of “the actual world” through the senses, that valid if limited knowledge of that actual world could be acquired.¹⁷³

As we have argued, for Maximus the ‘actual world’ - with all its complex variation and continual flux – presents to those with ‘eyes’ to see a vast book depicting the harmonious web of the whole created economy.¹⁷⁴ By virtue of the natural integrity of the dual sensible/intelligible composition of the universe, he can testify to the material order as bearing in itself ‘traces’ (ἀπληγήματα) of divine majesty ‘infused’ (ἐγκαταμίξαι) into its very sensible contours.¹⁷⁵ These traces, radiating the magnificence of the highest goodness, are ‘capable of conveying directly to God the human intellect which, having held itself above them, comes to transcend all visible phenomena.’¹⁷⁶ What is needed is three-fold: a recognition of the created and ordered harmony of the sensible/intelligible universe, the re-ordering and the preservation of the created order (*taxis*) of one’s own natural faculties, and

¹⁷² *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1160B).

¹⁷³ *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 109.

¹⁷⁴ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1128D – 1129A).

¹⁷⁵ *Q.Thal.* 51 (CCSG 7, 395.22-24).

¹⁷⁶ *Q.Thal.* 51 (CCSG 7, 395.24-27).

the proper exercise of those faculties upon the data of revelation in a progressive passage through all created beings – sensible and intelligible – and beyond them to God himself.

Maximus' basis then for viewing the path of revelation as a two-way, divine/human dialectical and pedagogical process is seen to be as much ontological as it is moral. He knows that it is impossible for a person to acquire any kind of divine gift – whether wisdom, knowledge, or faith – by means of natural ability alone. Their conferral is by divine power.¹⁷⁷ On the other hand 'it is obvious too', he says, 'that the grace of the Holy Spirit in no way leaves the natural faculty unengaged, but rather – since it has been left unengaged by behaviour contrary to nature – grace begins to make the natural faculty active again, leading it via the use of modes harmonious with nature towards the comprehension of divine things.'¹⁷⁸ He adduces two illustrative proofs. The first is christological:

For just as the Word did not perform (in a way appropriate to his divinity) activities natural to flesh apart from his intelligently animated flesh, neither does the Holy Spirit effect in the saints the knowledge of the mysteries apart from the faculty which naturally seeks and searches after knowledge.¹⁷⁹

The second is natural:

For just as the eye does not apprehend sensible phenomena without sunlight, so the human mind could never receive spiritual vision without spiritual light. For the one

¹⁷⁷ *Q.Thal.* 59 (CCSG 22, 47.61-64).

¹⁷⁸ *Q.Thal.* 59 (CCSG 22, 51.95-99).

¹⁷⁹ *Q.Thal.* 59 (CCSG 22, 51.104-109).

illuminates natural sense enabling it to apprehend bodies, while the other illuminates the mind for contemplation, bringing it to comprehend realities beyond sense.¹⁸⁰

According to their natural, created state, human faculties in their psycho-somatic totality are receptive to divine revelation since they are naturally ordered to respond to the symbolic revelatory data available to them in the sensible and intelligible world. Maximus elaborates upon the structural details of these faculties in *Ambiguum* 21. The five senses are fitted for application to sensible phenomena, though on their own lack the ability to discern the true nature of the things they sense.¹⁸¹ Conversely, the soul also has five faculties, each corresponding to its visible image in the senses.¹⁸² But since the soul is rational, it is capable of discerning the true nature of the things it apprehends through the bodily senses. One's interaction with particular visible things then is to be governed not by one's sensual experience of them but by the soul's divinely-illuminated rational account of their true universal nature and function - their *logos*:

If the soul uses the senses properly, discerning by means of its own faculties the manifold inner principles (λόγους) of created beings, and if it succeeds in wisely transmitting to itself the whole visible universe in which God is hidden and proclaimed in silence, then by use of its own free choice it creates a world of spiritual beauty within the understanding.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ *Q.Thal.* 59 (CCSG 22, 51.116-122).

¹⁸¹ *Amb.Io.* 21 (PG 91.1248A).

¹⁸² Eye=mind; ear=reason; nose=irascible faculty (θυμός); tongue=concupiscible faculty (ἐπιθυμία); touch=life.

¹⁸³ *Amb.Io.* 21 (PG 91.1248C).

By using the senses in this way, the soul actually is said to endow them with reason as 'intelligent vehicles of its own faculties.'¹⁸⁴ When it joins this transformed sensual operation on the one hand with the practice of virtue on the other, the whole soul/body composite becomes an agent of divine theophany.¹⁸⁵

This is of course the way it should be. But Maximus never underestimates the radically perverse state of fallen, empirical human existence. Through Adam's fall all these natural faculties have become disordered. Instead of the mind (νοῦς) acting as the leading (ἡγεμονικός) influence in a descending *taxis* of mind, reason, and sense, there has come about instead through the soul's abandonment of the natural course and its deliberate sensual inclination towards matter 'a complete absorption of the intellectual power in sense and in sense knowledge.'¹⁸⁶ Maximus' whole epistemology and doctrine of divine revelation is therefore articulated within a context in which the Christian must necessarily and continually be engaged in an ascetic struggle to reorder his own chaotic state. The key to achieving divine knowledge is found in a middle course between two tempting extremes: accession to the sensual and bodily realm on the one hand, and outright hatred for it on the other.¹⁸⁷

To that end, and drawing upon the distilled wisdom of the patristic monastic traditions, Maximus praises a partnership (συζυγία) between soul and flesh modelled variously on the relationships between master and servant, husband and wife, and Christ and the Church. The body with its senses is to be the soul's tool or instrument (ὄργανον) for comprehending the magnificence of visible things. It is to be the means of manifesting

¹⁸⁴ *Amb.Io.* 21 (PG 91.1249BC).

¹⁸⁵ *Amb.Io.* 21 (PG 91.1249C).

¹⁸⁶ Sherwood (trans. and notes), *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life, the Four Centuries on Charity* (Ancient Christian Writers 21, New York, NY/Ramsey, NJ: Newman Press, 1955), 64.

¹⁸⁷ *Car.* 1.6-8; 3.8-9.

externally through practical deeds the invisible glory of the virtuous soul. It is to be active in ‘symbolically engraving the hidden nature of intelligible things on the external contours of visible things.’¹⁸⁸

This is indeed Maximus’ assumption in *Ambiguum* 10 which is nothing less than an involved, elaborate apology on the necessity of practical ascetic struggle (πρᾶξις) in the Christian *diabasis* through the sensible and intelligible worlds to God.¹⁸⁹ Extending the insights of Vittorio Croce on Maximus’ theological method,¹⁹⁰ Blowers has convincingly argued that the notion of *diabasis* constitutes ‘an integrating leitmotif of Maximus’ entire hermeneutics.’¹⁹¹ He shows that while the Confessor uses a whole range of compounds of the verb βαίνειν (ἀνα-, δια-, μετα-, ἐπανα-) to express the dynamism inherent to spiritual progress, the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* feature a more concentrated and consistent use of the compound διαβαίνειν–διάβασις. Blowers conjectures that the reason for this lies in the fact that the latter pair

convey for him both a sense of *transcendence* – in keeping with the need to “pass over,” or to “ascend beyond,” sensible objects and the passions which they can spark – and yet also a crucial sense of *continuity*, namely, the necessity of first “passing through” or “penetrating” sensible objects en route to the intelligible and spiritual truth that inheres, by grace, in those sensible things.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ *Q.Thal. prol.* (CCSG 7, 17.1-18).

¹⁸⁹ Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua*, 33-34.

¹⁹⁰ *Tradizione e ricerca. Il metodo teologico di San Massimo il Confessore* (Milan, 1974), summarised by Aidan Nichols in *Byzantine Gospel: Maximus the Confessor in Modern Scholarship* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 24-63.

¹⁹¹ *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 100.

¹⁹² *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 97.

Maximus explicitly bases the need for *diabasis* not on some kind of anti-material worldview but on the Word's Incarnation and subsequent ascension in the flesh to the right hand of the Father. The human passage through the created order to God is a participation in Christ's own exodus and passage through the same. In *Chapters on Theology* 2.18, a paragraph noted for its roots in Origen,¹⁹³ Maximus presents a summary of this spiritual *anabasis* to God in which we see set together the whole range of verbal prefixes just mentioned. Taking as his starting point the scriptural phrases 'from strength to strength' (Ps 83:8) and 'from glory to glory' (2 Cor 3:18), Maximus likens the necessity of lifting one's soul and mind in prayer from human to divine realities to the necessity of continual *progress* (προκοπή) in the practice of the virtues, *advancement* (ἐπανάβασις) in the spiritual knowledge of contemplation, and *transferral* (μετάβασις) from the letter of Scripture to the spirit. 'In this way,' he says,

the mind will be able to follow him who *passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God* (Heb 4:14), who is everywhere and who has passed through (διεληλυθότι) all things in the economy on our behalf, so that following him, we also may pass through (διέλθωμεν) all things with him, and may come to be with him (πρὸς αὐτόν),¹⁹⁴ if, that is, we perceive him not according to the limitations of his economic condescension, but according to the majestic splendour of his natural infinitude.¹⁹⁵

Returning to *Ambiguum* 10, in which Maximus' terminology appears somewhat more fluid, the question had obviously been raised in connection with the passage from

¹⁹³ Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 561.

¹⁹⁴ The use of the preposition πρὸς by the Fathers – notably Origen and Maximus – reflects its very deliberate use in John's Gospel where it signifies the unique theological proximity of the Word/Son with God the Father.

Gregory Nazianzen's panegyric on Saint Athanasius¹⁹⁶ whether it was possible, given Gregory's omission of any mention of *πρακτική*, to 'pass over' the 'cloud or veil' of matter and the fleshly realm by reason and contemplation alone without ascetic struggle.¹⁹⁷ In part of his response Maximus reiterates the saints' teaching that ascetic struggle in itself cannot *create* virtue. It does nevertheless *manifest* it,¹⁹⁸ and it is to this revelatory character of *praxis* as a necessary, visible effect of the soul's participation in God that Maximus repeatedly returns in his elucidations on the question. The saints, for example, know that forbidden pleasure is sensually aroused. The solution to its eradication is not, as one given to pure intellectualism might have it, the total elimination of sense. Rather,

when therefore they perceived that the soul, when moved contrary to nature through the mediation of flesh towards matter, is clothed with the *earthly form* (1 Cor 15:45-49), the saints were disposed to appropriate the flesh in a seemly way to God through the mediation rather of the soul moved naturally towards God, adorning the flesh as far as possible with divine splendours through the ascetic pursuit of virtue.¹⁹⁹

Many scholars have observed the close relation between the practical and contemplative dimensions in Maximus' ascetic theology and its background in the renowned hermit Evagrius Ponticus (d. 399).²⁰⁰ In Evagrius, ascetic struggle (*πρᾶξις*, *πρακτική*) represents the first phase in an ascending triad of spiritual development that

¹⁹⁵ *Th.Oec.* 2.18.

¹⁹⁶ *Greg.Naz.Or.* 21.

¹⁹⁷ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1105C – 1108A).

¹⁹⁸ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1109B).

¹⁹⁹ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1112CD).

²⁰⁰ M. Viller, 'Aux sources de la spiritualité de S. Maxime. Les oeuvres d'Evagre le Pontique', *RAM* 11 (1930), 156-84, 239-268, 331-336; Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 330-38; Völker, *Maximus Confessor als Meister des geistlichen Lebens*, 236-248; Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 355-76; Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*,

progresses through contemplation (θεωρία, γνῶσις φυσικὴ) to mystical knowledge of the trinity (θεολογία).²⁰¹ The three stages reflect the fundamental revelatory and epistemological structure – one we have already outlined and seen as common to the patristic mystical tradition: purification from defiling attachments, engagement with the world of God’s economy, and finally doxological participation in the mysterious communion of the holy Trinity. Whether or not Evagrius advocated the eventual abandonment of the preliminary stages as one ascends the spiritual ladder remains a bone of scholarly contention.²⁰² It is clear, however, that Maximus – who likewise articulates a three-stage spiritual advancement that begins with *praxis*, moves to *theoria*, and is consummated in *theologia*²⁰³ - espouses the full and mutual co-inherence of *praxis* and *theoria*. The *vita practica* is not simply preparatory. One does not leave behind commandment-keeping and ascetic discipline and the practice of suffering love for one’s enemies as though such inherently corporeal and social factors *per se* get in the way of the true business of the Christian life. Rather it is the case, as Larchet asserts, that *praxis* forms ‘le complément indispensable et permanent’ of *theoria*.²⁰⁴ Or as Maximus himself puts it, ‘he who seeks the Lord through contemplation without ascetic struggle (χωρὶς πράξεως) shall not find him.’²⁰⁵ To be sure, the one leads to, implies, and qualifies the other, so that he can speak in a single breath of γνῶσις ἔμπρακτος and πράξις ἔνσοφος,²⁰⁶ or else

133-136; Larchet, *La divinisation de l’homme*, 451-57; Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (The Early Church Fathers, London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 35-38.

²⁰¹ Evag.*Prak.* 1 (SC 171, 498.1-2).

²⁰² See the arguments dealt with by Gabriel Bunge, ‘Origenismus-Gnostizismus: Zum geistesgeschichtlichen Standort des Evagrius Pontikos’, *VC* 40 (1986), 24-54; *idem.*, ‘The “Spiritual Prayer”: On the Trinitarian Mysticism of Evagrius of Pontus’, *Monastic Studies* 17 (1987), 191-208.

²⁰³ *Car.* 1.86; 1.94; 4.47; *Th.Oec.* 1.37-39; 1.51-57; *Myst.* 4; *et al.* See further Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 332-368; Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 133-145.

²⁰⁴ *La divinisation de l’homme*, 453.

²⁰⁵ *Q.Thal.* 48 (CCSG 7, 339.151-153).

²⁰⁶ *Amb.Th. prol.* (PG 91.1032A).

define *praxis* as θεωρία ἐνεργουμένη and *theoria* as πράξις μυσταγωγουμένη.²⁰⁷ In another passage he is unequivocal:

In my view, ascetic practice (πράξις) and contemplation (θεωρία) mutually cohere (συνεχομένως) in one another, and the one is never separated from the other. On the contrary, ascetic practice shows forth through conduct the knowledge derived from contemplation, while contemplation no less displays rational virtue fortified by practice.²⁰⁸

The implications of this conviction for both one's bodily senses and the entire sensible world become more apparent a little further on in the same treatise:

It is impossible for the mind to cross over (διαβήναι) to intelligible realities, despite their connatural relation, without contemplating intermediary sensible things, but it is also absolutely impossible for contemplation to take place without sense (which is naturally akin to sensible things) being joined with the mind.²⁰⁹

Before we end this first chapter, we ought finally to point out that the mutual co-inherence of *praxis* and *theoria* in no way upsets the necessary hierarchical *taxis* or gradation between them that corresponds to the ontological, epistemological, and eschatological priority of intelligible over sensible, *apophasis* over *kataphasis*, soul over body, spirit over letter. In the progressive ascent of the spiritual life, these corporeal entities 'are not to be eliminated as impure, but to be transcended as insufficient.'²¹⁰ One 'must first be lifted up

²⁰⁷ *Q.Thal* 63 (CCSG 22, 171.392-393).

²⁰⁸ *Q.Thal* 58 (CCSG 22, 31.64-69).

²⁰⁹ *Q.Thal* 58 (CCSG 22, 33.111-115).

²¹⁰ Vittorio Croce, quoted in Nichols, *Byzantine Gospel*, 38.

to God' and only then, once the soul's whole desire has been extended to him alone, 'descend to look into created beings and regard each one in terms of its own nature, and, through them, again be drawn up by contemplative knowledge to their creator.'²¹¹ Only thus can material realities be emptied of their obscurative, divisive character and reintegrated as the transparent vehicles of God's transcendent glory. We could do no better than to conclude by affirming with Blowers that for Maximus the path to 'authentic revelation' involves 'a process not of extreme spiritualization but of a *transfiguration* in which material realities disclose their created fullness κατὰ χριστόν.'²¹²

²¹¹ *QD* 64 (CCSG 10, 50.16-22).

²¹² *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 255.

CHAPTER TWO

Corporeality and the Cosmos

'What of vile dust?' the preacher said.

Metought the whole world woke,

The dead stone lived beneath my foot,

And my whole body spoke.¹

Why did God create the universe? How can it be, and not be God, who alone 'is'? How can its material order possess any 'being' at all, when its existence is marked by perpetual movement and flux, its continual becoming something that it wasn't before? These questions lead us into a study of the status and function Maximus accords corporeality in the cosmic order. We shall undertake it primarily by way of an examination of his great anti-Origenist treatise, the seventh of the earlier *Ambigua ad Ioannem*.

While scholars have rightly recognised its importance as a cosmological treatise, we shall see that *Ambiguum 7* is first of all a treatise about the human body. The drawing of an analogous correspondence between the ordered universe and the human body was a commonplace throughout Greek antiquity. In the fourth century Athanasius cites 'the Greek philosophers' who, following Plato's speculation about the mythical construction of the universe by means of the embodiment of a living creature endowed with soul and reason,² speak of the cosmos as 'a great body' (σῶμα μέγα).³ In the Platonic philosophical

¹ G.K. Chesterton, *The Praise of Dust*; in *idem., Stories, Essays, and Poems* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1935), 311.

² *Timaeus* 30b.

tradition, ‘the relation between body and soul was a microcosm of the vexed problem of the relation between God and the universe.’⁴ Like the cosmos, the human being ‘is all symmetry.’⁵ In adopting this same analogy, Maximus stands within a long tradition common to East and West in which to think of the human body ‘is to think of something that is ... a key to understanding the cosmos itself.’⁶

Concurrently, Maximus - like Athanasius - differs from Plato in his discernment that the ‘mystery’ of bodily existence is inextricably linked to the ‘mystery’ of Christ, God the incarnate Word. The divine Word’s assumption in time of human flesh endowed with a rational soul constitutes for the Confessor a unique paradigm of cosmic proportions, and therefore, as we have already seen in chapter one, he is able to view *sub specie aeternitatis* the entire cosmos – a composite unity of intelligible and sensible reality, as the incarnate, theophanic fulfilment of God the Word’s will ‘always and in all things to effect the mystery of his embodiment.’⁷

We may well ask before we begin whether this notion of God’s embodiment in the cosmos is so conceptually and structurally distinct from certain forms of pantheism and Neoplatonic immanentism. At least one of the charges brought against Origenism, then and now, is its eventual disparagement of the material and historical order as evil and God’s own subjection to some kind of external necessity (ἀνάγκη). Does Maximus, in his refutation of Origenism, go to the other extreme and posit a form of anti-dualist cosmic monism? Is the universe simply God’s material self-extension? These are important questions, and so in preparation for our analysis it will be helpful to conduct a brief survey

³ Ath.Inc. 41.

⁴ Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, 74.

⁵ George Herbert, *Man*, lines 13-14; in Wall, *George Herbert: The Country Parson, The Temple*, 210.

⁶ Andrew Louth, ‘The body in Western Catholic Christianity’, in Coakley, *Religion and the Body*, 112.

⁷ *Amb.Lo.* 7 (PG 91.1084D).

of sixth century Origenism. There it will become clear that in at least some quarters, the derogatory label 'Origenist' implied, in the opinion of the labelling party, a too-uncritical reception of certain aspects of non-Christian Greek philosophy that were thought to compromise the ontological distinction between God and creation, the integrity of the material order, and the wise practice of the ascetic life. From the evidence at hand in Maximus' works it is not entirely unreasonable to conjecture that whatever the so-called 'Origenism' was that he confronted, it shared with earlier tendencies an over-rigorous intellectualism that marginalised the body and the material world, an intellectualism that for Maximus' own monastic readership 'was still inducing the monks to pin their hopes for true spiritual stability on a future intellectual union with God in a state completely disconnected from time and matter.'⁸ While we have concurred in our introduction with Balthasar that the great themes which passed from the likes of Plato and Plotinus into Christianity were on the whole 'world-affirming', it appears that Origenism, precisely on account of its retention of an insufficiently-modified Platonic cosmology, was perceived equally by Maximus and his forebears to threaten the great Christian doctrines of creation, incarnation, and resurrection.

Origenism, Metaphysics and the Body

We begin tracing the metaphysical structure of the cosmos in Maximus' theological vision by providing a cursory sketch of the sixth century Origenist movement. A full account would entail a formidable essay in its own right, and indeed has been the subject of a

⁸ Paul Blowers, 'Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of "Perpetual Progress"', *VC* 46 (1992), 158.

number of detailed studies.⁹ It will suffice here simply to index a few lines of thought that will allow us better to appreciate Maximus' own engagement with what appears to be a problematic monastic trend of his time, and to see it not simply as an intellectualist debate, but a concern – at once philosophical and theological - impinging upon significant aspects of monastic, and thus Christian practice.

In an essay¹⁰ anticipating her novel reconstruction of the Origenist debate,¹¹ Elizabeth Clark, drawing to a large extent on research findings of Antoine Guillaumont¹² and Jon Dechow,¹³ argued that in the Origenist controversy of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the true concerns of anti-Origenist polemic were less theological than they were anthropological. The real nub of Origenism, she says, was not Origen's subordinationism, but Evagrius' 'anti-iconic theology.'¹⁴ Hand in hand with this anthropological 'iconoclasm', Clark argues, goes the 'ascetic assault on the human body.'¹⁵ The major line of Epiphanius' denunciation of Origen, like those of Theophilus of Alexandria and Jerome, 'pertains to issues of materiality as they manifest themselves in discussions of the body and of allegorical exegesis.'¹⁶ None of this is without implication for 'Origenism' in the sixth century, since Justinian makes judicious use of florilegia,

⁹ Antoine Guillaumont, *Les 'Kephalala Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'origénisme chez les grecs et chez les syriens* (Patristica Sorbonensia 5, Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1962); Clark, 'New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy', 145-162; Brian E. Daley, 'What did "Origenism" mean in the Sixth Century?', in Dorival and Boulluec, *Origeniana Sexta*, 627-638.

¹⁰ Clark, 'New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy', 145-162.

¹¹ *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). Clark's thesis is not without difficulties, not the least of which include her sweeping appraisals of Evagrius' spiritual anthropology (esp. 43-84) and her apparent hermeneutical failure to read 'with' his own agenda as a practitioner of pastoral diagnostics.

¹² *Les 'Kephalala Gnostica'*.

¹³ 'Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity: Epiphanius of Cyprus and the Legacy of Origen' (PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1975).

¹⁴ 'New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy', 149. See also Georges Florovsky, 'Origen, Eusebius, and the Iconoclastic Controversy', *CH* 19 (1950), 77-96, who in this connection raises the question of Maximus' own relation to Origen's christological ambivalence.

¹⁵ 'New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy', 154.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 155.

circulating by the second quarter of the sixth century,¹⁷ composed of anti-Origenian material from Epiphanius, Theophilus and Jerome.¹⁸

More recently Brian Daley has argued that while the fourth century crisis may well have concerned issues of bodility and corporeality, ‘our sources for the sixth-century controversy suggest that the center of debate had significantly shifted: what was really at stake in the struggle seems to have been Christology – the unity and symmetry of the person of Christ as an intelligent, embodied human creature and as “one of the Holy Trinity”....’¹⁹ Interestingly, however, Daley makes this claim within the context of his conviction, in which he concurs with Manlio Simonetti,²⁰ that sixth-century Origenism ‘signified more a style of religious thinking, and perhaps a set of priorities in living the monastic life, than it did adherence to a body of doctrine which could find its inspiration in the works of Origen.’²¹ In this respect, both Daley and Clark share the view that whatever ‘Origenism’ was, it was not confined to the ivory towers of ecclesiastical politics, but spelled pastoral crisis at the very grass-roots of monastic life.

These scholarly suggestions may be illuminated by an extract from monastic biographer Cyril of Scythopolis’ *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, penned around 560.²² Alongside the more rhetorically charged comments of Barsanuphius (d. ca. 540),²³ Cyril’s work remains one of the main sources for gauging reactions to ‘Origenism’ in Palestine in

¹⁷ CCT, 2.2, 386.

¹⁸ CCT, 2.2, 400.

¹⁹ ‘What did “Origenism” mean in the Sixth Century?’, 629.

²⁰ ‘Origenism was above all a way of living the Christian religion, in which great faith was joined with an equally great freedom of thought, and an ardent mystical impulse constantly came down to earth in terms characteristic of a Platonically stamped intellectualism.’ From ‘La controversia origeniana: caratteri e significato’, *Augustinianum* 26 (1986), 29, quoted by Daley, ‘What did “Origenism” mean in the Sixth Century?’, 637.

²¹ ‘What did “Origenism” mean in the Sixth Century?’, 628.

²² English translation by R.M. Price and John Binns, *Cyril of Scythopolis: Lives of the Monks of Palestine* (CS 114, Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1991).

²³ *Ep.* 600 in François Neyt and Paula de Angelis-Noah (eds.), *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza. Correspondance*, volume II (SC 451, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 804-810.

the first half of the sixth century.²⁴ In the exchange between Cyril and Abba Cyriacus of the Laura of Souka we learn about the appeal to Gregory Nazianzen's commendation of philosophical enquiry²⁵ by monks apparently taken by the doctrines of the pre-existence of the soul and a universal *apokatastasis*.²⁶ It is worth relating the exchange at length. We begin where the younger Cyril asks Cyriacus about a group of monks who had only recently (ca. 514) been expelled from the New Laura:

‘Father, what are the views they advocate? They themselves affirm that the doctrines of pre-existence and restoration are indifferent and without danger, citing the words of St Gregory, “Philosophize about the world, matter, the soul, the good and evil rational natures, the Resurrection and the Passion of Christ, for in these matters hitting on the truth is not without profit and error is without danger.”’

The elder replied in the following words: ‘The doctrines of pre-existence and restoration are not indifferent and without danger, but dangerous, harmful, and blasphemous. In order to convince you, I shall try to expose their multifarious impiety in a few words. They deny that Christ is one of the Trinity. They say that our resurrection bodies pass to total destruction, and Christ's first of all. They say that the Holy Trinity did not create the world and that at the restoration all rational beings, even demons, will be able to create aeons. They say that our bodies will be raised ethereal and spherical at the resurrection, and they assert that even the body of the Lord was raised in this form. They say that we shall be equal to Christ at the restoration.’

What hell blurted out these doctrines? They have not learned from the God who spoke through the prophets and apostles – perish the thought – but they have revived

²⁴ Joseph Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism: A Comparative Study in Eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 333.

²⁵ The infamous passage is from *Greg.Naz.Or.* 27.10 (SC 250, 96.17 – 98.22).

these abominable and impious doctrines from Pythagoras and Plato, from Origen, Evagrius, and Didymus. I am amazed what vain and futile labours they have expended on such harmful and laborious vanities, and how in this way they have armed their tongues against piety. Should they not rather have praised and glorified brotherly love, hospitality, virginity, care of the poor, psalmody, all-night vigils, and tears of compunction? Should they not be disciplining the body by fasts, ascending to God in prayer, making this life a rehearsal for death, rather than mediating such sophistries.²⁷

Given its hostility, it is difficult to know how reliable such an exchange is for historical reconstruction. For included among those expelled from the Laura as ‘Origenist’ leaders was the monk Leontius of Byzantium, whose doctrine has been demonstrated to bear little resemblance with that explicitly condemned here.²⁸ Nevertheless, it shows that at least one of the main concerns with monks reckoned Origenist was intellectualism – a preoccupation with speculative philosophy and the apparent neglect of the practice of prayer, humility, and brotherly charity. Joseph Patrich has suggested that likely candidates for such a ‘movement’ may have included οἱ λογιώτεροι – ‘the more educated’, and that the dissidents referred to above by Cyril as οἱ γεννώδες - ‘the distinguished ones’ - had probably received classical education on account of their higher socio-economic status.²⁹ Regarding the charge of intellectualism, a monk like Leontius could easily have been vulnerable since as a champion of strict Chalcedonianism he operated within a field of rational and analytical philosophical discourse in which, as Daley writes, ‘the common tools of debate had become far more technical and academic than they had been for Athanasius

²⁶ It is not the biblical idea of an ἀποκατάστασις πάντων *per se* that was thought to be troublesome (cf. Ac 3:21), but the inclusion in it of (finally restored) demons and Satan himself.

²⁷ Price and Binns, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 252-254.

²⁸ See Brian Daley, ‘The Origenism of Leontius of Byzantium’, *JTS NS* 27 (1976), 333-369.

and his contemporaries.³⁰ In other words the very doing of what in our day might be called 'philosophical theology' was reckoned by some to be an 'Origenist' pursuit. Moreover, we note also the association of Origen, Evagrius, and Didymus with the earlier non-Christian Greek philosophers – an association that had already been made explicit by Justinian in 543.³¹

It is to Justinian's edicts of 543 and 553 that we now turn. Once again, while we cannot deduce from them any definitive and lasting categories as to what did or did not constitute Origenism in other contexts, they do serve to illustrate that certain heretical tenets of the mid-sixth century arising from speculative theories of Greek philosophy were reckoned wrong on account of their incompatibility with the Christian doctrines of creation, incarnation, and resurrection. In comparing the edicts from the two occasions, Grillmeier speculates that those of 553 reflect an even more focused attention on issues of corporeality and christology.³² Among the nine canons of 543 we find rejected the doctrines of the pre-existence of souls, their surfeit and banishment into bodies, the differentiation between Christ (as a pre-existent soul) and the Logos, the spherical form of resurrected bodies, and the eventual restoration of all things, including demons. These are again included in the fifteen canons of 553, but with a few notable additions.³³ First, in the second anathema, there is the mention of the doctrine of a *henad*:

If anyone says that the origin of all rational beings was incorporeal and immaterial intelligences without any number or names, so that they formed a *henad* on account of the

²⁹ Patrich, *Sabas*, 333.

³⁰ Brian Daley, "A Richer Union': Leontius of Byzantium and the Relationship of Human and Divine in Christ", *SP* 24 (1993), 244.

³¹ *CCT*, 2.2, 391.

³² *CCT*, 2.2, 407.

³³ Straub, *ACO* IV.1, 248-9.

sameness of essence (*ousia*), of power (*dynamis*) and of activity (*energeia*) and on account of their union with the God-Logos and knowledge; that they became sated with the divine vision (κόρον δὲ αὐτοὺς λαβεῖν τῆς θείας θεωρίας) and turned to what was worse, each corresponding to its inclination to it, and assumed lighter or denser bodies and were labelled with names with respect to the fact that the difference of names exists, like bodies and powers too, from above; and that for this reason some became the cherubim, others seraphim, and again others principalities, powers, dominions, thrones, angels and all the other heavenly orders which exist and were so named, let him be anathema.

This rejection of the *henad* is important for us since it is precisely the problem under fire from Maximus in *Ambiguum* 7. Canons 10, 11 and 14 are also of interest for us:

If anyone says that the Lord's resurrected body is an ethereal and spherical body, that the other resurrected bodies too will be like this, that moreover the Lord will put off his own body first and in a similar way the nature of all the bodies will return to nothing, let him be anathema.

If anyone says that the coming judgement means the annihilation of all bodies, and at the end of the fable immaterial nature stays and in the future nothing of matter will continue to exist, but only the pure *nous*, let him be anathema.

If anyone says that there will be a single *henad* of all rational beings (πάντων τῶν λογικῶν ἑνὰς μία) through the annulment of *hypostases* and numbers with the bodies, and that the end of the worlds and the laying aside of bodies and the abolition of names follow the knowledge relating to the rational beings, and that there will be sameness of knowledge

as of *hypostases* and that in the fabricated *apokatastasis* there will be only pure intelligences, as they exist in their foolishly invented pre-existence, let him be anathema.

These paragraphs make evident how closely woven christological and anthropological concerns are with a cosmology in which the world is considered not simply in static metaphysical terms, but protologically and teleologically as well. One wonders whether the characteristically Justinian soteriological emphasis on the flesh of Christ who is 'one of the Trinity' is simply a political gambit to unite the Empire in the Chalcedonian *horos*, or whether in fact it represents a studied response on the basis of his insight into the implications of 'Origenist' cosmology. What can or cannot be said of Christ as a true, bodily human being and has immediate import both for what can or cannot be said of our bodies and the whole material order. The doctrine of a fall from an original *henad* - a primeval unity of rational, incorporeal beings, and with it the implicit understanding that the *telos* of all beings is constituted as a return and restoration to that pristine, incorporeal state, can be seen to impinge upon the doctrine of the Incarnation and especially of the resurrection - of Christ's body in particular and of human bodies in general. Yet bodies are not just corpses, but persons, or at least identifiably linked to created, subjective, human individuality. The swallowing up of all individuality and differentiation, when understood as the annihilation of *hypostases*, numbers, and bodies, condemned in Canon 14, was seen to amount to a defective doctrine of creation and, concurrently, a defective doctrine of the Incarnation.

Our point in this summary overview has not been to defend or implicate either Origen or Evagrius with respect to the errors that came to be associated with their names. Henri Crouzel has pointed out the noticeable 'gap' separating Origen of the third century

and the Origenism of the sixth, and more recently Gabriel Bunge has shown that Guillaumont's characterisation of sixth century Origenism as 'Evagrian' is far from certain.³⁴ Our intention rather at this stage has been to observe what in the mid-sixth century were the doctrines considered actual and imminent threats to the confession of the Church, its worship and, in specific connection to Maximus' milieu, to the faithful living of the monastic vocation. The Origenism Maximus takes to task cannot be identified from these sixth century sources. Its precise nature will only become more apparent as we examine his refutation of its metaphysical structure and false philosophical suppositions. This he does not by coming at it in a head to head negation, but by revisiting and reconstructing the Origenist world-view at a deep, sub-structural level. We have already seen in chapter one that Maximus is a monk-theologian who fully understands and wills to retain the essential and beneficial elements in the great Alexandrian's exegetical approach.³⁵ He is rightly named a 'definite insider' to the Origenian hermeneutical tradition.³⁶ Here above all we shall see how the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, radically and consistently applied, emerges as the fundamental solution to the faulty Origenist metaphysic. But this will be no battle of 'theology' against 'philosophy'. Maximus' doctrine of creation is itself a creative, enduring synthesis of patristic theology and the Neoplatonic, and especially Proclean,

³⁴ There has already been a considerable amount of study directed to this end. On Origen, see Henri Crouzel, *Origen* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 169-179; M.J. Edwards, 'Origen no Gnostic; or, On the Corporeality of Man and Body and Soul', *JTS NS* 43 (1992), 23-37. On Evagrius, especially in response to claims that he espouses an intellectualist, iconoclastic, or non-affective ascetic theology, see Gabriel Bunge, 'The "Spiritual Prayer": On the Trinitarian Mysticism of Evagrius of Pontus', *Monastic Studies* 17 (1987), 191-208; *idem.*, *Paternité spirituelle: La Gnose chrétienne chez Évagre le Pontique* (Spiritualité Orientale 61, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1994); Bouyer, *The Christian Mystery*, 216-221; also Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Melania the Elder and the Origenist Controversy: The Status of the Body in a Late-Ancient Debate', in John Petruccione (ed.), *Nova et vetera: Patristic Studies in Honor of Thomas Patrick Halton* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 117-127.

³⁵ Sherwood, 'An Annotated Date-List', 3.

³⁶ Paul Blowers, 'The Anagogical Imagination: Maximus the Confessor and the Legacy of Origenianian Hermeneutics', in Dorival and Boulluc, *Origeniana Sexta*, 649.

doctrine of participation, mediated to him via Dionysius the Areopagite.³⁷ Given what has been said about the integrity of the material order in Neoplatonism and Origenism, it will be interesting to see how the body fares in Maximus' refutation.

Ambiguum ad Ioannem 7: A Dynamic Ontology

Ambiguum 7 arguably ranks among the most important treatises of Maximus' early philosophical theology. Alongside *Ambiguum 15*, it spells out in detail the main themes in his refutation of Origenism and provides the foundation for elements that were to become central in the later christological debates. Halfway through the whole treatise comes the phrase that dominates our study of the place of the body in Maximus' total theological vision: 'For the Word of God and God wills always and in all things to effect the mystery of his embodiment.' This sentence suggests that the mystery of divine incarnation, enacted constitutively in Christ, is in fact the paradigmatic foundation of a far-reaching cosmic mystery. 'In all things' (ἐν παντί) signals the utterly universal scope of God's ultimate aim to be embodied in his creation. Yet the treatise begins with a question from Gregory Nazianzen regarding the mysterious quality of human bodily existence. How does Maximus achieve this shift from an anthropological conundrum to a universal cosmology?

³⁷ In an unpublished doctoral thesis, Eric D. Perl has striven to account for Maximus' doctrine of deification by recourse to eventually non-Christian philosophical sources alone. While I believe his depiction of the structure of Maximus' metaphysics to be accurate enough, I suspect that he misses somewhat the *spirit* of Maximus' thought and its rootedness in the *theological* tradition, and so ventures to ally Maximus with a view that far too baldly states the identification of God and creation. See his 'Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, and Deification in Saint Maximus the Confessor' (PhD thesis, Yale University, 1991); and more briefly, 'Metaphysics and Christology in Maximus Confessor and Eriugena', in Bernard McGinn and Willemein Otto (eds.), *Eriugena: East and West. Papers for the Eighth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenean Studies, Chicago and Notre Dame 18-20 October 1991* (Notre Dame, London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 253-270.

It would have been easy for him simply to repristinate the traditional repudiations of the principal Origenist doctrines on the homogeneity of end and beginning, the pre-existence of souls, the punitive and unstable nature of material creation, the endless cycle of being, and universal *apokatastasis*. Indeed, one could say that the refutation of Origenism in the sixth century, epitomised by Justinian's condemnations of 543 and 553, had largely been negative, rather than constructive. But, as Sherwood in his seminal study on *Ambiguum* 7 has pointed out, for Maximus simply to follow suit would have been 'ineffective, because superficial.'³⁸ In the first place, part of the problem was not simply the *content* of the Origenists' doctrines, but *their use of Fathers* revered for their authority as justification for their position. As we saw from the extract from Cyril of Scythopolis above, and learn also from the letters of Barsanuphius and John in Gaza,³⁹ Origenist monks had long been appealing to the authority of divines in the calibre of Gregory Nazianzen to bolster their doctrine of the pre-existence of souls. Maximus views his task in part controlled by the need to vindicate the Fathers associated.⁴⁰ Secondly, Maximus himself would have been sympathetic to the Origenist monks' genuine intellectual concern to articulate a coherent explanation of this material universe in relation to the one God, and of its final meaning and destiny in him. Perhaps Origenism's greatest danger was the very factor that made it so attractive: 'it offered a thoroughgoing philosophical foundation and adjudication for the contemplative life of the monks.'⁴¹ So we can surely agree with

³⁸ *The Earlier Ambigua*, 91.

³⁹ *Ep.* 604 in *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza. Correspondance* (SC 451, 815-824). Brian Daley provides a useful summary of the relevant exchanges in 'The Origenism of Leontius of Byzantium', 366-368.

⁴⁰ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1089C).

⁴¹ Blowers, 'The Logology of Maximus the Confessor in His Criticism of Origenism', in Robert J. Daly (ed.), *Origeniana Quinta: Papers of the 5th International Origen Congress Boston College, 14-18 August, 1989* (Leuven University Press, 1992), 570.

Sherwood that '[t]here was then necessary not merely a dialectical *non sequitur*, but a real ontological explanation of man's nature in regard to the end....'⁴²

Yet it is also true to say that Maximus would have shared the *experience* of the Origenist monks of this universe as 'a place where we discover our fallen state and learn to love God.'⁴³ Here we discover Maximus concerned to show how it is precisely *within* the material structure and temporal contingencies of the cosmos that there can be discerned the providential and gracious presence of a good God. Ontologically speaking, visible and sensible creation is inherently unstable, fluid, and liable to dissolution.⁴⁴ But, hidden (mystically!) beneath it in the form of intelligible reality, there is available to it from outside itself an ontological stability – *being* – that comes, graciously, from the free divine will. The solution to personal and cosmic mutability consists in a vision of reality in which created nature finds its true stability by participating in an ontological and eschatological order that ultimately is both realised and anticipated in the union of created and uncreate in the Incarnation. True (final) existence – both personal and cosmic, spiritual and corporeal - is achieved only through participation in Christ, the incarnate God.

So it is that Maximus does not merely negate what are only the external symptoms of the problems in Origenist doctrine. Instead, as a theologian-philosopher entirely adequate to the task, he revisits and revises Origenism's internal logical structure, strengthening its philosophical coherence and at the same time deepening its theological integrity. What emerges is a remarkably coherent and fundamentally christocentric vision of the mysterious union of all intelligible and sensible reality with God.

⁴² Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 91

⁴³ Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 67.

⁴⁴ *Amb.Io.* 15 (PG 91.1217A).

The difficult text before Maximus is from the Nazianzen's 14th Oration, *On Love for the Poor*,⁴⁵ a primary text for Gregory's anthropology. Here it follows in the relevant context:

... this wretched and low and faithless body: how I have been yoked together with it I do not know, nor how I am an image of God yet blended with clay. It makes war when healthy yet is vexed when warred upon. As a fellow servant I love it, and as an enemy I spurn it. As a fetter I flee it, and as a joint heir I am ashamed of it. I strive to weaken it, and have nothing else to use as a co-worker to attain the best - knowing for what I was made and that I must ascend to God through my actions.

*[I]f I spare it as a co-worker, then I have no way to flee its insurrection, or to avoid falling from God, weighed down by its fetters which draw me down or hold me to the ground.*⁴⁶ It is a gracious enemy and a treacherous friend. O what union and estrangement! What I am afraid of, I treat with respect, and what I love, I have feared. Before I make war [on it] I reconcile myself [to it], and before I make peace [with it] I set myself apart [from it]. *What is the wisdom that concerns me? What is this great mystery? Is it that God wills that we who are a portion of God and slipped down from above – in our struggle and battle with the body – that we should ever look to him, and that the weakness joined [to us] should serve to train our dignity, lest exalted and lifted up on account of our high status we despise the Creator*⁴⁷ - that we should know that we are at the same time both the greatest and the lowest, earthly and heavenly, transitory and immortal, inheritors of light and fire - or of darkness, whichever way we incline? Such is our mixture and this is its reason, as it appears to me at least: that when we exalt ourselves because of the image, we may be humbled because of the dust. Hence let him who wishes

⁴⁵ Greg.Naz.Or. 14.7 (PG 35.865C).

⁴⁶ Maximus treats this sentence in *Amb.Io.* 6.

⁴⁷ This is the passage treated in *Amb.Io.* 7. Note how the question posed by Gregory continues.

contemplate these matters, and we shall join him for spiritual exercises at a more opportune time.⁴⁸

Throughout this passage we hear expressed an ambivalence towards the body and bodily conditions – one that was widely felt in philosophical and Christian ascetic and theological traditions, both Eastern and Western.⁴⁹ Its essential features combine both Platonic and Pauline themes, echoing on the one hand Socrates' cool stance towards 'the foolishness of the body',⁵⁰ and on the other the Apostle's impassioned cry, 'who will rescue me from this body of death?'⁵¹

Baffled by the paradox of human sublimity and humility, Gregory is wondering why, if he was created for a heavenly life of union with God, man was given a body.⁵² His own answer is that the body keeps man humble, guarding him from pride and presumption on account of his kinship with the divine. Only in this lowly condition is man capable of recognising his true identity and so of achieving his heavenly destiny. To that end, one can take Gregory's rhetorical question, 'What is this mystery?', one he poses in suggestive contexts elsewhere,⁵³ and see in it the construction of a bridge between material creation and its deification.

⁴⁸ PG 35.865A - 865D.

⁴⁹ See D.S. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Greek Patristic View of Nature* (Manchester University Press/ New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968), 66-79; John M. Dillon, 'Rejecting the Body, Refining the Body: Some Remarks on the Development of Platonist Asceticism', in Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 80-87; Ware, 'My Helper and My Enemy', 90-110; Louth, 'The body in Western Catholic Christianity', 111-129.

⁵⁰ Plato *Phaedo* 67a.

⁵¹ Romans 7:24.

⁵² Anna-Stina Ellverson, *The Dual Nature of Man: A Study in the Theological Anthropology of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Studia Doctrinae Christianae Upsaliensia 21, Uppsala, 1981), 41.

⁵³ Greg.Naz.Or 2.17; 7.23; 38.13; 39.13; 45.9.

Because the text in question, as Sherwood has observed, ‘not only is patient of an Origenist interpretation, but positively invites it,’⁵⁴ we might also ask what are the concrete signs in monastic life such an interpretation could entail. I have highlighted the social conditions of the setting from which this difficulty emerges, since it ties our interpretation of Maximus’ cosmic ontology to the concrete context of the audience – John the Bishop of Cyzicus and the monks of the monastery there - to whom he directs his anti-Origenist confutation. They supposedly would have been especially acquainted with conditions in which, confronted by their own and others’ corporeality through ascetic struggle, exasperation with bodily life could become all the more acute. They would have known the temptation common to all ascetic and mystical traditions to leave behind practical asceticism in order to attain the traditional monastic ideal: a pure, undistracted form of intellectual contemplation. Yet the collective wisdom accumulated over the centuries in orthodox Christian ascetic traditions suggests that both the practical *and* spiritual goals of ascetic life demand that the monk neither pamper *nor* denigrate his body, but train it as a disciplined instrument and co-worker of the soul. In his popular monastic masterpiece Maximus gives voice to precisely this conviction when, appealing to the words of Saint Paul, he writes,

*No one, says the Apostle, hates his own flesh (Eph 5:29), of course, but mortifies it and makes it his slave (1 Cor 9:27), allowing it no more than food and clothing (1 Tim 6:8) and these only as they are necessary for life. So in this way one loves it without passion, rears it as an associate in divine things and takes care of it only with those things that satisfy its needs.*⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *The Earlier Ambigua*, 73.

⁵⁵ *Car.* 3.9.

The evidence adduced earlier suggests that Origenism manifested itself at the social level as an intellectual elitism, a presumptuous preoccupation with speculative spirituality at the expense of lived assimilation to God through rigorous *askesis*. The dangers inherent in such a one-sided existence include intellectual overload and stagnation. Monastic sapiential literature abounds with diagnostic remedies to cope with the danger of *akedia* – listlessness, despondency or boredom.⁵⁶ In addition, then, to the theoretical problems inherent in the Origenist position, there remained in Maximus’ context the ‘immediate and practical threat of “satiety”, namely, the kind of spiritual surfeit, the “peaking out” as it were, that the monks were prone to experience in their daily ascetic struggle.’⁵⁷

Having said that, what was the Origenist interpretation of Gregory’s passage, and what in turn its proper meaning? We shall not here analyse the whole of Maximus’ lengthy argument in thematic, synthetic detail. Sherwood has already done so admirably in his unrivalled analysis of *Ambiguum* 7.⁵⁸ Instead we shall strive to preserve the flow of Maximus’ argument, along the way isolating primary sub-structures that underlie and give shape to his vision of corporeality in the cosmos.

The two phrases at the heart of the difficulty are those where Gregory says that we are ‘a portion of God’ (μοῖραν Θεοῦ) and ‘slipped down from above’ (ἀνωθεν ρεύσαντας). Taken bare, both ideas sit comfortably enough with Origen’s understanding of the corporeal cosmos as the result of a primordial fall of souls, occasioned by ‘satiety’ and a ‘cooling’ in attention, from a pristine state of divine perfection and preoccupation

⁵⁶ See the studies by Pierre Miquel, ‘Akèdia’, in *Lexique du Désert: Etude de quelques mots-clés du vocabulaire monastique grec ancien*, (Spiritualité Orientale 44, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1986), 19-35; and Gabriel Bunge, *Akèdia. la doctrine spirituelle d’Évagre le Pontique sur l’acédie* (Spiritualité Orientale 52, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1991).

⁵⁷ Blowers, ‘Perpetual Progress’, 155.

⁵⁸ See also Riou, *Le Monde et L’Église*, 45-71.

with the good.⁵⁹ As such one could say that they contribute to what Ugo Bianchi calls the conceptual and objective connection drawn by Origen between the soul's fall and its 'terrestrial incorporation.'⁶⁰ Maximus opens the seventh *Ambiguum* with a brief run-down of the false ideas drawn from 'pagan teachings':

According to their opinion there was once a *henad* of rational beings, by virtue of which we were connatural to God and had our *dwelling* (cf. Jn 14:2) and foundation in him. Then they add that when motion (*kinesis*) came about - as a result of which these rational beings were dispersed in varying degrees, God envisaged the generation (*genesis*) of this corporeal world for the sake of binding them in bodies as a punishment for their former sins. This is what they propose the teacher⁶¹ is suggesting in the words above.

As Maximus has it, the Origenist schema places *genesis* as the third ontological 'moment' in a series that begins in monadic unity, disperses through motion (*kinesis*), and eventuates punitively in corporeal generation. The nature of motion, diversity and their cause had long been the object of philosophical scrutiny. It is a problem directly related to the question about the origin of evil, for when considered 'from below', motion, mutability, differentiation and evil go hand in hand.⁶² It was a question that in the fourth century had been addressed by Athanasius when he asserted the inherent goodness of creation and

⁵⁹ *Or.Princ.* 2.6.3; 2.8.3; 2.9.2.

⁶⁰ Ugo Bianchi, 'Some Reflections on the Ontological Implications of Man's Terrestrial Corporeity according to Origen', in Richard Hanson and Henri Crouzel (eds.), *Origeniana Tertia: The Third International Colloquium for Origen Studies, University of Manchester September 7th - 11th, 1981* (Rome: Edizioni Dell'Ateneo, 1985), 157. Crouzel has opposed Bianchi on this point in *Origen*, 215.

⁶¹ Ie. Gregory Nazianzen.

⁶² Some sought to resolve this issue by recourse to dualism - the positing of two sources of the cosmos, one good and the other evil. Interestingly Justinian had accused Origenism of precisely such dualism when he ascribed to Origen Manichaean errors: 'For he [Origen] was educated in the mythologies of the Hellenes and was interested in spreading them; he pretended to explain the divine scriptures, but in this manner mixed his own pernicious teaching in the documents of the holy scriptures; he introduced the pagan and Manichaean

denied of evil any positive or substantial status. The recurrence of strongly dualistic heresies throughout the patristic period and beyond necessitated frequent recourse to this basic orthodox affirmation.⁶³ The problem remained, however, of how to account for evil without subsuming created diversity into God himself (monism), or giving it a positive source outside of God (dualism).

Only later in *Ambiguum* 42 does Maximus – on christological grounds - outrightly reject the punitive character of corporeal generation inherent in the Origenist position as ‘Manichaean’.⁶⁴ Nothing created is evil. Here however he first concentrates on the structure rather than on the substance of the *henad* doctrine in which the negative motion of fall follows *after* a state of non-motion - *after* a state of perfect participation in God. While this appears to be the order that best fits the biblical story, it contradicts Neoplatonic logic. In classic Neoplatonist metaphysics, within the context of seeking to resolve the age-old problem of the relation between the one and the many, the basic structure of motion (and thus of all intelligible reality) is conceived of as an ontological cycle of remaining (*mone*), procession (*proodos*) and return (*epistrophe*). In proceeding from its cause - an *ontological*, not a temporal or spatial movement – an effect at the same time continues to *remain* in its cause. This *remaining* constitutes a thing’s identity between itself and its cause; *procession* constitutes its difference. The overcoming of difference is achieved by its *return* to the cause, a move entirely natural and innate. Procession and return are in fact the same motion viewed respectively from the aspect of the cause and from the aspect of the effect.⁶⁵ The whole

error and the Arian madness, so that he could give to them what the holy scriptures could not understand precisely’ (*Ed.c.Origen* 73.4-8, quoted in *CCT*, 2.2, 393-394).

⁶³ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1332A): ‘The being (τὸ εἶναι) of evil is marked by non-existence’ (cf. PG 91.1328A). See further Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, volume 2: *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 216-226.

⁶⁴ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1328A; 1332A – 1333A).

⁶⁵ ‘Procession and reversion together constitute a single movement, the diastole-systole which is the life of the universe.’ E.R. Dodds, *Proclus: The Elements of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 219.

process is summarised by Proclus in his *Elements of Theology* with the triadic formula: ‘every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and returns to it.’⁶⁶

As noted above, Eric Perl has demonstrated Maximus’ familiarity with Proclus’ metaphysical framework through his thorough acquaintance with the work of Dionysius. Since neither procession nor return entails a break with remaining (μονή), but in fact presupposes continuation in it, then in Maximus’ estimation, μονή must constitute a state of perfection *yet to be attained* by fallen creation. The essence of Maximus’ refutation of the Origenist *benad* then, as Perl concludes,

is that it is metaphysically impossible for the creature to begin in its deified condition, in perfect participation in God.... [I]f it did, then, contrary to Origenism, it would be impossible for the creature to fall, since it would already possess the Good, that which alone is desirable in itself.⁶⁷

The problem with the Origenist schema of *perfection*, fall, and (material) creation is that it contradicts a logic according to which perfection is actually perfect: inviolable, immutable. But if this is a false sequence, if there is no such thing as an historically actual prelapsarian perfect state, what for Maximus *is* the ontological status of this material universe in its present, fallen, historical condition? Did God create a flawed world? What is the relation between the rational creature’s natural procession from God into being (creation) and its unnatural movement towards non-being (fall)?

For Maximus, preserving the distinction between creation as procession from non-being into being on the one hand, and fall from being into non-being on the other hand, is

⁶⁶ ... μένειν πᾶν ἐν τῷ αἰτίῳ καὶ προῖέναι ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπιστρέφειν πρὸς αὐτό (*prop.* 35, in Dodds,

paramount. Yet the two are contemporaneous. At the very moment (ἄμω) of its coming-into-being, creation falls from its cause.⁶⁸ What to the modern reader may appear as a certain pessimism on Maximus' part here must be acknowledged to be at the same time both theologically realistic, true to his traditional sources, and consistent with his Neoplatonic metaphysical framework. By means of Adam's fall human nature has failed to attain the fullness of its natural, created condition in which it would be simultaneously united with and distinct from its creator. As a result, material, historical existence is experienced by fallen humanity as fragmented and distant from its creator, and so in some way as *less than created*. It does indeed seem that in his doctrine of providence and judgement, in which Maximus distinguishes between the ontological and the moral spheres, the operation of judgement as punishment and correction is restricted to the moral sphere.⁶⁹ Nevertheless his understanding of a double creation – in which he is continuous with a tradition reaching back to the two Gregories,⁷⁰ Evagrius,⁷¹ Origen,⁷² Clement,⁷³ Philo,⁷⁴ and perhaps Plato himself,⁷⁵ allows him also to think of Adam's fully-sensual

Proclus: The Elements of Theology, 38).

⁶⁷ See Perl, 'Methexis', 226.

⁶⁸ *Q.Thal.* 59 (CCSG 22, 61.262); *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 85.10-15).

⁶⁹ At the ontological level, Maximus rules out the punitive character of judgement, as in this crucial passage from *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1133D): 'The providence of Mind, I say, is not convertive, or as it were the dispensation that turns things from what is not necessary to what is necessary, but constitutes the universe and preserves the *logoi* according to which the universe was established. And judgement is not pedagogic or as it were punitive of sinners, but the salutary and determinative distribution of beings, in accordance with which each of the things that has come to be, in connection with the *logoi* in accordance with which it exists, has an inviolable and unalterable constitution in its natural identity....' 'Yet,' he goes on, and here he is speaking of the moral realm, 'providence and judgement are also spoken in connection with our implanted chosen impulses, averting us in many ways from what is wicked, and drawing us wisely back to what is good....' For further discussion, see Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 66-72, who underscores the anti-Origenist and anti-Evagrian character of this passage.

⁷⁰ *Greg.Nyss.Opif.* 16 (PG 44.185B); *Greg.Naz.Or.* 6.22; 38.11.

⁷¹ *Evag.Keph.* 1.51; 3.24-26; 6.36.

⁷² *Or.Gen.* 1.13.

⁷³ *Clem.Str.* 5.3.16.

⁷⁴ *Legum allegoria* 1.12. Here, commenting on Genesis 2:7, Philo writes: 'There are two kinds of humanity: one is heavenly, the other earthly. The heavenly man, being made in the image of God, is completely without a share in corruptible and terrestrial substance. But the earthly man was constructed out of diverse matter, which [Moses] calls dust. That is why he says that the heavenly man has not been moulded, but has been

material incorporation simultaneously as a punitive and assistive divine act. Adam's creation as a composite being formed from the dust of the earth and the breath of God (Gen 2:7) and his fall are simultaneous, so much so that for Maximus any actual, empirical prelapsarian existence is excluded. No sooner is man given being out of non-being than he transgresses the divine command, declining from the good. His natural passage from non-being into perfection or well-being is short-circuited by sin.

Returning to Maximus' objection to the Origenist *henad*, we can now be more attuned to the subtleties both of the Origenist position and the Maximian refutation. The subtleties of the Origenist position are threefold. First, a *henad* implies a pre-temporal, eternal creaturely coexistence with God. On the basis of the biblical title *pantocrator* for God, Origen had understood the eternity of the world (τὰ πάντα) to be correlative to the eternity of God's sovereignty.⁷⁶ Athanasius had clarified and corrected Origen by subordinating the secondary, contingent (economic) relation of creator-creation to the primary, eternal (theological) relation of Father-Son.⁷⁷ By positing the actual pre-existence of rational creatures, the doctrine of a *henad* reduces the act of creation to the addition of individual accidents, rather than seeing it as the creation of actual essences. This Maximus states and rejects with clarity elsewhere:

stamped with the image of God (οὐ πεπλάσθαι, κατ' εἰκόνα δὲ τετυπῶσθαι θεοῦ), whereas the earthly man is a moulded figure (πλάσμα) of the Artificer, but not his offspring.' Trans. F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker, *Philo* I (LCL, London: William Heinemann / NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1929), 166. See also *Philo De officio mundi* 46.

⁷⁵ *Timaeus* 69bc.

⁷⁶ 'As no one can be a father without having a son, nor a master without possessing a servant, so even God cannot be called omnipotent unless there exist those over whom he may exercise his power; and therefore, that God may be shown to be almighty, it is necessary that all things should exist' (*Or.Princ.* 1.2.10). This holds for the intelligible world, yet Origen did not hold the material universe to be eternal, for several times he clearly asserts that it was made by God out of nothing (eg. *Or.Princ.* 2.1.4; 4.4.6-7).

⁷⁷ 'For creatures not to exist does not lessen the maker; for he has the power of framing them whenever he wills. But for the offspring not to be always with the Father does lessen the perfection of the Father's

Some say that created things eternally coexist with God, which is impossible. For how can what is utterly limited eternally coexist with the wholly infinite? Or how are they really creatures if they are co-eternal with the creator? But this is the theory of the Greeks, who in no way admit God as the creator of the essences, but only of qualities (ποιότητων). But we who know God as the Almighty (τὸν παντοδύναμον) affirm that he is the creator not of qualities but of essences endowed with qualities. And if this is true, creatures do not eternally coexist with God.⁷⁸

Secondly, the doctrine of a *henad* implies that God brought the material world into being not freely, but *by necessity*. If creation is the *necessary* result of a fall from a state of unitary simplicity, that is, a necessary consequence of evil, then it cannot be the free and good creative act of God. Once again we turn elsewhere to find Maximus' assertion to the contrary:

In no way do we assert that souls pre-exist bodies, or that bodies were introduced as an addition to souls as a punishment for the evil committed beforehand by incorporeal beings. We do not suppose that evil alone is likely to have been the cause of the pre-eminent miracle of visible phenomena through which God, heralded in silence, can be known.⁷⁹

Thirdly, the doctrine of a fall from an already existing state of perfection, a fall occasioned by 'satiety,' implies a never-ending cycle of instability in which creation's ontological status is necessarily susceptible to corruption and dissolution. For if

essence. Thus his works were framed when he willed, through his Word; but the Son is ever the proper offspring of the Father's essence' (Ath.Ar. 1.29).

⁷⁸ Car. 4.6; also 3.28; 4.1-5.

⁷⁹ Amb.Io. 42 (PG 91.1328A); also Amb.Io. 42 (PG 91.1329C-1332B); and DP (PG 91.293BC), where Maximus rejects any thought of God being creator by necessity of his goodness.

embodiment and material diversity are the result of opposition – an opposition that arose even within a state of *monē*⁸⁰ and perfect union with God, then creation remains ontologically and fundamentally flawed. Gregory of Nyssa, to whom Maximus is so indebted in this treatise and in his anthropology in general, had been sensitive to precisely this problem in Origen’s doctrine in the fourth century, and against it pitted his doctrine of ‘perpetual progress’ – the never-ending progression in the good.⁸¹

Maximus begins his refutation of the existence of a *henad* by what is initially recognisable as an exercise in Aristotelian logic. The custom of determining the end by reference to the beginning or cause was ancient and well-established.⁸² Yet because of the fall, direct access to the beginning is impossible. The fall has ruled out the Platonic ideal of recollecting or returning directly to one’s origins. Instead, one must learn one’s beginning by turning to the end.⁸³ Asserting what will become an oft-repeated dictum, ‘nothing moving has [yet] come to rest’ (οὐδὲν κινούμενον ἔσται),⁸⁴ Maximus directs his attention not to the origin, but to the goal (*telos*) of motion, the ‘ultimate object of desire’ (το ἔσχατον ὀρεκτόν):

Now if the divine is immovable (ἀκίνητον) (since it fills all), and everything that has being from non-being is movable (κίνητόν) (since it is continually impelled towards some cause), and nothing moving has come to rest, since it has not yet found rest for its capacity for

⁸⁰ While the word *stasis*, a synonym of *monē*, is not used in its technical sense in *Amb.Io.* 7 (Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 93 fn44; 95), its meaning is implied in the long list of scriptural citations in PG 91.1072D – 1073A. Its first appearance as a technical term within the triad *genesis-kinesis-stasis* only occurs in *Amb.Io.* 15 (PG 91.1217D – 1221B).

⁸¹ See Ronald E. Heine, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life: A Study in the Relationship Between Edification and Polemical Theology in Gregory of Nyssa’s De Vita Moysis* (Patristic Monograph Series 2, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975).

⁸² *Epistle of Barnabas* 6.13; *Or.Princ.* 1.6.2; 3.6.1-3; *Bas.Hex.* 11.7 (SC 160, 242).

⁸³ ‘No longer, after the transgression, is the end revealed from the beginning, but the beginning from the end.’ *Q.Thal.* 59 (CCSG 22, 63.280-281).

⁸⁴ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1069B).

appetitive motion in the ultimate object of its desire, (for nothing else is apt to stop what is naturally impelled except the appearance of that object of desire), then nothing in motion has come to rest.⁸⁵

The main argument against the primordial existence of a *henad* lies in the fact that perfect stability - the attainment of the ultimate object of desire - remains an as-yet unrealised reality.⁸⁶ Here Maximus begins to lay down the parameters of what we have called his 'dynamic ontology.' For Aristotle, a proper analysis of a given reality involves asking about its four basic causes: the final cause - the *telos* 'for the sake of which' (τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα) a thing exists; the formal cause - the *logos* of being (ὁ λόγος τῆς οὐσίας) which characterises the course on which a thing travels; the material cause - the parts from which a thing is made; and the motive cause - the principle (ἀρχή) of motion, the cause which sets a thing on its course.⁸⁷ Maximus makes partial use of these categories as part and parcel of a scientific analysis of reality. Just as in Aristotle's teleological view of nature one can only account for reality by knowing 'that for the sake of which' it exists,⁸⁸ so with Maximus the cosmos is viewed not as a static, metaphysical unit, but in terms of its goal (*telos*) or purpose (*skopos*),⁸⁹ which for the Confessor is christologically determined. The beginning and end of creation are identical insofar as all creation comes 'from God' and is naturally oriented towards him as its goal. But the beginning is also *unlike* the end, in that the goal of

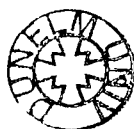
⁸⁵ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1069B).

⁸⁶ See *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1072C - 1073A) where Maximus draws upon a series of scriptural proofs to show that 'rest' is a future reality.

⁸⁷ Aristotle *De generatione animalium* I, 715a.

⁸⁸ Maximus uses this formula as the definition of *telos* here in *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1072C) and also in *Q.Thal* 60 (CCSG 22, 75.36-37), ascribing it anonymously to an 'outsider' (ἄλλότριος). Sherwood in *Earlier Ambigua*, 100 conjectures that the outsider is Evagrius, though it is not at all implausible that Maximus is referring to Aristotle himself.

⁸⁹ The term *skopos*, usually translated as 'purpose', 'plan', or 'goal', is of great importance in Maximus as providing the specific terms by which God brings creation to its *telos*. The word can also mean 'plot' or



creation is deification. At least in his early years, Origen viewed beginning and end as unitive: ‘when the end has been restored to the beginning, and the termination of things compared with their commencement, that condition of things will be re-established in which rational nature was placed.’⁹⁰ Within such a worldview, not only is all motion and difference problematic; the Incarnation cannot accomplish anything *new*, nor achieve any *real* goal, other than help towards the restoration of equilibrium. But for Maximus, created human nature - and with it, the whole cosmos - is defined by a dynamic trajectory considered equally from ontological, eschatological, and moral perspectives. This trajectory has its beginning (ἀρχή) in God its sole cause (αἰτία), who, as we shall see, brings it into ‘being’ from non-being and sets it upon the path that leads via ‘well-being’ towards its goal in ‘eternal well-being’, that is, in union with himself, the ‘ultimate object of desire.’ Maximus hereby combines what we have seen as the traditional Neoplatonic cycle of procession and return – one he often expresses with the Dionysian image of the spokes of a wheel proceeding from and converging upon a central point⁹¹ – with what could be considered a more historical, horizontal, developmental understanding of motion as the passage of the soul from *genesis* to *stasis* in God.⁹² Procession coincides with the creature’s emergence by the will of God from non-being into being. Being as return is stretched out into a movement at once caused by God and self-caused, since it is fundamental to the nature of the soul to be self-moved and autonomously oriented towards God. Its freedom, which at the same time constitutes its distinction from and relation to God, is entirely natural. Yet creaturely dependence is not denied when the human soul is designated

‘theme’, as among later Neoplatonist commentators it was customary to assign at the outset a single *skopos* to each philosophical work in the effort to unify that work and harmonise varying philosophical sources.

⁹⁰ *Or.Princ.* 3.6.3.

⁹¹ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1081C); *Myst.* 1 (Sotiropoulos 154.3-7); *Th.Oec.* 2.4; cf. *Dion.Ar.De div.nom.* 2.5; 5.6.

αὐθυπόστατος – ‘self-constituted.’⁹³ Since procession and return indicate ontologically, not chronologically distinct movements, the procession of the soul into being is, if not immediately interrupted by fall, identical with its return to its cause. It is thus the function of the triads *genesis, kinesis, stasis* and *being, well-being, eternal-well-being* to offset the equilibrium inherent in the procession-return cycle by introducing a linear, developmental movement.

Consequently the need for a reappraisal of the Origenist metaphysic is at once moral and ontological. If rational beings once had a secure ‘foundation’ and ‘abode’,⁹⁴ yet subsequently fell from that stable state, then given the same circumstances, Maximus concludes, they will ‘necessarily (ἐξ ἀνάγκης) experience the same alterations in position *ad infinitum*.’⁹⁵ That *necessary* ontological instability cannot but trigger a moral angst: ‘what could be more pitiable than that rational beings should be impelled in this way and neither possess nor hope for an immutable foundation (βάσις) whereby they may be anchored in the good?’⁹⁶ Here Maximus adumbrates what he will say later by identifying the Origenist problem as a dilemma about freedom. For Origen, freewill involves an act of rational power by which one moves oneself towards one of two opposites: good or evil.⁹⁷ In order for the choice of the good to be considered free, one must also be able to choose its opposite, namely evil.⁹⁸ Despite Origen’s abhorrence of determinism and his true concern to preserve both God’s transcendence and human freedom, by confusing ontological with moral stability both God and the cosmos get stuck between the dialectical vicissitudes of

⁹² Paul Plass has studied this modification as it relates to Maximus’ conception of time in ‘Transcendent Time in Maximus the Confessor’, *The Thomist* 44 (1980), 259-277, and ‘Moving Rest in Maximus the Confessor’, *Classica et mediaevalia* 35 (1984), 177-190.

⁹³ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1345D); *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1052AB); *Ep.* 7 (PG 91.436D – 437B). That the soul is self-constituted is axiomatic in Proclus’ theological metaphysics (*prop.* 189, Dodds, *Proclus: Elements of Theology*, 164).

⁹⁴ These terms are frequently paired: ἵδρυσις and μονή.

⁹⁵ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1069C).

⁹⁶ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1069C).

⁹⁷ See *Or.Princ.* 3.1.1-22 which is preserved in Greek.

good and evil. On the one hand, evil becomes itself the necessary cause of this present world. On the other hand, the good ends up being desired not for its own sake, but on account of the experience of evil.⁹⁹ Maximus will show how, paradoxically, creaturely freedom is maintained precisely by the soul's being naturally determined by God.

Having set the problem in perspective with this focus upon the final cause, the Confessor continues his argument by addressing the relation between *genesis* and *kinesis*. His argument progresses as a kind of consistent application of the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. *Genesis* must be the ontological precondition of *kinesis* in both intelligible and sensible beings,¹⁰⁰ because at the most fundamental level there are only two basic realms: the uncreated, and the created¹⁰¹ - and entities of the latter only have being by means of *genesis*. Over and against the essential continuum between the one and the many advanced in pagan Neoplatonism, Maximus presses this ontological divide with force. God as 'self-caused' (αὐταίτιος) is 'unmade, without beginning, and immovable.'¹⁰² 'To be *telos*, perfection and impassibility belongs to God alone, for he alone is immutable, complete, and impassible.'¹⁰³ He is that *telos* 'for the sake of which (οὐ ἕνεκεν) all things exist, but

⁹⁸ See *Or.Princ.* 2.8.3.

⁹⁹ This dialectical notion of freewill later becomes a subject of contention in the Monotheletist controversy, in which Maximus calls false the assumption that choice involves plurality, and that plurality necessarily involves opposition. Only acts of willing that correspond to the seat of will in nature are truly free. Florovsky in *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, 234-235, I believe, says as much when he comments on freewill in Maximus: 'Freedom of choice not merely does not belong to the perfection of freedom. On the contrary, it is a diminishing and distortion of freedom. Genuine freedom is an undivided, unshakable, integral striving and attraction of the soul to Goodness. It is an integral impulse of reverence and love. "Choice" is by no means an obligatory condition of freedom. God wills and acts in perfect freedom, but he does not waver and he does not choose. Choice – προαίρεσις – which is properly "preference,"... presupposes bifurcation and vagueness – the incompleteness and unsteadiness of the will. Only a sinful and feeble will wavers and chooses.'

¹⁰⁰ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1072A).

¹⁰¹ *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91.1304D).

¹⁰² *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1072C).

¹⁰³ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1073B).

itself *is* for the sake of nothing.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, all created beings are subject to motion - interpreted not as a general state of random flux (which would be contrary to nature), but as a movement directed toward a goal. Thus, perhaps citing the Aristotelian commentators, Maximus says ‘they call this motion a ‘natural capacity’ (δύναμιν φυσικήν) that hastens towards its proper goal, or ‘passibility’ (πάθος) which, as motion from one thing to another, has impassibility as its goal, or else ‘effective activity’ (ἐνέργειαν δραστικήν) whose goal is self-perfection.¹⁰⁵ Nothing created is its own *telos*, or is self-perfect, or impassible.¹⁰⁶ ‘It belongs to creatures to be moved towards the-end-without-beginning, and to cease their activity in just such a perfect end, and to be acted upon (παθεῖν).¹⁰⁷ This inherent passibility, Maximus explains, is not the passibility associated with deviance (τροπή) or the corruption of capacity, but the natural and fundamental condition of creatures which have been brought into being from non-being.¹⁰⁸

Motion then, is proper to the nature of rational beings, not because they have fallen, but because they have been created by God.¹⁰⁹ The mystery of creation places the world at a fundamental ontological distance from God, such that ‘the interval (τὸ μέσον) between uncreate and creatures is total, and as infinite as the difference.¹¹⁰ Yet it also places the world in an ontological relation to him – not as an extension of his own ineffable

¹⁰⁴ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1072C). We find this formula also in *Q.Thal.* 60 (CCSG 22, 75.36-37). For its possible origin in Evagrius, see Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 34.

¹⁰⁵ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1072B).

¹⁰⁶ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1072C).

¹⁰⁷ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1073B).

¹⁰⁸ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1073B).

¹⁰⁹ ‘The source (ἀρχή) of every natural motion is the *genesis* of things that are moved. And the source of the *genesis* of things that are moved is God, since he is the creator of nature (γενεσιουργός)’ *Amb.Io.* 15 (PG 91.1217C). According to Balthasar *kinesis* constitutes a basic ‘ontologischer Ausdruck des Geschaffenseins’ (*Kosmische Liturgie*, 136). Origen also says as much, at least in Rufinus’ translation: ‘But since those rational creatures, which we have said above were made in the beginning, were created when they did not previously exist, in consequence of this very fact – that they were not (*non erant*) and then came to be (*esse coeperunt*) - they are necessarily changeable and mutable (*necessario conuertibiles et mutabiles substiterunt*); since whatever power was in their substance was not in it by nature, but was the result of the goodness of the Maker.’ *Or.Princ.* 2.9.2 (SC 1, 354.31-36). See also *Or.Princ.* 4.4.8.

being, but fundamentally derivative of and dependent upon it. Maximus uses terminology clearly reflecting Proclus' doctrine of participation when he speaks of creation as issuing 'from God' (ἐκ Θεοῦ),¹¹¹ who 'imparts himself' (ἐαυτὸν... μεταδοῦναι) to beings in the form of being itself.¹¹² Dionysius the Areopagite had spoken of this when he referred to God as 'the being of beings.'¹¹³ In Maximus' construal of the vision, God is creation's *source* of being, its *means* of being, and its *goal* of being: its 'beginning (ἀρχή), middle (μεσότης), and end (τέλος).'¹¹⁴ But mere 'being' is not creation's goal, but 'eternal well-being': union with God – deification. Maximus links the now-reformed metaphysical triad *genesis*, *kinesis*, and *telos* to its counterpart *being*, *well-being*, and *eternal well-being*.

Since, therefore, rational beings are created, they are always moving. They have been moving naturally from the beginning by virtue of *being* (ἐξ ἀρχῆς κατὰ φύσιν διὰ τὸ εἶναι), and move voluntarily towards their goal by virtue of *well-being* (πρὸς τέλος κατὰ γνώμην διὰ τὸ εἶναι). For the end of motion for those being moved consists in *eternal well-being* (ἐν τῷ αἰεὶ εἶναι), just as the beginning (ἀρχή) is being itself, which is God, who is the giver of being and the gracious giver of well-being – since he is beginning and end. For the simple fact of our motion derives from him as the beginning, and the nature of our motion is defined by him as the goal.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1077A).

¹¹¹ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1072A; 1080AB); 10 (PG 91.1180A; 1188B); 15 (PG 91.1217D); 41 (PG 91.1312B). Cf. Romans 11:36.

¹¹² *Amb.Io.* 35 (PG 91.1289A).

¹¹³ αὐτός ἐστι τὸ εἶναι τοῖς οὐσι... καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι τῶν ὄντων *De div.nom.* 5.4 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* I, 183.8-9).

¹¹⁴ *Th.Oec.* 1.10.

¹¹⁵ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1073C). Cf. *Q.Thal* 60 (CCSG 22, 79.117-120): 'For it was necessary for the one who is truly creator by nature of the *ousia* of created beings also to become the author by grace of the deification of the beings he has created, so that the giver of well-being might appear also as the gracious giver of eternal well-being.'

The involvement of the human creature in this process is far from mechanical. It leads him in an escalating series of ecstatic experiences through which all perception – intelligible and sensible - becomes completely overwhelmed by the embrace of God, his true goal,¹¹⁶ 'like darkness illuminated by light, or iron completely penetrated by fire.'¹¹⁷ Perhaps because Origen's cosmology derived to a large extent from his meditations on the eschatological vision portrayed in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28,¹¹⁸ Maximus too¹¹⁹ reconsiders human destiny as ecstasy under the rubric of 'subjection' (ἡ ὑποταγή).¹²⁰ Just as the Saviour subjected himself to the Father in Gethsemane with his prayer 'not as I will, but as you will' (Mt 26:39), and as Saint Paul, disowning himself, could say that 'it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal 2:20), so freewill (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον) will become 'freely and completely surrendered to God, submitting to a state of being ruled by refraining from that which wills anything contrary to what God wills.'¹²¹ Far from entailing the abolition of freewill however, there is instead established a solid ontological foundation

¹¹⁶ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1073CD).

¹¹⁷ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1076A).

¹¹⁸ See, for example, *Or.Princ.* 3.6.1-6.

¹¹⁹ Sherwood (*Earlier Ambigua*, 89) notes that at two points in *Ambiguum* 7 'Maximus introduces and uses in an opposite sense those very texts which had served Origen, and after him of course the Origenists, as substantiation of their error.' This represents the second.

¹²⁰ This meditation reflects clear indebtedness to Dionysius' discussion of ecstasy in *De div.nom.* 4.13, where, reflecting on Saint Paul's words in Galatians 2:20 and 2 Corinthians 5:13, he writes: 'This divine yearning brings ecstasy so that the lover belongs not to self but to the beloved. This is shown in the providence lavished by the superior on the subordinate. It is shown in the regard for one another demonstrated by those of equal status. And it is shown by the subordinates in their divine return toward what is higher. This is why the great Paul, swept along by his yearning for God and seized of its ecstatic power, had this inspired word to say: *it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me* (Gal 2:20). Paul was truly a lover and, as he says, he was beside himself for God (2 Cor 5:13), possessing not his own life but the life of the One for whom he yearned, as exceptionally beloved.' In connection with this very passage, Andrew Louth has asserted that for Dionysius, ecstasy 'is not primarily some kind of overpowering experience, it is a matter of letting one's life be ruled by another.' See his 'St. Denys the Areopagite and St. Maximus the Confessor: a Question of Influence', *JP* 28 (1993), 171. On the basis of the Maximian text under observation here, we can plausibly argue that quite the same applies for Maximus.

¹²¹ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1076B).

for freedom, so that, ‘whence being comes to us, thence also we may desire to be moved.’¹²² It will be the case, says Maximus, that

like an imprint conforming to its original seal, ‘the image will ascend to the archetype,’¹²³ and will have neither the desire nor the ability to move elsewhere. Or to put it more forthrightly, *it will not be able to will otherwise*, since it will have taken hold of the divine activity, or rather have become God by deification, utterly delighted to the full in being outside (τῆ ἐκστάσει) those things that are and are perceived to be naturally its own. This is due to the abundant and overwhelming grace of the Spirit that shows God alone to be active, so that there is in all only one activity of God and the worthy,¹²⁴ or rather of God alone, inasmuch as he, in a way entirely befitting his goodness, interpenetrates entirely those worthy of God.¹²⁵

In the same stroke Maximus excludes the possibility of ‘satiety’ or any deviation in the final, perfect state. All reality – intelligible and sensible – will be ‘enveloped in God by his ineffable appearance and presence.’¹²⁶

Here ends Maximus’ initial refutation of the *henad*, after which he begins a positive interpretation of the two phrases from Gregory – ‘a portion of God’ and ‘slipped down from above.’ The two phrases, used in their original context as a probable *hendiadys*, are taken by Maximus as conveying two quite different meanings. ‘Slipped down from above’ consistently indicates a fall from the divinely intended and natural course of created human nature. It is applicable to us ‘because we have not moved in accordance with the principle

¹²² *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1076B).

¹²³ The phrase is from *Greg.Naz.Or* 28.18.

¹²⁴ Fifteen years later during the Monothelete controversy, Maximus had to clarify his meaning on this and other occasions where he spoke of one will or energy. See *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 33.114); *Opusc.* 1 (PG 91.33A).

¹²⁵ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1076C).

(*logos*) preexisting in God according to which we were made.¹²⁷ Further on he explains in more detail the ontological ramifications of this moral failure:

He is rightly said to have ‘slipped down from above’ who did not move towards his own beginning and cause according to which (καθ’ ἡν), by which (ἐφ’ ἣ), and for which (δι’ ἣν) he was made. He is thus in an unstable gyration and fearful disorder of soul and body. And even though his cause remains fixed, he brings about his own defection by his voluntary inclination towards what is worse.... He has willingly exchanged what is better for what is worse: being for non-being.¹²⁸

Any deviation (τροπή)¹²⁹ from the trajectory from being via well-being to eternal well-being constitutes a progressive fall into non-being. Coinciding with the creature’s good creation by God out of nothing, ‘the fall’ amounts to the creature’s immediate failure to attain that created state of being, a failure visibly marked and limited by its union with a corruptible, mortal body. The fall towards non-being in the form of material dissolution, then, is not the natural creaturely state of the soul. On the contrary, in its natural state the human soul is compelled towards being.¹³⁰

The claim that we are ‘a portion of God’, however, tells quite a different story: it is that ontological norm from which we have noticeably ‘slipped’ in our empirical existence.

¹²⁶ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1077A).

¹²⁷ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1081C).

¹²⁸ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1084D – 1085A).

¹²⁹ There are two levels at which Maximus speaks of τροπή: one (pejoratively) as a moral failure, and the other (neutrally) as an innate capacity - related to our composite condition - to suffer change. In the first case: ‘Deviance (ἡ τροπή) is a movement contrary to nature suggesting the failure to obtain the cause. For deviance, in my estimation, is nothing other than a decline in and a falling from our natural activities.’ *Ep.* 6 (PG 91.432AB). In the second: ‘Every creature is a composite of essence (οὐσίας) and accident (συμβεβηκότος) and in constant need of divine providence since it is not free from mutability (τροπῆς).’ *Car.* 4.9. Also *Amb.Io.* 15 (PG 91.1220C); Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 193-196.

Maximus' lengthy analysis of the phrase provides the setting for him to introduce the doctrine of the *logoi*, a 'complex, polysemantic, and rich concept which goes back to the early theology of the Apologists....'¹³¹ In Maximus' cosmology the *logoi* are hidden unifying, ordering, and defining principles deeply imbedded in the very substructures of creation. A thing's being – *what* it is - is determined by its *logos*, by what God intends it to be. As constitutive of relation and definition, the *logoi* define the essential qualities and purpose of creaturely being and at the same time disclose the divine Word and Wisdom operative within the cosmic economy. Quoting the Areopagite, Maximus calls them 'predeterminations' (προορισμοί) or 'divine intentions' (θεῖα θελήματα) according to which God has created and knows the things that are.¹³² Together with Maximus' use of the Neoplatonist philosophical logic of union and distinction, the doctrine of the *logoi* demonstrates how created nature can at the same time participate in God at the level of being, well-being, and eternal being without there ever being a confusion of essences between God and creation, or between different species of creatures.

The next section of *Ambiguum* 7 presents a crucial argument for us at this point, for it relates directly to the structure of deification, and carries over into Maximus' remarks on the nature and function of the body in relation to the soul. He begins with a syntactically awkward passage in which he says that while one must acknowledge the difference between individual *logoi* on the one hand, and the difference between all the *logoi* and God the Logos on the other, they are one in an indivisible and unconfused way because the *logoi* have their

¹³⁰ Maximus says this much with specific reference to the human nature of Christ in *DP* (PG 91.297A – 300A).

¹³¹ Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, 223.

¹³² *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1085AB). Cf. Dion.Ar.*De div.nom.* 5.8 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* I, 188.6-10): 'We say that the pre-existent *logoi* are paradigms.... Theology calls them predeterminations, divine and good intentions that are determinative and creative for beings. According to them the transcendent one predetermined everything that is and brought it into being.'

source of existence in the Logos, and thus, ultimately, also their teleological consummation in him. The strongly biblical provenance of Maximus' thinking is striking:

Who - knowing that God by his Word and Wisdom brought into being from non-being the things that are (Wis 9:1-2), if he should wisely direct the contemplative faculty of the soul to the infinite difference and diversity of natural beings, and by rational enquiry distinguish conceptually the principle (*logos*) according to which they were created – who [, I say,] will not see that the one Word (*logos*), while being distinguished from created things by an indivisible difference on account of their unconfused particularity with themselves and one another (διὰ τὴν αὐτῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλα τε καὶ ἑαυτὰ ἀσύγχυτον ἰδιότητα), is [in fact] many *logoi*? And again, [who will not see that] the many *logoi* are one Word, who by referring all things to himself (τῇ πρὸς αὐτὸν τῶν πάντων ἀναφορᾷ) exists for himself without confusion, and who is essentially and actually God the Word of God the Father, the beginning and cause of the universe, *by whom all things were created in heaven and on earth, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers – all things have been created from him and through him and for him?*¹³³

The doctrine of the *logoi* articulates the double reality of the simultaneous distinction and relation between God the Logos and the manifold created beings. For every species or category of created being – whether visible or invisible, angel or human – there is a corresponding *logos* or divine rationale that determines its nature - determines and qualifies, that is, 'what' that thing is.¹³⁴ Maximus states repeatedly that creation takes place 'in accordance with them' (κατ' αὐτοῦς).¹³⁵ As both ontologically and chronologically

¹³³ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1077C – 1080A). The biblical passage is a conflation of Colossians 1:16 and Romans 11:36.

¹³⁴ And thus, we could add, 'for what' a thing is, since the *logos* of a thing encloses both nature and function.

¹³⁵ Eg. *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1080A).

prior, they ‘pre-exist in God’ – not as subsistent realities, but as ideas or principles of God’s design and intent. All created beings, therefore, participate in God insofar as they have being from him. More specifically it can be said, though, that ‘every intellectual and rational being, angel or human, by means of the very *logos* according to which it was created - which is in God and with God, is called and is *a portion of God*, because its *logos* pre-exists in God.’¹³⁶ ‘Surely then’ Maximus affirms, ‘if it moves in accordance with its *logos* and comes to be in God, ... and if it wills and yearns to attain nothing else in preference to its own origin, then it will not fall away from God, but rather, in straining towards him, actually becomes God and is fittingly said to be *a portion of God* by its participation (τῶ μετέχειν) in God.’¹³⁷

This argument represents deft work, since by it Maximus does not simply negate the Origenist doctrine of pre-existence, but reworks it, giving sense and scope to material diversity, and situating the ground and goal of creaturely being firmly and immutably in God’s eternal purpose. Maximus’ logology builds upon the orthodox discernment of difference and relation between God and creation: God’s eternity lies at the level of actuality. Creation’s eternity, guaranteed by the *logoi*, exists only at the level of potential. Only when God freely creates something from non-being is that potential realised in the form of *being* (εἶναι).¹³⁸ While the *logos* of human nature does not suffer change or

¹³⁶ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1080B).

¹³⁷ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1080C).

¹³⁸ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1081AB); also *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1329C): ‘And with respect to those beings whose generation is in harmony with the divine purpose, their essential existence remains – unable to pass from being into non-being. And with respect to those beings whose actual essential existence is unable to pass from being after generation, their *logoi* are permanent and stable, having as their beginning the sole skill of being, from which and for which they exist, and *by which they possess the potential to propel themselves stably towards being.*’

alteration itself, it determines for human nature a dynamic course whose terminus (πέρας) lies in God. He is its ultimate Sabbath or 'place' of rest.¹³⁹

Every rational being (λογικός), therefore, is 'a portion of God' by virtue of having its *logos* in God. But this is only half of the argument. There is 'another way' of conceiving Gregory's phrase - structurally identical, yet more explicitly christocentric.¹⁴⁰ Since the Word of God, 'our Lord Jesus Christ, is the substance of all the virtues' – for the virtues are his not attributively as with us, but absolutely – 'every person who participates in virtue by a consistent conduct (καθ' ἕξιιν παγίαν) unquestionably participates in God.'¹⁴¹ This observation leads Maximus into a profound discussion arguably forming the heart of *Ambiguum* 7 in which he outlines the shape of the Christian life in terms of the reciprocal relation between God's incarnation and human nature's deification. In view of the significance of this section with respect to the overall focus of our study, it will be worth attending to in detail.

Image, Likeness and the Embodiment of God

We have already encountered the reworked metaphysical triad – about to re-emerge here in verb form as γίνεταί – κινεῖται – ζῆν – connecting the dynamically-conceived, divinely-purposed course of the *logos* of human nature to the triad *being*, *well-being*, and *eternal being*. But now the connection is further nuanced with an important and central distinction in

¹³⁹ 'When someone comes to be in God, he will no longer move away from that place, since it is a state surrounded by stillness and calm. Hence God himself is the 'place' of such blessedness for all the worthy, as it is written, *be for me God my protector, a strong place to save me* (Ps 70:3).' *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1080D – 1081A). Cf. *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 103.320-325), where the same text is quoted: 'For while God is not 'somewhere,' but in an absolute sense is beyond every 'where', the foundation (ἡ ἰδρυσις) of all those being saved will be in him, as it is written, *be for me God my protector, a strong place to save me* (Ps 70:3).' See also *Th.Oec.* 2.32.

¹⁴⁰ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1081C).

¹⁴¹ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1081D).

Maximus, suggested by the subtle difference between Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 1:27, between *image* and *likeness*.¹⁴² Having described the movement of the participant in virtue from beginning to end as ‘the praiseworthy course’ (τὸν ἐπαινετὸν δρόμον), he writes:

By virtue of this course he becomes God, receiving his ‘being God’ (τὸ θεὸς εἶναι) from God, having deliberately (προαιρέσει) added to the natural goodness of the image the likeness through the virtues – through the natural ascent to and conformity with his own beginning. From this point on there is also fulfilled in him the apostolic word which says, *for in him we live and move and have our being* (Ac 17:28). For he ‘comes to be in God’ (γίνεται ἐν τῷ Θεῷ) through diligence, having preserved uncorrupt the *logos* pre-existing in God of *being*. And being activated through the virtues he ‘moves in God’ (κινεῖται ἐν τῷ Θεῷ) according to the *logos* pre-existing in God of *well-being*. And he ‘lives in God’ (ζῆ ἐν τῷ Θεῷ) according to the *logos* pre-existing in God of *eternal being*.¹⁴³

By weaving into this course the added distinction between image and likeness, Maximus weds ontological considerations to the course of the spiritual life, and, almost incidentally, draws the conversation more deeply towards a treatment of the constitutive place of bodily life in the process of deification. It may not be wrong to suggest that this distinction, which holds a prominent place in select lines of the tradition,¹⁴⁴ plays

¹⁴² Thunberg quotes Disdier, ‘Les fondements dogmatiques de la spiritualité de S. Maxime le Confesseur’, *Échos d’Orient* 29 (1930), 296-313, to the effect that this distinction lies at the heart of all Maximus’ spirituality (*Microcosm and Mediator*, 113). See also Völker, *Maximus Confessor als Meister des geistlichen Lebens*, 47-68, 88-101; Larchet, *La divinisation de l’homme*, 151-164.

¹⁴³ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1084AB).

¹⁴⁴ This interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27 can be found in *Iren.Haer.* 5.6.1; *Clem.Str.* 2.22; *Or.Princ.* 3.6.1: ‘Man received the dignity of God’s image at his first creation; but the perfection of his likeness has been reserved for the consummation, namely, that he might acquire it for himself by the exercise of his own diligence in the imitation of God, the possibility of attaining to perfection being granted him at the beginning through the dignity of the divine image, and the perfect realisation of the divine likeness being reached in the end by the fulfilment of works’; *Diad.Cap.* 89; *Evag.Mel.* 12.484-485: ‘That which is natural to man, is that man was created in the image of God; what is supernatural is that we come to be in his likeness, according to

immediately to Maximus' benefit in his concern to address the peculiarly practical problems surrounding Origenist speculative philosophy. His appreciation and development of the distinction between image and likeness is distinctive. As we observed in chapter one there exists in Neoplatonic spirituality a concern to restore the beauty of the image of God in the soul so that the soul may be likened to him.¹⁴⁵ The Fathers generally follow Origen in pointing out that only Christ the incarnate Logos is the εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ (Col 1:15), whereas rational beings (λογικοί) are created 'according to the image of God' - κατ' εἰκόνα Θεοῦ. While for some writers image and likeness appear to be synonymous expressions denoting rational beings' close kinship to God, there is another tradition reaching back to Philo that draws a clear distinction between the two terms. So in Irenaeus we find expressed at one point the thought that only the perfect (τέλειος) human being, a tripartite unity of body, soul, and (divine) spirit, is truly 'in the image and likeness of God.' Carnal man, though retaining the image of God in the 'plasma' – the composite of body and soul - remains imperfect until he receives likeness through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁶ Clement of Alexandria, perhaps with Irenaeus in mind, refers to 'some of our own [teachers]' who divide image and likeness into divine gifts conferred in two stages. What is according to the image is given at creation, and what is according to the likeness is given at the future perfection.¹⁴⁷ And writing in the mid-fifth century, Diadochus of Photike

the word, "I have come that they may have life and that they may have it in abundance" [John 10:10]...? Trans. from the Syriac by M. Parmentier, 'Evagrius of Pontus' "Letter to Melania" I, in Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Forms of Devotion: Conversion, Worship, Spirituality, and Asceticism* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1999), 289. The distinction is evaluated by Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 120-132.

¹⁴⁵ Plotinus *Enneads* 1.2.1-7; 1.6.1-9. Plato (*Theaetetus* 176ab) equates the ideal of flight (φυγή) with a process of 'likening [oneself] to God as far as possible' (ὁμοίωσις θεῶν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν).

¹⁴⁶ Iren.*Haer.* 5.6.1; see further Adelin Rousseau, 'Appendix II', in his edition of *Irénée de Lyon. Démonstration de la Prédication Apostolique* (SC 406, 365-371).

¹⁴⁷ Clem.*Str.* 2.22 (SC 38, 133.6-9).

acknowledges that while all human beings are according to the image of God, only those are according to his likeness who subject their freedom to him through love.¹⁴⁸

Maximus inherits elements from all these traditions, but we find his conception of the distinction between image and likeness to be all the more developed. This is amply demonstrated in a response from the *Quaestiones et Dubia*, where the biblical *topos* presents a specific occasion for comment:

Why does it say, *Let us make man in the image and likeness of God* (Gen 1:26), but then a little further on it says, *so God created man, in the image of God he created him* (Gen 1:27), omitting the *according to his likeness*?

To which Maximus replies:

Since God's primary purpose was to make man *according to his image and likeness*, and 'image' means incorruption, immortality, and invisibility – all of which image the divine, he has appointed these for the soul's possession, having also given it with them the self-governing and freewilling faculty, all of which are images of the essence of God. But 'likeness' is impassibility, gentleness, patience and all the other characteristics of the goodness of God which are indicative of the activity of God.

Thus those things belonging to his essence which display the fact that we are in his image, he has given naturally to the soul. But the other things belonging to the activity of God which indicate likeness to him, these he has left to our self-determining will (τῆ ἡμετέρῳ αὐτεξουσίῳ γνώμῃ) while he awaits the perfection of man – if man should somehow make himself like God through the imitation of the divinely fitting characteristics

¹⁴⁸ Diad. *Cap.* 4 (SC 5, 86.10-16).

of virtue. That is why, therefore, the divine Scripture omits in the words following these the mention of 'likeness'.¹⁴⁹

All rational creatures are made in God's image, since they participate in God's essence (*ousia*). For Maximus, this is made evident in the soul's natural qualities: incorruption, invisibility, and immortality. But the attainment of likening to God, humanity's goal, is contingent upon participation in his goodness, which is indicative of his activity (*energeia*). This vocation necessarily involves the whole person - mind, soul, and body - in the practical and social virtues: imperturbability, gentleness, patience and so on. Thunberg has rightly recognised this holism when he points out that likeness to God in Maximus is 'consistently related to the life of virtues and the *vita practica*.'¹⁵⁰ That humanity is created in God's image is natural - it belongs to 'being'. But the acquisition of likeness to God through ascetic struggle, correlated to the attainment of 'well-being', is a gift of grace alone.¹⁵¹ This goal of perfection (likeness, well-being) attained by grace and by the life of virtue presupposes an incorporeal ontological foundation (image, being) by nature. Maximus' thinking on this subject bears some affinity with another passage in Diadochus, in which baptism is said to achieve 'two goods': the first restores a person immediately to the image of God in which he was made; the second, which presupposes yet 'infinitely surpasses' the first, anticipates the eschatologically perfected conformity to God's likeness

¹⁴⁹ *QD* III, 1 (CCSG 10, 170.1-20).

¹⁵⁰ *Microcosm and Mediator*, 128.

¹⁵¹ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1345D): 'In the beginning man was made in the image of God for the indisputable purpose of being born by the Spirit through free choice, and that he may acquire the likeness which is added to it through the keeping of the divine commandment, so that man himself might be on the one hand a creature of God by nature, and on the other hand a son of God and a god through the Spirit by grace.' Here Maximus does not oppose nature and grace, as he makes clear in a passage in *Amb.Io.* 10 where the first and third elements in the triad, being and eternal being, are correlated to the operation of 'God alone', whereas the middle element, well-being, is said to depend on 'our will and movement'. It is well-being that holds the other two together and makes them what they are (PG 91.1116B).

through love – ‘the fulfilment of the law.’¹⁵² Much more could be said. For now we must leave this topic until we treat baptism further in chapter five.

Returning then to *Ambiguum* 7, we can appreciate now the significance of Maximus’ insistence on the cruciality of the practical life in the fulfilment of humanity’s divinely given vocation. Moreover, the attainment of likeness through active participation in the virtues collapses the distance between this world and the next, between time and eternity. Elsewhere Maximus says the same thing of human nature when, by grace, it is united to its *logos*. Ultimately this only occurs at ‘the advent of infinite rest,’ when creatures come to be ‘in God.’ At that point, all motion related to temporal worldly existence ceases – or rather – reaches its proper goal in ‘evermoving rest.’¹⁵³ But here, such a person is said to have *already* (ἤδη) achieved immobility in God. *Already* he is ‘identical to himself [ie. to his own *logos*] by virtue of the most imperturbable habit.’¹⁵⁴ Such a person is ‘a portion of God: he *exists*, by virtue of his *logos* of being in God; *he is good* by virtue of his *logos* of well-being in God. *He is God* by virtue of his *logos* of eternal being in God.’¹⁵⁵ Nothing distinctively different from God remains visible in him, for ‘he has placed himself completely in God alone, having fashioned and formed God alone in himself entirely.’ In Gregory Nazianzen’s phrase, a ‘wonderful exchange’ has taken place in which as we have seen three distinct elements are discernible: man has become God, God has become man, and God’s deifying power has become *bodily manifest* and accessible in the deified person himself. It is worth quoting the passage again, this time in full:

¹⁵² *Diad. Cap.* 89 (SC 5, 149.1 – 150.17).

¹⁵³ See further *Q. Thal.* 65 (CCSG 22, 283.522 – 285.541).

¹⁵⁴ *Amb. Io.* 7 (PG 91.1084B).

¹⁵⁵ *Amb. Io.* 7 (PG 91.1084B).

The result is that he too is and is called 'God' by grace, that God is and is called man because of him by condescension, and that the power of this exchanged condition is displayed in him. This is the power that deifies (θεοῦσσαν) man to God on account of his love for God, humanises God to man on account of his love for humankind, and which, according to this 'wonderful exchange', makes man God on account of the deification of man, and makes God man on account of the humanisation of God. For the Word of God and God wills always and in all things to effect the mystery of his embodiment.¹⁵⁶

What Maximus is here describing, it should be recalled, is not that historical incarnation of the Word which took place in Christ. That proleptic event in time is certainly presupposed. Rather what is being described here is an existential, bodily theophany in the creature in whom has been realised the reciprocally proportionate and simultaneous dynamic of deification and incarnation. The demonstrative, theophanic character of this reciprocity is deeply significant, for it confirms for Maximus' monastic readers that that most contingent and mutable object of creation – the human body - when ennobled by deification, has been selected by God in his own good counsel as the primary means of his self-demonstration in the cosmos, and thus the high point of creation's access to him.

Reminding ourselves about the context of the discussion, we can see how it is that Maximus interprets Gregory's affirmation that we are 'a portion of God.' What it *cannot* mean is that we are divine by nature: God and creation are essentially different. Nor does it imply that bodily incorporation involves a *necessary* fall from kinship to God. Yet it is clear

¹⁵⁶ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1084CD). Other passages that express the reciprocity between divine incarnation and human deification can be found in *Amb.Io.* 3 (PG 91.1040D); 10 (PG 91.1113BC); 33 (PG 91.1288A); 60 (PG 91.1385B); *Q.Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7, 139.34 – 139.48); 61 (CCSG 22, 101.285-296); 64 (CCSG 22, 237.780-791); *Ep.* 2 (PG 91.401B; 91.408B); *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 32.97 – 33.106).

on the other hand that material creation, being inherently mutable and transient, cannot of itself possess any ontological stability. On its own it is less than real being. But that is the point. Its ontological stability rests in God's will and purpose for it, and thus in its ordered relation to that will. Kinship to God, expressed by the ontological fact that human beings are created in his image, is fulfilled only through the attainment of likeness to God at the moral level within the corporeal structures and limitations of human existence. These must be transcended, but they are simultaneously the *means* of transcendence. The impermanence of this universe drives us on to discern the proper purpose and goal of things determined by their *logoi* whose diversity converges metaphysically and teleologically in the unity of the Logos himself. Then, says Maximus, we shall 'no longer cling out of ignorance to the movement that envelops things, because we shall surrender our *mind* and *reason* and *spirit* to the great *Mind* and *Word* and *Spirit*, indeed, ourselves entirely to God entire, as image to archetype.'¹⁵⁷ Far from motion corrupting the divine vocation of human beings, the divine *logoi* are 'on account of their motion naturally adapted by the creator to help them reach the goal.'¹⁵⁸ Commenting on Gregory's statement where he speaks of the welcome the worthy will receive 'by the ineffable light' when they come to contemplate 'the holy and majestic Trinity' that 'unites itself entirely to the entire mind,'¹⁵⁹ Maximus adds that such rational beings have remained undiverted in their course, 'knowing that they are and will become instruments (ὄργανα) of the divine nature.'¹⁶⁰ This *instrumental* function of human nature in the divine plan is aptly illustrated by the instrumentality of the body in the life and activity of the soul. Given the profundity of this passage, I quote it in full:

¹⁵⁷ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1088A). This triadic structure of the human being (*nous, logos, pneuma*) in the image of its Trinitarian archetype, which is found in *Greg.Naz.Or.* 23.11, also appears in *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1196A) and *QD* 101 (CCSG 10, 79.1 – 80.26).

¹⁵⁸ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1088B).

¹⁵⁹ *Greg.Naz.Or.* 16.9 (PG 35.945C).

It is God entire who, in the way of a soul [with a body], has wholly embraced them so that they become like limbs of a body adapted and useful to their master. He directs them towards what he thinks fit and fills them with his own glory and blessedness, graciously giving them unending and ineffable life – a life completely free from every specific accompanying mark of this present life contracted through corruption - not a life consisting in the breathing of air, or in veins coursing with blood, but God entire being participated in by all: God entire becoming to the soul – and through the mediation of the soul, to the body – what the soul is to the body, as he himself knows how, so that the soul receives immutability (ἀτρεψία) and the body immortality (ἀθανασία). Thus the whole human being, as the object of divine action (θεουργούμενος),¹⁶¹ is deified by the grace of the God who became a human being. He remains wholly human in both soul and body by nature, yet becomes wholly God in soul and body by grace and by the divine radiance of the blessed glory, a radiance appropriate to him, besides which nothing more radiant and exalted can be imagined.¹⁶²

The repeated occurrence of the word ὅλος demands our attention. The ‘whole’ human - soul and body – is ‘wholly’ subject to the activity of God ‘entire’ and so experiences transformation to incorruptible life. Body, to be sure, is at the lower rung of an ordered hierarchy which rises through soul and intellect to God. But maintained in this proper *taxis*, it too is accessible to God as an instrument via the mediation of the soul. Here

¹⁶⁰ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1088AB).

¹⁶¹ This distinctly Dionysian word carries overtones from the liturgical sphere where it designates God’s efficacious activity through sacramental ritual acts. See further Andrew Louth, ‘Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism’, *JTS NS* 37 (1986), 432-438; Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute, 1984), 104-111. Also more recently Gregory Shaw, ‘Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite’, *JEC* 7 (1999), 573-600, who, while rightly arguing against drawing a strict division between pagan and Christian theurgy, wrongly characterises post-Dionysian Christian sacramentalism as purely anthropocentric.

we find Maximus expressing his commitment to the integrity of the body in union with the soul which he holds in continuity with Leontius of Byzantium, the two Gregories, and the fourth century physician-come-Christian philosopher, Nemesius of Emesa. That this markedly cosmological treatise should give rise to such a metaphor is not unreasonable, for, as we mentioned earlier, among Christian writers the fundamental unity of the cosmos was best expressed by the adoption of the classical understanding of the human being as a cosmos-in-miniature (μικρὸς κόσμος). This observation provides us with an appropriate moment to investigate further aspects of Maximus' anthropology - in particular his conception of the soul-body relationship, since it is inescapably bound up with his understanding of the hypostatic union, the Church, and consequently his whole vision of reality.

Soul, Body and the Mystery of the Human Vocation

Among the Fathers, actual anthropological dualism, as it was perceived to exist in extreme Gnostic circles,¹⁶³ was a rarity - even in the more rigorous ascetic systems. The Platonic doctrine of the soul's pre-existence, however, which enjoyed sporadic Christian sympathy throughout Late Antiquity, constantly held out the potential threat of a real dualistic view of the universe. With some exceptions, the Fathers largely resisted this tendency. As we noted above, Irenaeus envisaged ὁ τελείος ἄνθρωπος not as a purified soul, but as a composite union of body, soul, and spirit created in the image and perfected in the likeness of God.¹⁶⁴ For Clement, the body is the soul's 'consort and ally' with which it is honoured

¹⁶² *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1088BC).

¹⁶³ Such as the school of Basilides, described in *Iren.Haer.* 1.24.5.

¹⁶⁴ *Iren.Haer.* 5.6.1.

and sanctified by the indwelling Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁵ Unlike Clement, Origen maintained the pre-existence of the soul, and while he could see the necessity of the body in God's restorative economy, he does not find it constitutive of what it means to be human.¹⁶⁶

It is only with Nemesius in the fourth century however that we find a more concerted effort to provide a rational and philosophically attractive account of the relation of the soul to the body and the precise nature of the soul's superiority. Here we find for the first time in a Christian author a clearer picture of the dual nature of the human being who unites (συναπτόμενος) in himself two distinct orders of cosmic reality: intelligible and sensible, rational and irrational. In Nemesius' words, since man's being lies on the border (ἐν μεθορίοις) between intelligible and phenomenal, it provides

the best proof that the whole universe is the creature of the one God... God created both an intelligible and a phenomenal order, and required some one creature to link these two together in such a way that the entire universe should form one agreeable unity, unbroken by internal incoherences.¹⁶⁷

Nemesius' contemporaries Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa, who like him were indebted to Origen for their spiritual anthropology, made much of this dual nature and mediatorial function of human creatures. The Nyssene knew of humanity as 'a kind of

¹⁶⁵ Clem.*Paed.* 1.13.

¹⁶⁶ Or.*Cels.* 4.65-66; 7.38. Yet Or.*Cels.* 3.41 also has this to say against Celsus' disdain for Jesus' bodily birth: 'We affirm that his mortal body and the human soul in him received the greatest elevation not only by communion but by union and intermingling, so that by sharing in his divinity he was transformed into God.' And on the necessity of (present) corporeality, Or.*Princ.* 4.4.8: 'Now there will always be rational creatures that need a corporeal garment, and so there will always be a corporeal nature, the garments of which rational creatures must use – unless someone supposes he can show by any proofs that a rational nature can live apart from a body of any kind.'

¹⁶⁷ Nemes.*Nat.hom* 1 (Morani, 3.5; 5.1-6).

microcosm, enclosing in itself those very elements which make up the universe.¹⁶⁸ For the Nazianzen, this understanding was wedded with his conception of two creations and the tripartite structure of the human composite (mind-soul-body), clearly demonstrated in a passage Maximus quotes in our present treatise, where he proposes it as the divine doctor's clear explanation of the origins of humanity's *genesis*:

Mind (νοῦς), then, and sense (αἴσθησις), thus distinguished from one another, remained within their own boundaries, and bore in themselves the magnificence of the Creator-Word, silent praisers and thrilling heralds of his mighty work (cf. Ps 18:2). But there was not yet any mingling of both, nor any mixing of these opposites – a mark of a greater wisdom and extravagance [that would be demonstrated in the creation of] natures. Nor, as yet, were the whole riches of goodness known.

But then the Architect-Word, when he had determined to demonstrate this and to produce a single living being from both invisible and visible nature, created man. He took a body from already existing matter and breathed into it life from himself, which the Word knows to be an intellectual soul and image of God. He placed this man upon the earth – a sort of second great cosmos in miniature, another angel, a mixed worshipper....¹⁶⁹

The human being's mediatorial function as a miniature cosmos is expressed even more forthrightly - though with even greater subtlety and insight - by Maximus himself in the seventh chapter of his *Mystagogia* and most notably in the famous *Ambiguum* 41. In the former, Maximus draws a direct parallel between the bipartite structures of the cosmos and the human being. Just as the intelligible and sensible realms make up one cosmos, so soul and body make up one human being, and 'by virtue of the law of the one who bound

¹⁶⁸ Greg. Nyss. *Anim. et res.* (PG 46.28B).

them,' neither of these elements, bound together in inseparable unity, denies or displaces the other.¹⁷⁰ In the latter, he speaks of five divisions (διαιρέσεις) of reality: uncreated and created, intelligible and sensible, heaven and earth, paradise and the inhabited world, male and female.¹⁷¹ 'Humanity,' he writes,

clearly has the power of naturally uniting at the mean point of each division since it is related to the extremities of each division in its own parts.... For this very reason the human being was introduced last (ἔσχατος) among beings as a kind of natural bond (σύνδεσμός τις φυσικὸς) mediating between the extremities of universals through their proper parts, and leading into unity (εἰς ἓν) in itself those things that are naturally set apart from one another by a great interval.¹⁷²

As these passages suggest, the human being's mediatorial *vocation* rests upon his mediatorial *structure*. Specifically, soul itself operates as the mediating element between God and matter, since it possesses faculties that unite it with both: a rational faculty to link it with God through the intellect and an irrational faculty to link it with matter through the senses.¹⁷³ Let us examine this 'internal' structure more closely.

Nemesius as we saw discerned the primary function of the human being as one of holding in his psychosomatic unity the two realms of being together in unconfused union. Neither the body nor soul, therefore, can entertain independent existence: 'the body is not a living creature by itself, nor is the soul, but soul and body together.'¹⁷⁴ Their union is not

¹⁶⁹ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1093D); *Greg.Naz.Or.* 38.11.

¹⁷⁰ *Myst.* 7 (Sotiropoulos 186.13-15).

¹⁷¹ *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91.1304D – 1305A).

¹⁷² *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91.1305BC).

¹⁷³ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1193D).

¹⁷⁴ *Nemes.Nat.hom.*33 (Morani, 101.6-7).

one of juxtaposition (κατὰ παράθεσιν, παρακείσθαι) - like two dancers, nor of mixture (κράσις, κεκράσθαι) - like wine and water.¹⁷⁵ Instead, citing the authority of Ammonius Saccas,¹⁷⁶ Nemesius proposes a union without confusion (ἀσυγχύτως) resulting in a single living subject,¹⁷⁷ with the soul remaining distinct as the intelligent principle of life, activity, and movement. *It* modifies and masters the body, not the other way around. It pervades the body without diminution, and is bound and present to the body in the kind of relationship (ὡς ἐν σχέσει) by which God is said to be present with us – not spatially, but relationally (οὐδὲ τοπικῶς, ἀλλὰ κατὰ σχέσιν).¹⁷⁸ Nemesius goes on to invoke the union of the divine Word with his human nature as analogous to the soul's union with the body:

While God the Word suffers no alteration from his fellowship with the body and soul, nor participates in their infirmity when sharing with them his own divinity, he becomes one with them, remaining one just as he was before the union. This mode of mingling or union is utterly new, for he mixes with them throughout yet remains unmixed, unconfused, uncorrupted, unchanged, not sharing their passivity but only their activity.¹⁷⁹

Nemesius' language came to achieve great prominence in the christological controversies of the subsequent centuries – except rather than christology serving to illuminate anthropology, as in Nemesius, the union of soul and body was used as a consciously imperfect analogy of the union of two natures in Christ. Leontius of Byzantium in the sixth century could be said to provide the most exacting, scientific

¹⁷⁵ Nemes.*Nat.hom.* 3 (Morani, 38.12 – 39.12).

¹⁷⁶ The Alexandrian Neoplatonist – and, according to Eus.*H.e.* 6.19, teacher of Plotinus and Origen.

¹⁷⁷ Nemes.*Nat.hom.* 3 (Morani, 40.10-12).

¹⁷⁸ Nemes.*Nat.hom.* 3 (Morani, 41.15-19).

application of this analogy. According to a fine study by Brian Daley - in which he demonstrates Leontius' clear dependence upon Nemesius - Leontius' conception of the union of natures in Christ and the union of soul and body in man 'rests at heart on a subtle and elaborate conception of the dialectical 'relationships' (σχέσεις) that comprise and coordinate the generic and individual levels of reality.' Critical terms such as *physis* and *hypostasis* are, for Leontius, 'essentially ways of recognizing the underlying and ontologically fundamental communality and distinctiveness of things.'¹⁸⁰ In other words, orthodox christology's precise grammatical and conceptual designations serve to articulate the mystery of identity and difference, a mystery particularised and demonstratively enacted in the Incarnation.

As an heir to this intellectual tradition, Maximus freely draws upon both orthodox christological insights as well as the dialectical logic of the sixth century Aristotelian commentators to articulate his spiritual anthropology. In many cases it occurs specifically in the context of his refutation of the pre-existence of souls through his insistence upon the simultaneous coming-into-being (*genesis*) of soul and body as a single, complete human subject. Soul and body are clearly of different substance (*ousia*) and definition (*logos*). Soul is immortal, invisible, incorporeal; body is mortal, visible, and corporeal. Through his reading of Genesis 2, Maximus is able to trace this difference in being back to two different *sources* of being. Soul is constituted immediately from the divine and life-giving insufflation; body, however, is made by God mediately from the objective matter of the body from which it comes (dust, mother's blood).¹⁸¹ Given these natural differences, two questions present themselves for enquiry. First, how can two substances of opposing qualities be joined to

¹⁷⁹ Nemes.*Nat.hom.* 3 (Morani, 42.13-19).

¹⁸⁰ 'A Richer Union', 252.

¹⁸¹ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1321C).

make up (ἀποτελεῖν) a single, complete, unified species? Secondly, given their union, what is the nature of their relation with one another?

At the forefront of Maximus' development of these issues lies the Aristotelian 'principle of relation' (ὁ τοῦ πρὸς τι λόγος),¹⁸² which he explains applies to parts of a whole that come into existence simultaneously to constitute a single species.¹⁸³ The insistence on simultaneous (ἄμα, ὅμου) *genesis* thus becomes all-important, since if one were to pre-exist the other, their *synthesis* to form a particular instance of a generic species (ἄνθρωπος) would either involve a necessary alteration in substance or else imply the endless perpetuation of reincarnation or reanimation. Both these (im)possibilities, which dissolve the principle of relation, are rejected outright.¹⁸⁴ Maximus argues instead for the *composite nature* of human being: the soul or body of a particular person, each as a part of a whole, can only be considered *in relation to* that whole person:

For the soul is not said to be a 'mere soul' after the death of the body, but the soul of a human being, indeed, the soul of a particular human being. Even after the body, it retains by relation the whole as its own species (ἔχει ὡς εἶδος αὐτῆς τὸ ὅλον κατὰ τὴν σχέσιν), since the [whole] human being is predicated of an individual part. Likewise, ... the body is not said to be a 'mere body' after its separation from the soul, even if it is corruptible and naturally returns to the elements from which it is constituted. Like the soul, it too retains by relation the whole as its own species, since the [whole] human being is predicated of an individual part.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Cf. Aristotle *Categoriae* IV.

¹⁸³ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1100C); *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1324A) *et al.*

¹⁸⁴ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1324AB); *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1100D). Owing to an unfortunate misunderstanding of the text, Thunberg (*Microcosm and Mediator*, 104) wrongly takes Maximus' rejection of the doctrine of metempsychosis in this passage as a (positive) assertion of a perichoretic-like relation between body and soul.

¹⁸⁵ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1101B). The language here is clearly related to Porphyry's tree of being (γένος – εἶδος – διαφορά – ἴδιον – συμβεβηκός): 'The higher is always predicated of the lower. ... Thus, the individual is

The inviolability of this relation (σχέσις) between soul and body in no way compromises their substantial, natural difference from one another.¹⁸⁶

Since the critical point in this relation of parts – that which assures their ontological permanence and indissolubility of relation - is directly related to their simultaneous *genesis* as a complete species, the virginal conception of Christ and his bodily ascension into heaven both serve as the archetypal examples.¹⁸⁷ On the basis of the virginal conception, at which moment the divine Word unites to himself the whole human nature at the exact moment the latter comes into actual being, the simultaneous union-*genesis* of soul and body as an individual *hypostasis* is said to be brought about entirely by the will of God.¹⁸⁸ In other words, there is no potential naturally inherent in either soul or body capable of effecting and maintaining the union. Their simultaneous *genesis* and *synthesis* is the free and sovereign act of God. With Christ's bodily ascension and session, Maximus finds the foundation for the assertion of the *permanence* of the soul-body relationship. Since Christ's body forever remains a constitutive component of the human nature hypostatically united with the Word in heaven at the right hand of the Father, Maximus deems it arrogant to infer that, 'with respect to the advancement of rational beings towards perfection,... bodies will at some time dissolve into non-being.' Who can think this, he adds, and 'believe also that the Lord himself and God of the universe is with a body now and forever, and renders to others the

contained by the species and the species by the genus, for the genus is a kind of whole, the individual a part. The species is both a whole and a part, a part of another and a whole, not of another but in others. The whole is in the parts.' Porphyry *Isagoge* 7.13 – 8.2; trans. by Edward W. Warren, *Porphyry the Phoenician: Isagoge* (Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1975), 41. Thus species (as whole) is ontologically prior to individual (as part).

¹⁸⁶ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1101C).

¹⁸⁷ The situation with Christ remains, however, still utterly unique, for the divine nature already exists from eternity as the *hypostasis* of the second Person of the Trinity, whereas the assumed human nature only comes into being at the very moment of union. Obviously much here spills over into Maximus' christology, something we shall be treating in more detail in chapter three.

power to be able to advance, and who, as the author of universal salvation, ushers and beckons all towards his own glory, as far as possible, by the power of the Incarnation, and who cleanses the stains of all?¹⁸⁹ The Confessor is simply being faithful to the dogmatic tradition which asserts that what is united to God is also saved. To be sure, the very reason the Word became flesh was that he might ‘save the image’ and ‘render the flesh immortal.’ ‘How then,’ Maximus retorts in words that underscore the permanence of the soul-body union, ‘can what is saved be lost, and what is rendered immortal die?’¹⁹⁰

Soul and body, then, are necessarily and permanently related to one another by virtue of their simultaneous coming-into-being as a particular human being – as parts of a whole instance of a composite species. Even at death when they are temporarily separated, each can only be spoken of in relation to the whole person whose body or soul it is. Their union is established and maintained, as we noted, by the will and purpose of God. Nevertheless, their natural differences remain, a fact implying that their relation to one another will not be one of equals. The corporeal body, utterly incapable of self-sufficiency *per se*, remains the instrument of the intelligent soul, for

the whole soul, permeating (χωροῦσα) the whole body, gives to it both life and movement, since the soul by nature is simple and incorporeal. [The soul does this] in the whole body and in each of its members without being divided or split up by the body, since it is natural for the body to admit the soul according to the body’s natural underlying capacity to receive the soul’s activity. Present throughout, the whole soul binds together

¹⁸⁸ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1324C – 1325B). Also Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 98-99.

¹⁸⁹ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1332C – 1333A).

¹⁹⁰ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1336A). See also *Q.Thal.* 54 (CCSG 7, 459.277-279).

the members variously capable of receiving it in a manner commensurate with its preservation as one body.¹⁹¹

In exploring this further, we are led back into the complex flow of Maximus' explanation in *Ambiguum* 7 as to what Gregory means when he says we are 'a portion of God.' By these words Gregory intended, suggests Maximus, not to explain the cause of human *genesis*, but the reason for the bodily affliction attending empirical human existence.¹⁹² We recall from the context of Gregory's passage that that reason was related to God's providential and pedagogical economy. The inherent weakness and contingency of bodily life keeps us rational beings humble, 'lest exalted and lifted up from our high status we despise the creator.' But keeping in mind Maximus' distinction between image and likeness, it is also the means of our being likened to God. The rational and intellectual soul, made in God's image, is capable precisely *in its union with the body* of receiving likeness to God. By the soul's 'intelligent provision for the lower part' (κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἐπιστημονικὴν πρὸς τὸ ὑφειμένον πρόνοιαν) – that is, by fulfilling the commandment to love neighbour as self and its 'prudent care for the body' (ἐμφρόνως τοῦ σώματος ἀντεχομένην), and through its mediating to the body the indwelling maker and his gift of immortality, it endues the body with reason through the virtues and appropriates it to God (οἰκειῶσαι Θεῷ) in such a way that the body becomes its fellow-servant (ὁμόδουλον).¹⁹³ The result, he continues, in terms clearly echoing Nemesius' conviction that the unity of man demonstrates one creator,

¹⁹¹ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1100AB).

¹⁹² *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1089D).

¹⁹³ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1092B).

is that ‘what God is to the soul, the soul becomes to the body,’¹⁹⁴ and there is manifested the one creator of all who resides proportionately in all beings through humanity, and our manifold and natural diversities converge into one. Then God himself will be *all in all* (1 Cor 15:28). He will have encompassed and given independent existence to all things in himself, by the fact that no being will continue to possess motion that is aimless and deprived of his presence. It is with respect to this presence and by our reference to the goal of the divine plan that we are and are called *gods* (Jn 10:35) and *children* (Jn 1:12) and *body* (Eph 1:23) and *members* (Eph 5:30) and ‘a portion’ of God.¹⁹⁵

Saint Paul’s expression ‘all in all’ (πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν) forms a natural focal point for meditation, since it presents in exact wording what became the ‘golden rule’ of Neoplatonism that accounts for the presence of causes in their effects: ‘everything in everything but in a way appropriate to each.’¹⁹⁶ Dionysius’ way of expressing this notion, reckoned by Perl to be his ‘ultimate conclusion of the theory of participation’¹⁹⁷ epitomises the mystery of God’s relation to and difference from creation: ‘He is all things in all things (ἐν πᾶσι πάντα ἐστὶ) and he is nothing in anything, and he is known to all from all, and to none from any.’¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, it is important to understand Dionysius’ words as an answer to his preceding question, ‘how do we know God?’ That God is said to be ‘all things in all things’ is primarily an *epistemological* assertion, or, more correctly, an exclamation of praise. Indeed, the sentence that follows it more clearly states Dionysius’ meaning: ‘he is

¹⁹⁴ The phrase is a direct quote from Greg.Naz.Or. 2.17 (SC 247, 112.14-15): ἵν’ ὅπερ ἐστὶ Θεὸς ψυχῆ, τοῦτο ψυχῆ σώματι γένηται.

¹⁹⁵ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1092C).

¹⁹⁶ Πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν, οἰκείως δὲ ἐν ἑκάστῳ; Proclus, *prop.* 103 (Dodds, *Proclus: Elements of Theology*, 92.13). In his commentary (254), Dodds mentions the possible Pythagorean roots of this formula, adding that later Neoplatonism ‘saw in it a convenient means of covering all the gaps left by Plotinus in his derivation of the world of experience, and thus assuring the unity of the system: it bridged oppositions without destroying them.’ Note also the context of Dionysius’ use of 1 Corinthians 15:28 in *De div.nom.* 1.7.

¹⁹⁷ Perl, ‘Methexis’, 75.

known to all from all things and to no one from anything.’ The fact that ‘he is all things in all things’ is immediately qualified by ‘and he is nothing in anything’ reminds us of Dionysius’ overarching apophaticism in which any positive assertion of God and creation’s ontological identity is excluded, since any such possibility remains hidden in the inscrutable depths of the divine Wisdom. So when in *Ambiguum* 22 Maximus refers to the ontological fact of God’s being ‘all in all’ – ‘wholly in all beings in general and indivisibly in each particular’ – it falls within a rhetorical question in which the matter is regarded as an impenetrable mystery.¹⁹⁹ And speaking of the same presence as an ecclesially fulfilled reality in *Mystagogia* 1, God’s immanence ‘all in all’ is said to be a fact ‘that will become apparent only to the pure in disposition (μονώτατος τοῖς καθαρῶις τὴν διάνοιαν ὁραθήσεται).’²⁰⁰

With Maximus’ citations from Ephesians then we are reminded that all that he has been saying about the relation of soul to body and parts to the whole – while steeped in the theological and technical vocabulary of Neoplatonist metaphysics and Aristotelian logic - stems ultimately from his reflections on the scriptural witness to the Church as the body of Christ. It is as he develops this meditation further that we encounter yet another interpretation of the phrase ‘a portion of God.’ The soul-body relation sits alongside previously mentioned images of light-air and fire-iron,²⁰¹ all three of which ‘illustrate the same metaphysical phenomenon.’²⁰² Each image exemplifies God’s own theophanic embodiment in Christ, creation, deification, and Church. The metaphysical structure – determined by the union of uncreated and created in the one person who is the incarnate

¹⁹⁸ *De div. nom.* 7.3.

¹⁹⁹ *Amb. Io.* 22 (PG 91.1257AB).

²⁰⁰ *Myst.* 1 (Sotiropoulos 152.4-5).

²⁰¹ *Amb. Io.* 7 (PG 91.1076A; 1088D).

²⁰² Perl, ‘Methexis’, 134.

Word - is the same in each case. In each case too the illustrative interpenetration of soul with body, light with air, fire with iron is mutual, but not symmetrical. Just as the natures of body, air, and iron are wholly qualified by the properties of the more active natures of soul, light, and fire, without any nature losing its distinctive properties, so too is creation wholly penetrated by God the Word, who 'wills always and in all things to effect the mystery of his embodiment.'²⁰³

Hereby Maximus affords us a glimpse into what is a deeply ecclesiocentric cosmic ontology. True cosmic being is fulfilled in the Church, the body of Christ, 'the fullness of him who is filled all in all' (Eph 1:23). Christians are 'members' or limbs of this body, who together, to use Irenaeus' favourite christological image ecclesiologicaly, are being 'summed up' (Eph 1:10) according to the Father's wonderful plan – hidden in him before the ages (Eph 3:9) but now revealed through the Incarnation. The Incarnation proleptically 'maps out,' as it were, and actually performs in corporeal contours God's plan for the creation and perfection of human nature by uniting the extremities of the cosmos in Christ.²⁰⁴ Using a cognate of the verb recalling his assertion of the fixity of our ontological foundation in God (πήγνυμι), Maximus describes how the Son of God, in uniting to himself our nature, 'fixed us firmly to himself (ἐαυτῷ συμπηξάμενου) through his intelligibly and rationally animated holy flesh taken from us, as through a first-fruit (ὡς δι' ἀπαρχῆς),' and 'in the way of a soul with a body, knitted and adapted us to himself by

²⁰³ See further Perl, 'Methexis', 196.

²⁰⁴ See *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91.1308C – 1312B); and *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1333CD), where the incarnate Word, as the author and perfecter of our salvation, is said to have provided himself 'as a type and blueprint' (τύπον καὶ πρόγραμμα) with respect to the attainment of virtue (cf. *Greg.Naz.Or.* 7.23). If there was to be a final annihilation of the body in the scheme of perfection, it would have been effected beforehand in his own economy.

the Spirit.’²⁰⁵ In *Ambiguum* 31, Maximus expounds further his very Johannine understanding of Saint Paul’s ascription of the name ‘firstfruits’ to Christ (1 Cor 15:20, 23):

If, then, Christ as man is the ‘firstfruits’ of our nature with God the Father, and as it were the leaven of the whole lump, and as the Word who is never displaced from his permanence in the Father is with God the Father according to the designation of his humanity, let us not doubt that in accordance with his petition with the Father (Jn 17:20-26) we shall be where he is as the firstfruits of our race. For just as having loosed the laws of nature supernaturally he was made low for us without change – a human being as we are, sin alone excepted, so also will we consequently come to be above because of him – gods as he is by the mystery of grace – altering nothing at all of our nature. Thus again, as the wise teacher says, ‘the upper world is filled’ - the members of the body being united to the head according to their worth, each member clearly by its proximity in virtue harmoniously receiving the position (θέσις) proper to it through the orchestration of the Spirit and filling up the body which *fills all* and is filled from all – the body of him *who is filled by all in every way* (Eph 1:23).²⁰⁶

Has this redemptive dispensation fulfilled in the Church always been part of God’s original plan and intent for creation? The affirmative answer to this question belongs to Maximus’ refutation of the Origenist cyclical schema in which the end of all things involves a restoration to their pristine former state. Yet the monk has no love for simplistic solutions that fail adequately to discern the inherently mysterious quality of God’s eternal will, let alone ones that ignore the great weight of biblical and traditional consensus. We are not to understand his ecclesiological vision of participation in the body of Christ as

²⁰⁵ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1097B).

something entirely other than, or additional to, his ontology of creation, where all creatures participate in the being of God. It is rather its fulfilment. His articulation of the difficulty here as elsewhere²⁰⁷ is achieved by the subtle employment of careful distinctions. And here he makes explicit for the first time in this treatise a distinction that will in the next chapter become crucial for our understanding of his christology: that between *logos* and *tropos*. God's wonderful plan (παντάγαθος σκοπός) has never received anything new as far as its original principle is concerned (κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον λόγον), but having reached its time for fulfilment, 'he clearly introduced it by means of another, newer mode' (δι' ἄλλου καινοτέρου τρόπου).²⁰⁸ The explanation that follows in which can be observed the classical Maximian delineation of divine plan, human fall, followed by the newness of divine restoration must be heard in full:

For God created us [to be] like unto himself by possessing through participation the exact characteristics of his goodness, and gave us the means (*tropos*) which, through the use of our natural powers, leads to this blessed end. But humankind voluntarily (ἐκουσίως) rejected this mode by the abuse of its natural powers. Therefore, lest alienated humankind move still further from God, another means had to be introduced in its place, one more divine and paradoxical than the former to the extent that what is beyond nature is higher than what is natural. And this, as we all believe, is the mystery of the most-mystical dwelling of God with human beings (cf. Rev 21:3). For, says the divine Apostle, *had the first covenant remained blameless, no place would have been sought for a second* (Heb 8:7). And it is clear to all that the mystery that has come to pass in Christ at the end of the age is the

²⁰⁶ *Amb.Io.* 31 (PG 91.1280C – 1281B).

²⁰⁷ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1328AB).

²⁰⁸ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1097C).

unambiguous demonstration and fulfilment of that which at the beginning of the age was committed to the charge of our forefather.²⁰⁹

On this note we draw to a close a lengthy excursus through one of Maximus' greatest expositions on the ontological foundations of bodily human and cosmic being. A brief summary will bring together our final thoughts.

Having sketched out the principal tenets of sixth century Origenism, we noted that the springboard for Maximus' refutation of problematic trends among his monastic readership lies in a request for him to comment on a passage in Gregory of Nazianzen in which, given that human beings are 'a portion of God', the meaning of bodily life is questioned as a 'mystery'. We were reminded that in considering the place of the corporeal in Maximus' theological vision we are guided by the distinctly practical circumstances towards which his philosophical articulation is directed.

Secondly, we found there to be two levels at which motion or change in the cosmos must be considered. On the one hand, all created beings are moved since they have been brought by God into being from non-being. Motion that is natural to created beings leads them from non-being into being, and then on a path that leads via well-being to eternal being in union with God. This is the structure of deification, creation's proper goal. But on the other hand, empirical existence possesses a kind of negative instability as the result of the human creature's abandonment of his beginning and source of being from the very moment of his coming-into-being. Adam's material incorporation and his transgression of the divine command are simultaneous. Hence the original mode (*tropos*) by which humanity was to realise its divinely given pattern (*logos*) was interrupted and

²⁰⁹ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1097CD). See also *Amb.Io.* 31 (PG 91.1276B); 41 (PG 91.1308CD) *et al.*

corrupted. The entry of evil in the form of deviation from one's natural course and the experience of death is the complex result of devilish deception, the abuse of freedom, deliberate choice, and the righteous judgement of God. The fall, through which human beings 'have actualised non-being in themselves',²¹⁰ is simultaneously moral and ontological, but in that order, for it involves the irrational choice of non-being over being, the love of dust instead of love for God.²¹¹ Its ramifications are necessarily cosmological, for *fallen* humanity lacks the means to fulfil its mediatorial vocation as the microcosm in whom the disparate realms of the universe are reconciled and united. Left alone in such a predicament, all material reality – the human body especially – can only be experienced as the exacerbation of dispersal, disharmony, and dissolution. As Maximus summarises the situation in *Ambiguum* 15:

All beings according to the principle by which they subsist and are, are stable and unmoved. But by the principle of the things observed around them, according to which [principle] the economy of this universe plainly is constituted and disposed, it is obvious that all things are moved and are unstable.²¹²

But thirdly, in spite of the fallen condition, history and creation remain the arena in which is fulfilled God the Word's will 'always and in all things to effect the mystery of his embodiment.' What is ultimately stable and real in the universe is determined by its relation to what is assumed by the incarnate Word, for in Christ a radically new existence has become manifest and accessible by which embodied humanity – and in it, all creation - can attain its proper end and beginning. In view of Christ, human corporeality in itself cannot

²¹⁰ *Amb.Io.* 20 (PG 91.1237BC).

²¹¹ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1092C – 1093A).

be a hindrance but is rather, in its rightful order, a constitutive, signal means of achieving the creaturely goal of likeness to God, since in bodily humanity the divine glory finds the organ for its manifestation and active presence throughout the whole cosmos. The incarnation of God has as its reciprocal correlate the deification of man - a cosmically sanctifying event and process achieved and perfected in the Church, the body of Christ, whose members are parts and portions of God. Thus human participation in God as 'a portion of God', a reality true of every created rational being, is fully realised only by participation in the Word, the substance of the virtues.

This whole vision is expressed by Maximus by means of precise Neoplatonic metaphysical conceptual terminology, shaped on the one hand by Aristotle's (horizontal) analysis of nature in terms of its *telos* and function, and on the other by Proclus' (vertical) theory of participation, both of which serve to transform the Origenist schema. The final state cannot simply consist of a return to a former *henad*, since perfect participation in God – 'who is by nature limitless and honourable, and naturally stretches to infinity the appetite of those who enjoy him through participation'²¹³ – precludes any possibility of satiation, and infinitely transcends all temporal and spatial limitation. Deification is as endless and infinite as its source. Yet it does not involve a universal assimilation of individuals into the divine essence – the obliteration of essential difference and hypostatic identity – but the utter transience of all individuality and human actuation in the light of divine activity. This, according to Maximus, is the heart of Saint Paul's claim that God ultimately will be 'all in all' (1 Cor 15:28), a totality encompassing both intelligible *and sensible* reality. Precisely how such a universal, trans-temporal cosmic vision can be regarded by Maximus to have

²¹² *Amb.Io.* 15 (PG 91.1217AB).

²¹³ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1089B).

been achieved *definitively* through something as precarious as the particular, historical, bodily life of Christ will form the subject of our next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Corporeality and Christ

Christ hath took in this piece of ground,

And made a garden there for those

Who want herbs for their wound.¹

We have seen in the foregoing chapters how manifestly Maximus' thinking on the place of the corporeal in the structure of creation and revelation is dominated by the mystery of the enfleshed Word of God. But if in doing so we failed to discern a marked, *qualitative* difference between the Word's incarnate economies in Scripture and cosmos on the one hand, and his incarnate sojourn on earth in the person and work of Jesus Christ on the other, we shall find it to be otherwise when in this chapter we investigate more closely the constitutive soteriological function of Christ's corporeality. It is an investigation that seeks to understand to what extent divine passion features as the Incarnation's primary mystery, and thus will necessarily lead us to ask what Maximus considers an acceptable, or indeed *the definitive* form of orthodox theopaschism. For with the stark fact of the decidedly contingent and material dimensions of Christ's corporeal life in time and space, Maximus - along with his Christian forebears - comes face to face with the mystery of divine passibility, a mystery that raises sharply the difficult question about the relation between the utter impassibility of the divine nature – universally acknowledged as a theological axiom,

¹ George Herbert, *Sunday*, 40-42; in Wall, *George Herbert: The Country Parson, The Temple*, 193.

and the confessed reality of the divine Son's conception and birth, suffering and death 'for us and for our salvation.'

Maximus is well known for his openness to overtly theopaschite language, even though he lived in an ecclesiastical climate where the formal, grammatical relation between orthodox and heterodox theopaschitism was still strained and unclear. Perhaps one of the most striking examples occurs towards the end of his *Mystagogia* when he likens God to 'the poor man' (Mt 25:40; Jam 2:1-13) on account of his salvific solidarity with the poverty of the human condition. God's suffering is clearly not limited to his humble life in Palestine. Taking into himself the suffering of each person in due proportion, God suffers until 'the perfection of this age', and is said to be 'always suffering mystically out of goodness.'² Yet as this chapter unfolds it will become clear how even this profound appreciation of the *paschal* contours of God's general economic activity is deepened still further in Maximus' more specifically christological reflections in which he extends to *economia* the theological distinction between *logos* and *tropos*, contemplates the *perichoresis* of divine and human natures in Christ at the modal, hypostatic level, and emphasises in notably Cyrilline fashion the all-encompassing, deifying power of Christ's 'holy flesh'. In the concrete bodily sufferings and death of Christ Maximus encounters 'truly a passible God', the God who precisely in his fleshly, passible *kenosis* has graciously demonstrated and wholly wrought the deification of passible, bodily human nature.

There are other good reasons to pursue this particular line of enquiry with regard to Maximus' christology. The greater deal of contemporary theologising, especially since the systematic genocide of the Second World War, continues to be scandalised by the Fathers' universal acceptance as a theological norm of what is largely disdained as an abstract and

² *Myst.* 24 (Sotiropoulos, 238.4-8).

largely irrelevant metaphysical principle of Greek philosophy, namely, the impassibility of God. In the view of one especially influential theologian of the past half-century, Jürgen Moltmann, patristic christology and, as a result, all traditional soteriology, is corrupt almost from the start by the Fathers' assertion of divine *apatheia*.³ As the argument goes, a God who cannot suffer cannot love – nor can he save those who suffer without violating or overriding the natural human condition. Moltmann's convictions run parallel to a whole trend in modern theology (unconsciously?) indebted to process philosophy in which God ends up necessarily subject to the evolutionary vicissitudes (and ultimately, the dark nihilism) of the universe.⁴

Our scope here is not to engage directly with contemporary critical scholarship, nor to negate that most poignant and critical difficulty raised for Christian theology by the vast, immeasurable burden of human suffering, whose silent plea continues to rise to heaven like the age-old cry of Abel's blood from the ground and Israel's lament 'How long?', and whose full depths God himself demonstrates to have experienced definitively and vicariously in the prayer of Golgotha, 'My God, my God, why...?' Dietrich Bonhoeffer was far from capitulating to modernist sympathies when, whilst awaiting execution at the hands of the Nazis, he penned the famous line, 'only a suffering God will do.' Rather our goal is to show that for Maximus the *theological* problem presented by the hypostatic union in Christ of divine and human, of incorporeal and corporeal, of impassible and passible is subsumed under the status of that union as the dynamic crucible of human salvation, as the historically actual fact that defies the universe. God's real suffering as Christ, precisely because it really is God the Word's own suffering, bears redemptive, recreative power.

³ *The Crucified God*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974), 227-235; *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981), 23-24.

⁴ See the literature adduced by Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 1-25.

Thus Maximus calls the sufferings of Christ ‘wonderful sufferings’ because by virtue of the hypostatic union their destructive character, in fact the whole ‘use’ (χρησις) of death, the ultimate *pathos*, has been reversed. What his suffering and death take away from him – life, honour, glory - are precisely by that very suffering and death given to us.⁵ In and through his particular sufferings, *all* human suffering – an ontological and theological more than a psychological reality - is given potentially redemptive significance, in such a way ‘that our salvation resides in the death of the only-begotten Son of God.’⁶

We shall begin then by presenting a brief overview of theopaschism in the centuries prior to our period, all the time highlighting its correlation to the dual question regarding the integrity of Christ’s corporeality and the integrity of salvation in his flesh. Then we shall move on to examine Maximus’ christology primarily as it is expressed in his *Ambigua ad Thomam*, in which the question of divine (im)passibility figures as a prominent, even overarching theme, and in which Maximus ventures upon a refined and increasingly rich commentary upon difficult christological passages in Gregory Nazianzen and Dionysius the Areopagite. Finally we shall turn our attention towards the two expressions from which the title of this study is derived - ‘holy flesh’ and ‘wholly deified’ – by which Maximus expresses his most mature christological and soteriological convictions in the context of the Monotheletist controversy.

Divine Impassibility and the Corporeality of Christ

It has been argued, not implausibly, that the christological debates of the fifth century were from at least one perspective a struggle over deep-seated efforts to defend and preserve

⁵ *QD* I.12 (CCSG 10, 143.1-6).

undefiled the dogma of God's impassibility.⁷ Throughout the patristic epoch, as G.L. Prestige once rightly observed, it was 'invariably assumed and repeatedly stated that impassibility is one of the divine attributes. Human nature, on the other hand, is passible, because in men the rational mind is dependent on a fleshly instrument, and consciousness is mediated through physical senses.'⁸ Passibility, it was discerned, is specifically and strictly linked to corporeality. And so while passibility must properly be denied of God on account of his incorporeal nature, it is also bound somehow to feature in any realist account of the Incarnation.

And indeed, theopaschite language with reference to the Incarnation was part and parcel of accepted Christian nomenclature right from apostolic times. If it was true that the Word who 'became flesh' and 'tabernacled among us' was the same Word who in the beginning was 'with God' and who 'was God' (Jn 1:1-14), then surely it was not improper to speak with Ignatius of Antioch of 'God's passion' (τὸ πάθος τοῦ Θεοῦ) or of 'the impassible one who suffered for us',⁹ or of 'the living God who suffered', as we find with Clement of Alexandria.¹⁰ Yet this liberty in attributing passibility to God was by and large explicitly limited to the dimensions of his saving economy 'for us' and did not extend to the Father or to the transcendent divine nature in general. The same Tertullian who could employ such theopathic language as 'God's sufferings' or 'God's blood'¹¹ - or even more pointedly, 'God crucified' and 'God dead' - was to combat the Patripassianism of Sabellius

⁶ *Ep.* 12 (PG 91.468D).

⁷ John J. O'Keefe, 'Impassible Suffering? Divine Passion and Fifth-Century Christology', *TS* 58 (1997), 39-60; also with specific reference to the Nestorian/Monophysite dispute, see Henry Chadwick, 'Eucharist and Christology in the Nestorian Controversy', *JTS NS* 2 (1951), 158-162.

⁸ G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 2nd ed. 1952), 6.

⁹ *Ign.Rom.* 6.3; *Ign.Polyc.* 3.2.

¹⁰ *Clem.Prot.* 10.106.4.

¹¹ Cf. Acts 20:28.

and Praxeas with devastating ire.¹² Origen too, while equally able to speak of divine suffering, regarded it strictly as an economic, provisional reality, acknowledging with the philosophers God's ultimate moral and ontological *apatheia*.¹³

In the earlier centuries one could afford to make theopathic expressions in a less guarded manner, but later on in the face of Arianism when it became necessary to affirm Christ's constitution as consubstantial both with the Father and with creaturely humanity, and not much later again in the face of Apollinarianism and Nestorianism when it became necessary to clarify the locus and identity of the acting subject in Christ, such overtly theopaschite language was increasingly regarded as possessing questionable legitimacy, or at least in need of careful qualification. At the same time, Docetism loomed as a continual threat with dire soteriological consequences. Such tensions were undoubtedly felt by Athanasius, for example, whom we draw upon here in two instances for what in the ensuing centuries were to become representative issues in the christological debates. In the first passage the relationship between the Word's assumed corporeality and passibility is especially clear. It arises in his letter to Epictetus (ca. 372) at a point where Athanasius opposes the view that the Word in himself was *changed* into flesh and bones. Rather,

[the Word] appropriated to himself what belonged to the body, as belonging to himself, the incorporeal Word.... For the Word was present with the human body, and what it suffered he referred to himself so that we might be able to partake of the Godhead of the Word. It was a marvel that he was the one suffering, yet not suffering; suffering in so far as the body

¹² Tert.*Prax.* 1.5; 16.

¹³ See Thomas Weinandy, 'Origen and the Suffering of God', *SP* 36 (2001), 456-460; Ronald E. Heine (ed.), *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel according to John, Books 13-32* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 29-32.

which was his very own suffered, yet not suffering in so far as the Word, being God by nature, is impassible.¹⁴

It does not follow, however, that one should reduce the respective actions of Christ – miracles or sufferings – to either his divine or his bodily nature. Thus in our second passage we find Athanasius writing to Serapion:

[Christ's acts] did not occur in dissociation, along lines governed by the particular quality of the various acts – as though the actions pertaining to the body took place apart from the divinity, or the acts pertaining to the divinity took place apart from the body. Rather they all occurred interconnectedly, and it was one Lord who did them all paradoxically by his own grace.¹⁵

In the wake of Nestorianism, Athanasius' emphasis upon the 'one Lord' who is both impassible and passible and whose actions occur 'interconnectedly' was reaffirmed in Cyril of Alexandria's third letter to Nestorius read at the Council of Ephesus (431) when it decreed that one should attribute 'all the expressions in the Gospels to the single person, the one incarnate *hypostasis* of the Word.'¹⁶ While the 'Antiochene' conception (as it has been dubbed, somewhat injudiciously) of two coincidental subjects which together make up 'Christ' had the advantage of clarity, as well as of preserving intact the impassibility of the divine nature, Cyril's characteristic emphasis upon the singular subject – 'the one incarnate nature of God the Word' (μία φύσις τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου σεσαρκωμένη) – held

¹⁴ *Epistula ad Epictetum* 6; trans. John A. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy, Its History, Theology and Texts* (Leiden/New York/Cologne: E.J. Brill, 1994), 384.

¹⁵ *Epistula ad Serapionem* 4.14 (PG 26.657A).

¹⁶ Schwartz, ACO I.1.i, 38.21-22.

more closely to both the biblical witness and the creed of Nicaea, at the same time possessing greater accessibility and pastoral depth. In general the Cappadocians were careful in their use of theopaschite language,¹⁷ though in a more rhetorical flourish Gregory Nazianzen could speak pointedly of our need for ‘a God made flesh and put to death’, and went so far as to use an expression – in vogue today since Luther – also found in a fifth century apocryphal source: ‘crucified God’ (ἑσταυρόμενος θεός).¹⁸

Despite Nestorian accusations to the contrary, Cyril was far from wanting to teach θεοπάθεια, that is, from ascribing real passibility to the divine nature.¹⁹ ‘The Godhead is impassible’, he wrote in his second letter to Nestorius, ‘because it is incorporeal.’²⁰ Nevertheless, acknowledgement of the real suffering of the incarnate Word – whether ‘impassibly’, ‘economically’, ‘by appropriation’, or ‘in the nature of his flesh’²¹ – as a necessary corollary of his corporeal and fully human existence, became through Cyril’s influence a primary touchstone of orthodox christology, as the famous twelfth anathema at the very end of his provocative third letter to Nestorius makes abundantly clear:

¹⁷ For a brief analysis of Cappadocian christology, see *CCT*, 1, 367-377.

¹⁸ *Acta Philippi* 6.7 (CCSA 11, 189.14-15). On Gregory, see John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary press, 1987), 71.

¹⁹ ‘The Antiochenes believed that Cyril allowed the human pathos of Jesus to touch the godhead and thereby to compromise God’s impassible nature.’ O’Keefe, ‘Impassible Suffering?’, 50. Cyril counters such accusations to Succensus: ‘They do not understand the economy and make wicked attempts to displace the sufferings to the man on his own, foolishly seeking a piety that does them harm. They try to avoid confessing that the Word of God is the Saviour who gave his own blood for us, and say instead that it was the man Jesus understood as separate and distinct who can be said to have achieved this. To think like this shakes the whole rationale of the fleshly economy, and quite clearly turns our divine mystery into a matter of man-worshipping.’ From *Second Letter to Succensus*, 4 (McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 362).

²⁰ ἀπαθὲς γὰρ τὸ θεῖον, ὅτι καὶ ἀσώματον (Schwartz, *ACO* I.1.i, 27.16).

²¹ McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 202.

If anyone does not confess that the Word of God suffered in the flesh, was crucified in the flesh, and tasted death in the flesh, becoming the first-born from the dead, although as God he is life and life-giving, let him be anathema.²²

Just as the soul, which is inherently impassible, appropriates as its own the pain of the body with which it is united, so too can it be said that the enfleshed Word ‘suffered impassibly’ (ἔπαθεν ἀπαθῶς) the weaknesses inherent to the human condition.²³ It was precisely this form of theopaschism that formed the ‘key element’ of his ‘basic soteriological intuition.’²⁴

Cyril’s insistence upon the paradoxical and mysterious character of the coexistence of impassible and passible in one Christ secured his place as the christological champion of both the Greek orthodox and Monophysite traditions. Still, the very real ecclesiastical divisions aroused in the fifth century christological debates involving the question of divine passibility were not healed when more than five hundred bishops met together in the basilica of Saint Euphemia to decide the matter at the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon (451). In actual fact they were exacerbated. For a great number of especially Palestinian bishops, Pope Leo’s formulation, officially ratified during the Council, represented a move away from Cyril and the Nicene creed and a capitulation to the evils of Nestorianism:

For each form, in communion with the other, performs the acts which are proper to it: the Word, that is, performing what belongs to the Word, and the flesh carrying out what

²² McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 275. It is worth noting that on account of its wariness of theopaschite language, Chalcedon gave synodical status to Cyril’s second letter to Nestorius but not this his third containing the twelfth anathema. It had to wait until the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553 to receive sanction.

²³ *Scholium* 8 (McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 300-301).

²⁴ Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 70.

belongs to the flesh. The one [form] shines out in miracles, the other succumbs to injuries.²⁵

At first glance, what Leo is saying is just what Cyril, following Athanasius, had excluded: the strict reduction of Christ's actions reported in the Gospels to one or the other nature. The crucial, redeeming phrase is his qualification 'in communion with the other', a phrase whose hidden but abiding influence came to especially clear light with Maximus himself and his understanding of *perichoresis*. It was not enough, however, to convince many Eastern bishops who considered Leo's letter to Flavian, and eventually with it, the whole thrust of the Synod, to be far from the more direct theopaschism of Cyril and the previous conciliar tradition. In the ensuing controversy between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian factions, both parties attached importance to the identity of the subject of various theopaschite formulae, the adverbial qualifications appending them, and the ascription of both divine and human actions (miracles and sufferings) to a single acting subject. Despite the initial wariness displayed by strict Chalcedonians to overtly theopaschite language, theopaschism increasingly came to figure as the corollary of the realist incarnationism they themselves were seeking to uphold. For example, the monk Leontius of Byzantium, whose christology is often characterised as somewhat dry, abstract, formal and scholastic, and who has suffered both in ecclesial and intellectual history through his having been labelled with the incriminatory title 'Origenist',²⁶ found it necessary to invoke the fact that

²⁵ Leo. *Tom.* 4 (Schwartz, ACO II.2.i, 28.12-14): *Agit enim utraque forma cum alterius communione quod proprium est: Verbo scilicet operante quod Verbi est, et carne exsequente quod carnis est. Unum horum coruscat miraculis, aliud succumbit iniuriis.* The Greek translation (Schwartz, ACO II.1.i, 14.27 – 15.1) runs: ἐνεργεῖ γὰρ ἑκατέρα μορφή μετὰ τῆς θατέρου κοινωνίας ὅπερ ἴδιον ἔσχηκεν, τοῦ μὲν Λόγου κατεργαζομένου τοῦθ' ὅπερ ἐστὶν τοῦ Λόγου, τοῦ δὲ σώματος ἐκτελοῦντος ἅπερ ἐστὶν τοῦ σώματος, καὶ τὸ μὲν αὐτῶν διαλάμπει τοῖς θαύμασιν, τὸ δὲ ταῖς ὑβρεσὶν ὑποπέπτωκεν.

²⁶ See the evaluation of Daley, 'The Origenism of Leontius of Byzantium', 333-369. Also *CCT*, 2.2, 185-229.

the incarnate Word ‘can never be considered apart from his body’.²⁷ To his mind, they are ‘atheists’ who assert the impassibility of the Word ‘against Christ’ (κατὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ);²⁸ they fail to appreciate what the Fathers mean when the latter speak of ‘God’s blood, cross, suffering, and death...’²⁹ And Leontius of Jerusalem, by emphasising the Chalcedonian distinction between *physis* and *hypostasis*, was able more successfully than his Byzantine namesake to locate the *ego* of Christ, to whose divine nature has been united a ‘passible essence’ (οὐσίαν παθητήν) with all its fully human *idiomata*, at the hypostatic level.³⁰

It was in connection with the Church’s *lex orandi* in particular that marked efforts took place in an attempt to secure ecclesial unity under the rubric of faithfulness to the Cyrilline-Chalcedonian tradition. Three phases can be identified. The first revolved around the addition of the phrase ‘who was crucified for us’ to the Trisagion hymn of the liturgy by Peter the Fuller of Antioch in the 470s, so that it was sung, ‘Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, *thou who wast crucified for us*, have mercy on us.’ Interpreted christologically, the hymn could be regarded as entirely orthodox, as Severus of Antioch argued in the last of his 125 cathedral homilies. But when in 510 visiting Antiochene monks introduced the addition to Constantinople where the hymn was customarily addressed not to the Son but to the holy Trinity, it was suspected as Monophysite and subsequently (by 518) rejected.³¹

The second phase revolved around the formula ‘one of the Trinity... was incarnate.’ In an expression of genuine diplomatic concession Emperor Zeno used this formula in his *Henotikon* (482) to win the Monophysites over to an acceptance of

²⁷ *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* (PG 86.1281A).

²⁸ *Dialogos contra Aphthardocetas* (PG 86.1321CD).

²⁹ *Deprehensio et triumphus super Nestorianos* 41 (PG 86.1380A).

³⁰ Quoted by Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 77-79; CCT, 2.2, 271-312.

³¹ See CCT, 2.2, 254-259.

Chalcedon. In it both ‘the miracles and the sufferings’ are ascribed to ‘the one person.’³² But not only did this ‘instrument of unity’ fail to reconcile the Monophysites; it precipitated schism with Rome, for, among other things, it presented a formula esteemed highly by such vehement anti-Chalcedonians and anti-Leonines as Severus of Antioch.³³

The third phase revolved around forms of what is more strictly regarded as the true theopaschite formula, ‘one of the Trinity suffered/was crucified/died.’³⁴ Promoted in the capital from 519 by the so-called Scythian monks and their leader John Maxentius as a confession to unite divided Chalcedonians and to consolidate Chalcedon in an anti-Nestorian direction, the formula eventually won the support of Emperor Justin I’s nephew Justinian. Attempts to gain approval of the formula from Pope Hormisdas (514-523) during Justin’s reign proved unsuccessful, but in 533 Rome finally gave it sanction. Justinian’s enthusiasm for the theopaschite formula was so great that from the time he became sole Emperor (527), no official christological document omitted its confession.³⁵ Its establishment as an integral confession in the Constantinopolitan liturgy in 535 with the qualifying word σαρκί (‘in the flesh’) was strengthened in 553 by the strongly Cyrilline tenth canon of the Fifth Ecumenical Council:

If anyone does not confess that our Lord Jesus Christ who was crucified in the flesh is true God and Lord of glory and one of the holy Trinity, let him be anathema.

³² A detailed study of the *Henotikon* and its significance, with an English translation, can be found in *CCT*, 2.1, 247-317.

³³ Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, volume 1, 274-275.

³⁴ For historical background and a translation of the text, see John A. McGuckin, ‘The “Theopaschite Confession” (Text and Historical Context): A Study in the Cyrilline Reinterpretation of Chalcedon’, *JEH* 35 (1984), 239-255.

³⁵ *CCT*, 2.2, 338. For the affairs of the Scythian monks, see *CCT*, 2.2, 320-343.

Justinian likewise underscored the singularity of subject in Christ when he insisted that ‘the wonderworker’ and ‘the sufferer’ are not different subjects, but ‘one and the same, our Lord Jesus Christ, the enfleshed Word of God made man.’³⁶ By his influence the ascription of both the miracles and the sufferings to ‘one person’, which we observed above in Zeno’s *Henotikon*, was confirmed by the Fifth Council’s third canon.

Justinian’s genius in trying to secure a theological basis for ecclesial unity can only be considered remarkable, for both the recognition that ‘one of the Trinity suffered (in the flesh)’ and that ‘both the miracles and sufferings are of the one person’ were insights which could be affirmed by Severans and Chalcedonians alike. Yet it could also be argued that it was precisely this common commitment to a generic Cyrilline theopaschism that obscured still-unresolved questions regarding the relationship between the divine subject, God the Word, and his human activity, manifest chiefly under the form of passivity. Whence did this activity-as-passivity spring? Was it a soteriological necessity, an essential facet in the whole divine economy in the flesh? Or was it incidental – a metaphysical accident, a temporary concession purely limited to the phenomenological, pedagogical plane? Did the theopaschite formula sufficiently preserve the essential dogmatic structure in which the mystery of Christ is comprehended only within a trinitarian, theological framework in such a way that the permanently theological character of christology, canonised in the creed, was safeguarded? Or did it risk blurring the distinction between *theologia* and *economia*, or even collapsing both into soteriology? Let us turn now to Maximus and see if we cannot suggest some answers to these perplexing questions.

³⁶ Justn. *Conf.* (PG 86.995CD).

Passible God against sin, or: Truly a Suffering God

The *Ambigua ad Thomam* present themselves as an especially rich and important source of material with which to explore the place of the corporeal in Maximus' christology. Written as they were about mid-career in his life (mid-630s),³⁷ they provide clear indications of Maximus' emerging opposition to Monenergism, and represent mature reflections on the normative christological traditions – subsequent to his careful elaboration of an anti-Origenist philosophical theology (*Ambigua ad Ioannem* 6-71), yet before his full-scale engagement in the Monotheletist controversy sparked by the promulgation of the imperial *Ekthesis* in late 638.³⁸ Their insertion as a kind of shorter prologue to the much longer earlier *Ambigua*, an ordering possibly appropriated by Maximus himself,³⁹ suggests that the Confessor accorded them a theological priority over the whole of the *Ambigua*, thereby underlining their interpretive function in the light of the earlier, larger set. By situating such an explicit theological and christological group of chapters at the head of a work more

³⁷ Following Sherwood, *Annotated Date-List*, 39.

³⁸ We recall that around 634 Maximus had indicated that an orthodox interpretation of 'one *energeia*', one of the two phrases outlawed by Sergius in the *Psephos* drawn up in response to the Alexandrian *Pact of Union* and the protests of Sophronius (633), was possible in a qualified way (*Ep.* 19 [PG 91.592BC]; *Opusc.* 9 [PG 91.132C]). For Maximus, Pope Honorius' response to Sergius - in which the pontiff speaks of 'one will in our Lord Jesus Christ', is ambivalent about the legitimacy of formulae isolating either one or two activities, and sanctions strongly theopaschite language - is likewise capable of an orthodox reading. But only with the promulgation of the *Ekthesis* in October 638, a document drafted by Patriarch Sergius and signed by Emperor Heraclius, does Maximus begin openly to oppose Monotheletism. For Maximus, the *Ekthesis*' rejection of two wills and two activities in Christ indicates a clear departure from Chalcedon's confession of one Christ 'from' and 'in' two natures. Interestingly, however, in continuity with the Cyrilline-Chalcedonian tradition the *Ekthesis* affirms in an explicitly anti-Nestorian polemic the passibility of the one, incarnate divine subject, to whom the miracles and the sufferings both belong.

³⁹ This is at least Sherwood's contention, based on a reference in *Opusc.* 1 (PG 91.33A), where there is a reference to the second of the earlier *Ambigua ad Ioannem* (*Amb.Io.* 7) as 'the seventh chapter.'

generally conjectural in character,⁴⁰ Maximus makes it clear where his confessional sympathies lie.

And such a clarification may well have been necessary. For in his earlier refutation of Origenism, Maximus was himself prone to think and write in such a way as to risk his own reception as 'Origenist' at another level.⁴¹ As we saw in chapter one in material cited from the *Chapters on Theology* especially, Maximus operates with an epistemology patently rooted in Origen, in which, simply put, the *anabasis* of the intellect from the material to the spiritual constitutes the dominant structural metaphor. It would be wrong to write this epistemological structure off as hopelessly intellectualist or esoteric, for it was a complex amalgamation of Pauline and Platonic strands which, over the course of several centuries, had become recognisable as mainstream, as is evident for instance in the fundamental themes of Alexandrian exegesis, Cappadocian spirituality, and Desert monasticism. It is an epistemology marked not only by a wise acknowledgement of the potentially deceptive character of empirical knowledge and the ultimate transcendence of divine realities, but also a keen sense of the unity, order and purposefulness of the visible cosmos, and a deep intuition for its capacity to disclose, albeit in shadows, invisible realities beyond itself.

Nevertheless, while there is nothing heterodox *per se* about this approach, it lends itself to an interpretation of the Incarnation that, in the hands of those 'less well grounded

⁴⁰ See Maximus' own qualifications about the conjectural (στοχαστικῶς) status of his thoughts in *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1193BC); 19 (PG 91.1236C); 21 (PG 91.1244B); 41 (PG 91.1316A); 42 (PG 91.1349A); 71 (PG 91.1412AB).

⁴¹ There are a number of polemical sources that associate Maximus with Origenism. One is the caustic Syriac biography edited by Sebastian Brock, 'An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor', *Analecta Bollandiana* 91 (1973), 315, reprinted in Sebastian Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1984). Another, a Syrian Monophysite tract called *The Heresy of the Maximiennes* by Simeon of Kennesrin and translated by Guillaumont, *Les Kephalaia Gnostica*, 176-180, aligns Maximus with Origen, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Nestorius. A third source is evident in the record of Maximus' trial (RM [CCSG 39, 29.225-227]), where he is accused of 'enticing everyone to follow the doctrines of Origen.'

in the essentials',⁴² threatens its integrity precisely at its primary point of significance. Any unqualified emphasis upon a permanent transition in human apprehension from the flesh of the incarnate Logos to his 'naked' (γυμνός) pre-incarnate form contains in itself the potential to relativise the whole of the economy of God's condescension and turn it into yet another parable of God's universal immanence – a theophany perhaps *quantitatively* greater than, but *qualitatively* no different from God's self-manifestation in the economies of creation and history.⁴³

One further implication of such potential relativisation is the debasing of materiality and the denial of its inherent redeemability, a problem we discovered in the previous chapter to be not at all incidental in the Origenist debates of the 6th century. This problem becomes all the more acute when we see the peculiar prominence in Maximus' earlier thought of a Pauline text to which Origen took frequent recourse: 'If we once knew Christ according to the flesh, we do so no longer' (2 Cor 5:16). For the great Alexandrian this sentence virtually constituted a formal epistemological principle. As far we can observe by examining his use of it – often in the context of commenting upon the Transfiguration – it is clear he regards knowledge of Christ κατὰ σάρκα as an inferior 'first stage' compared to a higher form of knowledge of him as he was before his sojourn in the flesh, that is, as he was 'with God' in the beginning. He likens the former kind of knowledge to Saint Paul's knowledge of nothing except 'Jesus Christ, and him crucified' (1 Cor 2:2), whereas the latter is exemplified in certain biblical prophets and, above all, in Saint John

⁴² Sherwood, 'Exposition and Use of Scripture in St Maximus', 207.

⁴³ Grillmeier suspects Evagrian christology of this problem by its being subsumed within an intellectualist, non-empirical epistemology, in which the eternal (and ontological) significance of Jesus' humanity is minimised. See *CCT*, 1, 377-384.

the Evangelist.⁴⁴ As we have seen in the first chapter of this study, the distinction is capable of an orthodox interpretation when it is seen to mark the return from *economia* to *theologia*, that is, when it is seen as a subjective shift in perception commensurate to the Word's own pedagogical programme. One ceases to know Christ κατὰ σάρκα when one perceives in Christ the eternally existing Word without being blinded or scandalised by his bodily condition. Gregory of Nyssa apparently understands the Pauline text in much the same way,⁴⁵ and Gregory Nazianzen can cite it in a passage with no uncertain incarnational commitments.⁴⁶ But John Chrysostom seems to have been aware of the potential pitfalls posed by the text to intellectualist interpreters. He emphasises the fact that 'not according to the flesh' means *not* that Christ is without the true flesh of his human nature, which abides with him in glory, but that he is no longer subject to the affections of bodily nature, such as thirst, hunger, weariness and the like.⁴⁷ So when Maximus in his earlier works cites the text in apparent sympathy with Origen's interpretation,⁴⁸ it is no small wonder that certain aspects of his epistemological method, viewed in isolation from his entire christological vision, might be regarded with suspicion by those not even as maliciously disposed as his Monophysite opponents.

We shall confine ourselves in the present context to suggesting that in the climate of the impending christological debate Maximus may well have been conscious that his epistemology required at the very least some critical qualification.⁴⁹ With the foundational

⁴⁴ Or.*Joh.* 2.2-4 (SC 120, 224.28-29); Or.*Matt.* 12.37 (GCS 10, 152-155); Or.*Jer.* 15.6 (GCS 3, 130); Or.*Cant.prol.*; Or.*Cels.* 6.68; 7.39.

⁴⁵ Greg.Nyss.*Virg.* 2.2 (SC 119, 268.18-25).

⁴⁶ Greg.Naz.Or. 30.14.

⁴⁷ *Homily 11 in 2 Cor.* (Philip Schaff [ed.], NPNF, volume 12, 332).

⁴⁸ *QD* 29 (CCSG 10, 25.39-40); *Th.Oec.* 2.18 (cf. Or.*Princ.* 2.11.6); 2:61 (cf. Or.*Cels.* 6.68).

⁴⁹ We are far from reviving Balthasar's early thesis - which anyway he proposed 'nur als eine Vermutung' (*Kosmische Liturgie*, 12-13) - of an 'Origenist crisis' in Maximus' career. To that we can bring Sherwood's refutation based on his findings in *The Earlier Ambigua*, amply summarised by Thunberg (*Microcosm and Mediator*, 10-11): 'It is [Maximus'] terminology which is later more clearly defined and not his theology....'

christological narratives at stake, Origenist epistemology could only be admitted within an interpretive context in which the fundamental dogmas of the Church – most specifically its conviction regarding the mutually corrective function of christology and soteriology – form the backdrop for an account of subjective human engagement with God as he wills to make himself known.

So it is that we can plausibly conjecture that Maximus situates the later *Ambigua* before the longer earlier *Ambigua*, since it sets down with dogmatic precision the *lex credendi* whose primary historical form and locus had found expression in the theopaschite shibboleth, *unus ex trinitate passus est*. Herein lies the definitive mark of all orthodox theologising. It is in relation to this article of faith, in whose formal structure is compressed the credal shift from *theologia* to *economia*, that everything Maximus has to say about Origenism, monastic practice, and scriptural exegesis is to be understood. And more than what *Maximus* has to say, for, as the Confessor himself would have it, it is the key to a proper reading of the Fathers, who are bound to be misunderstood and abused unless the realities of the Incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, as received in and confessed by the orthodox, catholic Church, are taken into full account equally at the metaphysical, soteriological, and moral levels.

Be that as it may, the shorter corpus bears features that signal its own literary and theological integrity. It is for a start addressed to a certain Thomas, whom Maximus regards

[T]here is a very considerable degree of consistency in Maximus' theology from the first ascetic writings onwards....' Next to this, and closer to our point, we may place the important insight made by Florovsky many decades ago: 'St. Maximus to some extent repeats Origen.... But the Logos doctrine has now been entirely freed from the ancient ambiguity, an ambiguity which was unavoidable before a precise definition of the Trinitarian mystery.... [A]ll the originality and power of St. Maximus' new Logos doctrine lies in the fact that *his conception of Revelation is developed within Christological perspectives*. St. Maximus is coming from Origen, as it were, but overcomes Origen and Origenism. It is not that Christology is included in the doctrine of Revelation, but that the mystery of Revelation is discernible in Christology.' Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, 216.

as his ‘spiritual father and teacher.’⁵⁰ Thomas seems to have been a prominent figure (Abbot?) in the Philippist monastery in Chrysopolis, and some years later (ca. 640) Maximus addressed him a second letter in which he answered Thomas’ invitation to clarify some his responses given in the first set of difficulties.⁵¹ Both the *Ambigua ad Thomam* and the follow-up letter share with almost Maximus’ entire *œuvre* the character of occasional works – responses to specific requests to elucidate difficult passages in the traditional material.

The difficult passages in question are from the renowned *Theological Orations* of Gregory Nazianzen (treated in *Ambigua* 1-4), and from the fourth letter of Dionysius the Areopagite to the monk Gaius (treated in *Ambiguum* 5).⁵² On the surface, it may appear that the first difficulty,⁵³ which is ‘altogether free from allusion to Christology’,⁵⁴ bears nothing more than a formal relation to the difficulties that follow. In it the concern has been raised over Gregory’s use in two of his sermons of the verb κινεῖν in connection with the divine monad. How can it be said that there is any ‘movement’ in God? Movement implies three things: first, passibility, that is, the fact of being a passive object, susceptible to the action or causation of another. Secondly, mutability, since movement implies change or diffusion. And thirdly, plurality, and for Gregory plurality involves opposition and corporeality.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ *Amb.Th. prol.* (PG 91.1032A).

⁵¹ *Epistula secunda ad Thomam*. The critical edition by Bart Janssens (CCSG 48) was not available in time for me to consult in detail for this study. My analysis and references are based upon the introduction and text in P. Canart, ‘La deuxième lettre à Thomas de S. Maxime le Confesseur’, *Byzantion* 34 (1964), 415-445.

⁵² It is noteworthy that Maximus himself accords both authors an equal status. Both are among those ‘holy, venerable and blessed men’ who have received every outpouring of wisdom accessible to the saints’ (*Amb.Th. prol.* [PG 91.1032B]). The teaching we receive from them we receive from Christ himself, ‘who by grace exchanged himself for them’ (PG 91.1033A).

⁵³ PG 91.1033D – 1036C.

⁵⁴ Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 48.

⁵⁵ *Greg.Naz.Or.* 28.7 (SC 250, 114.11-15): ‘For every compound is a starting point for strife, and strife of separation, and separation of dissolution. But dissolution is altogether foreign to God and to the primary nature. Therefore there can be no separation, that there may be no dissolution, and no strife that there may be no separation, and composition that there may be no strife. Thus also there must be no body, that there may be no composition....’

How can any of these exist in God who is ‘without beginning, incorporeal, and undisturbed’?⁵⁶

In dealing with this difficulty, Maximus is preparing the ground for what he will say in the four following chapters that treat the passibility of God in the person of the incarnate Word. It cannot be incidental that a strictly *theological* difficulty should be dealt with first, before moving into christology. The application of trinitarian terms and formulae to christology was considered by Maximus a key to apprehending the mystery of the hypostatic union and the *communicatio idiomatum*.⁵⁷ *Theologia* here functions as an essential prolegomenon to christology – and all the more so because the subsequent christological difficulties involve the question of divine passibility.

Hence before Maximus addresses the immediate question at hand, he embarks upon an elaborate but typical confession of the holy Trinity, clearly distinguishing between the terms οὐσία and ὑπόστασις and their cognates.⁵⁸ God is Trinity at the level of the particular - *hypostasis*, and Unity at the level of the common - *ousia*. Neither fact is a separate, self-evident reality, but is spoken of in relation to the other. Thus, ‘the Trinity is truly a monad, because this is the way it *is* (ὅτι οὕτως ἐστί), and the Unity is truly a triad, because this is the way it *exists* (ὅτι οὕτως ὑφέστηκεν), since the one Godhead *is* monadically, and *exists* triadically.’⁵⁹

The Confessor goes on to relate this distinction to that between *logos* and *tropos*. *Logos* has to do with ‘what’ a thing is at the level of being (*ousia*). *Tropos* has to do with ‘how’ a thing is at the level of *hypostasis* – its actual state of existence. This distinction between

⁵⁶ *Amb. Th.* 1 (PG 91.1036B).

⁵⁷ In his dispute with Pyrrhus Maximus found it necessary to defend his application of trinitarian terms to Christ (PG 91.348CD).

⁵⁸ In *Opusc.* 13 (PG 91.145A – 149D) Maximus argues that the misconstrual of this basic distinction is at the root of all the major errors in trinitarian and christological doctrine.

‘being’ and ‘existence’ is not a distinction between abstract and actual reality, but a grammatical, logical distinction between the universal, structural makeup of a certain nature and its existential mode at the level of the particular and concrete. They are theoretical terms expressing two distinct dimensions of a single entity. In this case, since the *logos* in question is associated with the unknowable divine *ousia*, it is better understood as indicating the ‘fact’ of being. Maximus goes on to use this distinction in the second step of his answer that deals with how it is that there is said to be ‘movement’ in God:

But if when you heard the word ‘movement’ you wondered how the super-infinite Godhead moves, [know that] the passivity belongs to us, not to it. For first we are illumined about the *fact* of its being (τὸν τοῦ εἶναι λόγον αὐτῆς). Then we are enlightened about the *mode* of how it exists (τὸν τοῦ πῶς αὐτὴν τρόπον), since [knowing] *that* something is, is always conceptually prior to [knowing] *how* it exists.⁶⁰

So while we cannot ascribe any passive ‘being moved’ to the triune God, we can speak of movement in relation to the subjective acquisition and order of theological knowledge. The movement of which Gregory is speaking, argues Maximus, refers to an epistemological shift within us, itself specifically occasioned ‘through revelation’ (δι’ ἐκφάνσεως),⁶¹ and which leads us eventually to confess God as simultaneously one and three.⁶²

⁵⁹ *Amb.Th.* 1 (PG 91.1036C).

⁶⁰ *Amb.Th.* 1 (PG 91.1036C). The rationale bears striking resemblance to Greg.Nyss.*Tres dii* (GNO III.1, 56.17 – 57.7): ‘We must first believe *that* something exists, and then scrutinise *the manner of existence* of the object of our belief. Thus the question of existence is one, and that of the mode of existence is another.’

⁶¹ *Amb.Th.* 1 (PG 91.1036C).

⁶² The question of movement in God is also addressed by Maximus in the chronologically anterior work, *Amb.Io.* 23. There it is clear that the first step in theological knowledge is ‘the principle of unity’, from which one moves by illumination to knowledge of the mode in which such unity exists. Maximus follows another line of thought in Greg.Naz.*Or.* 31.26, but going back to Irenaeus and Tertullian, in which there is outlined a progressive order of revelation corresponding to the three eras of salvation history: the time of the Old Testament in which God reveals himself openly as Father; the time of the New Testament in which was

It is by divine illumination, consequently, that we move from the level of unity, which in the order of *theologia* is denoted by *logos*, to the level of differentiation, which is denoted by *tropos*. In the order of *economia*, however, *the pattern is reversed*. Unity in Christ occurs at the level of *tropos* or *hypostasis*, whereas differentiation occurs at the level of *logos* (*ousia, physis*). Epistemologically, the latter is arrived at by encounter with the former. The reversal is of profound significance, for if *hypostasis* is ‘the concrete, spatially and temporally limited form in which the mind encounters intelligible or formal reality’,⁶³ and therefore has priority over universal or generic reality in the order of knowing, then christology will always be first and foremost a markedly *empirical* science. It also means that whatever is contingent in Christ – his corporeality, his suffering, his very particularity as a human being with a name and a face and a history – is charged with revelatory, and thus soteriological power.

If this dynamic lies in the back of Maximus’ mind, how does it unfold in the following three difficulties (*Ambigua* 2-4) in which he demonstrates a very real concern to read Gregory’s comments in relation to their textual and theological context? It was precisely the more contingent, corporeal aspects of Christ’s history that presented Gregory and his audience with a theological dilemma. So with reference to the humbler actions described of our Lord in Scripture, Gregory advised that his hearers

manifested the Son; and the time of the Church in which the divinity of the Holy Spirit is more firmly established. In this way, says Maximus, the Godhead can be said to be moved ‘by the gradual nature of revelation’ (*Amb.Io.* 23 [PG 91.1261A]).

⁶³ As Daley defines it with respect to Leontius in ‘A Richer Union’, 248.

ascribe the exalted things to the Godhead and to the nature that is greater than passions and the body, and the more lowly things to the composite one who for you emptied himself and was incarnate, or it is no worse to say, who became a human being.⁶⁴

At first blush Gregory seems to be suggesting a capitulation to that reductionism which in the preceding section we saw Athanasius before him and the tradition following him had recognised as insufficiently nuanced to depict faithfully the *mysterium Christi*. Yet for Maximus it is unthinkable that the divinely-inspired ‘Theologian’ could have been straying toward the more ‘Antiochene’ conception of Christ as a coincidence of two quite independent subjects. To be sure, the distinction Gregory is drawing between ‘the Godhead’ and the divine nature on the one hand, and ‘the composite one’ on the other, is not the Nestorian division of Christ into a divine subject and a composite human subject made up of body, soul, and mind. It is rather the distinction between the orders of *theologia* and *economia*, between the Word as he is in his transcendent divine nature and the Word as he is in the Incarnation – a ‘composite’ (σύνθετος) but single subject at once fully divine and fully human.

Maximus, conscious of the need to read Gregory in context, proceeds by paraphrasing the Cappadocian in terms of clear Chalcedonian logic and Cyril’s *kenosis* christology:

While the whole Word of God is complete *ousia*, since he is God, and while the whole [Word of God] is *hypostasis* without defect, since he is Son, when he emptied himself he became the seed of his own flesh, and having rendered himself composite by the ineffable

⁶⁴ Greg.Naz.Or. 29.18; *Amb.Th.* 2 (PG 91.1036D – 1037A).

conception he became the *hypostasis* of that same assumed flesh. So by this novel mystery⁶⁵ the whole Word without change truly became a human being. The same Word was a *hypostasis* of two natures - uncreate and created, impassible and passible, admitting without defect all the natural definitions [of the natures] of which he was a *hypostasis*.⁶⁶

Composition, then, is built into the very reality which is the incarnate Word. But at what level? And to what end? It is at this point that Maximus draws in a striking phrase from Gregory's fourth *Theological Oration* – 'passible God against sin'⁶⁷ – by which the status and function of Christ's suffering in the economy are given direction and meaning:

But if the Word admitted substantially all the natural definitions of the natures of which he was a *hypostasis*, then, lest the sufferings of his own flesh be thought of as merely [human sufferings], the teacher most wisely attributed them to him who became composite at the level of *hypostasis* by the assumption of the flesh, and, since the flesh was his, to him who according to it (κατ' αὐτήν) is truly 'passible God against sin.'⁶⁸

Most importantly, what Gregory is doing is not dividing the single *hypostasis* who is Christ the incarnate Word, but, according to Maximus, 'demonstrating the difference between *ousia*, with respect to which even having become incarnate the Word remains simple, and *hypostasis*, with respect to which he assumed flesh, became composite, and went about as passible God in the economy.'⁶⁹ Because the *hypostasis* who is the incarnate Word is identical to the *hypostasis* who is the eternal Word and second person of the Trinity, it is

⁶⁵ While he resolutely affirms the consubstantiality of Christ's human nature with ours, Maximus concedes the novelty and utter uniqueness of the mode of the Incarnation (*Amb.Lo.* 7 [PG 91.1097C]).

⁶⁶ *Amb.Th.* 2 (PG 91.1037A).

⁶⁷ Θεός παθητός κατὰ τῆς ἀμαρτίας (Greg.Naz.Or 30.1). See also Maximus *Opusc.* 9 (PG 91.120A).

⁶⁸ *Amb.Th.* 2 (PG 91.1037AB).

necessary to identify it in the economy as a ‘composite *hypostasis*’ – a term with a history going back to the first half of the sixth century⁷⁰ - not in order to indicate any change in the divine *ousia*, which remains simple and unaltered, but to show that it is in very fact also the *hypostasis* of the human *ousia*, which has no particular existence, no separate subsistence or *hypostasis* of its own. The term ‘composite *hypostasis*’, along with ‘God, passible against sin’, accounts for the incarnate God’s passibility without falling into the errors of either Docetism or idolatry, that is, worshipping a naturally passible, and therefore creaturely God.

It remains for Maximus to qualify what he means, or rather, what *Gregory* means by *ousia*. Here he is conscious of the Arian and Apollinarian errors, which ‘both cut short the integrity of the human nature of the Word, and make him to be passible divinity by nature.’⁷¹ Yet the problem is not only metaphysical, but soteriological. On it depends the efficacy of the salvation wrought by the only-begotten God who has ‘become a true human being in every respect, sin alone excluded... yet not excluding natural activity.’⁷² It is the principle of this natural activity (φυσική ἐνέργεια) that constitutes the definition of *ousia*: it is ‘that which is predicated of things as common and generic.’⁷³ Whatever can be predicated as common and generic to human nature – *passibility included*, must also be capable of predication to the *ousia* of *Christ’s* human nature. Yet, taking Chalcedon in a Cyrilline direction, we are to predicate these properties not simply of his human nature (his

⁶⁹ *Amb.Th.* 2 (PG 91.1037B).

⁷⁰ Daley in ‘The Origenism of Leontius’, 361, fn2, traces the term back to John the Grammarian (d. 520). While Grillmeier (*CCT*, 2.2, 336-338) discovers it in the Chalcedonian Abbot Euthymius (377-473), teacher of the great Palestinian monastic leader, Sabas, our sources for this evidence are late (post-550). According to Grillmeier the term was actually rejected by Leontius of Jerusalem (*CCT*, 2.2, 295; *pace* Nicholas Madden, ‘Composite Hypostasis in Maximus Confessor’, *SP* 28 [1993], 186-187), but revived under Justinian.

⁷¹ *Amb.Th.* 2 (PG 91.1037C).

⁷² *Amb.Th.* 2 (PG 91.1037C).

⁷³ *Amb.Th.* 2 (PG 91.1037C).

‘what’), but of him (his ‘who’) who is a composite *hypostasis* of both the divine and human natures: the one incarnate Word.

So far we have witnessed Maximus’ attempt to apply the formal logic of what David Yeago has dubbed the ‘grammar of sameness and otherness’⁷⁴ to a difficult passage in Gregory’s third *Theological Oration*. It is a logic Maximus develops in detail elsewhere,⁷⁵ and most notably in a letter written, perhaps at a slightly earlier date, to Cosmas, a deacon in Alexandria.⁷⁶ There in a classic passage he explains how it is possible to speak of unity or distinction, first at the level of *ousia*:

Things united according to one and the same *ousia* or nature... are always the same as one another in *ousia* and different in *hypostasis*. They are the same in *ousia* by the principle of the common equality of essence observed indistinguishably in them in their natural identity. By virtue of this principle, one thing is not more what it is or is called than another thing, but all admit one the same definition and description (ὄρον τε καὶ λόγον) of *ousia*.

But they are different in *hypostasis* by the principle of the particular difference that distinguishes them. By virtue of this principle each is distinguished from the other, and they do not coincide with one another by their characteristic properties at the level of *hypostasis*. Instead, each one in the sum total of its properties brings a totally individual description of what is proper to it at the level of *hypostasis*.⁷⁷

Then at the level of *hypostasis*:

⁷⁴ ‘Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption: The Relevance of St. Maximus the Confessor’, in *Modern Theology* 12 (1996), 170.

⁷⁵ *Opusc.* 13 (PG 91.145B).

⁷⁶ *Ep.* 15 (PG 91.544-576). Sherwood, *Annotated Date-list*, 40.

⁷⁷ *Ep.* 15 (PG 91.552BC).

Things united according to one and the same *hypostasis* or person (πρόσωπον), that is, things constitutive of one and the same *hypostasis* by virtue of their union, are the same as one another in *hypostasis* and different in *ousia*. They are the same in *hypostasis* by the principle of the indivisible particular (προσωπικῆς) unity that is constituted from them by virtue of their union. By virtue of this principle the properties differentiating each from what is common to it by *ousia* are, by virtue of their simultaneous coming together with one another in a state of being, rendered characteristics of the one *hypostasis* constituted from them. They are observed to be identical with one another at the level of *hypostasis*, admitting no difference whatsoever, as is the case with a human soul and body....

But they are different in *ousia* by the principle of their natural difference from one another. By virtue of this principle, they in no way admit the definitions and descriptions of one another at the level of *ousia*. Instead, each yields a description of its own *ousia* that does not coincide with that of the other.⁷⁸

Those things that share the same *ousia* are different in *hypostasis*. Human beings are the prime example, since they share a common human nature, yet differ in their respective *hypostases* – their particular existences as one or another person, such as Peter or Paul or Mary. But those things that share the same *hypostasis* are different in *ousia*. One example Maximus is fond of employing in this respect – an example used in the same way by Leontius of Byzantium⁷⁹ – is of a particular human person, a composite of body and soul. Body and soul are different in *ousia*: their properties are different and distinct. Yet each has no concrete, independent existence in itself, but only as a complete (composite) *hypostasis* – as a particular human being. Maximus explains:

⁷⁸ *Ep.* 15 (PG 91.552D – 553A).

⁷⁹ V. Grumel, 'L'union hypostatique et la comparaison de l'âme et du corps chez Léonce de Byzance et saint Maxime le Confesseur', *Échos d'Orient* 25 (1926), 393-406; Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 101-104.

For the properties (τὰ ἰδιώματα) that mark off someone's body from the bodies of others and someone's soul from the souls of others, concurring by virtue of their union, characterise and at the same time mark off from other human beings the *hypostasis* constituted from them. Take for example [the *hypostasis*] of Peter, or of Paul. Yet [those properties do not mark off] the soul of Peter from his own body, nor the soul of Paul from his own body. For both, soul and body, are identical with one another by the principle of the one *hypostasis* constituted from them by virtue of their union, because neither exists on its own (καθ' αὐτὰ) in separation from the other before their composition by which the species comes about (εἰς γένεσιν εἴδους). For the production, the composition, and the constitution of the species from them according to their composition, are all simultaneous.⁸⁰

Thus, while at the level of *ousia* the properties of a particular person's body are different from the properties of that person's soul, the properties of each are predicated of that whole particular person, since he or she is that body or soul's *hypostasis*: its particular mode of existence as one instance of the human species. Their difference is at the level of 'what' they are (*ousia*); their identity is at the level of 'whose' they are (*hypostasis*).

By placing this logic from Letter 15 alongside our discussion on the christology of the later *Ambigua*, we do not wish to imply that Maximus thinks that the union of body and soul in a particular human being is anything more than an imperfect analogy of the union of the two natures as a composite *hypostasis* in Christ.⁸¹ In this respect Maximus is far more

⁸⁰ *Ep.* 15 (PG 91.552D).

⁸¹ While Thunberg's summary of the analogy at work in *Opusc.* 13 and *Ep.* 15 is accurate (*Microcosm and Mediator*, 101-104), and one may plausibly interpret the relationship of soul to body with the idea of *perichoresis*, his main justification for the theory is based upon an unfortunate mistranslation of *Ambiguum* 7 (PG 91.1100D). According to Thunberg (104), Maximus 'not only makes an anti-Origenist use of the terms of

reserved than Cyril, whose liberal application of the analogy the Confessor would probably have considered excessive in his own milieu. For Maximus, the parallels between the union of body and soul and the union of natures in Christ are primarily logical and linguistic;⁸² indeed, he can also speak of a particular dog as a *hypostasis*. Yeago's comments are instructive when he rightly asserts,

The example does not illumine the *phusiologia* of Christ directly but rather the grammar of the ways in which we use the concepts of identity and difference in the interplay of the registers of ousia and hypostasis. Maximus is not providing a "model" for incarnation, but suggesting that clarity about the grammar of these concepts will enable us to talk coherently about identity and difference in the inexpressible mystery of Christ.⁸³

We are now in a position to trace Maximus' development of this language in his treatment of difficulties from Gregory in *Ambigua* 3 and 4. It is a language that allows him to juxtapose a series of paradoxical claims about Christ which, held together in inseparable, unconfused unity, form a picture that discloses the essentially salvific character of the economy. This use of paradoxes and the concurrent refusal to minimise the tension inherent in the authentic bodily and human life of the divine Word is reminiscent of the approach of Cyril, who 'loved to press the force of this economy by the use of strong paradoxes.'⁸⁴ The increase in occurrences of soteriological formulae (ὑπὲρ σε, ἵνα

transmigration in fact but understands by them, on the human level, what he means by *perichoresis* on the Christological level.' But Maximus does nothing of the sort. Rather he reduces to the point of ridicule the doctrine of the transmigration of souls or bodies in connection with his refutation of the soul's pre-existence.

⁸² This should not be taken to mean that Maximus regards the union of natures in Christ in terms of a purely 'grammatical' orthodoxy. On the contrary, he repeatedly insists on the fact of the union πράγματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ, not simply κλήσει ('in name'); *Ep.* 15 (PG 91.573A); 17 (PG 91.581C); 18 (PG 91.585BC). The references are from Völker, *Maximus Confessor als Meister des geistlichen Lebens*, 72 fn5.

⁸³ Yeago, 'Cosmic Redemption', 170.

⁸⁴ McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 185.

σώση..., διὰ τὸ...), familiar to us from New Testament kerygmatic formulae and Christian homiletical literature, and here used in connection with the Incarnation and actions of Christ, indicate Maximus' narrowing focus on the implications of this metaphysical christo-logic. In *Ambiguum* 3, he comments on a passage from Gregory's second sermon on the Son, in which Gregory had defended the sobriety of a realist interpretation of John 1:14: that the uncomposed became composed. In his apology, Gregory advanced the soteriological 'cause' (αἰτία) of the Incarnation upon his recalcitrant hearers with evocative force:

That cause was to save you who are insolent, who despise the Godhead for this reason: that having become man, that is, the lower God (ὁ κάτω Θεός), he admitted your thickness. He engaged flesh through the mediation of mind, since that flesh was mingled with God and has become one, the stronger prevailing, so that I might become God as far as God has become man.⁸⁵

Gregory's words, 'he engaged flesh through the mediation of mind', indicate a structure familiar to Maximus as mediated through the legacies of Evagrian, Nemesian, and Neoplatonic anthropology. The intellect (νοῦς) is the leading principle (*hegemonikon*) of the human being, and as the primary organ of the spiritual subject constitutes the connecting point to the (divine) intelligent domain, whereas the body connects the human being to the (created) sensible domain, the human soul mediating between both.⁸⁶ According to Gregory, the assumption of a sensible body by the divine Word takes place *via* the mind and the soul.

⁸⁵ *Amb.Th.* 3 (PG 91.1040A). *Greg.Naz.Or.* 29.19.

⁸⁶ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1193D – 1196A); *Myst.* 5, 7.

Nevertheless, it is not on the basis of the composition of human nature as body, soul, and mind, but on the basis of the union of the two natures that Maximus here argues that the condition which the Logos has become is composite at the hypostatic level: *composite*, strangely enough, at the point where *union* is to be located.⁸⁷ Before his incarnate state, the Word was simple (ἀπλοῦς) with respect to both nature (φύσις) and *hypostasis*. Maximus summarises this simple state in terms of incorporeality, affirming that as God, the Word was ‘devoid of a body and bodily conditions’ (γυμνός σώματος καὶ τῶν ὅσα σώματος).⁸⁸ But ‘now’ (νῦν), in order to save, ‘by the assumption of flesh with an intelligent soul, he has become that which he was not with respect to *the composite hypostasis* (τὴν ὑπόστασιν σύνθετος), and remained what he was with respect to *the simple nature* (τὴν φύσιν ἀπλοῦς).’⁸⁹ It is by the assumption of human nature in its full reality – *flesh* endowed with an intelligible, rational soul – that the *hypostasis* who is the Word is rendered composite. The whole event is disposed of in such a way as to ensure both continuity and discontinuity: continuity at the level of nature, in that the divine nature is preserved simple and entirely ‘without change’; discontinuity at the level of *hypostasis*, not in that the Word ceased to be the second *hypostasis* of the Trinity, but in that by the assumption of human nature, a composite of body and soul, the *hypostasis* who is the Word freely becomes receptive to certain conditions basic to a creaturely state. Maximus’ way of describing this outcome is deliberately paradoxical, for we might expect there to be discontinuity at the level of nature – in that the simple divine nature is united to a composite human nature,

⁸⁷ Maximus reasserts this point strongly in his follow-up letter to Thomas. Christ is not a composite nature, as Severus taught, or else he would be a *tertium quid* consubstantial with neither his Father nor his Mother. Text in Canart, ‘La Deuxième Lettre à Thomas’ [Canart], 433.85 – 437.134.

⁸⁸ *Amb. Th.* 3 (PG 91.1040B).

⁸⁹ *Amb. Th.* 3 (PG 91.1040B).

and continuity at the level of *hypostasis* – in that the divine subject who is the second person of the Trinity is identical to the subject who is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

This fundamentally paradoxical way of conceiving the Incarnation is increasingly seen to be inextricably and *necessarily* bound to discerning its soteriological function. In a sentence loaded with soteriological formulae, Maximus seeks to articulate this new reality in a kind of running midrash on Gregory's text:

For he had no other reason to be born carnally than to save that nature whose passibility he experienced as a kind of thickness. He 'engaged with flesh through the mediation of mind', 'having become man, that is, the lower God', and on behalf of all became all that we are, excluding sin: body, soul, mind (through which comes death) – a human being, a community of these - God become visible for the sake of the intelligible.⁹⁰

It is this real subjectivity to what Maximus calls 'natural sensation' (ὕπὸ τὴν φυσικὴν αἰσθησιν)⁹¹ that can, or indeed, *must* be predicated of the Word who has become flesh. The effects of the union are repeatedly spoken of through metaphors of revelation, visibility, and manifestation, terminology that will feature even more prominently in the next two *Ambigua*. 'Through naturally passible flesh he rendered visible his super-infinite power,' and in clothing himself with flesh he 'fittingly deified it by the hypostatic identity.'⁹² Deification is not simply human assimilation to God, but the salvifically effective, bodily enactment of divine theophany. The 'prevailing' of which Gregory speaks,

⁹⁰ *Amb.Th.* 3 (PG 91.1040B).

⁹¹ *Amb.Th.* 3 (PG 91.1040BC).

⁹² *Amb.Th.* 3 (PG 91.1040C).

as Maximus was to clarify later, does not entail the absorption or negation of the human *ousia* by the divine. On the contrary, it occurs entirely at the hypostatic, modal level.⁹³

The extent of the deification of human beings, then, in terms that have become familiar to us, is conditional upon and proportional to the extent of God's Incarnation. Just as in the hypostatic union the Word who 'is his natures' has become voluntarily receptive to the creaturely conditions of human nature, so too in 'the deification of those being saved by grace' - a deification that is given 'in corresponding measure to his emptying,' human nature becomes what it was created to become: 'wholly deiform... receptive (χωρητικῶν) to God entire and God alone.'⁹⁴ The finite *is* capable of the infinite. By means of this profound insight - which we would expect from one committed to a Cyrilline interpretation of Chalcedonian dogma, God's passibility in Christ, while still presenting a paradox that defies rational explanation, is understood ultimately as a dynamic reality bound to the attainment of human perfection.

In the first half of his fourth *Theological Oration*, Gregory took up Scripture passages adduced by his opponents one by one, which they appear to have used to support a thorough-going subordinationism. At one point, he treated a series of texts that suggested the Son's subjection to the Father, including the prayer from the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'⁹⁵ When we come to the difficulty Maximus deals with in *Ambiguum* 4, the Scripture text Gregory was explaining is Hebrews 5:8, 'Although he was a Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.' Gregory argued that neither obedience nor disobedience can properly be predicated of the Logos *qua* Logos. Yet in his 'alien form', the Word 'honours obedience by action' and 'experiences it by what he suffers.' In

⁹³ Canart, 433.85 – 435.119.

⁹⁴ *Amb.Th.* 3 (PG 91.1040D). This line is an exact quote from *Greg.Naz.Or.* 30.6 (SC 250, 238.38-39).

⁹⁵ Psalm 21:1; also 1 Corinthians 15:45. *Greg.Naz.Or.* 30.5.

an act of total and gracious solidarity, the incarnate Word experiences suffering and so fulfils the obedience that properly belongs to human nature.⁹⁶

Maximus takes the opportunity to reiterate Gregory in a way that fills out the notion of Christ's obedience and subordination within a fully-fledged schema of orthodox theopaschitism, at the same time weaving into his reading immediate concerns raised by the Monenergist agenda. The fact that he can do so without contrivance may well indicate the perceived subtlety of the threat posed to orthodox theopaschitism by Monenergism – both through what in Maximus' eyes is its minimalist portrayal of the humanity of Christ, and consequently through its implicit denial of the reality of the sufferings of the incarnate Word. The way out of this crisis was to propose, through the characteristically Cyrilline adoption of a series of adverbially qualified paradoxical actions, a doctrine of the true passibility of God in his saving economy.

The foundation of such a doctrine lies in a full appreciation of the precise character of the human condition assumed by the Word. It may be appropriate here to explore this appreciation further. In his writings, Maximus generally distinguishes between two kinds of passibility (πάθος) in relation to human nature. The first is inherent. By virtue of its being brought into being from non-being, human nature shares with all creation a creaturely passivity.⁹⁷ The second is added, a liability introduced on account of Adam's deviation from the good.⁹⁸ In a punitive act of benevolent foresight, God added this passibility, associated with man's corporeality as a composite nature and his capacity for sense, as a means of his eventual restoration. Yet both passibilities are called 'natural'. Both correspond to Maximus' complex conception of human nature as the product of two creations,

⁹⁶ *Amb.Th.* 4 (PG 91.1041A); *Greg.Naz.Or.* 30.6.

⁹⁷ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1073B).

⁹⁸ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1093C); 42 (PG 91.1316C – 1317B).

ontologically though not chronologically distinct, a duality which we have seen is suggested by the two Genesis accounts (1:27; 2:7). The added passibility, while punitive and restorative in function, is blameless (ἀδιάβλητος): it is the result or consequence of sin, but it is not in itself sinful.⁹⁹

We have already seen that the Word assumes human nature in its composite sensible and intellectual entirety: mind, soul, and body. But how closely does this human nature assumed by the Word correspond to our own *fallen*, mutable human condition? If sin – upon which follows corruption and death, is explicitly excluded from the nature assumed by him, how can one speak meaningfully of his participation in our suffering?

Maximus realises the need to address this problem carefully, for on it hinges the whole question of human salvation. It is a problem he clearly thought long and hard about, and in a number of treatises he offers a detailed treatment.¹⁰⁰ Here it is enough for him to assert that the human nature assumed by the Word is the entire, natural, passible nature common to all:

On the one hand, as being by nature God, the Word is entirely free by nature of obedience and disobedience.... For the law of command and its fulfilment or transgression apply to those who by nature are movable, not to him who by nature is immobile being.

But on the other hand, in the form of a slave, that is, having become by nature a human being, the Word condescended to fellow-servants and slaves, and assumed an alien form, adopting together with our nature the passibility of that nature that is ours. For alien

⁹⁹ *Q.Thal* 21 (CCSG 7, 127.5 – 129.62); *Q.Thal* 42 (CCSG 7, 285.7 – 289.90); *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1316D - 1317A); *Opusc.* 20 (PG 91.237AB).

¹⁰⁰ Eg. *Q.Thal* 21, 42, 61; *Amb.Io.* 42.

indeed is the penalty of the sinner to the one who is sinless by nature. And *that penalty is the passibility given in judgement to the whole of nature on account of the transgression.*¹⁰¹

Part of the solution Maximus here touches upon lies in the dual aspect of the movement involved in the Incarnation. In a delightful parallelism he describes this dual aspect under the distinct rubrics of emptying (κένωσις) and condescension (συγκατάβασις), the latter of which seems to indicate a successively 'lower' dimension than the former:

Yet, since he *emptied* himself in the *form of a slave*, that is, as a *human being*, and since he *condescended* to assume an *alien form*, that is, he became by nature a *passible human being*, then in his *emptying* and *condescension* he is seen to be both good and a lover of humankind, the *emptying* showing that he has *truly become a human being*, the *condescension* showing that he is *truly a passible human being.*¹⁰²

As he is wont to do, Maximus takes what for Gregory are probably synonyms, namely, 'the form of a slave' and 'an alien form', and with them creates a technical distinction that corresponds to the dual level at which human nature exists. By his *emptying*, the Word truly becomes a *human being*. By this he enters into the first kind of creaturely passibility. By his *condescension*, he truly becomes a *passible human being*. By this he enters into the second kind of punitive passibility.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *Amb.Th.* 4 (PG 91.1041BC).

¹⁰² *Amb.Th.* 4 (PG 91.1041CD).

¹⁰³ The significance of this corresponding distinction should not be pressed. Indeed we find the scheme in the reverse order at the beginning of *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1316D) in which Maximus links typologically the distinction between Christ's generation (γένεσις) and birth (γέννησις) to the dual levels of the Incarnation as condescension and emptying: 'For he who accepted to become a human being by generation (*genesis*) on behalf of the first Adam, and did not deem it unworthy to be born on account his transgression,

What are we to make then of the biblical assertion of Christ's sinlessness (Heb 4:15), a fact Maximus repeats tirelessly? And how are we to understand the Word's assumption of a nature bordered by corruption and death, if he is free of the sin upon which they follow?

Here we must introduce the other distinction which Maximus only hints at here, and that is between 'blameless' (ἀδιάβλητος) and 'blameworthy' (εὐδιάβλητος) passibility.¹⁰⁴ He had already made this distinction between 'blameless' and 'blameworthy' passibility in human nature in *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 21 and in *Ambiguum* 42, both of which will be studied in more detail in the final chapter. The sufferings borne by the Word, while clearly present in 'the entire human nature' as a result of judgement, are said to be 'blameless' (ἀδιάβλητα).¹⁰⁵ In another place, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 42, he makes the same distinction within a specifically christological frame of reference in connection with Saint Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that God 'made him who knew no sin to be sin for us.'

After the faculty of choice belonging to Adam's natural reason was corrupted, it in turn corrupted together with itself the nature which had abandoned the grace of impassibility. And so sin has come about. The first sin, which is blameworthy (εὐδιάβλητος), is the deliberate fall from good to evil; the second, which is a result of the first, and is blameless (ἀδιάβλητος), is the alteration (μεταποίησης) of nature from incorruptibility to

demonstrated through his coming-to-be (*genesis*) his condescension to him who had fallen (πρὸς τὸν πεσόντα), and through his birth (*genesis*) his voluntary self-emptying for him who had been condemned (πρὸς τὸν καταδικασμένον).'

¹⁰⁴ *Q.Thal* 21 (CCSG 7, 127.5 – 129.62); *Q.Thal* 42 (CCSG 7, 285.7 – 289.90); *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1316D-1317A); *Opusc.* 20 (PG 91.237AB).

¹⁰⁵ *Amb.Th.* 4 (PG 91.1044A). See further Larchet, 'Ancestral Guilt according to St Maximus the Confessor: a Bridge between Eastern and Western Conceptions', *Sobornost* 20:1 (1998), 36-38.

corruptibility. These two sins have come about through the forefather by the transgression of the divine command. The first is blameworthy. The second is blameless....

Therefore the alteration of nature towards passibility and corruption and mortality is judgement for Adam's deliberate sin.... The Lord took [upon himself] this judgement for my deliberate sin – I mean nature's passibility and corruption and mortality, and so *became sin* for me according to passibility and corruption and mortality.¹⁰⁶

What we have in this brief paragraph is a whole series of paired terms that give formal symmetry to the complexities involved in the Incarnation with a view to demonstrate more amply its essentially soteriological thrust. Not many years later (ca. 640) Maximus would make a similar distinction in a different connection in a remarkable passage in *Opuscula* 20. Instead of using πρόσληψις, the normal term for the Word's 'assumption' of human nature, he uses οἰκείωσις – 'appropriation', in this case with regard not to human nature in general but to the 'dishonourable sufferings' associated with it. The verb form of this word had featured in the Council of Ephesus when, in Cyril's third letter to Nestorius, it was said that 'in the crucified body,' the only-begotten God 'impassibly *appropriated* [made his own] the suffering of his own flesh.'¹⁰⁷ In the sentence before our passage, Maximus describes how, in the way of a doctor with a sick patient, it is 'by appropriation alone' out of compassion, that the incarnate God 'expends and destroys the sufferings by the power of his embodiment, until he liberates us from them, yet spares us.'¹⁰⁸ At this point, he draws the important distinction:

¹⁰⁶ *Q.Thal.* 42 (CCSG 7, 285.7-15; 288.58 – 289.67).

¹⁰⁷ τὰ τῆς ἰδίας σαρκὸς ἀπαθῶς οἰκειούμενος πάθη (Schwartz, ACO I.1.i, 37.11-12).

¹⁰⁸ *Opusc.* 20 (PG 91.237AB).

For the principle of suffering (ὁ περὶ παθῶν λόγος) is twofold. The first is associated with honour (ὁ μὲν τῆς ἐπιτιμίας). The second is associated with dishonour (ὁ δὲ τῆς ἀτιμίας). The first characterises (χαρακτηρίζων) our nature. The second debases (παραχαράττων) it completely. Hence the first he admitted substantially (οὐσιωδῶς κατεδέξατο) as a human being, willing so for us, simultaneously securing nature and dissolving the condemnation against us. And he disposed himself to appropriate (οἰκονομικῶς ᾠκειώσατο) the second which can be recognized in us and in our insubordinate ways. His purpose was that, having utterly consumed all that is ours as fire does wax and the sun low-lying mist, he might give us a share in the things that are his,¹⁰⁹ and that he might render us henceforth not only impassible, but also incorruptible according to the promise.¹¹⁰

As is also evident in this passage just quoted, the upshot of the dual-descent traced by Maximus in *Ambiguum* 4 is seen to be twofold. On the one hand, there is a negative movement, described in terms of what is removed from human nature: badness is ‘exhausted’; the penalty of disobedience is ‘dissolved.’ Both of these are damaging accretions arising from the inclinations of the ‘unnatural deliberative mindset.’¹¹¹ On the other hand, there is a positive movement, described in language inspired by 2 Peter 1:3-4 as the gift of participation ‘in his divine power, a power that activates the immovability of the soul and the incorruptibility of the body by the identity of the will around what is good by nature.’¹¹² The beneficial effects of the Incarnation extend to the corruptible body, since the extent to which the Word assumed human nature includes, under the rubric of

¹⁰⁹ This sentence, with its fire/wax, sun/mist analogies, is from Greg.Naz.Or. 30.6, which same passage heads *Amb.Th.* 4.

¹¹⁰ *Opusc.* 20 (PG 91.237AB).

¹¹¹ *Amb.Th.* 4 (PG 91.1044A).

¹¹² *Amb.Th.* 4 (PG 91.1044A).

condescension, its bodily corruption. The positive and negative movements are aspects of the Word's active and passive fulfilment of obedience, which he 'honours by action' and 'proves by suffering.'¹¹³ This is entirely consistent with a conclusion Maximus draws elsewhere, namely that 'the suffering the incarnate Word underwent was not a penalty (ἔκτισις), as it is with us, but an emptying (κένωσις) on our behalf.'¹¹⁴

Throughout the fourth *Ambiguum* one can detect the spelling out of the Son's saving works in what may be described as corporeally *demonstrative* terms. It is here in particular that Maximus moves a step beyond his predecessors to give expression to divine suffering in Christ in a way that amplifies its soteriological implications and at the same time excludes heterodox christologies that lay claim to orthodox theopaschism. For the previous tradition, it was enough to assert that Christ did divine things 'divinely' (θεϊκῶς), and human things humanly or 'bodily' (σωματικῶς).¹¹⁵ Even Cyril, who said that 'Christ acted divinely and bodily at the same time,'¹¹⁶ still insisted on maintaining with respect to the one true Son both 'the absence of suffering divinely' and 'the attribution to him of suffering humanly.'¹¹⁷ Severus too spoke of the one subject doing miracles 'divinely' and suffering 'humanly.'¹¹⁸ With Dionysius the Areopagite, however, we detect the first signs of the inversion of these traditional ideas. In his fourth letter, as a prelude to his articulation of the famous *theandric* character of Christ's activity, Dionysius denies that Jesus did his divine works κατὰ θεόν and his human works κατὰ ἄνθρωπον.¹¹⁹ Maximus takes the Dionysian vision and, on the basis of the *perichoresis* of Christ's natural activities and within

¹¹³ *Amb.Th.* 4 (PG 91.1044B).

¹¹⁴ *Opusc.* 9 (PG 91.120AB).

¹¹⁵ See the references given in Lampe, PGL, 618.

¹¹⁶ *Cyr.Luc.* 5.12 (PG 72.556B).

¹¹⁷ The reference is from the *Second Letter to Succensus* (text in Lionel R. Wickham [ed.], *Cyril of Alexandria: Select Letters* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983], 90.14-16): ἔδει γὰρ ἀναγκαίως ἀμφοτέρωθεν σώζεσθαι τῷ ἐνὶ καὶ κατὰ ἀλήθειαν υἱῷ, καὶ τὸ μὴ πάσχειν θεϊκῶς καὶ τὸ λέγεσθαι παθεῖν ἀνθρωπίνως.

¹¹⁸ Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, volume 1, 273.

the parameters prescribed by Chalcedonian orthodoxy, re-casts it positively by means of an inverted formula: the incarnate Word performs the *human* or *fleshly* works *divinely*, and the *divine* works *humanly*.

His remained Lord by nature, and became a slave for me – a slave by nature, in order to make me master over the one who had obtained tyrannical control through deceit. That is why, on the one hand, accomplishing the works of a slave in a lordly fashion, that is, *the fleshly works divinely*, he went about displaying (ἐπεδείκνυτο) his natural and impassible power and asserting his lordship by fleshly means. Through passibility this power erases corruption, and through death creates indestructible life. And on the other hand, performing the lordly works in the manner of a slave, that is, *the divine works carnally*, he went about declaring (ἐνεδείκνυτο) his ineffable emptying. Through passible flesh this emptying deifies (θεουργοῦσαν) the entire race bound to earth by corruption.¹²⁰

We shall see the Confessor develop this line of thought even further in the latter sections of this chapter. By the salutary and death-destroying actions performed in paradoxical congruity with the two natures, Christ manifests the ‘substantial energies’ of those natures of which he is a *hypostasis*.¹²¹ By ‘paradoxical congruity’ I mean to suggest that for Maximus it is not possible simply to isolate certain actions in the narrative history of Christ by labelling them as either ‘divine’ or ‘human’. At the modal, empirical level, divine acts are seen to be performed in a human manner, human acts in a divine manner. That means that Christ’s human actions, such as suffering and subjection and even death, are not incidental or superficial to the saving economy, but belong constitutively to it, since

¹¹⁹ Dion.Ar.Ep. 4 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 161.8-9).

¹²⁰ *Amb.Th.* 4 (PG 91.1044CD).

they function on the one hand as the means of disclosing the divine action of the Logos, and on the other, as we shall see in due course, as the precise means of reversing their potentially negative power. The integrity of neither nature is compromised, yet by virtue of the fact that natural activity, or, more narrowly, that ‘the constitutive power of nature’ (ἡ κατὰ φύσιν συστατικὴ δύναμις) is the demonstration (ἀποδείξις) of *ousia* – a point asserted with formulaic clarity only in the next *Ambiguum*,¹²² and that what has been effected in the union is a real ‘exchange’ (ἐπαλλαγῆ),¹²³ the activity of each nature can only be comprehended under the form of ‘works’ accomplished ‘in united fashion’ (μοναδικῶς) and ‘with integral form’ (ἐνοειδῶς) by the single subject. To put it in another way, the Incarnation – and, by extension, deification – is a human act as well as a divine act. And this human activity, most recognisable in the active passivity of Christ’s flesh, is not merely incidental, but a constitutive ‘component’, if you will, of the saving economy. It is now as he takes up a difficult passage in Dionysius that the full scope of this elaboration upon the paradoxical exchange in the Incarnation is unveiled.

Suffering Wonders, Wonderful Sufferings

The fifth *Ambiguum* has attracted its fair share of scholarly attention. Part of the reason is that it presents a matrix for analysing Maximus’ role as an interpreter of Dionysius the Areopagite, evident in Pelikan’s characterisation of it as the ‘orthodox restatement and reinterpretation of the Dionysian structure....’¹²⁴ Another reason is that the difficulty in

¹²¹ *Amb.Th.* 4 (PG 91.1044D).

¹²² *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1048A).

¹²³ *Amb.Th.* 4 (PG 91.1044D).

¹²⁴ ‘The Place of Maximus Confessor in the History of Christian Thought’, in Heinzer and Schönborn, *Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur*, 395; see also Enzo Bellini, ‘Maxime interprète de

question arises from one of the letters by Dionysius containing a phrase sounding suspiciously Monenergist which, whether in an original or manipulated form, had occupied the centre of a long and divisive christological debate. The phrase is, of course, ‘one theandric activity’; or, in the textual tradition reckoned authentic by Maximus and modern editors alike, ‘a certain *new* theandric activity.’¹²⁵

Dionysius’ letter is actually the fourth in a pseudo-series to Gaius, a monk under his episcopal jurisdiction. In chapter one we already discovered the decidedly apophatic tone of Dionysius’ Letters 1 and 2: knowledge of God involves an entry into a transcendent darkness, for God ‘is completely unknown and non-existent. He exists beyond being and he is known beyond the mind.’¹²⁶ Then in Letters 3 and 4 it appears that *our Bishop of Athens specifically seeks to apply this via negativa* to certain scriptural affirmations regarded as bearing christological significance. In contrast to our contemporary christological climate in which people readily assume Jesus’ humanity but remain skeptical concerning his divinity, the prevailing mood in the sixth century accepted Jesus’ divine status – for was he not worshipped as God? – but struggled with the reality of his humanity. And so it is that Letter 4 responds to the biblical ascription of the name ἄνθρωπος¹²⁷ to Jesus – possibly in Philippians 2:8 or 1 Timothy 2:5 – an ascription that forms a sticking point in Gaius’ understanding of God. Dionysius writes:

How is it, you ask, that Jesus, who is beyond all, has been ranked together with all human beings at the level of being? For here (ἐνθ’ ἄλλ’)¹²⁸ he is not called the cause (αἰτία) of

Pseudo-Denys l’Aréopagite’, in Heinzer and Schönborn, *Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur*, 37-49.

¹²⁵ See further, in brief, Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 54-56.

¹²⁶ *Ep.* 1 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 157.3-5).

¹²⁷ *Ep.* 4 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 160.3).

¹²⁸ It is this reference that causes me to suspect that Dionysius has some definite Scriptural passage in mind.

humanity, but is himself, in the whole of his being (κατ' οὐσίαν ὅλην), truly a human being.¹²⁹

This is the portion of the letter before Maximus as he begins his explanation of what he believes Dionysius is up to:

According to his simple interpretation of Holy Scripture, the monk Gaius apparently thinks that because God is designated as the cause of all with all the names of those things that have come from him, so also after the Incarnation he is again named 'man' in this manner only. Hence the great Dionysius in these words corrects him by teaching that the God of all, as incarnate, is not simply called a human being, but that he is 'himself truly and essentially a whole human being'.¹³⁰

From here on, Maximus' expository method of dealing with this difficulty indicates his sensitivity to the spirit and structure of Dionysian logic at work here. For the Areopagite as for the Cappadocians, who encountered the Eunomian heresy first-hand, none of the names or categories that apply to created beings are properly applicable to God. Even to say that 'God is' is not strictly accurate. In an apophatic schema it is more accurate to say that 'God is not' - to *deny* that 'God is.'¹³¹ In some ways Maximus has followed the same route in the preceding *Ambigua* when he began by asserting the transcendence of the Trinity, and then moved into an engagement with the mystery of God's suffering in the order of the economy. Yet as it has become evident his goal is not simply to unlock the metaphysical complexities of the Incarnation, but to enable his readers

¹²⁹ Now from Maximus *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1045C).

¹³⁰ *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1048A).

to discern therein the salutary revelation of the transcendent Logos, and so have him take incarnate form in them.¹³²

At first he simply re-states what has already been said in the previous difficulties: ‘God incarnate is to be denied nothing at all of what is ours, apart from sin.’¹³³ Any quasi-docetic interpretation of the Word’s humanity is expressly rejected. But then in a shift to what can only be called apophatic terminology, Maximus goes on to draw in material from both Dionysius’ third and fourth letters that functions as a controlling hermeneutic to be applied to the paradoxical data generated by the Incarnation:

‘The eternally transcendent one is not less overflowing with transcendent being,’ for when he became a human being, he was not subjected to nature. On the contrary, he rather raised up nature to himself and made it another mystery. And while he himself remained completely incomprehensible, and demonstrated his own Incarnation... to be more incomprehensible than any mystery, *the more he has become comprehensible because of it, the more he is known to be incomprehensible through it.* ‘For he is hidden even after his revelation,’ the teacher says, ‘or, to speak more divinely, even *in* his revelation.’¹³⁴

The movement towards knowing God as incomprehensible takes place not only after, but *in* one’s engagement with him in his corporeal, contingent self-manifestation. God is known as hidden precisely where he is encountered as visible.

In order to show how this dynamic functions, Maximus moves on to introduce for the first time into the apophatic/kataphatic dialectic the *logos/tropos* distinction he had used

¹³¹ See *De div.nom.* 5.4 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* I, 183.5-10).

¹³² *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1060C).

¹³³ *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1048B).

¹³⁴ *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1048D – 1049A); *Dion.Ar.Ep.* 4 and *Ep.* 3.

and explained in a trinitarian context in the first difficulty, *Ambiguum* 1.¹³⁵ Maximus' connecting in the Incarnation of this distinction with that of apophatic/kataphatic is subtle and profound: Christ's human nature is affirmed, since its *logos* (its 'what') remains completely intact and natural. At the same time, it is transcended, since the *tropos* (mode – the 'how') in which that nature, in unconfused communion with the divine nature, is freely lived out and encountered at the level of the contingent and particular, is supernatural.

Here we are encountering themes that we find elsewhere in Maximus, most memorably in his meditations on the Transfiguration. The Word's self-disclosure is reciprocally proportionate to his concealment in a way that parallels the mysterious union of and metaphysical distinction between the two natures. Yet, paradoxically, it is not the bare natures themselves that we encounter in the concrete events of the Incarnation, but their unified and unique new mode (*tropos*) of existence. As Madden observes with reference to the respective natural activities, 'they can retain their natural identity and at the same time enter into an exchange in his hypostasis, which entitles them to the epithet 'new' and the theological status of being theandric.'¹³⁶ Simultaneously manifest and hidden in the particular person Jesus are the intertwined activities of a fully divine nature and a fully human nature, each with its constitutive features intact.

Two classic miracles used by the Areopagite and generally favoured by the Cyrilline tradition – both Chalcedonian and Severan - function for Maximus as apt illustrations: the virginal conception and Jesus' walking on the water.¹³⁷ Both involve the *affirmation* of what are natural human activities: being conceived and born, and walking. But with Jesus these

¹³⁵ *Amb.Th.* 1 (PG 91.1033D – 1036C).

¹³⁶ Madden, 'Composite Hypostasis in Maximus Confessor', 194.

¹³⁷ The two Gospel events are paired in *Dion.Ar.Ep.* 4 and in an important passage in *De div.nom.* 2.9, where they substantiate the supernatural *physiologia* of Jesus, comprehensible only to faith. Maximus' interpretation echoes that of Severus of Antioch who had appealed to the Gospel accounts (Mt 14:25; Mk 6:48; Jn 6:19) of

activities are lived out in a supernatural manner, for ‘the natural activity of his own flesh is inseparable from the power of his divinity.’¹³⁸ Thus the conception and birth are of a *virgin*.¹³⁹ The walking is on *water*.¹⁴⁰ Yet both miracles demonstrate not the suppression of nature, but a renewed, transcendent *manner* of operation of what are natural human activities. They are both physical manifestations of what Maximus understands to be an overarching soteriological ἀνάγκη at work, so that ‘having become what nature is in actual fact, he has fulfilled without illusion the economy for our sake.’¹⁴¹

We can now move on to clarify the implications of Maximus’ teaching on the Incarnation for our enquiry regarding the constitutive function of the material and contingent in the economy. First, it is only as *anthropos* that God has become recognisable as the *philanthropos*. In the unique modality that is the particular historical life of Jesus the incarnate Word, all that is inherent in human nature - in all its physical, material, passible contingency - is drawn into a transcendent, supernatural manner of existence in and by which the transcendent God, who in his condescension never ceases being transcendent, becomes visibly accessible precisely as the transcendent lover of human kind. The efficacy of Jesus’ love for humanity is dependent upon its ontological ground in divine transcendence.¹⁴² Yet the union of divine and human activities at the level of the particular changes nothing as far as the human nature is concerned. What is new is the supernatural mode in which it is lived out.¹⁴³ And for Maximus, this qualitatively¹⁴⁴ new human existence

Jesus’ walking on the water as demonstrating the insufficiency of the Chalcedonian conception of the two natures. See CCT, 2.2, 138; Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 215 fn11.

¹³⁸ *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1049C).

¹³⁹ *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1049B).

¹⁴⁰ *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1049B).

¹⁴¹ *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1049D).

¹⁴² *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1053C).

¹⁴³ ‘For the transcendent Logos, having truly assumed our being for our sake, joined to the affirmation of nature the transcendent negation of what is natural to it, and became a human being – the supernatural *tropos* of being (τὸν ὑπὲρ φύσιν τοῦ πῶς εἶναι τρόπον) having been linked to the natural *logos* of being – so that

is re-creative, eschatological, and universal in scope. Once again David Yeago's comments are instructive:

The union of the natures and energies is not... conceived in abstract or merely conceptual terms. Christ himself, as a single subject, a single hypostasis, *is* the true union of the divine and human energies, and their unity is displayed not in any abstract "godmanhood" which could be described in general terms, but in the self-consistent, singular pattern of his contingent actions, in a word, in the concrete Gospel narrative... Thus redemption is not a general state of affairs, something which could be described without mentioning the particular person of the redeemer; redemption is what happens in the story of Jesus, impossible to characterize without constitutive reference to "the things that have come to pass" [τὰ γινόμενα] [*si*] in that particular narrative.¹⁴⁵

Secondly, it is due to the double – *theandric* - character of Christ's acts - the voluntary limitation of the operations of the divine nature to the human, fleshly mode, and the lifting up of the operations of the human nature to the divine, transcendent mode, that the *mysterious* character of the Incarnation is preserved and heightened. The *exchange* of divine and human activities at the level of the modal and particular brings about its redemptive, transformative effects in an at-once hidden and revealed way, so that while Christ is said to have 'suffered' the miraculous wonders typically associated with the divine nature, the sufferings associated with his human nature - since they are suffered θεϊκῶς -

the nature, which does not admit any change in its *logos*, might be confirmed by the newness of the modes, and that he might demonstrate the power that surpasses infinity as it is recognised in the *genesis* of opposites' (PG 91.1053B).

¹⁴⁴ 'This newness is a matter of quality, not quantity' (PG 91.1057A).

¹⁴⁵ 'Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption', 175, 177.

become ‘wonderful’ or, we could say, wonder-working.¹⁴⁶ This builds upon Maximus’ articulation of the mystery of God’s passibility by affirming that while God truly suffers, he does so actively, voluntarily, and salvifically, thereby transforming ‘the sufferings of his human nature into active works.’¹⁴⁷

We find the same idea expressed at around the same time (*ca.* 634) in Maximus’ Letter 19 to Pyrrhus. It is noteworthy that Maximus seems here gently to be qualifying the *Psephos* (633) of Sergius, Patriarch of Constantinople, which had forbidden any talk of either one or two ἐνέργειαι in Christ. Maximus, sympathetic to the *Psephos*’ conciliatory aims, yet eager to be faithful to the Chalcedonian confession of ‘one and the same Christ... acknowledged in two natures’, presents the mystery of the union of the divine and human natures by employing two verbs taken from the prologue to the fourth Gospel, each denoting one or the other nature: ‘what he was’ (ὅπερ ἦν), that is, the pre-existent Word (Jn 1:1-2), and ‘what he became’ (ὅπερ γέγονε), that is, a human being (Jn 1:14). When these are combined, the result is predictably paradoxical:

So while he became what he was not, [God the Word] has remained what he was, for he is without change. And while he remained what he was, he preserved what he became, for he loves humankind. Through what he was and what he became, he acted divinely, demonstrating what he became to be unaltered; and through them he suffered humanly, proving what he was to be unchanged. For *he performed the divine things carnally*, because natural activity is not excluded through flesh, and *the human things divinely*, because he accepted human limitations – not as a matter of circumstance, but freely and willingly. For neither were the divine things done divinely, since he was not bare God, nor were the

¹⁴⁶ *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1056AB).

¹⁴⁷ *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1053C).

human things done carnally, since he was not mere man. Hence the wonders were not without suffering, nor were the sufferings without wonder, but the wonders were, if I may venture to say, not impassible, and the sufferings were manifestly wonderful. Both were paradoxical, because both divine and human come from one and the same God the Word incarnate, who in his actions guaranteed by means of both the truth of those realities the natures from which, and which, he was.¹⁴⁸

While the controversial Dionysian term *theandric* does not occur in this particular section of the letter, Maximus' explanation clearly parallels that which he gives in the fifth *Ambiguum*. Thunberg is surely right when he defines the term *theandric* as Maximus' '*preferred expression of the divine-human reciprocity in action.*'¹⁴⁹ But reciprocity does not imply equilibrium. The divine-human union is 'asymmetrical', to use a term first coined by Georges Florovsky. The divine nature is still divine. The human nature is still human: created, and thus naturally subordinate. Their respective activities in communion thus manifest themselves in different ways: divine wonders are *suffered*; human sufferings are *made wonderful*.

Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified

As the controversy over the number of natures, activities, and wills in Christ both widened and deepened, Maximus' recognition of the correspondence between the metaphysical and the soteriological in the Incarnation gained increasing prominence in his writings. To detract from the integrity particularly of Christ's 'all-holy flesh', with all its attendant characteristics such as activity and will, would be to 'condemn ourselves to inherit a portion

¹⁴⁸ *Ep.* 19 (PG 91.593A - 593C).

¹⁴⁹ *Man and The Cosmos*, 72.

of an imperfect salvation or else to fall from the whole of salvation completely.¹⁵⁰ On that basis Maximus could only affirm his associate Thomas' own intuition regarding the need to 'safe-guard the movement of the soul which mediates between God the Word and the flesh, the movement to which, according to the definition given by the inspired Gregory, even the sufferings of the flesh are to be referred as natural.'¹⁵¹ Anything short of this is, in Maximus' estimation, to charge the Godhead with deceit – as though, in a show of conceited pretence, the divine essence either simulated human actions or else succumbed unnaturally to the conditions of carnal humanity. To the extent that the true account is threatened by perversion, 'one is compelled to join in the battle for it and to offer a clear and ordered presentation of it, so that not only believing devoutly with our heart we may be justified, but also everywhere confessing rightly with our mouth we may be saved (Rom 10:10).'¹⁵²

These are themes we find constantly repeated in the *Opuscula*, many of which were written in the 640s. The 'wholeness' of Christ's human nature, since it is wholly deified, corresponds to the 'wholeness' of human salvation. And the measure of the wholeness of his nature is judged by its level of correspondence to human nature in general, sin alone excepting. In two respects, his nature appears different: he is sinless, and was conceived by an ordinance 'contrary to nature.'¹⁵³ But these do not amount to *natural* differences, but *modal* ones. As far as its *logos* is concerned, Christ's humanity is identical to ours. His birth from the Virgin and his sinless life, however, demonstrate a new mode of existence in which his human nature operates in a manner entirely in keeping with its divinely-given

¹⁵⁰ *Epistula secunda ad Thomam* (Canart, 437.145-147).

¹⁵¹ *Epistula secunda ad Thomam* (Canart, 441.188-191).

¹⁵² *Epistula secunda ad Thomam* (Canart, 445.250-253).

¹⁵³ *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91.1313C).

definition and vocation.¹⁵⁴ Thus while his body is wholly deified, it does not become divine *by nature*, for that too would signal an alteration in its essential, created constitution,¹⁵⁵ and ‘nothing at all changes its nature by being deified.’¹⁵⁶ On the contrary, the redemption effected by Christ involves the *restoration* of human nature to its fully natural mode of existence in which alone it is capable of its supernatural vocation:

For he did not come to devalue (παρὰχαραξάσαι) the nature which he himself, as God and Word, had made, but he came to deify wholly (διόλου θεώσσαι) that nature which, with the Father’s approval and the Spirit’s co-operation, he willed to unite to himself in one and the same *hypostasis*, with everything that naturally belongs to it, apart from sin.¹⁵⁷

Maximus is repeatedly wary of admitting to Christ’s economy any hint of delusion or phantasy. In this he follows the typical anti-docetic strain of Johannine christology. But his recognisably Athanasian reasoning demonstrates his especial appreciation of the constitutive character of the external and empirical in Jesus’ life: it is for the sake of our senses, that is, our creaturely and corporeal condition according to which we can only begin to apprehend divine realities through sensual perception.¹⁵⁸ It is in this connection that a proof drawn from Cyril becomes especially useful, so that Maximus can draw upon it in a number of contexts. Repeating Dionysius, Christ’s human acts are not κατὰ ἄνθρωπον, since he is not a mere human being. Nor are his divine acts κατὰ Θεόν, since he is not bare God.¹⁵⁹ Instead, Christ demonstrates his natural energies ‘to be thoroughly

¹⁵⁴ *Opusc.* 4 (PG 91.60C); *DP* (PG 91.297D).

¹⁵⁵ *Opusc.* 7 (PG 91.77B).

¹⁵⁶ *Opusc.* 7 (PG 91.81D).

¹⁵⁷ *Opusc.* 7 (PG 91.77C).

¹⁵⁸ *Opusc.* 7 (PG 91.76D; 91.80CD).

¹⁵⁹ *Opusc.* 7 (PG 91.85C); *Opusc.* 9 (PG 91.120B).

united by their mutual adhesion and interpenetration.¹⁶⁰ Cyril supports this fact when in commenting on the eucharistic significance of Jesus' words in John 6:53 - 'unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you' - he speaks of the Saviour using his holy flesh as a 'co-worker' (συνεργάτην): he raises the dead and heals the sick not simply by his 'almighty command' (τῷ παντοῦργῷ προστάγματι), but also by 'the touch of his holy flesh' (τῇ ἀφῆ τῆς ἁγίας σαρκός).¹⁶¹ In so doing, says Maximus, Cyril aims to show that 'it is *this* flesh, to which properly belong touch, voice and the rest, that has the power to give life through its essential activity.'¹⁶² Just as a glowing sword as a single instrument both cuts and burns, while each nature, that of fire and that of iron, remains unchanged even 'in acquiring the property of its partner in union',¹⁶³ so too does Christ effect a double activity in such a manner that his flesh, having acquired the divine ability to give life, and at all times playing a constitutive role in the saving economy, never loses its inherent 'fleshly' properties. As Balthasar goes so far as to assert,

The divinity of his actions has its ultimate guarantee in the uncurtailed and uninjured authenticity of his humanity. Precisely [his] speech, breathing, walking, his hunger, eating, thirst, drinking, sleeping, weeping, and anguish is the particularised place of the appearing of the divine.... God appears to the extent that what is particularly human is lived out.¹⁶⁴

It is also at this outermost extreme of human nature - its somatic and sarkic dimension, that redemption *needs* to occur, for it was via this dimension that Adam first fell.

¹⁶⁰ *Opusc.* 7 (PG 91.88A)

¹⁶¹ *Opusc.* 7 (PG 91.85D). The quotations from Cyril are from *Cyr.Joh.* 4.2 (PG 73.577CD). Severus found in the combination of Christ's voice and touch the model of how one *energeia* is to be understood (*CCT*, 2.2, 163-164).

¹⁶² *Opusc.* 7 (PG 91.85D). The same argument recurs in *Opusc.* 8 (PG 91.101A - 104A).

¹⁶³ *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1060A).

In a passage from *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 61, Maximus focuses on the realm of sense and passibility as simultaneously the locus of man's undoing and redemption, the former under the dispensation of the old Adam, the latter under the dispensation of the new Adam.¹⁶⁵ Nature's inherent passibility, blameless in itself, functions as a 'weapon' or 'instrument' (ὄπλον) capable of exacting either death on the one hand, or life on the other.¹⁶⁶ The Word of God's coming in the flesh spells the dramatic reversal of the cursed Adamic cycle of birth, corruption, and death. On account of his *voluntary* possession of the punishment that resides in Adam's flesh, Christ 'reversed the use of death' (ἀντέστρεψε τὴν χρῆσιν τοῦ θανάτου), so that his death in the flesh achieves not the death of nature, but the death of sin.¹⁶⁷ But this is only the negative effect. The positive effect is suggested in a mysterious phrase in which Maximus conjectures a 'more mysterious' interpretation of Gregory's exhortation in his sermon on the *Pascha* for his hearers to 'ascend with Christ' into heaven.¹⁶⁸ The Word's economy in the flesh is the means by which 'the world of the flesh of the Word came to be with the Father.'¹⁶⁹ Christ's very flesh – crucified, risen and ascended into heaven – contains in itself the whole ordered universe (ὁ κόσμος) which already participates in the hidden, glorious trinitarian communion.

Perichoresis then is seen to extend beyond the respective activities of the united divine and human natures into the realm of their soteriological efficacy. But either way, its effective locus remains σωματικῶς in strict correspondence with the Son's economy in

¹⁶⁴ *Kosmische Liturgie*, 259.

¹⁶⁵ Also *Q.Thal.* 21 (CCSG 7, 127.1 – 133.115).

¹⁶⁶ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 89.77-94).

¹⁶⁷ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 93.155 – 95.164).

¹⁶⁸ *Amb.Io.* 60 (PG 91.1384D – 1385C); *Greg.Naz.Or.* 45.25.

¹⁶⁹ *Amb.Io.* 60 (PG 91.1385B).

the flesh.¹⁷⁰ His flesh is not eliminated or overcome; rather its very frailty is rendered potent.¹⁷¹ There it is that 'he put death to death',

in order that he might show as a human being that what is natural is saved in himself, and that he might demonstrate, as God, the Father's *great* and ineffable *plan* (Is 9:6) fulfilled bodily. For it was not primarily to suffer, but to save, that he became a human being.¹⁷²

Just as Adam's death is separation from God, Christ's death is union with God.¹⁷³ Doubtless this is what was in Maximus' mind when we heard him referring earlier to Christ's sufferings as 'wonderful.' But once again, let us emphasise the constitutively *corporeal* dimensions of this reversal, in this case strikingly rendered in the present tense:

[The Word] effects the overthrow of the tyranny of the evil one who obtained control over us through deception, conquering the flesh which was overcome in Adam by brandishing it as a weapon (ὄπλον) against him. He does this to reveal his flesh, which formerly was crushed by death, as that which captures its captor and by natural death destroys [the evil one's] life. His flesh becomes on the one hand a poison for him to make him vomit up all whom he had swallowed in his might, since *he holds the power of death* (Heb 2:14), and on the other hand life for the human race, raising like dough all nature towards the resurrection of life.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Cf. *DP* (PG 91.344BC).

¹⁷¹ *Q.Thal.* 54 (CCSG 7, 465.376-378).

¹⁷² *Opusc.* 3 (PG 91.48BC). This sentence is found also in *Q.Thal.* 63 (CCSG 22, 173.435-438), except there he adds an important qualification which brings out the Adam-Christ relief more strongly: 'For God did not become man primarily in order to suffer, but to save man through his sufferings under which man, who from the beginning was impassible, has put himself by transgressing the divine commandment.'

¹⁷³ *Car.* 2.93; 2.96.

Returning to *Ambiguum* 5 to what may be regarded an anti-intellectualist swipe, Maximus puts the recognition of this perichoretic exchange beyond νοῦς as ‘indemonstrable.’ ‘Faith alone’ (μόνη πίστις) can comprehend the mystery of Christ, a comprehension that is experienced and lived as worship.¹⁷⁵ Faith alone can discern anything ‘wonderful’ (θαυμαστόν) hidden under the sufferings of Christ. Likewise, faith alone can discern that divine wonders ‘were fulfilled through the natural suffering power of the flesh of the One who worked these wonders.’¹⁷⁶ Maximus is here face to face with a paradoxical reality he has expressed elsewhere:

In himself, in his essence, God is always hidden in mystery; and even when he emerges from his essential hiddenness, he does so in such a manner that, by its very manifestation, he makes it even more mysterious.¹⁷⁷

Eventually this cannot but lead to a stance of wonder before the veritable newness of redemption, in which the Confessor repeats what nearly a millenium later became the catch-cry of the Reformation:

For who knows how God assumes flesh and yet remains God, how, remaining true God, he is true man, showing himself truly both in his natural existence, and each through the other, and yet changing neither? *Faith alone* can grasp these things, honouring in silence the Word, to whose nature no *logos* from the realm of being corresponds.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 36.165-174).

¹⁷⁵ PG 91.1053D. Cf. *Dion.Ar.De div.nom.* 2.9.

¹⁷⁶ PG 91.1056B.

¹⁷⁷ PG 90.1181BC.

But lest we assume too much common ground between Maximus and the Reformers by collapsing their distance, we would do well to add some concluding observations by reconsidering some of our major points within Maximus' own context and that of the emerging Monenergism of the 630s. By recovering the Dionysian 'new theandric activity' as a voice articulating the orthodox confession of two energies and two natures, Maximus opens up a compelling way of conceiving deification.¹⁷⁹ Perhaps it is unfair, even inaccurate to say of the Monenergist account of the Incarnation what Florovsky once said of Monophysitism, namely, that it is a vision damaged by 'anthropological quietism.'¹⁸⁰ That was certainly not the intention of Severus of Antioch in the sixth century nor of Sergius of Constantinople in the seventh. Yet logically and theoretically, that is where the Monenergist account leads, and what the orthodox position guards against. According to the Monophysite schema, the divinisation of Christ's 'flesh' occurs only as far as its diminution.¹⁸¹ A lengthy quote from Grillmeier highlights the difficulties:

... Severus distinguished various strengths in the controlling influence on the Logos on his humanity. The highest degree is present in the miraculous healings. But what is the case in the everyday life of the Incarnate One? ... Severus, in the tradition of Gregory of Nyssa and Cyril of Alexandria, could not properly imagine such an everyday life. The hypostatic union signified for the humanity of Christ the constant claim to participation in the divine life. For this reason on each occasion it also needed permission on the side of the godhead

¹⁷⁸ *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1057A). The meaning of this formula in Gregory of Nyssa is the subject of a study by Martin Laird, "By Faith Alone": A Technical Term in Gregory of Nyssa', *VC* 54 (2000), 61-79.

¹⁷⁹ 'One might even say that the term "theandric" becomes *his preferred expression of the divine-human reciprocity in action.*' Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, 72.

¹⁸⁰ Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, 42.

to hunger and suffer, even to die. Such a release of the flesh for the ‘blameless passions’, however, was due really to a restraining of that power, on which the hypostatic union was built. In warding off the teachings of Julian, Severus trapped himself here in an insoluble dilemma. The *henosis* of Christ was not sought at the right level.¹⁸²

By contrast, not only does the assertion of two distinct energies in Christ, one divine and one human, and their monadic and paradoxical interpenetration in him, best account for ‘the great mystery of the *physiologia* of Jesus.’¹⁸³ It also furnishes the backbone for an effective and robust soteriology by providing a structure for the reciprocally related account of the mystery of deification, or ‘Christification’, as Panayiotis Nellas dubbed it,¹⁸⁴ in which human nature achieves its full and perfect fulfilment through its supernatural activation right at the level of the corporeal, particular, and mundane. In fact this forms the chief goal and purpose of the Incarnation, ‘for [the Son] lives out this [theandric] activity not for himself but for our sake and renews nature so that we can transcend nature.’¹⁸⁵ And while Christ alone ‘is his natures,’ both divine and human, the latter is the common human nature of all people and hence - in a way recalling Irenaeus’ doctrine of *recapitulatio* (Eph 1:10)¹⁸⁶ and Saint Paul’s Adam-Christ typology (Rom 5:12-17; 1 Cor 15:45) – it is cosmically

¹⁸¹ Grillmeier makes this point in *CCT*, 2.2, 163. The evidence, however, is based on a Latin translation of Severus: *evidens est eam [carnem] non tenuisse sine defectu suam proprietatem* (‘it is evident that it has not retained its natural quality without diminution’).

¹⁸² *CCT*, 2.2, 171.

¹⁸³ *Amb.Th.*5 (PG 91.1052B).

¹⁸⁴ *Deification in Christ*, 121-140.

¹⁸⁵ *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1057C). ‘The goal of the Incarnation is precisely to make possible a communion between energies, which alone can bring into being the divinization that is the final goal of human life.’ Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, 72.

¹⁸⁶ *Iren.Hlaer.* 3.16.6 – 3.21.9.

and universally representative.¹⁸⁷ At least that is what is suggested in a summary passage near the end of *Ambiguum* 5:

For by the whole active power of his own divinity, the incarnate Word, possessing undissolved the whole possible potentiality of his humanity (combined in union), performs as God, but in a human fashion, the miracles accomplished through the flesh that is possible by nature, and undergoes as a man, yet in a divine fashion, *the sufferings of nature, making them perfect by divine authority*. Or rather in both [he acts] 'theandrically', since, being at the same time both God and man, by means of the wonders he gave us back to ourselves – [us, that is] – who show that which we have become, and by means of the sufferings, he gives us to himself – [us, that is] – who have become what he demonstrated. Through both he confirms the truth of those natures 'from which' and 'in which' and 'which' he is, as the only true and faithful one (Rev 3:14), who wishes to be confessed as such by us.¹⁸⁸

Reading the passage just quoted in the context of the whole *Ambigua ad Thomam*, and indeed, in the context of our whole discussion about divine (im)passibility, raises the question as to whether it is possible to posit a flipside to this redemptive theandric *energeia*: namely, theandric *pathos*. It was the late Dumitru Staniloae who suggested as much when he noted with reference to the fifth *Ambiguum* that 'l'endurance des passions est-elle aussi théandrique, comme l'est également l'accomplissement des miracles.'¹⁸⁹ The term

¹⁸⁷ It is curious that Larchet ('Ancestral Guilt according to St Maximus the Confessor', 35) appears to play down the notion of humanity's incorporation in Adam and Christ in Maximus' theology, reducing it to 'plain rhetorical effect.' Yet incorporation is clearly presupposed in a number of important passages, such as *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1316D – 1317C; 1325AB); *Q.Thal.* 42 (CCSG 7, 285.7 – 289.76); *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 85-113), and is crucial to Maximus' understanding of the universal scope of the Incarnation. See further Sherwood, *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life*, 63-70; Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, 72.

¹⁸⁸ *Amb.Th.* 5 (PG 91.1060B).

¹⁸⁹ From his commentary on the *Ambigua* as appended to Ponsoye's translation, *Saint Maxime le Confesseur. Ambigua*, 382.

'theandric' obviates any reductionistic, and eventually divisive predication of wonders or sufferings, the miraculous or the mundane, to either one or the other nature of Christ, and allows us to understand both in terms of a voluntary and salvific demonstration of the communion of energies at the level of the modal, subjective, and particular. To be sure, divine incarnation and human deification are both theophanic events in which the divine and human natural activities – the latter of which is marked not least of all by increasing passivity or receptivity to God¹⁹⁰ - are welded into a new theandric, deifying dynamic. In Christ, insofar as he actually embodies the point at which the future fullness of human deification is realised, *pathos* becomes 'supernatural' (ὑπὲρ φύσιν).¹⁹¹ Deification is as much 'suffered' as it is 'achieved.' From the redemptive complex of evidence on display in the Incarnation, Maximus brings to bear upon his readers the conviction of the catholic patristic tradition that Christ's suffering, death, and holy flesh, and, implicit with these, the inherent passibility of created human nature, are not obstacles to union with God, but the fundamental loci of God's proleptic demonstration and historic realisation of humanity's goal of union with him,¹⁹² and indeed, the expansive media through which he turns suffering and death on its head and brings the whole cosmos to its pre-planned perfection.

¹⁹⁰ In his dispute with Phyrus, Maximus countered the suggestion that in contrast to divine activity, human activity is *pathos* (PG 91.349CD). While we might describe the activity of human nature as passive – we cannot define it as such. As Maximus argues (PG 91.349D), the Fathers only spoke of human movement as passive 'on account of the creaturely principle inherent in it.' Commenting further on Maximus' point in this passage, Keetje Rozemond notes: 'The human energy is a subordinate action: dependent and limited - in that it is created; but even so, it is no less real.' *La Christologie de Saint Jean Damascene* (Buch-Kunstverlag Ettal, 1959), 55.

¹⁹¹ *Q.Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7, 141.80).

¹⁹² So in defining 'the mystery of Christ' as the hypostatic union in *Q.Thal.* 60, Maximus uses the term προεπινοούμενον τέλος to refer to the recapitulation of all creation in God, a union proleptically realised in the Incarnation (CCSG 22, 75.32 – 77.63).

CHAPTER FOUR

Corporeality and the Church

*This my defiled tabernacle, subject to corruption,
Has been united to your all-pure body
And my blood has been mixed with your blood.
I know that I have been united also to your Godhead
And have become your most pure body,
A member shining with light, holy, glorious, transparent....¹*

Not surprisingly, in no single work does Maximus present what we might recognise as a systematic account of a doctrine of the Church. In this he is continuous with the whole patristic tradition before him. Nevertheless, in the interests of our analysis we can and must offer an account in which we examine under the rubric of ecclesiology Maximus' vision of the status and function of that notably public and corporeal phenomenon he habitually calls 'the holy Church of God.' For while a work such as the *Mystagogia* might be regarded as less an ecclesiological treatise than an unfolding, symbolic application of the mysteries unveiled in the eucharistic liturgy to the ascetic life, that application is grounded in the experience of the concrete, *housed* enactment of the divine liturgy, an enactment that implies a predetermined, given complex of concrete ritual, social and geographical arrangements. This in itself already suggests how an examination of his ecclesiology is connected with our

¹ Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymns* II, 11-29, quoted by Kallistos Ware, 'My helper and my enemy', 103.

overarching interest in the bodily since, as liturgiologist Mark Searle has pointed out, liturgy is ‘uniquely a matter of the body: both the individual body and the collective body.’²

Maximus’ distinctly liturgico-centric ecclesiology has been reckoned by Thunberg to be ‘more a dimension than a specified theme of theology.’³ Yet it is, he adds, ‘*the supreme dimension*’, one that ‘contains the total vision of Maximus.’⁴ In this respect the learned Swede concurs with Polycarp Sherwood who, writing some thirty years earlier in the introduction to his English translation of Maximus’ ascetic works, observes that while the Confessor’s ecclesiology is more implicit than explicit, more *descriptive* than *definitive*, the Church is for him the primary realm in which there is experienced divine activity.⁵ Earlier still, Georges Florovsky spoke of the Church in Maximus’ theology as the microcosm or ‘macro-humanity’ where ‘man’s fate is decided.’⁶ More recently the Orthodox scholar Jean-Claude Larchet has confirmed all these views in his affirmation that ‘it is to the Church that the mystery of human deification has been entrusted. For Maximus and his forebears, the Church is the milieu where one attains union with God, the place where deification is effected.’⁷

But when Thunberg goes on to oppose this dynamic depiction of the Church to its formal, externally-ordered existence as a social institution, he proposes an antithesis more characteristic of the modern era that would, I suspect, appear to the Confessor as not entirely true. In Maximus’ mind, claims Thunberg, ‘the Church is not an ecclesiastical

² Mark Searle, ‘Ritual’, in Cheslyn Jones *et al.* (eds.), *The Study of the Liturgy* (London: SPCK; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 56.

³ *Man and the Cosmos*, 113.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵ *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life*, 73.

⁶ *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, 243.

⁷ *La divinisation de l’homme*, 400.

institution distributing divine grace, but truly a Mystical Body that represents symbolically the whole divine-human mystery.’⁸

Now it is a fact that, as Henri de Lubac demonstrated some time ago, the phrase ‘mystical body’ (*corpus mysticum*) only came to be applied to the Church for the first time in the twelfth century, before which time it designated the body of Christ received in the Eucharist.⁹ The phrase was, to be sure, used by some Fathers to refer to the Church of heaven,¹⁰ and Maximus - without using the term σῶμα μυστικόν - does indeed think of the Church on earth as a markedly heavenly, eschatological, *mysterious* reality. Its true character or nature is not immediately apparent, but must be got at through contemplative penetration of its outward, symbolic form. It remains the case however that what can be gleaned as certain from Maximus’ writings is that - whether expressed in his teaching on the Incarnation and baptismal regeneration, his analogical commentary on Scripture and the liturgy, his appeals to the divine authority of Fathers and councils, his personal exhortations to priests and bishops on the nature of their office, or his apparently lucid confession of the pre-eminence of the Roman See - ‘the holy Church of God’ is neither an invisible idea nor a utopic ideal, but an actual *polis*: a substantive, identifiable communion of faith whose inherent unity in Christ, orthodoxy of worship, and fulfilment of its mediatorial mission is strictly related to its hierarchical orders, its liturgical constitution, and its faithfulness in doctrine.

Our reasons for investigating Maximus’ understanding of the Church in connection with our study on the place of the corporeal in his theology are therefore hopefully obvious. Prominent in our analysis will of course feature those constitutively corporeal,

⁸ *Man and the Cosmos*, 113.

⁹ *Corpus Mysticum. L’Eucharistie et L’Église au Moyen Age* (Paris: Aubier, 1949).

¹⁰ De Lubac draws particular attention to Theodoret (d. ca. 468) and Augustine (*Corpus Mysticum*, 16-17).

external marks of the Church's existence: liturgy, priesthood, sacraments.¹¹ These are not simply incidental, material components extrinsic to a more spiritual engagement with the Church's intrinsic, transcendent life. It is precisely *as* a sacramental, hierarchical, liturgical community that the Church is encountered as the true cosmos, as an ordered universe penetrated by the presence of God - or to extend an originally eucharistic metaphor, as 'the divine body.'¹² This affirmation does not simply set before us a mental image for rhetorical application, but a profound truth that identifies that liturgically constituted phenomenon which is the Church as the concrete locus whereby Christ is universally identifiable and tangibly accessible in all his salvific splendour. Thus if we want to learn precisely what Maximus regards as ultimately constitutive for the creation, preservation, and perfection of all created and material bodies, we must sooner or later look to the Church. And since the Church is Christ's own body, his deifying self-location, such an exercise will be emphatically christocentric. As Saint Gregory of Nyssa has it, 'he who looks to the Church looks directly to Christ.'¹³ For at the centre of all Maximus' thinking about bodies - whether cosmic, scriptural, human or ecclesial - is the transfigured, radiant body of Christ. To risk repeating what is now in this study a well-worn theme: in the eschatologically-charged account of the Transfiguration the human body of Christ becomes the medium of divine glory: the created, visible, symbolic instrument for beholding the invisible light of God. It is, to recall Richard Crashaw's poetic depiction of the Christ-child, 'all Wonders in one sight!'¹⁴

¹¹ The sacrament of holy baptism will be studied in more detail in the final chapter.

¹² *Amb.Io.* 48 (PG 91.1364B).

¹³ *Greg.Nyss.Cant.* 13 (GNO VI, 382.2 - 383.3): ὁ πρὸς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν βλέπων πρὸς τὸν Χριστὸν ἄντικρυς βλέπει.

¹⁴ From his Christmas Ode, quoted by Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 36.

In like manner ‘the glorious and transcendently radiant magnificence of the holy Church’ is regarded by Maximus as a wholly pure, unadulterated object of contemplation – utterly untarnished by material contingencies, persecution, or heresy. By grace she ‘gives saving strength to the entire disposition of those who devoutly contemplate her, for she invites the ungodly, imparting to them the light of true understanding, and preserves those who cherish the vision of the mysteries performed in her, guarding as unscathed and without diminution the apple of their spiritual eye.’¹⁵

Our principal aim in this chapter then is not to attempt to provide a full account of Maximus’ ecclesiology *per se*, but to examine *in what way* this radiant ecclesial body functions as the *locus deificandi*, the definitive *place* in which all creation reaches its divinely appointed goal of union with God in Christ. In doing so we shall also highlight what Maximus considers, explicitly or implicitly, the significance of the external, material aspects of the Church’s liturgical life, the conceptual terms with which he expresses that significance, and the relation between these external aspects and the Church’s mediatorial vocation. With the designation ‘mediatorial vocation’ we are already hinting at a connection requiring further explication between Christ’s priestly mediation between God and man, heaven and earth, and the Church’s fulfilment of the same as his deified body. What we shall argue is that for Maximus the mediatorial veracity of this ‘divine body’ is inseparable from the ritual and institutional dimensions of ecclesial life. Here again his thinking about the Church is correlative to his christology, in which as we have seen the deification of the whole of human nature through Christ’s ‘holy flesh’ is the reciprocal and direct effect of the mediatorial and hypostatic union in Christ of the divine and human natures. Let us recall

¹⁵ *Q.Thal.* 63 (CCSG 22, 145.13-14; 147.36-44).

briefly Maximus' thinking on this matter in the first of his so-called christological letters,¹⁶ where in explicitly biblical language he paraphrases the Nicene Creed, 'the beautiful inheritance of the faith,' as it has been taught by the Fathers:

His nature or essence is double, because as *mediator between God and men* (1 Tim 2:5), he must fittingly restore the natural relationship to the mediated parties by his existence as both, so that - in him and through him in very truth, having united the earthly realm with the heavenly (Eph 1:10),¹⁷ and having led back to his God and Father the material nature of men that had been made hostile as a result of sin, but is now saved, reconciled and deified (not by an identity of essence but by the ineffable power of his becoming human) - he may through his holy flesh, taken from us as a first-fruit, perfectly make us *sharers in the divine nature* (2 Pet 1:4). Hence he is known in fact and not in name alone to be *at the same time*¹⁸ both God and man.¹⁹

Let us now proceed by learning how this mediation of the incarnate Word, 'our great and true High Priest of God,'²⁰ is made concretely accessible.

¹⁶ *Ep.* 12-19 (PG 91.460A – 597B).

¹⁷ In *QD* 63 (CCSG 10, 49.1-6) Maximus links Ephesians 1:10 with its talk of the recapitulation in Christ of 'things in heaven and things on earth' with Ephesians 2:14-15, in which Jews and Gentiles are united in Christ to make 'one new man.'

¹⁸ This emphasis on the simultaneity of Christ's existence as God and man and its cruciality for the efficacy of his mediatorial vocation has its precedent in Cyril of Alexandria's understanding of Christ as High Priest. See Frances M. Young, 'Christological Ideas in the Greek Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews', *JTS NS* 20 (1969), 152. Thus we may dismiss as unqualified the notion, voiced by the great Jesuit liturgical scholar Josef A. Jungmann in *The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer*, trans. A. Peeler (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 239-263, of a general trend in later Greek christology that sublimates Christ's high-priestly activity into his divinity.

¹⁹ *Ep.* 12 (PG 91.468CD).

The 'Priesthood of the Gospel': God Visible on Earth

In characteristically biblical terms, the holy flesh of Christ in the passage just quoted is the very meeting point of God and humanity,²¹ a reality prefigured in Israel's worship by the priesthood,²² the tabernacle,²³ the holy name,²⁴ the altar,²⁵ the holy of holies,²⁶ and the Temple.²⁷ This emphasis on mediation through *location* - through the whole incarnate divine Son rather than any single specific deed, was to become an important characteristic of Byzantine liturgical theology, as we witness in Nicholas Cabasilas' *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* from the 14th century:

[Christ] is mediator between God and man, not by his words or prayers, but in himself; because he is both God and man, he has reunited the two, making himself the meeting-ground of both.²⁸

²⁰ *Myst.* 23 (Sotiropoulos, 214. 10-11).

²¹ Jn 1:14, 18; 6:53-57; 7:37; 14:9; 20:28; 1 Jn 1:1-3; Rev 21:3.

²² Ex 29:42-46.

²³ Ex 33:7-11; 40:34-35.

²⁴ Ex 33:12-23; 34:5-7; Dt 12:5; 2 Chron 6:1-11.

²⁵ Lev 9:1-24.

²⁶ Ex 25:22; Num 7:89.

²⁷ 2 Chron 7:14-16.

²⁸ Chapter 49 in J.M. Hussey and P.A. McNulty (trans.), *Nicholas Cabasilas: A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* (London: SPCK, 1960), 110. While it is safe to assert as a general trend in Byzantine theology this emphasis upon the saving efficacy of the whole Incarnation rather than upon any specific deed of Christ, it ought not be overstressed, or at least, not in Maximus' theology. Maximus is often led to focus on certain events in Christ's life - his virginal conception and birth, his baptism, his temptation in the wilderness, the transfiguration, his agony in the garden, his death, and finally his resurrection and ascension. Each possesses in a varying respect a distinct and integral soteriological place and function in the overall redemptive economy. Blowers offers some subtle reflections on and, I believe, a balanced appraisal of scholarly trends in this connection in an article cited in the previous chapter, 'The Passion of Jesus Christ in Maximus the Confessor: A Reconsideration.'

Such an emphasis suggests an understanding of the liturgy – and of the eucharist in particular – primarily as a performative *epiphany* of the transfigured Lord who, present as high-priest, radiates through his body the light of his divine glory.²⁹ Our question is how, concretely, does this happen? What does it look like? With this distinctly *liturgical* theme of Christ as priest and mediator before us, it is appropriate to explore further Maximus' remarks on what he knows as, in contrast to the Aaronic priesthood of the old dispensation, ἡ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἱερωσύνη – 'the priesthood of the gospel.'³⁰

On numerous occasions in his role as spiritual father Maximus was presented with opportunities to write to associates occupying a wide range of prominent political and ecclesiastical positions. It is in his friendly exhortations to two bishops in particular that we find four passages providing subtle indications of his high esteem for the priestly office and of his understanding of its function to present God visibly on earth to the eyes of faith. This distinctly christocentric character of the priesthood, or more specifically, of the episcopate, is especially evident in his calling it τὸ τῆς ἀρχιερωσύνης μυστήριον.³¹ Of the four passages, all of which predate 630,³² three come from letters addressed to his close friend John, Bishop of Cyzicus, whom he came to know when he lived at the monastery of Saint George, and to whom he addressed the great earlier *Ambigua*.³³ In the first, Maximus offers counsel with respect to those under John's episcopal jurisdiction suffering some kind

²⁹ On this point we would express agreement with Jungmann's estimation that central to this epiphanic understanding of the Byzantine mass is the human-ward movement of the Logos sent by the Father. But we would disagree quite strongly if this were taken to exclude a reciprocal human movement towards the Father through the mediating Logos. What must be avoided is any simplistic (Nestorian or Monophysite) reduction of 'divine service' to either a divine or a human activity. See *The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer*, 239-263, and esp. 252-255.

³⁰ *QD* 7 (CCSG 10, 7.7-8).

³¹ *Ep.* 28 (PG 91.621A). In Maximus' works the terms ἱερεὺς and ἱερωσύνη chiefly refer to the bishop and the episcopal office, though without excluding the wider presbyterate.

³² Sherwood, *Annotated Date-List*.

³³ We accept for the moment, though not without reservation, the authority of Combéfis, as reported by Sherwood (*Annotated Date-List*, 27), who supposes the 'Kyrisikios' addressed in *Ep.* 28 is in fact a corruption of *Kyrikenos*, and is therefore the same Bishop John of Cyzicus.

of dispersion – perhaps as a result of the Persian invasion. He reminds John that, ‘in accordance with the grace of the high-priesthood’, it has fallen to him to be ‘an imitator of the divine goodness on earth,’ and on that basis exhorts him to

strive to *gather together the scattered children of God into one* (Jn 11:52), for this too is a mark (χαρακτήρ) of divine goodness. And since you are head (κεφαλή) of the precious body of the Church of God, join its members together with one another through the harmonious design of the Spirit. Having been made herald of the divine teachings, call with a loud voice those far and those near, and bind them to yourself with the indissoluble bond of the Spirit’s love....³⁴

In the second passage, Maximus cites certain ‘interpreters of the divine mysteries’³⁵ who, using the adjective ἐλκτικός, liken the priesthood to the *attractive* or *drawing* power first of fire, then of God:

Physicists say that the force of fire *draws up* all the underlying material. In symbolically comparing God to fire, the interpreters of the divine mysteries say that he also *draws up* all who wish to obey his laws and who strive to live a pious life. And declaring the priesthood to be *a picture which in image-form suitably portrays what it represents* (ἐν εἰκόνι γραφήν εὐφυῶς τὴν μίμησιν ἔχουσιν ὑπάρχειν λέγοντες τὴν ἱερωσύνην), they assert that it too, by the equally gracious law of compassion, *draws up* to God all who are under the same nature.³⁶

³⁴ Ep. 28 (PG 91.621A).

³⁵ Maximus may well have Dionysius in mind. See a similar idea expressed in Dion.Ar.De ecc.hier. 1.1; 1.5; 2.3.3 (Corpus Dionysiacum II, 63.10 – 64.14; 67.16 – 68.4; 74.12 – 75.9).

Maximus goes on to offer John specific injunctions on the basis of his appointment 'to bear (ἔχειν) the image of God on earth.'³⁷

In the third passage, also to John, very similar language is used, with the additional image of priest as pedagogue who leads a receptive person through sacramental initiation to perfect deification with God. Thus the priest, as mediator, presents God to earthly man, and offers deified man to God:

Just as the sun's rays suitably attract to it the healthy gaze which naturally delights in the light and impart their own brightness, so also the true priesthood – *being through all a visible representation of the blessed Godhead to those on earth* (χαρακτήρ οὔσα διὰ πάντων τῆς μακαρίας θεότητος τοῖς ἐπὶ γῆς) – *draws to itself* (ἐφέλκεται πρὸς ἑαυτὴν) every soul of devout and divine habit and imparts its own knowledge, peace and love, so that, having borne each faculty of the soul to the final limit of its proper activity, it may present to God as entirely deified those sacramentally initiated by it.³⁸

And, he continues, this knowledge, peace, and love – the true *telos* of the soul's rational, concupiscible and irascible faculties respectively, are the agents through which 'the true priesthood' reaches its own *telos*, which is 'to be deified and to deify' (θεοποιεῖσθαι τε καὶ θεοποιεῖν).³⁹ This last phrase echoes very clearly Gregory Nazianzen's summary of the

³⁶ *Ep.* 30 (PG 91.624B).

³⁷ *Ep.* 30 (PG 91.624B).

³⁸ *Ep.* 31 (PG 91.624D – 625A).

³⁹ *Ep.* 31 (PG 91.625A). Völker cites this passage as evidence in Maximus that 'the ascent to deification is... bound to the Church and its sacramental gifts as well as to the priesthood which distributes them.' *Maximus Confessor als Meister des geistlichen Lebens*, 481.

two-fold mediatorial goal of the priesthood, namely, ‘to be God and to deify’ (θεὸν ἐσόμενον καὶ θεοποιήσοντα).⁴⁰

In the fourth passage, which again forms the theological basis for subsequent *paraenesis*, Maximus is addressing an unnamed ‘most holy Bishop of Cydonia.’⁴¹ The monk’s high praise for him stems from the bishop’s perfect imitation of the mystery of God’s saving economy in paradoxically uniting in himself ‘sublimity’ and ‘humility’. This Christ-like joining of transcendent divine qualities with bodily human nature – so that each becomes visible through the other - is to Maximus’ mind especially appropriate to the incumbent bishop, ‘since *God ordained the priesthood to represent him on earth to ensure that he may not cease being seen bodily* and that his mysteries may not cease appearing to those with eyes to see.’⁴²

In summary of these four passages, the priest/bishop is seen by Maximus as head of the body of people under his oversight. Their unity in him is established and preserved through his proclamation of doctrine and his active exercise of divine love. As the χαρακτήρ and εἰκών of God⁴³ he communicates heavenly, divine realities *on earth, bodily*, and more specifically, *visibly*. It is to the *eyes* more than to any other sense that the priest presents God,⁴⁴ for they are the physical organ by which the mind penetrates sensible phenomena to apprehend exclusively intelligible realities. In turn, the priest *draws* to himself

⁴⁰ Greg.Naz.Or. 2.73 (SC 247, 186.17-18); see also Greg.Naz.Or. 2.22 (SC 247, 120.14), where the goal of the priest’s art is θεὸν ποιῆσαι.

⁴¹ Ep. 21 (PG 91.604B – 605C). Cydonia is on the north coast of Crete.

⁴² Ep. 21 (PG 91.604D).

⁴³ One cannot overlook the christological significance of the term χαρακτήρ as it appears in Hebrews 1:3. Yet its association with the priesthood in Maximus, as in Gregory Nazianzen, ought not be interpreted by way of the later Tridentine notion of a priestly *character indelibilis*. See André de Halleux, ‘Grégoire de Nazianze, témoin du «caractère sacerdotal»’ in *idem*, *Patrologie et Œcuménisme, Recueil D’Études* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 693-709.

⁴⁴ A fact also noted by Irénée-Henri Dalmais, ‘Mystère Liturgique et Divinisation dans la Mystagogie de saint Maxime le Confesseur’, in Jacques Fontaine and Charles Kannengiesser (eds.), *Epektasis: Mélanges Patristiques Offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Beauchesne, 1972), 56.

all those under his care and presents them, perfectly deified, to God. While the actual person of the priest and his mediatorial function are in no way viewed as though incumbent and office were separable, it is chiefly in his role as one who renders visible the divine 'mysteries' that he is most truly the bodily image of God on earth.

There is also much more to this 'drawing' than may at first meet the eye.⁴⁵ The term clearly echoes Jesus' words about his priestly activity in John 12:32: 'And when I am lifted up from the earth I will *draw* (ἐλκύσω) all people to myself.' But Maximus' immediate source of inspiration for its use is more likely Dionysius the Areopagite. The word comprehends the totality of the function of the Church's sacerdotal office in which the *hierarch* - the bishop - serves as a mediating ray for the assimilation to God of all the orderly ranks under him. This of course indicates that Dionysius and Maximus following him understood the notion of hierarchy differently from how it is popularly understood today.⁴⁶

Hierarchy is, to my mind, a sacred order, knowledge and activity, which is being assimilated to likeness with God as much as possible and, in response to the illuminations that are given it from God, is raised to the imitation of him in its own measure.... The purpose of hierarchy, then, is to bring about assimilation to God and, as far as possible, union with him.⁴⁷

Andrew Louth comments on the meaning of this passage in the context of Dionysius' [Denys'] broader vision of ecclesial and celestial orders:

⁴⁵ The verb ἐλκεῖν is translated in these contexts by Völker with 'sich anziehen' (*Maximus Confessor als Meister des geistlichen Lebens*, 140-141).

⁴⁶ Dionysius is repeatedly slighted in many quarters for introducing to the medieval Church of the West, through Aquinas, a hierarchical view of ministry in which 'service' is allegedly 'swallowed up by authority.' See, for instance, Paul Philibert, 'Issues for a Theology of Priesthood: A Status Report', in Donald J. Goergen and Ann Garrido (eds), *The Theology of Priesthood* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 17-19.

[Hierarchy] is, certainly, a matter of order (τάξις), but for Denys it is much more. The hierarchy itself is knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and activity (ἐνέργεια), and has a purpose: that of drawing into union with and assimilation to God all that belongs to it. . . . [H]ierarchy has a healing purpose. Far from being a structure of ordered and repressive authority, hierarchy for Denys is an expression of the love of God for everything that derives from him – that is, everything – a love that seeks to draw everything back into union with the source of all being. Hierarchy is the theophany of God’s love that beings are.⁴⁸

With this background in mind we can better appreciate the full, cosmic scope of Maximus’ understanding of the ‘drawing’ purpose of the priesthood. At the same time it may allow us to make clearer sense of Maximus’ conception of hierarchy when we come to consider it more closely in the next section.

We move now to another passage which sheds further light on this central notion of the priest as one in whose person, teaching, love and ritual actions God is presented visibly and bodily on earth and all the members of the body are drawn together and united. It appears in Anastasius’ record of Maximus’ first trial in 655.⁴⁹ There we discover why it is Maximus would have the Emperor, who in this case was bent on enforcing the notorious *Typos*, excluded from the task of defining catholic doctrine. The text shows itself to be an important part of our investigation when we see with Maximus that the unity and mediatorial vocation of the Church are grounded in the orthodoxy of its public confession of saving dogma, a confession which is itself defined and regulated exclusively by the

⁴⁷ Dion.Ar.De coel.hier. 3.1-2 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 17.3-11).

⁴⁸ Andrew Louth, ‘Apophatic Theology: Denys the Areopagite’, *Hermathena* 165 (1998), 78.

⁴⁹ For details on authorship and dating, see Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (eds.), *Scripta Saeculi VII, Vitam Maximi Confessoris Illustrantia* (CCSG 39, Turnhout: Brepols and Publishers, 1999), xv.

Church's priests and bishops. Having asserted as much, the aged Confessor was asked whether every Christian Emperor is not also a priest and therefore possesses the right to determine dogma, to which he replied:

He is not, for neither does he stand at the altar nor after the consecration of the bread does he elevate it saying, 'Holy things for the holy.' Nor does he baptise, or perform the rite of chrismation, or ordain and make bishops and priests and deacons; nor does he anoint churches, or wear the symbols of the priesthood, the omophorion⁵⁰ and the Gospel book, in the way in which he wears, as symbols of kingship, the crown and purple robe.⁵¹

Appealing to the Church's *lex orandi* Maximus here indirectly affords us an insight into elements he considers constitutive of the priestly office. It is with reference to the opening words of this passage that Robert Taft speculates that Maximus 'obviously views [the elevation] as a rite of some significance, even emblematic of the priestly ministry.'⁵² It is apparently the theophanic moment of unveiling the eucharistic gifts at which the priest, at least in the rite known to Germanus in the 8th century, exhorts 'Look, see, behold God! ... God is the holy one who abides with the saints!' (βλέπετε, θεωρεῖτε· ἰδοὺ ὁ Θεός· ... Θεός ἐστὶν ὁ ἅγιος ἐν ἁγίοις ἀναπαυόμενος).⁵³ While in his *Mystagogia* Maximus omits any mention of this particular moment in the eucharistic rite, which falls between the 'Our Father' and the congregational hymn 'One is Holy', it appears when his model

⁵⁰ 'The omophorion of the Greek Rite... corresponds to the Latin pallium, with the difference that in the Greek Rite its use is a privilege not only of archbishops, but of all bishops.' Joseph Braun, 'Pallium', *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 11 (London, 1913), 429.

⁵¹ RM (CCSG 39, 27.183-190).

⁵² Robert F. Taft, 'The Precommunion Elevation of the Byzantine Divine Liturgy', *OCP* 62 (1996), 31.

⁵³ Chapter 43 in Paul Meyendorff, *St Germanus of Constantinople on the Divine Liturgy* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 104. While I have taken ἁγίοις as the masculine plural, the expression invites being understood as 'in the holy things', that is, in the sacramental elements, 'among the holy ones', that is, the angelic beings, and 'in the sanctuary', as it is used sometimes in LXX (cf. Is 57:15; Ezek 44:11).

mystagogue, Dionysius the Areopagite, makes at least three references to the elevation in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, introducing it with formulaic regularity as the bishop's performance of 'the most divine acts':

[Then] the hierarch performs the most divine acts and elevates the things praised through the sacredly displayed symbols (ὁ ἱεράρχης... ἱερούργει τὰ θειότατα καὶ ὑπ' ὄψιν ἄγει τὰ ὑμνημένα διὰ τῶν ἱερῶς προκειμένων συμβόλων).⁵⁴

If all we had to go on was this passage from Dionysius and the statement from Maximus' trial we could do no more than speculate with Father Taft about the 'emblematic' status of the elevation in Maximus' understanding of the priestly office. But coupled with the testimony of Germanus, it cannot be insignificant that in the *Mystagogia* itself, when he comes to praise the communion (ἡ μετάδοσις) as the *telos* of the whole synaxis, Maximus writes how at that point – which immediately follows the elevation – the worshippers themselves 'beholding the light of the invisible and ineffable glory become, together with the powers above, vessels (δεκτικοὶ) of the blessed purity.'⁵⁵ Combined with the material cited above from the *Epistulae* may we not plausibly suggest that the reason Maximus cites this moment first in a series of episcopal functions is because he regards the action of the priest, in the movement from standing before the altar to lifting before the eyes of the saints Christ's holy body, as somehow constitutive of his mediatorial office through which the worthy are united to God? Surely we are justified in affirming that Maximus explicitly *locates* the significance of priesthood at the altar (θυσιαστηρίῳ), in the elevation, with the proclamation τὰ ἅγια τοῖς ἁγίοις!, because there above all is the

⁵⁴ Dion.Ar.De ecc.hier. (*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 81.6-7; 90.9-10; 92.17-18).

priest most visibly and definitively what he is appointed to be: the mediating servant by which worthy individuals attain a *holy* communion. There he most closely resembles Christ the mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5), ‘who through his flesh makes manifest to human beings the incomprehensible Father, and through the Spirit leads those reconciled in himself to the Father.’⁵⁶ There he most explicitly manifests the two principal tasks which, according to Gregory Nazianzen, have been entrusted to him: ‘the protection⁵⁷ of souls’ (ψυχῶν προστασία) and ‘the mediation between God and man’ (μεσιτεία θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων).⁵⁸

The Ranks of the Church: Ordained by the One Spirit

A second point arising from the statement made in Maximus’ trial, and one most pertinent to our topic, is the question of ecclesial ranks. In the scheme of ecclesiastical order the Emperor stands alongside the laity. Maximus is further recorded as noting that in the intercessory lists included in the eucharistic anaphora, the Emperor is remembered with the laity *after* all the clerical ranks, implying therefore his subordination to that unifying episcopal authority exercised most definitively in the bishops’ defining doctrine and their presiding at the eucharist:

During the holy anaphora at the holy altar, the emperors are remembered with the laity *after* the bishops and priests and deacons and the whole priestly rank when the deacon says,

⁵⁵ *Myst.* 21 (Sotiropoulos, 210.8-10).

⁵⁶ *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 30.71-74).

⁵⁷ The word προστασία carries a range of meanings – oversight, care, leadership, patronage. A προστάτης in Graeco-Roman society was a patron. For Gregory, this essentially meant a protector of the weak. See the comments of Jean Bernardi in *Grégoire de Nazianze. Discours 1-3* (SC 247, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1978), 47-48.

‘And those laymen who have died in faith, Constantine, Constans,...’ and the others. Thus he makes remembrance of living emperors *after* all the clergy.⁵⁹

We have already encountered the existence of ranks in connection with our study in chapter one of ‘proportionate revelation’ and the ascent from *praxis* through *theoria* to *theologia* in the *Chapters on Theology*. There we saw within a more consciously monastic milieu how and why Maximus distinguishes between ‘initiates’ or ‘beginners’ (οἱ εἰσαγόμενοι, οἱ νηπίοι) and ‘the perfect’ (οἱ τελειώθεντες, οἱ τελείοι),⁶⁰ or between the respective spiritual ranks of πιστός, μαθητής, and ἀπόστολος.⁶¹ In no way does this existence of a hierarchy of different ranks within the Church contradict the fundamental baptismal unity announced by Saint Paul in Galatians 3:28, a central text in Maximian theology: ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ.’ On the contrary, it is precisely by way of differing ecclesial ranks, themselves χαρίσματα of the one Holy Spirit, that the unity of the Church is preserved. Maximus makes this clear when he is asked by the priest Thalassius to reconcile an apparent biblical discrepancy in which Saint Paul allegedly disobeys the Spirit.⁶² How was the Apostle’s journey to Jerusalem justified when the Tyrian disciples, speaking *by the Spirit*, urged him not to go (cf. Ac 21:4)?

Maximus begins his reply by referring to Isaiah 11:1-3 where the prophet lists seven ‘spirits’, by which Isaiah does not infer that there are seven spirits of God, but that the ‘energies of one and the same Holy Spirit’ are said to be ‘spirits’ since the same ‘actuating

⁵⁸ Greg.Naz.Or. 2 (SC 247, 208.17-18).

⁵⁹ RM (CCSG 39, 27.200-206).

⁶⁰ Th.Oec. 1.97; 2.13; 2.28; Q.Thal. 10 (CCSG 7, 83.6-24). Cf. the contrast between νηπίοι and the ἀνήρ τέλειον in Ephesians 4:13-14.

⁶¹ Th.Oec. 1.33-34.

⁶² Q.Thal. 29 (CCSG 7, 211.1 – 215.72).

Holy Spirit exists wholly and complete in each energy proportionately.⁶³ These ‘diverse energies’ also include the ‘diverse gifts’ mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:4, again given by one and the same Spirit. The Spirit distributes these gifts in proportion to each person’s faith, and by participating in the gift that person receives the corresponding energy or activity of the Spirit, thus enabling him to fulfil particular commandments.

Returning to the problem in hand, Maximus first distinguishes between Paul’s gift of ‘love for God’ to the disciples’ gift of ‘love for Paul’:

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. And in fact he did not go up disobeying them at all, but rather by his own example *he drew* (ἔλκων) them – who prophesied through the energy of the Spirit which was in due proportion given to them according to the gift of grace – towards that yearning desire for him who is beyond all.⁶⁴

This first distinction is based on the two-fold divine command of love for God and love for neighbour, which in no way admits any division or separation. Still, the one is subordinate to the other. Maximus then introduces a second distinction – that between ‘the prophetic gift’ (τὸ προφητικὸν χάρισμα) and ‘the apostolic gift’ (τὸ ἀποστολικὸν χάρισμα). The latter is superior to the former, since it has in mind the whole divine *skopos*.

Since the prophetic gift is inferior to the apostolic gift, it was not appropriate to the Word who governs the universe (τὸ πᾶν) and assigns each one his due office (τὴν ἐκάστου

⁶³ *Q.Thal.* 29 (CCSG 7, 211.9-12).

⁶⁴ *Q.Thal.* 29 (CCSG 7, 213.43-49).

διορίζοντος τάξιιν) for the superior to submit to the inferior, but rather for the inferior to follow after the superior. For those who prophesied through the prophetic spirit in them – not the apostolic spirit – revealed the way in which Saint Paul would suffer for the Lord. But he, looking only towards the divine purpose (πρὸς μόνον ἀφορῶν τὸν θεῖον σκοπόν), regarded as nothing all that would intervene. He was concerned not to survive that which would befall him, but to become another Christ through the imitation of Christ and through accomplishing all that for the sake of which Christ in his love for humankind chose life in the flesh in his economy.⁶⁵

Any question of opposition between various ranks is therefore done away with, since they are seen to be arranged by divine reason (the *Logos*) and are related to the entire economies of cosmic and salvific order. Consequently the alleged ‘disobedience’ of the Apostle, concludes Maximus, is in fact

a guardian of the good order (εὐταξίας φυλακῆ) which arranges and governs all sacred matters, and which keeps each person from falling away from his own abode and foundation (μονῆς καὶ ἰδρύσεως). It also teaches clearly that the ranks of the Church which the Spirit has fittingly assigned (τοὺς καλῶς ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος διωρισμένους τῆς ἐκκλησίας βαθμούς) are not to be confused with one another.⁶⁶

From here I do not think it too great a leap to move to the contended question in Maximus’ theology of the status of the Church of Rome. On this point we must ask whether the external, charismatic hierarchy which as we have seen guards and preserves the Church’s ordered harmony extends to a ranking of different episcopal sees. If for Maximus

⁶⁵ *Q.Thal.* 29 (CCSG 7, 213.54 – 215.66).

such an order is essential to each member's harmonious preservation in the whole body - if there is no opposition, but rather a necessary correlation between ordered ranks in the Church and the Church's fundamental unity - then we might expect to find that he reckons entirely acceptable the extension to one particular church of a divinely-given rank of pre-eminence over the others. This whole subject has been studied extensively by Larchet,⁶⁷ who refutes and clarifies some of the lofty claims made by Dominicans Alain Riou⁶⁸ and Juan-Miguel Garrigues.⁶⁹ Larchet rightly rejects any appraisal of Maximus as a virtual proto-champion of a fully developed medieval version of papal primacy. He argues that Maximus' defence of Popes Honorius (625-638)⁷⁰ and Theodore I (642-649)⁷¹ stems primarily from his conviction that their language was capable of admitting an orthodox interpretation and indeed, we might add, despite weaknesses in their choice of words, was intended to do so. But what of the unambiguous exaltation extended to the Roman See in the two incomplete texts that survive as *Opuscula* 11 and 12? Larchet has pointed out that the second of these texts,⁷² both of which are no more than extracts preserved by the 9th century librarian and member of the papal curia Anastasius (d. ca. 878),⁷³ is extant only in Latin and of potentially dubious authenticity. Even so, '[s]etting aside questions of textual authenticity and accuracy of translation from the Greek original,' he writes,

⁶⁶ *Q.Thal.* 29 (CCSG 7, 215.67-72).

⁶⁷ We shall draw in large part from the briefer comments in his Introduction to Emmanuel Ponsoy's French translation of the *Opuscula* in *Saint Maxime le Confesseur. Opuscules Théologiques et Polémiques* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998), 7-108. For a full treatment of each relevant text with the necessary historical background, see Larchet's *Maxime le Confesseur, médiateur entre l'Orient et l'Occident* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998), 125 – 201.

⁶⁸ *Le Monde et L'Église selon Maxime le Confesseur*.

⁶⁹ 'Le sens de la primauté romaine selon Maxime le Confesseur', *Istina* 21 (1976), 6-24.

⁷⁰ *Opusc.* 20 (PG 91.237C – 245D).

⁷¹ *Opusc.* 10 (PG 91.133D – 136C).

⁷² PG 91.144A-D.

⁷³ For a brief précis of Anastasius Bibliothecarius' life and work, see Allen and Neil (CCSG 39), xxvi – xxx.

one notes first of all that Maximus does not establish strictly speaking an equivalence between the Catholic Church and the See of Rome, but... affirms the recognition that the Church of Rome, engaged in the controversy to defend the orthodox faith, represents that faith in a way the Church of Constantinople, fallen in heresy, does not. And it is only to the degree that the Church of Rome confesses the orthodox faith that she may be considered the universal Church.⁷⁴

The authenticity of the second text, *Opuscula* 11, while more commonly accepted, can neither be regarded as entirely free from doubt. It is generally thought to have been penned by Maximus in Rome soon after the Lateran synod in 649. Before we hear from Larchet, let us place before our eyes the whole of the disputed passage:

For the very ends of the earth and those in every part of the world who purely and rightly confess the Lord look directly to the most holy Church of the Romans and its confession and faith as though it were a sun of unfailing light, expecting from it the illuminating splendour of the Fathers and the sacred dogmas, just as the divinely-inspired and sacred six synods (ἅγιοι ἕξ σύνοδοι) have purely and piously decreed, declaring most expressly the symbol of faith. For ever since the incarnate Word of God came down to us, all the churches of Christians everywhere have held that greatest Church there (αὐτόθι) to be their sole base and foundation (μόνην κρηπίδα καὶ θεμέλιον), since on the one hand, it is in no way overcome by the gates of Hades, according to the very promise of the Saviour (Mt 16:18-19), but holds the keys of the orthodox confession and faith in him and opens the only true and real religion to those who approach with godliness, and on the other hand, it shuts up and locks every heretical mouth that speaks unrighteousness against

⁷⁴ Larchet, Introduction to Ponsoye, *Saint Maxime le Confesseur. Opuscles Théologiques et Polémiques*, 74.

the Most High. For that which was founded and built by the creator and master of the universe himself, our Lord Jesus Christ, and his disciples and apostles, and following them the holy fathers and teachers and martyrs consecrated by their own words and deeds, and by their agony and sweat, suffering and bloodshed, and finally by their violent death for the catholic and apostolic Church of us who believe in him, they strive to destroy through two words (διὰ δύο ρημάτων) [uttered] without effort and without death – O the patience and forbearance of God! – and to annul the great ever-radiant and ever-lauded mystery of the orthodox worship of Christians.⁷⁵

According to Larchet, who provisionally accepts Maximian authorship, what the Confessor has to say in this text ‘s’explique cependant en grande partie par les circonstances historiques et celles de sa propre vie...’⁷⁶ In other words, Maximus’ ‘enthousiasme’ here is coloured by the fact that as a political refugee he had found protection and support in the western empire generally and in the Church of Rome in particular when she alone was confessing the true faith against the Monotheletist policy endorsed by the Imperium. In Larchet’s words, the eminence with which the Confessor regards the Roman See ‘chiefly relies on the fact that she has confessed the orthodox faith and defended it against heresies.’⁷⁷

A closer reading of the text however reveals that according to its author’s own explicitly *theological* reasoning, the eminence of the Church of Rome for its confession of faith is not independent of its pre-eminence on the basis of the promise of Christ - of which Rome is the primary and representative recipient. The locative adverb ‘αὐτόθι’ (*here; there; in this or that specific place*) indicating Rome is immediately linked to Christ’s promise of

⁷⁵ PG 91.137C – 140B.

⁷⁶ Introduction to Ponsoye, *Saint Maxime le Confesseur. Opuscules Théologiques et Polémiques*, 107.

the inviolability of the Church against the gates of Hades and the conferral of the keys to Peter (Mt 16:18-19). We can only presume that in the author's way of thinking, the Church in Rome holds these keys for no other reason than what was accepted universally as the Petrine connection to Rome, a connection first made explicit by Irenaeus,⁷⁸ referred to at the Council of Sardica (ca. 343),⁷⁹ developed by Leo I (440-461),⁸⁰ and exploited from very early on⁸¹ through the establishment of a shrine at the Apostle's tomb and its promotion as a holy place for pilgrimage.⁸² Upon his concession to Maximus in the dispute in Carthage in July of 645, Pyrrhus drew precisely that connection when he expressed his desire 'to be deemed worthy first of venerating the shrines of the Apostles - or rather those of the chiefs

⁷⁷ Introduction to Ponsoye, *Saint Maxime le Confesseur. Opuscles Théologiques et Polémiques*, 107.

⁷⁸ *Iren.Haer.* 3.3.2 (SC 211, 32.15-29): 'Although it would be overly long in this kind of book to enumerate the [episcopal] successions of all the churches, yet by drawing attention to the tradition from the Apostles and the faith confessed to mankind which have come down to us through the succession of bishops in the greatest, most ancient and well-known Church founded and constituted by the two most glorious Apostles Peter and Paul at Rome, we may confound all those who in any other way, either through self-satisfaction or vainglory or through blindness and wicked intent, assemble improperly. For with this Church, on account of its more authoritative origin (*propter potentiorem principalitatem*), all churches must agree, that is, the faithful in all places, because in it has always been preserved by the [faithful] of all places the tradition from the Apostles.'

I take the two celebrated phrases in *Ign.Rom.* (one in the salutation in which he addresses the Church that προκάθηται ἐν τόπῳ χωρίου Ῥωμαίων, and the other in *Ign.Rom.* 4.3: οὐχ ὡς Πέτρος καὶ Παῦλος διατάσσομαι ὑμῖν) as evidence of an earlier (ca. 110), but implicit recognition of the connection.

⁷⁹ Canon 3: 'But if perchance sentence be given against a bishop in any matter and he supposes his case to be not unsound but good, in order that the question may be reopened, let us, if it seem good to your charity, honour the memory of Peter the Apostle, and let those who gave judgement write to Julius, the bishop of Rome, so that, if necessary, the case may be retried by the bishops of the neighbouring provinces and let him appoint arbiters.' Trans. in Henry R. Percival (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church* (NPNF 14, Edinburgh: T&T Clark / Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1900), 417. Before this time it appears there may have been claims made by individual Roman bishops to a Petrine succession for their office. The famous though not undisputed cases are that of Pope Calixtus I (d. 223) in connection with Tertullian's polemic to a nameless bishop in *De pudicitia* 21, and that of Pope Stephen I (d. 257), who, in an extract preserved by Cyprian of Carthage (*Cyp.Ep.* 74.17), was accused by Firmilian of Caesarea of claiming to possess the chair of Saint Peter 'through succession.'

⁸⁰ See Walter Ullmann, 'Leo I and the Theme of Papal Primacy', in Everett Ferguson *et al.* (eds.), *Studies in Early Christianity: A Collection of Scholarly Essays* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1993), 359-385.

⁸¹ In a recent article Brian Daley notes that 'excavations carried out under the Vatican basilica in the 1940s confirm that Christians were venerating Peter's remains there, with great devotion, from at least the 160s.' See 'The Ministry of Primacy and the Communion of Churches', in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (eds.), *Church Unity and the Papal Office* (Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 37.

⁸² In *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 87-88, Peter Brown records how the young prince Justinian's request for a fragment of Peter's remains was

(κορυφαίων) of the Apostles themselves [Peter and Paul], and then of seeing the face of the most-holy Pope.⁸³ According to *Opusculum* 11 then, Rome's pre-eminence is not seen exclusively to be conditional upon the orthodoxy of its confession, but is also bound up with the promise of Christ, his bestowal of the keys to the Church in the person of Peter, and the succession of Peter's episcopacy located in Rome.

Thus there can be no question about the essential meaning of the text, nor does its ecclesiology necessarily furnish any real doubts about Maximian authorship. For Maximus, Peter is 'the all-holy, the great *foundation* (κρηπίς) of the Church.'⁸⁴ His is the 'reverent confession, against which the wicked mouths of the heretics, gaping like the gates of hell, never prevail.'⁸⁵ It appears that Maximus also accepts communion with the Roman See as a critical factor, properly inseparable from 'the right confession of the faith', in the realisation of the unity of the Church. When, according to the record of the debate which took place in August 656 while Maximus was in exile in Bizya,⁸⁶ Bishop Theodosius, imperial and patriarchal legate, proffers superficial acceptance of Maximus' position and offers to confirm it in writing, Maximus directs him and his associates – 'that is, the Emperor and Patriarch and the synod convoked by him' - instead to 'send a written account to this effect to Rome as the canon stipulates.'⁸⁷ His summary recommendation is that the Emperor and the Patriarch themselves forward to the Pope of Rome 'an exhortatory dispatch' and 'a

flatly denied. Instead, he received a handkerchief that had been lowered into the crypt and brought out 'heavy with the blessing of St Peter.'

⁸³ *DP* (PG 91.352D – 353A).

⁸⁴ *Q.Thal.* 27 (CCSG 7, 197.114-115). In specifically identifying Peter as the ἀκρότατος and κορυφαῖος of the Apostles (*Q.Thal.* 59 [CCSG 22, 55.171-172]; 61 [CCSG 22, 101.272]) Maximus expresses the common mind of the Byzantine tradition both before and for a good while after him. See John Meyendorff, 'St. Peter in Byzantine Theology', in *idem. et al.* (eds.), *The Primacy of Peter* (London: The Faith Press, 1963), 7-29.

⁸⁵ *Ep.* 13 (PG 91.512B).

⁸⁶ Allen and Neil (CCSG 39), xv.

⁸⁷ *DB* (CCSG 39, 113.432-434). The canon to which Maximus here refers is presumably canon 5 of the First Ecumenical Council (see Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, 8). The (earlier?) Apostolic canon 32 (Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 595-596) is like it: 'if any presbyter or deacon has been

conciliar petition' respectively so that, 'if indeed you are found to be turning to the way of the Church on account of your right confession of the faith, you may be reconciled....'⁸⁸

Nevertheless, notwithstanding Maximus' continuity with the tradition's acceptance of communion with the Roman See and its Bishop as a necessary condition of Church unity, *Opusculum* 11 does present one peculiar and unaccountable phrase that raises unavoidable questions of textual authenticity. We are referring to the expression, 'the sacred six synods' or 'councils'.⁸⁹ According to the 17th century Dominican patrologist François Combéflis, the 'six synods' mentioned in the text include the Lateran synod of 649 in Rome, which he assumes Maximus must have regarded as on par with the five councils by that time generally regarded as 'ecumenical': Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), and Chalcedon II (553). This assumption has acquired nearly universal acceptance.

There is in principle no reason why Maximus might not have thought of the Lateran synod as a truly 'ecumenical' synod. It was convoked by the Pope himself, brought together bishops from around the inhabited world, confessed the faith and rejected error in accordance with the dogmatic tradition enshrined in the great councils of the past. But does Maximus anywhere else give any indication that he thought of the Lateran synod as a universal synodical gathering on par with the five synods generally accepted as ecumenical? We should first ask whether he could have gained that impression from the synod itself - though it seems those councils subsequently called 'ecumenical' never actually set out with a self-conscious view of their status as such.⁹⁰ The *Acta* of the Lateran synod of 649 are

excommunicated by a bishop, he may not be received into communion again by any other than by him who excommunicated him....'

⁸⁸ *DB* (CCSG 39, 115.445-450).

⁸⁹ The words 'synod' and 'council' translate the same Greek word.

⁹⁰ This of course raises the much-disputed question as to what constitutes an 'ecumenical' council or synod. There is one passage in Maximus' trial that perhaps indicates a prevailing belief that a synod's validity

recorded simply as ‘the proceedings of the holy and apostolic synod conducted in this illustrious and venerable [city] Rome.’⁹¹ That is, they appear to regard the synod as ‘one of the normal bi-annual provincial synods as visualized by Nicaea 1 (canon 5).’⁹² Riedinger grants it a more modest status yet, going so far as to suggest that it was little more than a meeting convoked to approve the Latin translation of already existing Greek documents. His basis for such a view rests on the fact that there was no actual debate or discussion.⁹³

When later the validity of this ‘synod of Rome’ is questioned by several of Maximus’ interrogators, he gives no indication that he thinks of it at that stage as bearing the illustrious title ‘ecumenical’.⁹⁴ Yet his mention of ‘four synods’ in his trial is qualified by the adjective οἰκουμενικῶν,⁹⁵ as we find in an earlier treatise where he speaks of ‘the holy five ecumenical synods.’⁹⁶ And in a work written after his death by followers dearly dedicated to the primacy of the Roman See, we find no signs of their exploiting Maximus’ alleged recognition of the Lateran synod as on par with the first Five Ecumenical Councils, but instead find distinguished ‘the five holy and ecumenical synods’ and ‘the holy and most pious apostolic synod convoked in Rome.’⁹⁷

depended on its being convoked or authorised by the Pope, given, that is, that he was legitimately in possession of his office. When mention is made of the doctrinal authority of the Lateran synod in Rome, one of Maximus’ accusers, Demosthenes, with reference to Pope Martin I’s shameful arrest, trial, and exile at the hands of the Imperium, counters with the cry, ‘The synod has not been ratified since the one who summoned it has been deposed.’ To which Maximus calmly replies, ‘He was not deposed, but banished. What synodal and canonical act is there among the things accomplished that firmly attests his deposition?’ *RM* (CCSG 39, 47.457 – 49.463).

⁹¹ Riedinger, *ACO* ser. II.1, 2.3-4. This titular form also occurs in Anastasius’ *DB* (CCSG 39, 111.416-417) where Maximus is recorded as pointing out patristic citations from τὴν βίβλον τῶν πεπραγμένων τῆς ἁγίας καὶ ἀποστολικῆς συνόδου Ῥώμης.

⁹² J.M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 20.

⁹³ Rudolph Riedinger, ‘Griechische Konzilsakten auf dem Wege ins lateinische Mittelalter’, *Annuaire Historiae Conciliorum* 9 (1977), 255-257; cited by Bronwen Neil, ‘The Monothelite Controversy and Its Christology’ (MATR dissertation, University of Durham, 1998), 19.

⁹⁴ *RM* (CCSG 39, 31.250 – 33.263; 45.428 – 49.468); *DB* (CCSG 39, 95.234 – 97.260).

⁹⁵ *RM* (CCSG 39, 31.253).

⁹⁶ *Opusc.* 9 (PG 91. 128B).

⁹⁷ *Hypom.* (CCSG 39, 213.225-232).

Combéfis may well be right. Yet it is not entirely impossible that a later writer with certain sympathies towards the Roman See - perhaps even Anastasius Bibliothecarius himself - composed and inserted the fragment we have come to know as *Opusculum* 11 in the Maximian corpus. Interestingly enough, after his own attempt to install himself to the papal office by unlawful means and his subsequent deposition, Anastasius became ‘unofficial secretary and private adviser’⁹⁸ to Pope Nicholas I (858-867) who, in the polemical context generated by his debate with Photius and questions of a more juridical nature, asserted the traditionally accepted eminence of Rome with no uncertain rigour in language remarkably similar to our own *Opusculum* 11. It is also interesting to note that at this stage – well *after* the Second Council of Nicea (787) – it would apparently have been entirely normal for the those allied with the Church of Rome to refer with Pope Nicholas to the authority of ‘sex universalium conciliorum’.⁹⁹

None of these speculations pretends to prove anything positive, nor do I possess either the evidence or competence to offer a firm verdict on text-critical questions at this stage. What can be said is that any conclusions regarding the authenticity of *Opusculum* 11 will have to settle the question of the ‘six synods’, a task that might also be helped by a certain identification of the ‘two words’ referred to towards the end of the text, a reference no commentator to my knowledge has yet addressed.¹⁰⁰

In the final analysis, furthermore, one’s interpretation of *Opusculum* 11 must be qualified by what we come across later in Maximus’ life in two sets of statements which could be said definitively to represent his mature ecclesiology. In the first, from the

⁹⁸ Allen and Neil (CCSG 39), xxvii.

⁹⁹ See *Nicolai I. papae epistolae* 91; 92; 98 (E. Perels [ed.], *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolarum Tomus VI*, vol. 4: *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* [Berlin, 1925], 520.17; 539.34-35; 558.18).

¹⁰⁰ My hunch would be to suggest that, supposing *Opusc.* 11 to be at least contemporary with Maximus, the phrase refers to the Imperial *Ektthesis* and the *Typos*, both of which were condemned at the Lateran synod; in which case the Greek would better be translated as ‘two statements.’

Disputatio Bizyae, Bishop Theodosius is found to be trying amicably but unsuccessfully to persuade Maximus to submit to the *Typos* and return to fellowship with the Church (of Constantinople). It becomes evident that Maximus' resistance is rooted not in a pedantic dogmatism¹⁰¹ but in an understanding of a divinely instituted order of ecclesial and doctrinal authority in which the teaching of the Apostles and Prophets, recorded in Scripture and mediated through the Church's Bishops and Councils, itself conveys what is constitutive for the reception of divine life. To receive their teaching is to receive them, and to receive them is to receive Christ. To receive anything contrary to their teaching, such as the *Typos*, no matter what its source or medium, is to reject them and receive instead the devil. Maximus explains this at length to Theodosius in words that could scarcely be stronger:

What kind of believer accepts a dispensation silencing the very words which the God of all ordained to be spoken by the apostles and prophets and teachers? Let us investigate, reverend master, what kind of evil this summary blindly arrives at. For if *God appointed in the Church first apostles, then prophets, and third teachers* (1 Cor 12:28) *for the perfecting of the saints* (Eph 4:12), having said in the Gospel to the apostles and through them to those after them, *What I say to you, I say to all* (Mk 13:37), and again, *He who receives you receives me, and he who rejects you rejects me* (Lk 10:16), it is clearly manifest that whoever does not receive the apostles and prophets and teachers, but rejects their words, rejects Christ himself.

Let us also investigate the other passage. God chose to raise up apostles and prophets and teachers *for the perfection of the saints*. But to oppose godly religion the devil chose to raise up false apostles and false prophets and false teachers, so that the old law

¹⁰¹ *Pace* Greek historian A.N. Stratos, who, charging Maximus with 'resolute obstinacy', derives his resistance from 'his aristocratic background, combined with a monastic and senile stubbornness....' Quoted by George

was opposed, as was also the evangelical law. And as far as I understand it the false apostles and false prophets and false teachers are the heretics alone, whose words and train of thought are distorted. Consequently, just as the one who receives the true apostles and prophets and teachers receives God, likewise the one who receives false apostles and false prophets and false teachers receives the devil. So the one who throws out the saints along with the cursed and impure heretics - mark my words! - manifestly condemns God along with the devil.

If, in that case, in racking our brains to come up with new terms in our own times we find those terms to have descended to this extreme evil, watch out lest we - whilst alleging and proclaiming 'peace' - be found to be struck ill with the apostasy which the divine Apostle said beforehand would accompany the coming of the Antichrist (2 Thess 2:3-4).

I have spoken this to you, my lords, without holding back.... With these things inscribed on the tablet of my heart, are you telling me to enter into fellowship with a church in which these [other] things are proclaimed, and to have communion with those who actually expel God and, I imagine, the devil with God? May God – who for my sake was made like me – sin excepted - never let this happen to me!¹⁰²

Then on April 19, 658,¹⁰³ in a letter written from exile in Perberis to Anastasius - his faithful disciple of forty years - Maximus recounts his interrogation by legates of the Constantinopolitan Patriarch Peter sent to persuade him to give in to Peter's own compromise Monotheletist/Monophysite formula. While up until this time it seems that subsequent Roman bishops at best stood only loosely by Pope Martin I's rejection of

C. Berthold, 'The Church as Mysterion: Diversity and Unity According to Maximus the Confessor', *Patristic and Byzantine Review* 6 (1987), 20.

¹⁰² *DB* (CCSG 39, 89.181 – 93.218).

¹⁰³ Following the dating proposed by Allen and Neil (CCSG 39), xvi-xvii.

Monothelism at the Lateran synod, the interrogators applied new pressure to Maximus by announcing that all five Patriarchates, including Rome, had become united under the compromise formula:

Of what Church are you? Byzantium? Rome? Antioch? Alexandria? Jerusalem? Look here - all have been united along with the regions under them! So if you belong to the catholic Church, be united, lest forging a novel and alien path by your way of life, you suffer what you least expect.¹⁰⁴

Faced with such dire circumstances Maximus is forced to offer in reply what is surely his narrowest, most precise ecclesiological definition (and not simply a description!) in which the catholic Church is specifically equated with the orthodox confession of faith:

The God of all, having blessed (μακαρίσας) Peter on account of the fact that he confessed him rightly, declared (ἀπεφήνατο) the right and saving confession of faith in him to constitute the catholic Church.¹⁰⁵

The interpretation one gives to this definition depends largely on whether one takes the verbs μακαρίσας and ἀπεφήνατο as sequential or simultaneous. Either way, Peter here is no less yet no more than the archetypal and paradigmatic confessor of true faith in Christ. It is *eo ipso* 'the right and saving confession of faith in Christ/God' that constitutes the Church in its catholicity. Not even the Councils stand above this rule, since, as Theodosius

¹⁰⁴ *Ep. Max.* (CCSG 39, 161.4-8).

¹⁰⁵ καθολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν, τὴν ὀρθὴν καὶ σωτήριον τῆς εἰς αὐτὸν πίστεως ὁμολογίαν, Πέτρον μακαρίσας ἐφ' οἷς αὐτὸν καλῶς ὡμολόγησεν, ὁ τῶν ὅλων εἶναι Θεὸς ἀπεφήνατο. See *Ep. Max.* (CCSG 39, 161.9-11).

at one point has to admit, 'it is as you say: the rightness of the dogmas judges the synods.'¹⁰⁶

In following an apparent digression we have not lost sight of our primary point. To separate this definitive principle of ecclesial existence from the fully-rounded (catholic) contours of its corporeal life would not be far removed from envisaging the life of the soul apart from its body. The universality of the Church's mediating vocation, constituted by its orthodox confession of faith in Christ, is properly inseparable from the specificity of its particular divinely-given orders, ranks, and sacramental worship. There are signs here of what Peter Brown has described primarily with reference to the Latin west as the localisation of the holy,¹⁰⁷ though in our case it is as much structural as it is spatial. Regarding the external criteria of the Church's catholicity, Maximus clearly accepts the headship of Peter among the Apostles, the pre-eminence of the Church of Rome on account of its living Petrine office, and communion with its bishop as an essential factor for the realisation of catholicity. He also accepts a temporal hierarchy in which Christ is mediated through the apostles and prophets and teachers (the Church's bishops),¹⁰⁸ and a local hierarchy of bishops, priests, deacons, monks and other lay orders, and initiates. There is no doubt that apart from its reference to the one Word and Spirit of God, such external specificity can only lend itself to diffusion and dissolution. As Blaise Pascal was to write in another era, 'La multitude qui ne se réduit pas à l'unité est confusion; l'unité qui ne dépend pas de la multitude est tyrannie.'¹⁰⁹ So we find Maximus invoking the Apostle Paul 'through whom the Holy Spirit condemns even angels who institute anything contrary to

¹⁰⁶ DB (CCSG 39, 97.261-262).

¹⁰⁷ *Cult of the Saints*, 86.

¹⁰⁸ Sherwood, *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life*, 75; also Pelikan, 'Council or Father or Scripture', 277-288.

¹⁰⁹ *Pensées sur la Religion et sur quelques autres sujets* (Club des Libraires de France, 1961), 370 [= Brunschvicg, 36].

the *kerigma*.¹¹⁰ Yet through the harmony created by right faith active in love, the Church's hierarchical *ordo* is the means by which each individual component in the whole structure is able to participate in its unique, unchanging centre (Κέντρον).¹¹¹ It is the means by which the whole Church with each of its members rightly confesses the true faith. It is the means by which God is manifest bodily on earth. And so it is the means also to true ecclesial communion and personal deification. In the inspired vision of Dionysius who himself coined the term, 'sacred order' (*hierarchia*) is seen to be a gift bestowed upon the Church by the divine goodness itself 'to ensure the salvation and deification of every rational and intelligent being.'¹¹²

Spiritual Topography and the Body of Christ

With our interest in the Church as the *locus deificandi* and our reference just now to the 'localisation of the holy', we are well-situated to undertake a closer investigation of Maximus' conception of τόπος and its relationship to somatic and ecclesiological concerns. In our study of *Ambiguum* 7 in chapter two we saw how Maximus speaks of the final state or position of the saved as being 'in God', their 'abode and foundation.' In the age to come, neither space nor time – both of which are created realities - are obliterated, but come to transcend their finite boundaries by their participation in the infinite God. 'Inspired by Gregory of Nyssa,' Blowers remarks, 'Maximus projects a zone of eternal sabbatical motion or 'moving rest' in which the features of spatio-temporal extension

¹¹⁰ *RM* (CCSG 39, 35.293-4).

¹¹¹ *Myst.* 1 (Sotiropoulos, 154.4).

¹¹² *De ecc.hier.* 1.4 (*Corpus Dionysiacum* II, 66.21 – 67.1).

[διόστημα] are gradually collapsed....¹¹³ In this section we shall seek to demonstrate how it is through his use of the term *topos* that Maximus extends this vision to the ecclesial sphere.

In the biblical, philosophical and patristic traditions, *topos* implies far more than the English words 'place' or 'space'. In the LXX *topos* translates the Hebrew *māqôm*, a term often used to evoke or designate a specific cultic locus at which people have been granted access to God's gracious presence. Thus Abraham prepares his son Isaac as a burnt offering at the 'place' indicated by the Lord (Gen 22:4), a mountain he eventually names, 'The Lord has seen' (Gen 22:14). Upon waking from his dream at Bethel ('house of God') Jacob exclaims, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven' (Gen 28:17). In Exodus 'the place of God' is the mountain of theophany and heavenly communion (Ex 24:9-11). The Jerusalem Temple is the 'place' where God has put his name and where alone Israel is to worship (Dt 12:5-9). After its destruction in 70 AD (cf. Jn 11:48), the early Church recognised Jesus himself – through his own name (Mt 18:20) and body (Jn 2:19-22) – to be their 'place.' Saint John underscores the eschatological and trinitarian character of this new sanctuary when, evoking the image of a bridegroom anticipating union with his bride, he records Jesus speaking of going to prepare a 'place' for his disciples in his Father's house (Jn 14:2-3; cf. 1 Clem 5.4-7).

In his brief study on *topos* in late Neoplatonism,¹¹⁴ Shmuel Sambursky has shown that such cultic and sacral inferences are not confined to the biblical sources. Remarking upon the effect of their tranquil, paradisiacal surrounds on their conversation Socrates tells

¹¹³ 'Realized Eschatology in Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 22', *SP* 32 (1997), 260. See also Plass, 'Transcendent Time in Maximus the Confessor', 263.

¹¹⁴ *The Concept of Place in Late Neoplatonism* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982).

Phaedrus, ‘this place seems to be a holy place.’¹¹⁵ In commenting on the episode of Jacob’s dream at Bethel, Philo gives three meanings for the term *topos*: it is the space (χώρα) filled up by a body, the divine *logos*, or God himself, since he encompasses all things but is not encompassed by anything.¹¹⁶ Later in the Neoplatonic tradition, writes Sambursky, ‘[t]he central conception ... was that the encompassed is supported by the encompassing, that secondary entities are always contained in primary ones and have their place in them.’¹¹⁷ *Topos* is that space filled up by body,¹¹⁸ yet ‘the forces acting in space do not merely encompass bodies, but totally penetrate them.’¹¹⁹

In Maximus these sources converge to reveal an understanding of *topos* that is at once deeply rooted in cosmology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. For a start we should be reminded that the Confessor always considers spatial extension *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is, from that eschatological perspective in which ‘God will be all in all’ (1 Cor 15:28). In other words, *topos* is ultimately equated with God himself since it refers to that space filled in the age to come by God’s own incarnate self-extension, the Church, a body he penetrates entirely. On the other hand, *topos* denotes a category inapplicable to God. He is not ‘somewhere’, but is beyond every ‘where.’¹²⁰ And yet since the psalmist knows God to be ‘a strong place’ (Ps 70:3), Maximus affirms – as an economic, teleological reality – that God will be the abode (μονή) and foundation (ἰδρυσις) of those being saved – their ‘place’ – ‘uncircumscribed, immeasurable and infinite’ – ‘becoming all to all’ (1 Cor 9:22; cf 1 Cor 15:28).¹²¹ Maximus cites as illustrative of this state the way the soul ‘manifests itself in the limbs of a body as a subjective power at work in each limb, and through itself holds the

¹¹⁵ *Phaedrus* 238c.

¹¹⁶ *De somniis* I. 61-63.

¹¹⁷ *The Concept of Place*, 16.

¹¹⁸ *The Concept of Place*, 25.

¹¹⁹ *The Concept of Place*, 16.

limbs united for life together towards being.¹²⁰ In *Ambiguum* 7 we came across the same idea in connection with his anti-Origenist argument that while the Sabbath rest remains a yet-to-be-realised reality, it is already anticipated in this life by the virtuous. When such a person comes to be ‘in God’,

he will no longer be moved away from his own place, since it is a state surrounded by stillness and calm. Hence God himself is the ‘place’ of all those deemed worthy of such blessedness, as it is written, *be my God and protection, a strong place to save me* (Ps 70:3).¹²³

Elsewhere we gain further indication that this anticipated bliss is already realised in this age as a simultaneously personal and *ecclesial* experience. Hinting at John 12:32 in the *Chapters on Theology and the Economy*, Maximus tells how, ‘when the Word of God is exalted in us through *praxis* and *theoria*, he draws (ἔλκει) all people to himself.’ ‘Therefore,’ he goes on,

let him who beholds divine things ascend with zeal, following the Word until he attains the ‘place’ where he is. For there he ‘draws’ him, as Ecclesiastes says: *he draws towards his place* (Ecc 1:5), clearly referring to those who follow him as the great high priest who leads them into the holy of holies where, as one of us (τὸ καθ’ ἡμῶς), he himself *entered on our behalf as a forerunner* (Heb 6:20).¹²⁴

¹²⁰ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 103.320-325); *Th.Oec.* 1.68.

¹²¹ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 105.328-330)

¹²² *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 105.333-336). Origen uses the same analogy with explicit reference to the relationship between the Logos and his body the Church (*Or.Cels.* 6.48).

¹²³ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1081A).

¹²⁴ *Th.Oec.* 2.32.

We may note how Maximus here weaves together the ‘drawing’ function of Christ’s priesthood on our behalf and the notion of ‘place’ as the final destiny of such movement. Later he designates this same ‘place’ as the ‘inheritance’ (κληρονομίαν) and ‘abode’ (μονήν) of those being saved, equating all three terms with ‘the pure kingdom of God’, ‘the goal of those being moved through longing for the ultimate object of desire.’¹²⁵ Yet it is especially in a brief passage from one of the *Quaestiones et Dubia*¹²⁶ that we see in continuity with Neoplatonic thought how *topos* indicates God as the ‘space’ filled by the body of Christ, which in turn is itself entirely penetrated by that space. The question seeks the meaning of the Pauline phrase, ‘the fullness (τὸ πλήρωμα) of him who is filled all in all’ (Eph 1:23). *Pleroma* is a pregnant word whose meaning ‘totality’, ‘content’, or ‘unity’ as distinct from multiplicity or partiality lends itself as a metaphorical¹²⁷ cosmo-spatial term to convey the ‘totality’ of divine life in Christ (Col 1:19; 2:9), and of christic life in the cosmic Church (Eph 3:19; 4:10).¹²⁸ For the Stoics it functioned as an anti-dualist term signifying the mutual compenetration of the divine soul and the whole material cosmos.¹²⁹ Here in Ephesians 1:23 it appears in immediate apposition to τὸ σῶμα of Christ and, indirectly, to the Church. Presumably it is the passive form (πληρουμένου) of the verb πληροῦν which poses the interpretative problem.¹³⁰ It is remarkable enough that the Church, as Christ’s body, is God’s ‘fullness’, but how can it be said that God *is filled* ‘all in all’?

¹²⁵ *Th.Oec.* 2.86.

¹²⁶ *QD* 173 (CCSG 10, 120.1-16).

¹²⁷ I use this word qualifiedly in the positive sense defended by Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

¹²⁸ See G. Dellings, ‘πλήρωμα’, in TDNT VI, 298-305. See also the excellent study by Pierre Benoit, ‘Body, Head and *Pleroma* in the Epistles of the Captivity’, in *idem.*, *Jesus and the Gospel*, volume 2, trans. Benet Weatherhead (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 51-92.

¹²⁹ Benoit, ‘Body, Head and *Pleroma*’, 83.

¹³⁰ Benoit notes that the passive sense rather than the middle is supported by philology and the Fathers (‘Body, Head and *Pleroma*’, 90).

Maximus' answer is divided into two parts. The first is an exercise in apophatic theology in which he excludes God from all definition or perception or participation by created beings. But then kataphatically speaking, that is, 'according to the providential procession, being participated in by many, he is also *filled* by them.' Every creature therefore, according to its *logos* in God, 'is said to be a member (μέλος) of God and to have a *place* in God.' At first glance it appears that Maximus is here speaking primarily of a cosmic rather than an ecclesial reality. But in what follows it becomes clear that the fulfilment of this participated cosmic reality occurs only in, or *as*, the body of Christ. Christ is the concrete meeting point at which the fullness of God and the totality of the new creation compenetrates, each filling and being filled by the other. For if, as he says, the creature moves in harmony with its *logos*, it will come to be 'in God, filling its own *place* and achieving its proper dignity as a useful member of the body of Christ.' The only alternative is non-being, or being 'no-where.' To borrow Perl's apt phrase, '[t]he world *is* only as the body of Christ.'¹³¹

In these passages we have witnessed a close correspondence in the spiritual topographies of the individual soul, the cosmos, and the Church. Maximus knows of no opposition between the individual, communal, and cosmic. As Ephraim the Syrian has it, 'He who celebrates alone in the heart of the wilderness / He is a great assembly.'¹³² The soul as microcosm *is* the Church, and the Church - as the *Lebensraum* of divine theophany, the fullness of Christ, the new creation - *is* the cosmos, or in Origen's words, κόσμος τοῦ κόσμου.¹³³ Yet while neither displaces the other, the Church occupies a kind of centre since

¹³¹ Perl, 'Methexis', 305.

¹³² Quoted by André Louf, *Teach us to Pray: Learning a Little About God*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (np: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 97.

¹³³ Or.*Joh.* 6.301 (SC 157, 360.9); Or.*Joh.* 6.304 (SC 157, 364.42-43): 'Let the Church, therefore, be said to be the cosmos when it is enlightened by the Saviour.' With Origen early Christianity apparently embraced the

it is the place where the new life of the soul begins and where the life of the cosmos reaches its goal. It is 'in the Church of God' that Christ the Word of the Father 'is proclaimed according to the pious faith, exalted by the life made virtuous through keeping the commandments, and manifested among the nations....'¹³⁴ The divine plan that each person – bearing in himself the extremities of the cosmos - attain his proper place 'in God' is in fact fulfilled by participation in the body of Christ, so that it can be said both collectively and individually that 'in us *the fullness* (τὸ πλήρωμα) of the Godhead dwells bodily *by grace*', just as 'in Christ the Word of the Father *all the fullness* (ὅλον τὸ πλήρωμα) of the Godhead dwells bodily *by essence*'.¹³⁵ Such correspondence and bodily (σωματικῶς) indwelling of the divine 'fullness' do not amount to the elimination of personal distinctions or the conflagration of all bodily particularity with the *hypostasis* of God the incarnate Word. Maximus insists on as much when in another striking passage from the *Chapters on Theology* he comments on the phrase, 'We [you] are the body of Christ and members of it each in particular' (1 Cor 12:27).¹³⁶ The thrust of the passage can be more fully appreciated when it is examined in the light of the paragraph preceding it,¹³⁷ with which it forms a precise structural and thematic parallel. There the scriptural text up for consideration is Saint Paul's similarly outstanding claim, 'we have the mind (νοῦν) of Christ' (1 Cor 2:16). According to Maximus, the saints receive this mind

not by a negation (οὐ κατὰ στέρησιν) of our own intellectual faculty, nor as a supplementary mind to ours, nor by its essential and hypostatic transferal into our mind,

theology of Second-Temple Jewish sources – especially Philo - in which the Temple was likened to the cosmos and the Temple service seen to ensure continuing cosmic stability. See further C.T.R. Hayward, *The Jewish Temple: a non-biblical sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 6-9, 108-141.

¹³⁴ *Q.Thal.* 63 (CCSG 22, 147.52-54).

¹³⁵ *Th.Oec.* 2.21. Cf. Col 2:9.

¹³⁶ *Th.Oec.* 2.84.

but by its illuminating the faculty of our mind through its own inherent quality and by its bringing (φέρων) our mind to the same activity.

The saints thereby are said to possess Christ's mind not by the elimination of their own mind or intellectual faculty but by the harmonious activity of Christ's mind and theirs brought about by an illuminating *qualification* of the activity of their mind by his.

In a similar way, participation in Christ's body by a multiplicity of bodies does not threaten the integrity and unity of his body, nor does it entail the elimination of the plurality of the various members' bodies. Rather it implies the purging from individual bodies of the divisive character they have accrued through sin:

We are said to be the body of Christ... not by a negation (οὐ κατὰ στέρησιν) of our own bodies in our becoming his body, nor again by his hypostatic transferal into us - or by his being sundered limb from limb, but - in the likeness of our Lord's flesh - by the repudiation from oneself of sin's corruption.¹³⁸

The same idea is expressed more subtly in the so-called 'nourishment texts'¹³⁹ which often contain strongly eucharistic and ecclesiological undercurrents.¹⁴⁰ In them Maximus basically shows how the divine Word adapts himself to become edible and thus participatable in a manner commensurate with the multi-dimensional levels of common human existence and individual spiritual capacity. In this way, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer

¹³⁷ *Th.Oec.* 2.83.

¹³⁸ *Th.Oec.* 2.84.

¹³⁹ Sherwood, *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life*, 80.

¹⁴⁰ *Th.Oec.* 1.100; 2.56, 66, 88; *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 34.128-134; 59.560 – 60.571); *Q.Thal.* 36 (CCSG 7, 243.1 – 245.47); *Amb.Io.* 48 (PG 91.1361A – 1365C).

perceived in another context, ‘the body of Jesus Christ takes up space on earth.’¹⁴¹ Commenting on Gregory Nazianzen’s paschal homily in which various bodily parts and organs of the paschal lamb are spoken of as being ‘consumed and distributed for spiritual digestion,’¹⁴² Maximus explains that by such eating the Lord ‘*transforms into himself* those who participate by the Spirit, initiating and repositioning each of them according to their state of bodily harmony into the place (τόπον) of the component which is spiritually consumed by that person....’¹⁴³ Thus spiritual eating – whether ethical, contemplative, or eucharistic - is actually a means of total, yet proportionate self-assimilation to a *place* in the body of the Word, a notion equally familiar to the mysticism of an Origen or a Gregory of Nyssa,¹⁴⁴ or to the eucharistic ecclesiology of a Cyril of Alexandria.

So far in our exposition of the Church’s spiritual topography we have postponed closer analysis of the *Mystagogia*, but in turning to it now shall attempt to demonstrate how it is only *through the Church*, insofar as it is the place of divine ‘fullness’, and specifically through its liturgy – ‘the sacred arrangement of the divine symbols’¹⁴⁵ - that God ultimately becomes ‘all in all.’ For while in his economic dispensation God is equally present to soul or cosmos, it is in the concrete, corporeal actions of the Church’s eucharistic synaxis that the grace of the Holy Spirit is present ‘most distinctively’ (ἰδιοτρόπως δὲ μάλιστα) to ‘transmute, transform and transfigure’ each one.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ ‘Der Leib Jesu Christi nimmt Raum ein auf Erden.’ Martin Kuske and Ilse Tödt (eds.), *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Nachfolge* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1994), 241.

¹⁴² *Greg.Naz.Or.* 45.16.

¹⁴³ *Amb.Io.* 48 (PG 91.1365BC).

¹⁴⁴ *Greg.Nyss.Or.cat.* 37.

¹⁴⁵ *Myst.* 24 (Sotiropoulos, 234.12).

¹⁴⁶ *Myst.* 24 (Sotiropoulos, 222.12-13).

Liturgical Metaphysics¹⁴⁷ and Ritual Action

Having devoted a whole section to an analysis of Maximus' ecclesiocentric use of the spatial term *topos*, we may now justifiably cite as instructive Robert Taft's remarks on *the sense of space* as characterised in the Byzantine liturgical tradition in general and in Justinian's great basilica, the Hagia Sophia, in particular. 'What was most new about this building, far more so than its startling architecture, was the *vision* created by its marvelous interior. ...'¹⁴⁸ Taft describes it as a vision of 'awesome splendour', one which 'led observers of every epoch to exclaim with remarkable consistency that here, indeed, was heaven on earth, the heavenly sanctuary, a second firmament, image of the cosmos, throne of the very glory of God.'¹⁴⁹ He adds the important observation that it was 'the space itself, not its decoration' which created this impression.¹⁵⁰

Perhaps on account of his almost certain participation in the synaxis of the capital's cathedral, and therefore his first-hand experience of this same dramatic sense of space, it may be said that Maximus, in a way not dissimilar to Dionysius,¹⁵¹ generally pays greater attention in his *Mystagogia* to the symbolic value of ritual *action* and movement rather than to the significance of particular sacramental objects.¹⁵² For him the Church's liturgy

¹⁴⁷ The term comes from Perl, 'Methexis', 311.

¹⁴⁸ Robert F. Taft, 'The Liturgy of the Great Church: An Initial Synthesis of Structure and Interpretation on the Eve of Iconoclasm', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 34-35 (1980-1981), 47.

¹⁴⁹ 'The Liturgy of the Great Church', 48.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁵¹ Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and Introduction to their Influence* (New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 116-117.

¹⁵² The Church building itself - as symbol of the cosmos, the whole human being (mind, soul, body), and the soul considered in itself - is perhaps the only exception. Otherwise the word *symbolon* in the *Mystagogia* is reserved for ritual *actions* such as the entrance, the chants, the readings, the closing of the doors, the kiss of peace, the confession of 'the symbol of faith', and the invocation of God the Father in the Lord's prayer. Precisely what we mean by the terms 'symbol', 'symbolic', and 'symbolism' and what Maximus intends by using the terms 'type and image' may be summed up in the following words: 'Along with the whole platonic tradition, Maximus sees in the image not so much the sign of an absent reality than the reality itself somehow rendered present by the sign. The image is in a certain manner that which it represents and, in turn, the thing

constitutes a progressive series of unfolding symbolic, theandric activities through which the hidden, eschatological union of the cosmos in and with God is manifested and realised in historic time. His experiences in the Great Church may also account for his uniqueness among Greek mystagogues in the particular symbolic prominence he accords to the church's architectural topography in the traditional two-fold division of the church building into two *topoi* – the nave (ναός), accessible to all the lay faithful, and the sanctuary (ἱερατεῖον), accessible exclusively to priests and deacons. This topography speaks for Maximus of the inherent unity and diversity of the Church, the human being, and the entire cosmos. While each remains a distinct space whose boundary is governed by the hierarchical orders and the kind of liturgical action performed in it, the church 'being by construction a single building... is one in its concrete reality (μία ἐστὶ κατὰ τὴν ὑπόστασιν) without being divided with its parts on account of their difference from one another.'¹⁵³

In going on to explain how it is that this fundamental unity of the church building as a single, particular reality (*hypostasis*) is not damaged by the difference admitted through its division into two distinct spaces, Maximus uses a term which we encountered in our analysis of *Ambiguum* 7 where he explains how the many *logoi* are in fact one *Logos* 'by means of the reference (τῆ ἀναφορᾷ) of all things to it, since it exists without confusion by virtue of itself.'¹⁵⁴ In our present context he writes:

signified exists in its sensible representation. This close relationship between the image and the reality it signifies forms the basis of St Maximus' sacramental and liturgical symbolism.' R. Bornert, 'Les commentaires byzantins de la divine liturgie du VII^e au XI^e siècle', *Archives de l'Orient chrétien* 9 (Paris, 1966), 113-114, quoted by Larchet, *La divinisation de l'homme*, 405 fn37.

¹⁵³ *Myst.* 2 (Sotiropoulos, 156.11-13).

¹⁵⁴ *Amb.Io.* 7 (PG 91.1077C).

by means of *the reference* [of the parts] to [the building's] unity, the church releases (ἀπολύουσα) these parts from their difference in name, reveals (δεικνύουσα) both to be identical with one another, and shows (ἀποφαίνουσα) one to be to the other reciprocally (κατ' ἐπαλλαγὴν) what each one is in itself: the nave, being sanctified as a priestly offering by *the reference* of the sacred rite to its destination (τῇ πρὸς τὸ πέρασ ἀναφορᾶ τῆς μυσταγωγίας ἱεουργούμενον), is the sanctuary in potential, and in turn the sanctuary, since it has the nave as the starting point (ἀρχήν) of its own sacred rite, is the nave in actuality. The church remains one and the same through both.¹⁵⁵

It is worth underscoring that Maximus is here speaking about a decidedly concrete, material object: the church as a *building*, and the actual rite of the synaxis which begins in the nave and proceeds to the sanctuary. The sanctuary, towards which the focus of the people in the nave is drawn and to which they finally come for communion, constitutes the final destination (τὸ πέρασ) of the whole rite. From the beginning of the service then, the nave is already the sanctuary in potential, since the progressive movement of 'the sacred rite' (μυσταγωγία) orients its lay occupants towards it.¹⁵⁶ But this rite which properly culminates in the sanctuary actually begins in the nave as the first processional entrance of the people with the bishop.¹⁵⁷

Maximus' meditations on the two-fold division of the church space are therefore bound to his observation of the way those different parts (μέρη) function in the ritual actions and movement of the liturgy. In no way does his insistence on their fundamental

¹⁵⁵ *Myst.* 2 (Sotiropoulos, 156.13-19).

¹⁵⁶ In *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), 162-169, Thomas F. Mathews argues on the basis of textual and archaeological evidence that in non-Syrian churches of this time there existed no visual barrier (such as a curtain or iconostasis screen) between the nave and sanctuary. The cloth-covered altar was apparently clearly visible to the lay participants throughout the rite.

¹⁵⁷ *Myst.* 8-9 (Sotiropoulos, 192.1 – 194.21).

unity imply that the division is arbitrary or dispensable. The two spaces in the church building are distinct elements in a single reality whose primary, final, subjective singularity is brought about by the ordered, reciprocal penetration of its parts and *their ritually determined orientation to their final state*. Suggested in Maximus' use of the Aristotelian term 'reference' is, in contrast to Dionysius, an eschatological perspective that views the different parts in terms of what they will become (and thus *are*) as a single subject.¹⁵⁸ It cannot be accidental that he finds this term especially applicable to a relationship centred upon and realised in association with the unfolding movement of the eucharistic synaxis, whose central prayer is also called the *anaphora*. It is chiefly by means of their ritually achieved 'reference' or *upward orientation* to the final unity realised through communion in the earthly-heavenly sanctuary that the distinct parts of the church building – and, by extension, the members who occupy those parts – compose a single hypostatic reality.¹⁵⁹

What we are emphasising is that the metaphysical 'reference' of the parts to their whole is seen to be *ritually* achieved. The ordered divisions of the church building and the two-tiered structure of the liturgy are presented by Maximus, at least in this instance, as the means of ritually effecting – *by disclosing* – the unity of 'another sort of church not made with human hands,' that is, the cosmos – likewise undivided with its division into intelligible and sensible reality. The 'reference' of the distinct parts to their indivisibly single, concrete, *hypostatic* reality – whether church building or cosmos – allows them to be seen at the same time as identical both to that single reality and to each other (ταυτὸν ἑαυτῷ τε καὶ ἀλλήλοις). The whole wholly fills all its parts, and in and through each

¹⁵⁸ According to Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary*, 122, Dionysius' *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* contains 'not a hint of such eschatological typology or correlation of the events of the liturgy with the future glory of heaven.'

¹⁵⁹ Maximus makes use of a parallel metaphor to depict the same reality. Scripture speaks of Christ as 'the head of the corner' (Ps 117:22). Thus 'corner', the union of two walls, is for Maximus the Church which joins

distinct part there is made manifest entire both the other part and the whole. Taking this section further not simply as a commentary on church architecture but as a demonstrative parable of ‘the holy Church of God’ as image of the cosmos, the Church’s fundamental unity can be seen to be an eschatological reality whose present, potential subjectivity is realised in hypostatic actuality via the inductive movement enacted in ‘the sacred rite.’

Maximus describes the same ritually achieved reality with even greater metaphysical precision in the first chapter of the *Mystagogia* when, in defining how the Church ‘bears the type and image of God’, he states that it shares ‘by imitation and type’ God’s activity by which he draws diverse beings together into unconfused union with one another in himself. Here again we find the term ‘reference’ playing a pivotal role. Its meaning is further elucidated by its being paired with *συνέλευσις* (gathering) and *ἔνωσις* (union), and by its association with the term *σχέσις* (relation). But before we examine the particulars, let us first view the chapter as a whole.

In the first half Maximus outlines the entire economy of God’s activity in creation as it can be summarised by the biblical and Neoplatonic formula that knows God to be ‘all in all (*πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν*).’ Having created all intelligible and sensible beings

God contains, gathers, circumscribes, and providentially binds them to himself and to one another. Maintaining around himself as cause, beginning and end all beings that are naturally set apart from one another, he makes them converge with one another by virtue of the singular power of their *relation* to him as beginning (*κατὰ μίαν τὴν πρὸς αὐτὸν ὡς ἀρχὴν σχέσεως δύναμιν ἀλλήλοις συννευκότεα ποιεῖ*).¹⁶⁰

Gentiles and Jews in one faith. It is a union of universals and particulars, of intelligible and sensible, of heaven and earth, of the Logos and creation. See *Q.Thal.* 48 (CCSG 7, 341.178-193); 53 (CCSG 7, 431.6-16).

It is this indissoluble 'relation' (σχέσις) that proves to be the critical factor in the simultaneous unity and identity of diverse beings with one another and with God. So much so that it is said by Maximus to

render impotent and obscure (καταργούσαν τε καὶ ἐπικαλύπτουσαν) all the particular relations (ἰδικὰς σχέσεις) considered according to each being's nature, not by dissolving or destroying them or making them cease to exist, but by overcoming and transcendently revealing them in the way of a whole with its parts.... For just as parts naturally come from the whole, so also do effects properly proceed and come to be recognised from their cause and suspend their particularity in a state of rest at which point, having acquired their *reference* to the cause (ἡνίκα τῆς πρὸς τὴν αἰτίαν ἀναφορᾶς περιληφθέντα), they are wholly qualified in accordance with the singular power of their *relation* (σχέσεως) to the cause.¹⁶¹

In the same way, as an image reflecting its archetype, the Church effects with human beings the very same activity God performs in creation. But the two activities – ecclesial and divine - are not simply parallels. They are *the same* – in that their effects are indistinguishable. Mirroring the vast diversity in creation, almost infinite is the multiplicity of men, women and children differing from one another by race and class, nationality and language, custom and age, opinions and skills, manners and habits, pursuits and studies, reputation, fortune, characteristics and connections. Yet distinct and different as they are, 'those who are brought into being in the Church (τῶν εἰς αὐτὴν γιγνομένων) are by her

¹⁶⁰ *Myst.* 1 (Sotiropoulos, 150.6-11).

¹⁶¹ *Myst.* 1 (Sotiropoulos, 150.16 – 152.2).

reborn and recreated in the Spirit.¹⁶² The language here is at once metaphysical and baptismal, since holy baptism is the primary means by which the Church as active subject brings about in these disparate people an existence which, from the perspective of fallen creation, appears as utterly new. It is in connection with this baptismal, ritual activity of the Church that we find Maximus once again using the terms ‘relation’ and ‘reference’:

The Church confers on and gives to all equally a single divine form and designation, namely, both to belong to Christ and to be named from him. And she confers on and gives to all in proportion to faith a simple, whole, and indivisible relation (σχέσιν) which, on account of the universal *reference* and *gathering* of all things into her, hides from recognition the existence of the many and innumerable differences among them (τὴν τὰς πολλὰς καὶ ἀμυθήτους περὶ ἕκαστον οὐσας διαφορὰς, οὐδ’ ὅτι κἄν εἰσι συγχωροῦσαν γνωρίζεσθαι, διὰ τὴν τῶν πάντων εἰς αὐτὴν καθολικὴν ἀναφορὰν καὶ συνέλευσιν).¹⁶³

‘Relation’ therefore, as the necessary result of the universal, eschatological ‘reference and gathering’ of all creation into the Church, and as a condition commensurate to faith, is brought about ritually through baptism. On account of it ‘no one at all is separated from what is common to him.’ Rather ‘all converge and join with one another by virtue of the one, simple, indivisible grace and power of faith, *for all*, he says, *had but one heart and soul* (Acts 4:32), since to be and to appear as one body of different members is actually worthy of Christ himself, our true head.’ This according to Maximus is none other than the fulfilment of the Apostle’s words in the great baptismal text of Galatians 3:28, and of

¹⁶² *Myst.* 1 (Sotiropoulos, 152. 16-17).

¹⁶³ *Myst.* 1 (Sotiropoulos, 152.17-21).

Colossians 3:11 in which Christ himself is said to be ‘all and in all (πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν).’ *To be one* is to be the Church, and to be the Church is to be Christ. Separation from this reality amounts to dissolution into non-being. The soul’s activity as a member of the body, the Church’s activity as the body of Christ, Christ’s activity as Saviour and head, and God the Trinity’s activity as creator are, at the level of effect, one and the same. Maximus predicates to God an activity among created beings of identical character and means to that of the Church: ‘he softens the differences surrounding them and creates an identity by their *reference* and *union* to himself (τῇ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ... ἀναφορᾷ τε καὶ ἐνώσει).’¹⁶⁴ The Church images God because the union of the faithful with God it effects *is* the union of the whole universe with God achieved by him without confusion.

To conclude this chapter, we may summarise our findings against the broader background of patristic ecclesiology. From very early on in the development of Christian thought there was expressed the intuition that the Church is somehow the very pinnacle of all creation, indeed, of the whole divine economy of creation and redemption. According to the Shepherd of Hermas she was created first before all things: it is for her sake that the world was created.¹⁶⁵ Earlier still in Second Clement the Church is said to precede all creation: she is ‘spiritual’ and ‘from above’ (ἄνωθεν). But in the last days she was made manifest in Christ’s flesh, itself a ‘type’ (ἀντίτυπος) of the spiritual.¹⁶⁶ For Origen too, the body of Jesus which was crucified and raised from the dead is considered to be a type of the Church, not the other way around.¹⁶⁷ And for his Alexandrian predecessor Clement, just as the cosmos is the fulfilment of God’s creative will, so the Church is the fulfilment of

¹⁶⁴ *Myst.* 1 (Sotiropoulos, 154.19-20).

¹⁶⁵ *Herm. Vir.* 2.4.1.

¹⁶⁶ *2 Clem.* 14.

¹⁶⁷ *Or. Job.* 10.228.

his universal saving plan.¹⁶⁸ In short the Church is, as it were, the final, ultimate created reality to which the cosmos and the flesh of Christ testify. She is

... the pure height,
Clear, lofty and fair;
Scripture named it Eden,
The summit of all blessings.¹⁶⁹

Alongside these convictions goes the understanding of the mutual interpenetration of God the Logos and his own incarnate body, and the identification by grace of this body with the Church and, ultimately, the cosmos. In Origen's words, 'just as a soul animates and moves the body which is unable to live or move by itself, so the Word, moving and activating the whole body as required, moves the Church and each of her members which do nothing apart from the Word.'¹⁷⁰

We have found Maximus at once faithful to these traditions and yet developing them by anchoring them firmly in the Church's actual hierarchical and liturgical structures. For him the Church is a kind of synthesis of all creation as it is summed up in the three laws of nature (cosmos), law (Scripture) and the Spirit (Christ). In them, he says, 'is encompassed the entire orderly arrangement (διάκοσμος) of the Church.'¹⁷¹ Through its thoroughly corporeal hierarchical, doctrinal, and liturgical constitution, it brings into being the new creation prefigured in the old. Or as it has been remarked, 'The body of Christ confers a redeemed significance on the cosmos and marks out a sacred space in which this

¹⁶⁸ Clem.*Paed.* 1.27.2.

¹⁶⁹ Ephraim the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise* 5.5, in Sebastian Brock (trans.), *The Harp of the Spirit: Eighteen Poems of Saint Ephrem* (np: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1983), 23.

¹⁷⁰ Or.*Cels.* 6.48 (SC 147, 300.17-21).

redemption is celebrated and effected.¹⁷² The ritually achieved, ecclesial union Maximus envisages between God and the soul/cosmos is nothing short of that future nuptial mystery heralded by Moses (Gen 2:23), marvelled at by Saint Paul (Eph 5:29-32), and unveiled in all its splendour in Saint John's Apocalypse (Rev 21:1-4). Drawing upon language familiar to the tradition of contemplative exegesis of Solomon's Song of Songs, Maximus calls it 'the blessed and most holy intercourse by virtue of which there is accomplished that awesome mystery of the union surpassing mind and reason, a mystery through which God becomes one flesh and one spirit with the Church, and thus with the soul, and the soul with God.'¹⁷³ Indeed, in the ritual expulsion of the catechumens and the closing of the doors in the liturgy is anticipated the future passing away of the material world, the perfect abolition of deceitful activity in the senses, and the entry of the worthy into the intelligible world, that is, into 'the bridal chamber of Christ.'¹⁷⁴ No wonder then that near the end of the *Mystagogia* Maximus follows both 'the blessed old man' and the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews (Heb 10:25) in exhorting his readers not to abandon the holy assembly at which the mysteries of their salvation are performatively demonstrated. There (ἐνταῦθα) through corporeal, sensible symbols – the ritual actions of the eucharistic liturgy culminating in holy communion - are exhibited proleptically 'the archetypal mysteries': gifts of the Holy Spirit in which the baptised in this life already participate διὰ τῆς ἐν πίστει χάριτος and in which they shall in the age to come participate 'in actual, concrete fact' (ἐνυποστάτως αὐτῷ τῷ πράγματι), that is, when they pass from 'grace by faith' to 'grace by sight'.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ *Q. Thal.* 64 (CCSG 22, 239.809-810).

¹⁷² Louth, 'The body in Western Catholic Christianity', 121.

¹⁷³ *Myst.* 5 (Sotiropoulos, 176.15-19).

¹⁷⁴ *Myst.* 15 (Sotiropoulos, 204.7).

¹⁷⁵ *Myst.* 24 (Sotiropoulos, 224.24 – 226.4).

CHAPTER FIVE

Corporeality and the Christian

*Frail creatures are we all! To be the best,
Is but the fewest faults to have:-
Look thou then to thyself, and leave the rest
To God, thy conscience, and the grave.¹*

‘What is a monk? ... A monk is toil. The monk toils at all he does. That is what a monk is.’² If any saying encapsulates Maximus’ vision of the practical aspect of monastic discipleship in which the Christian embodies participation with the one who ‘had to suffer,’ then this sentence from Abba John the Dwarf of the desert may well be it. Here in this final chapter all the relevant findings of our previous inquiries come together at the level of the concrete personal spiritual quest for perfection. Here we shall attempt to offer the most explicit answer to our original question: what happens to the body when it is deified?

From a purely biological perspective, individual human existence begins at conception and ends at death. Birth and death universally constitute the inescapable parameters within which the human struggle for existence is contrived. Like his spiritual predecessors, Maximus is a realist when it comes to recognising death as the inevitable terminus of our present bodily existence, and when he seeks to live out the ancient

¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Humility the Mother of Charity*, in Ernest Hartley Coleridge (ed.), *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 486.

² Quoted in Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (CS 59, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975), 93.

philosophical ideal of making this life a preparation for death.³ That means, among other things, not simply *thinking* about one's own mortality, but actually putting into present practice the impending separation between soul and body 'by cutting the soul off from worrying about bodily concerns' even before death comes.⁴

But the Platonic ideal of making this life a preparation for death is deepened and given even broader corporeal contours in the theology of the Christian Fathers. Maximus acknowledges with Saint Paul that through the waters of holy baptism the Christian has in fact already entered into the path that leads through the shadow of death. In this chapter we shall see how for Maximus baptism forms the connecting point by which the universally significant events of Christ's own birth, baptism, death, and resurrection in the flesh become applicable at the level of the individual and particular. And if the sacrament of baptism plunges the baptised into Christ's death, then it also establishes and pre-empts in them at a corporeal, historical level the pattern of Christ's resurrection. It is only by virtue of Christ's bodily resurrection that 'the material cosmos can follow the soul into the kingdom of heaven when it is translated into the world of God...'⁵ Ultimately baptism is made complete at the final day when our own bodies are raised from the dead.

We shall see too how Maximus views the purification wrought in baptism as encompassing both the moral and spiritual spheres. At one point he is asked to comment on the difference between being born 'of water and the Spirit' (Jn 3:5) and being baptised 'with the Holy Spirit and with fire' (Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16). When these two passages from the Gospels are placed alongside one another, he discerns a parallelism indicating the dual level, corporeal and spiritual, at which the Spirit is operative:

³ Plato *Phaedo* 81a; Greg.Naz.Or. 27.7, 15; *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 61.599-600).

⁴ *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 61.601-602).

⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*, trans. A.V. Littledale (London: SPCK, 1961), 210.

The Holy Spirit is active in each: as *water* he purifies the defilement of the flesh and as *the Spirit* cleanses the stain of the soul. And as *the Holy Spirit* he establishes as preliminary the way of the virtues and as *fire* makes a person God by grace, shining on him the divine characteristics of virtue.⁶

In this connection we shall witness Maximus' understanding that the faith given in baptism is a potential which must be willingly brought to actuality through the exercise of virtue. This activated faith is love, by which the believer re-created in the image of God comes perfectly to be likened to him. Only through love does the Christian possess *in toto* the concrete reality towards which faith impels him. Maximus' way of conceiving the relationship between faith and love leads us to discover the intrinsically social, ecclesial character of divine love, and thus perhaps to be able to answer the question raised by Georges Bernanos' priest when, speaking approvingly of 'old monks, wise, shrewd, unerring in judgement, and yet aglow with passionate insight, so very tender in their humanity', he immediately asks, 'What miracle enables these semi-lunatics, these prisoners of their own dreams, these sleepwalkers, apparently to enter more deeply each day into the pain of others?'⁷ Drawing on a pair of sayings from the wisdom tradition of Ecclesiasticus (6:14-15), the Confessor shows in a series of sentences what it takes to make a faithful friend (φίλος πίστος).⁸ All the effort expended in the acquisition of the virtues that renders a monk unperturbed in the midst of demonic attack and infinite distraction is intended to lead to his faithful participation in the sufferings of another. Present, suffering love for the godforsaken, the summit of all the corporeal works of asceticism, is the

⁶ *QD* 4 (CCSG 10, 4.5 – 5.2).

⁷ Georges Bernanos, *Diary of a Country Priest*, trans. Pamela Morris (London: Boriswood, 1937), 115.

touchstone by which true spiritual progress is tested and proved.⁹ Consequently deification is manifested bodily most poignantly under the form of suffering love. And only in the Church, among Christ's disciples, is this love to be found, 'for only they have the true love, the teacher of love.... Therefore the one who possesses love possesses God himself, since *God is love* (1 Jn 4:8).'¹⁰

These then in brief are the themes of our final chapter. Let us now examine them in closer detail.

Bodily Birth and Death

It is almost inevitable that in attempting to describe the place of the body in Maximus' theological vision we must eventually treat two items which heavily occupy contemporary body theologies, namely sex and death. At the heart of Maximus' five-fold division of created being lies the division between male and female, and not surprisingly it is here that Christ's renovative work of reconciling the various divisions in the universe must start. The recapitulation of the universe in Christ begins by his overcoming the fundamental division between the sexes, 'for in Christ Jesus', as we have found Maximus repeatedly pointing out, 'there is neither male nor female' (Gal 3:28). It forms the essential first stage of unification from which Christ ascends through the intermediate steps of reconciliation in proper order and rank, ending at last with the division between created and uncreated.¹¹

But why is it so, we may ask? Why is this particular bifurcation found to be so divisive? How did it arise? Moreover, how is it healed in the particular history of the

⁸ *Car.* 4.93-99.

⁹ Cf. *LA* 36 (CCSG 40, 81.698-700).

¹⁰ *Car.* 4.100.

incarnate Word, and thus in his incarnate life in the virtuous Christian, and what implications does that healing bear for the way in which redeemed women and men are to relate to one another? And what is its relation to marriage and virginity, to the 'natural' cycle of bodily birth, aging, suffering and death, and so to the deification of bodily beings whose concrete existence in this world is necessarily characterised by such 'marks of corruption'? What we offer here is hardly the 'detailed study' of this theme in Maximus called for by Verna Harrison over a decade ago,¹² but it will hopefully open up avenues for further reflection, research, and action.

We may begin attending to these questions by returning to examine more closely Maximus' understanding of the causes of humanity's fall and of the character and function of its gendered condition. It shall be emphasised that the problem presented by sexual differentiation in bodily human nature, a differentiation created by God, can only properly be understood within a context in which sexual reproduction is seen to carry a double significance: it provisionally ensures the overall continuation of the whole human species, but also perpetuates the cycle of individual human mortality. Thus sexual reproduction, whose condition is sexual differentiation, is an aspect of God's providential but at the same time punitive provision on account of human sin. According to Maximus, 'it is in bodily birth,' a *pathos* issuing from a deviant carnal pleasure, 'that the power of our condemnation resides.'¹³

Scholars have recognised Maximus' reception and development of a long tradition most characteristically expressed in Gregory of Nyssa's speculations regarding the

¹¹ *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91.1305BC; 1309A).

¹² Verna E.F. Harrison, 'Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology', *JTS NS* 41 (1990), 469, fn93.

¹³ *Amb.Io.* 42 (1348C).

essentially asexual character of the primal human being(s) made in the image of God.¹⁴ For Gregory, God adds gender to human beings *in preview* of their impending fall toward the material world. The Bishop of Nyssa's readiness - on the basis of the fact that the sacred text only mentions Adam and Eve's sexual intercourse *after* their expulsion from Paradise (Gen 4:1) - to link genital procreation with the curse of death resulting from sin, may at first blush appear to represent an almost Encratist view of marriage and sex. Only when we recognise it as the fruit of considered reflection on what is regarded as clear scriptural warrant for asserting the primacy of both virginity and the primal couple's eschatologically oriented, angelic mode of existence can we appreciate its subtlety and apologetic value.¹⁵ Marriage is for Gregory, as van Eijk and others have rightly argued, an 'ambiguous' reality whose positive value and purpose is contingent upon its proper ordering and use.¹⁶ While the soul, the ontological seat of human nature, is essentially asexual, it is according to Rowan Williams' astute analysis 'always implicated in contingent matter, and even its final liberation for pilgrimage into God depends... upon the deployment and integration of bodiliness and animality. That is to say, the ungenderedness of the soul is never the actual state of a real subject.'¹⁷

Maximus is clearly following in Gregory's footsteps when he views marital procreation, a function that depends on sexual differentiation for its existence, as a provisional gift added to human nature *on account of* Adam's sin. In one crucial and

¹⁴ Secondary commentators include Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 202; Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 373-376; Larchet, 'Ancestral Guilt according to St Maximus the Confessor', 27. On this aspect of Gregory's anthropology see Greg.Nyss.*Opif.* 16-18; Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 48-71; Harrison, 'Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology', 465-471.

¹⁵ Cf. Lk 20:35-36; 1 Cor 7:1-40. See the insightful article by Ton H.C. van Eijk in which he traces precisely these themes in the Greek philosophical and patristic traditions: 'Marriage and Virginity, Death and Immortality', in Fontaine and Kannengiesser, *Epektasis*, 209-235, esp. 230-234.

¹⁶ 'Marriage and Virginity', 231.

unambiguous phrase, Adam's transgression itself is identified as the instrumental cause by which marriage is introduced: ἡ δὲ παράβασις τῆς ἐντολῆς τὸν γάμον εἰσήγαγεν διὰ τὸ ἀνομῆσαι τὸν Ἀδάμ, τουτέστιν ἀθετῆσαι τὸν ἐκ θεοῦ δοθέντα αὐτῷ νόμον.¹⁸ Yet in citing this we would want immediately to add the observation that sexual differentiation, like the four other divisions detailed in *Ambiguum* 41 between created and uncreated, sensible and intelligible, earth and heaven, the inhabited world and paradise, only becomes a problem when, through ignorance of their fundamental connectedness, human beings fail to unite each aspect of these respective divisions within their own lives. This ignorance can properly be said to amount to a genuine 'failure' because by virtue of its *genesis* from God human nature possesses a natural capacity to unite the disparate parts of each division in itself.¹⁹ As the Confessor asserts in connection with the first division, that between created and uncreated, 'although God has created the radiant orderly arrangement of all beings in his goodness, what and how it came to be is not immediately apparent in it. [Thus] the saints call this division, which divides creation and God, ignorance.'²⁰ Conversely, the reunion or reconciliation of the divided entities by no means involves the elimination of their distinct characteristics, but, being a matter of τελεία γνώσις,²¹ involves the recognition of an overarching divine *logos* in whose universality even the most particular extremities are united without being reduced to a solitary metaphysical unit by their specific differences collapsing in confusion or dissolving into non-existence.

Thus I think it is fair to say that it is unlikely Maximus is referring specifically to sexual genitalia when he speaks here and there in somewhat circumlocutory fashion of τὰ

¹⁷ Rowan Williams, 'Macrina's Deathbed Revisited: Gregory of Nyssa on Mind and Passion', in Lionel R. Wickham and Caroline P. Bammel (eds.), *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy in Late Antiquity: Essays in Tribute to George Christopher Stead* (Leiden / NY / Köln: E.J. Brill, 1993), 244.

¹⁸ *QD* I, 3 (CCSG 10 138.4-6).

¹⁹ *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91.1308C; 1309D).

γνωρίσματα of Adam, explained further as ‘the characteristic features of those subject to generation and corruption,’²² even though certain occurrences certainly suggest a connection.²³ Whatever these distinguishing marks are in concrete, corporeal fact, they apparently function as the external indicators of the punishment (τὸ ἐπιτίμιον) residing in human flesh by which human beings receive their life through birth from seed and blood (like the plants and animals), keep their life through pain and toil, and eventually lose their life through corruption and death.²⁴ If they are not the genitalia themselves, then they are the characteristic marks of animal life generated by genital reproduction: birth, aging, suffering, and death. These things will indeed be done away with.

We have seen that in Maximus’ mind sexual differentiation, which ‘in no way depends on the primordial reason behind the divine purpose concerning human generation,’²⁵ is provisionally linked to Adam’s fall. Next we must ask how. Maximus implicitly locates the answer within his discussions on the complex relationship between pleasure (ἡδονή) and pain (ὀδύνη). While Christoph von Schönborn is surely right to highlight the remarkable ‘fraîcheur’ and ‘plausibilité culturelle’ Maximus’ analysis retains for our own contemporary situation,²⁶ the discussions themselves most often arise in connection with and, as Larchet notes, are ‘for the most part justified by the special conception of the modalities of the saving economy of Christ.’²⁷ In other words, what Maximus has to say on pleasure and pain does not arise out of any kind of personal

²⁰ *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91.1304D – 1305A).

²¹ *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91.1305D).

²² *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 87.60; 93.150-155).

²³ See *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 50.400-402); *Amb.Io.*41 (PG 91.1312A). It is likely Maximus would have been aware of Gregory Nazianzen’s reference (*Greg.Naz.Or.* 7.23 [SC 405, 240.22]) to all the divisions listed in Galatians 3:28 as τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς γνωρίσματα.

²⁴ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 93.148 – 95.164).

²⁵ *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91.1305C).

²⁶ Christoph von Schönborn, ‘Plaisir et Douleur dans L’Analyse de S. Maxime, d’après Les Quaestiones ad Thalassium’, in Heinzer and Schönborn, *Maximus Confessor, Actes du Symposium*, 274-275.

psychological angst any more than his position on sexual differentiation and marriage arises out of any kind of personal sexual phobia. Rather both arise out of an attempt to connect christology concretely to the Adamic state within a teleological view of perfection. The *locus classicus* for this topic is found at the beginning of *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 61:

When God created human nature, he did not create along with it sensual pleasure or sensual pain, but built into it a certain spiritual capacity for pleasure, according to which it would be able ineffably to enjoy him. But at the very moment he came into being, the first man surrendered this capacity – I mean the natural desire of the intellect for God – to the senses, and so according to this initial movement toward sensible objects by means of sense perception he experienced the kind of pleasure which is activated in a manner contrary to nature. To this pleasure the one who tends to our salvation providentially attached pain as a sort of assisting punitive power. By virtue of this power the law of death was wisely implanted in bodily nature, in this way putting a fence around the unnatural desire of the mind's madness – the desire which is moved towards sensible objects.²⁸

The law of death, operative in all human nature, is here seen to follow as the direct result of Adam's surrender to his sensual appetite.²⁹ But to this 'initial movement' away from God towards the experience of sensual pleasure, God has, in the interests of man's immediate correction and eventual restoration, attached pain, hardship and suffering, upon which follows death (cf. Gen 3:16-19). Such pain tempers man's appetite for unnatural

²⁷ Larchet, 'Ancestral Guilt according to St. Maximus the Confessor', 44.

²⁸ *Q. Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 85.8-21).

²⁹ Or as Thunberg summarises, 'Man's fall was due to bodily desire and search for sensual lust. That is Maximus' basic conviction, and it is confirmed through his definition of self-love as love for the body, which he considers to be the root of all sins and passions and the primitive sin which caused the fall.' *Microcosm and Mediator*, 377.

pleasure and limits its spread,³⁰ but remains powerless to negate it entirely. Fallen man henceforth ‘gains his generative origin from corruption through pleasure unto corruption through death.’³¹ In a poignant metaphor in which he exploits the ancient association of human mortality with a birth arising out of pleasure (Wis 7:1-2), Maximus calls pleasure ‘the mother of death’, for the sexual desire that leads to intercourse and conception gives birth to a life subject to pain and suffering and bordered by corruption and death.³² In fact ‘the more human nature strives to perpetuate its existence through birth, the more it binds itself to the law of sin, since its passibility³³ continues to activate transgression.’³⁴ ‘By his fear of death man remains enslaved to pleasure.’³⁵ Human existence between the extremities of pleasure and pain involves its members therefore in a torturous dialectic:

For while wanting to flee from the painful sensation associated with pain we seek refuge in pleasure, endeavouring to appease the nature that is hard pressed by the torment of pain. And striving through pleasure to dull the disturbances of pain, we fully confirm its *written charge against us* (Col 2:14) and are unable to have pleasure without pain and hardships.³⁶

Maximus has certainly put his finger on a universal existential affliction, something like that recognised in our own time by Bernanos when his country priest asks: ‘how is it we fail to realize that the mask of pleasure, stripped of all hypocrisy, is that of anguish?’³⁷

³⁰ Larchet (‘Ancestral Guilt according to St. Maximus the Confessor’, 35) wisely notes that Maximus ‘does not seem to ascribe an expansion to evil to the development of human nature [*per se*], but rather to the fact that men have, each one through choice and through his own sins, persevered in the way of evil opened by Adam.’

³¹ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 87.46-49).

³² *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 93.138-139).

³³ That is, its tendency to sin.

³⁴ *Q.Thal.* 21 (CCSG 7, 127.24-27).

³⁵ *Q.Thal.* 21 (CCSG 7, 131.70-71).

³⁶ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 89.92 – 91.100).

³⁷ *Diary of a Country Priest*, 136.

What is more, there seems no hope of disillusionment from this lie. By its very fallen existence human nature is ‘bound indissolubly in a treacherous bond.’³⁸ At the heart of this dialectic lies the disordered and thus ‘deliberative’ will (*gnome*) and the corrupted faculty of choice (*proairesis*) of each individual:

Having a deliberative will that shrinks from pain out of cowardice, man, who is thoroughly dominated by the fear of death, even against his will, in an effort to prolong life, stays locked in slavery to pleasure.³⁹

In a related passage cited earlier Maximus is prompted to comment on the well-known verse from Psalm 50: ‘I was conceived in iniquity and in sin did my mother pine for (ἐκίσσησε) me.’⁴⁰ He first affirms that birth involving marriage and corruption was not part of God’s original purpose (*skopos*). Marriage was introduced by Adam’s transgression, that is, ‘his disregard for the law given to him by God.’ At this point the Confessor makes an strikingly original distinction based on the literal meaning of the rare verb κισσάω, a *hapax* in LXX, in the sense used to describe the pleasurable pining of a pregnant woman for her child, and further suggested by the syntactic division of the verse into two clauses:

Consequently all those born from Adam are *conceived in iniquity*, thereby falling under the condemnation of the forefather. And the phrase *and in sin did my mother pine for me* indicates that Eve – the first mother of us all – *pined for sin* (ἐκίσσησε τὴν ἀμαρτίαν), in that she

³⁸ *Q.Thal.* 21 (CCSG 7, 127.23-24).

³⁹ *Q.Thal.* 21 (CCSG 7, 131.82-85).

⁴⁰ *QD* I, 3 (CCSG 10, 138.1 – 139.13).

desired sexual pleasure. This is why we also fall under the condemnation of our mother, and so say that we were craved for (κισσᾶσθαι) in sin.⁴¹

By its association with the unnatural desire for carnal pleasure, genital procreation is seen by Maximus to be the result of a fall from a more superior form of reproduction common to created intelligible beings.⁴² Yet having asked whether this does not imply that ‘the joining of man to woman is always something sinful’, Sherwood - rightly I believe - can supply a negative answer.⁴³ Marriage, since it has been instituted providentially by God, is not sinful. The law of nature that dictates the use of carnal pleasure as a necessary means of propagation is in itself ‘blameless’ (ἀνἀίτιος),⁴⁴ even though it is a law that amounts to the ‘bestializing’⁴⁵ of human nature so that in this act man resembles the irrational plants and animals. For Maximus as for Gregory of Nyssa, sexual instinct is ‘neutral’ and ‘acquires moral colouring only in relation to the goals and activity of mind.’⁴⁶

The trouble therefore is not with sexual intercourse itself, but with the fact that human existence is dependent upon a law that arose out of and perpetuates an unnatural desire for carnal pleasure, a desire whose ultimate root is ‘self-love’ (φιλαυτία). From as far back as Clement of Alexandria the tradition knew of self-love as ‘the cause of all sinning’ (πάντων ἁμαρτημάτων αἰτία).⁴⁷ Maximus defines it as ‘the first sin, the first progeny of the devil and the mother of the passions.’⁴⁸ Even more specifically it is ‘the

⁴¹ *QD I*, 3 (CCSG 10, 138.7 – 139.13).

⁴² See *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91.1309A) where Maximus mentions ‘another way, foreknown by God, for human beings to increase, if the first human being had kept the commandment and not cast himself down to an animal state by abusing his own proper powers.’

⁴³ *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life*, 67-70.

⁴⁴ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 87.33).

⁴⁵ Sherwood, *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life*, 68.

⁴⁶ Rowan Williams, ‘Macrina’s Deathbed Revisited’, 235.

⁴⁷ *Clem.Str.* 5.56.2. Cf. *Car.* 3.57.

⁴⁸ *Ep.* 2 (PG 91.397C).

passionate attachment to the body' (τὸ πρὸς τὸ σῶμα πάθος),⁴⁹ or 'the irrational love for the body' (ἡ τοῦ σώματος ἄλογος φιλία).⁵⁰ Self-love therefore is not only the fundamental egoistic orientation of fallen man, but his *bodily* egoism, his state of being *incurvatus in se*, whose form and focus is chiefly carnal. As Thunberg has demonstrated, self-love 'manifests itself *primarily* in an inner affection for bodily sensations and the sensible world. ...'⁵¹ Human beings generated under this regime nevertheless do not share in Adam's guilt so much as in its consequences, namely passibility (susceptibility to unnatural passionate attachments), corruption, and death.⁵² Notice that these are effects specifically brought about and experienced at a *bodily* level. They are what Maximus at one point calls the 'operations' of the evil powers 'embedded in the provisional law of nature.'⁵³

In studying this dialectic between pleasure and pain we are led to analyse more precisely the character of bodily birth, for in Maximus' mind the latter forms a kind of connecting point by which all human beings become united to Adam and heirs of the consequences of his fall. In this context 'bodily birth' entails much more than the simple passage of a mature foetus from the womb into the light of day. It is, to be sure, something that comes to fecundic completion in the pain of labour but, as seen above in the commentary on Psalm 50:7, is essentially constituted by conception. On the basis of the traditional double-creation doctrine, Maximus posits and plays upon a distinction we have

⁴⁹ *Car.* 2.8.

⁵⁰ *Car.* 2.59; also 3.8; 3.56-57.

⁵¹ *Microcosm and Mediator*, 244. For the whole of his outstanding analysis, see *Microcosm and Mediator*, 231-248. Also Irénée Hausherr, *Philautie: de la tendresse pour soi à la charité selon Maxime le Confesseur* (Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1952). One of the most important texts in Maximus on this theme is the lengthy prologue to the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* (CCSG 7, 17.1 – 43.432).

⁵² We may once again profitably cite Larchet ('Ancestral Guilt according to St. Maximus the Confessor', 35-36) in this connection: 'If all men necessarily suffer the effects of Adam's sin, they sin themselves (and are consequently guilty) not because they have inherited Adam's personal sin in their nature, but because they imitate Adam.... Such [a] conception has nonetheless to be expressed with many precautions, because the idea that sin is transmitted only by imitation was one of the first and main arguments of [the] Pelagians.'

⁵³ *Q.Thal.* 21 (CCSG 7, 129.45).

encountered in an earlier chapter between *genesis* (generation) and *genesis* (birth). *Genesis* is related to the creation of the soul and the gift of the divine image by insufflation at the moment of conception. *Genesis* is related to the formation of the body from already existing blood and semen, also at the moment of conception. The two events are simultaneous, with *genesis* being associated with the *logos* of birth and *genesis* being associated with the *tropos* of birth.⁵⁴ At the same time, each possesses its own integral *logos* and *tropos* corresponding to the ontological difference between the two entities: soul and body.⁵⁵

All this becomes particularly important when Maximus identifies *genesis*, the second in our scheme, as the precise *point* as it were by which human beings come to share concretely in ‘the likeness to the man of corruption.’⁵⁶ The law by which *genesis* comes to pass was a law established *before* Adam’s transgression, and thus was prior to sin. The law of *genesis*, however, was established ‘after the transgression as a result of judgement.’⁵⁷ It is by means of this second ‘ignoble’ (ἀτιμος) birth,⁵⁸ brought about as it is by the sensual passion invariably involved in sexual intercourse, that everyone who experiences it becomes necessarily subject to the passibility and corruption of human nature resulting from Adam’s transgression. Thus the initial order has been reversed. Out of sheer necessity man now receives his blameless *genesis* from ignoble *genesis*.

Let us now see how Maximus brings these distinctions together in a single passage. Once again it is significant that the discussion takes place in a christological context in which we find him using the Adam/Christ typology to explain the significance of Christ’s

⁵⁴ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1320A).

⁵⁵ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1321CD).

⁵⁶ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1316D).

⁵⁷ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1317A).

⁵⁸ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1317B).

‘stripping the principalities and powers’ (Col 2:15). It is through the lens supplied by the Word’s own incarnation as Christ that Maximus contemplates what is basically the presupposition of empirical human existence:

When without any change in himself the divine Word clothed himself with our nature and became a perfect human being... he brought the first Adam to light by the way in which he was generated and born. The first man, who received being from God and was made according to the same *genesis* of being, was free from corruption and sin, for they were not created along with him. But when he sinned by transgressing the commandment he condemned himself to a birth (*genesis*) contracted through passion and sin. Because of this all subsequent natural generation (*genesis*) is held in the passibility of sin, as in a kind of law. According to this law, no one is free from the effects of sin, since each of us is subject by nature to the law of being born, a law introduced alongside generation because of sin.⁵⁹

In this scheme human *genesis*, that is, human nature’s very coming into being from God, is governed by and coincides with a birth ‘contracted through passion and sin.’ Hence its ontological foundation, originating as it does in a morally questionable source, is unstable. Having preferred what is pleasant and manifest to the senses in place of the intelligible and as yet invisible good,

the first man abandoned this deifying and divine and incorporeal birth and was condemned as is appropriate to be subject to a bodily birth which is involuntary, material and perishable. God determined by worthy judgement that he who deliberately chose the inferior instead of the superior should exchange his free, impassible, autonomous and holy

⁵⁹ *Q.Thal.* 21 (CCSG 7, 127.5-18).

birth for one which is passible, servile, and subject to necessity like the irrational and unintelligent animals, and that he should swap the divine and ineffable honour with God for the life of dishonour on the same material level as the dumb beasts.⁶⁰

We have I think sufficiently captured the sense of the Adamic dilemma as Maximus portrays it. The law of being born from the union of male and female plunges its offspring into a downward spiral towards non-existence: ‘onward to darkness and to death we tend.’⁶¹ Human *genesis* moves inexorably ἐκ φθορᾶς καὶ εἰς φθορὰν - ‘taking its beginning from corruption and meeting its end in corruption.’⁶² Adam’s brief course on earth is marked by the constant vacillation between pleasure and pain, a vacillation itself engendered by his own somatocentric self-love and failure to love the good. But Adam is no distant figure of the shady past. He is, as Blowers aptly remarks, ‘a prototype of the monk in his or her ascetic struggles, and his humanity is an antitype of the *new* eschatological humanity of the Second Adam.’⁶³ It remains now for us to explore the redemptive flip-side to this equation.

Baptismal Rebirth and Spiritual Renovation

Having referred obliquely just now to baptism as the redemptive ‘flip-side’ to the cycle of birth and death propagated by sexual reproduction, we may go on to qualify our meaning by citing Maximus’ observation that by virtue of its immediate relation to the incarnation, baptism brings about ‘the annulment and dissolution of bodily birth’ (εἰς ἀθέτησιν καὶ

⁶⁰ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1348A).

⁶¹ Christopher Wordsworth.

⁶² *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 51.406).

⁶³ ‘Gentiles of the Soul’, 66.

λύσιν τῆς ἐκ σωμάτων γεννήσεως).⁶⁴ But what is the connection between the Incarnation, baptism, and the dissolution of bodily birth?

At one point at least the connection is suggested to him by a passage in Gregory Nazianzen's *Oration on Holy Baptism*,⁶⁵ preached in Constantinople on Epiphany - the feast commemorating the baptism of our Lord. In it Gregory says that 'the Word knows three births for us: one from the body, one by baptism, and one by resurrection.'⁶⁶ But when he goes on to explain these three births, Gregory apparently adds a fourth, or at least, he splits the first - the birth from the body - into two aspects: 'the initial and life-giving insufflation', and 'his incarnation.'⁶⁷

It is in dealing with this question of three or four births that Maximus provides some of his most remarkable reflections on the connection between Christ's own birth, Christian baptism, and the dissolution of bodily birth inherited from Adam.⁶⁸ The two aspects of the birth from the body represent to Maximus the dual nature of human birth, consisting as it does on the one hand in *genesis* - linked as we have seen with the divine insufflation as the creation of the soul in the image of God, and on the other hand in *genesis* - linked with the formation (*plasis*) of the body from already existing matter. These two aspects are in turn seen to constitute the two dimensions of the divine Word's becoming a human being through condescension (*sygkatabasis* - *genesis*) and self-emptying (*kenosis* - *genesis*). But since the Word's *genesis* springs not from the corruption inherently resulting from sexual union, but rather from a supernatural conception wrought without seed, the second part of his birth - the *genesis*, is transformed. In this way Christ becomes

⁶⁴ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1348C).

⁶⁵ *Greg.Naz.Or.* 40.

⁶⁶ *Greg.Naz.Or.* 40.2.

⁶⁷ *Greg.Naz.Or.* 40.2.

⁶⁸ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1316A - 1349B).

‘the new Adam’ who by ‘causing the second and dishonourable birth [*genesis*] to become salvific and restorative of the first and honourable [*genesis*], also established the first [*genesis*] as constitutive and preservative of the second [*genesis*].’⁶⁹

In ‘honouring bodily birth’⁷⁰ for us like this, the Word willingly suffered to be subject to the natural passions inseparable from this kind of birth. But he did so freely: without necessity, and without sin. So while in his *genesis* he received through insufflation the sinlessness natural to a created soul, he did not assume incorruptibility (τὸ ἄφθαρτον οὐ προσέλαβε). And while in his *genesis* he received the passibility natural to bodily birth as a result of judgement, he has not assumed its sinful aspect (τὸ ἁμαρτητικόν οὐ προσείληφε), that is, its tendency to sin.⁷¹ Thus he ‘powerfully healed both births’ – *genesis* and *genesis*:

On the one hand he made his *genesis* the means by which *genesis* is saved, paradoxically restoring by the passibility associated with it the incorruptibility of *genesis*. And moreover, on the other hand, he established his *genesis* as the means of preserving *genesis*, sanctifying its passible dimension by the sinlessness of *genesis*. His purpose was to recover *genesis* completely, confirming nature by the divinely perfect *logos* of his *genesis*, and to liberate completely the nature of *genesis* that had fallen by birth because of sin - by means of the fact that his *genesis* was not governed by the eruptive mode of seed, as is the case with all the rest who live on earth.⁷²

In the light of this train of thought, the constitutive place of Jesus’ conception and birth from a virgin, and their function in the redemptive task of reconciling male and

⁶⁹ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1317AB).

⁷⁰ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1320C).

female in Christ, becomes patently clear. In the body of the Virgin Mary is contracted a new mode of human generation and birth that restores fallen human generation and birth to its properly natural, created *logos*. Mary's *fiat* is the 'word of faith by which everything that is beyond nature and knowledge is naturally achieved.'⁷³ Since no sexual pleasure precedes the Lord's conception and birth, Maximus sees in the virgin birth the dissolution of those provisional laws of nature that from Adam's fall have bound humanity to a mode of generation contracted through sexual intercourse and thus 'from corruption, to corruption.'⁷⁴

For God's conception was entirely without seed, and his birth untouched by corruption. That is why even after the birth of the one born from her Mary remained a virgin, or rather throughout the birth remained unharmed – a paradox departing from every law and principle of nature. In fact through his birth, God – who deemed it worthy to be born in flesh taken from her – actually tightened the bonds of virginity in her, though she was a mother.... For it was absolutely essential for the creator of nature to correct that nature through himself by dissolving those primary laws of nature by means of which sin, through disobedience, had condemned human beings to receive their succession from one another in precisely the same way as the irrational animals.⁷⁵

Virginal birth, that is, the paradoxical coming into existence of a sinless and naturally passible human being whose natural orientation is toward being, well-being, and eternal well-being, has in Christ been constituted as the definitive and exclusive means by

⁷¹ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1317A).

⁷² *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1317BC).

⁷³ *Amb.Io.* 41 (PG 91.1313D).

⁷⁴ *Amb.Io.* 31 (PG 91.1276A).

⁷⁵ *Amb.Io.* 31 (PG 91.1276AB).

which man and the cosmos are to be redeemed and ‘the upper world filled.’⁷⁶ Here then lies the connection between the incarnation and Christian baptism. Baptism effects the dissolution of the ‘involuntary, material, and perishable’ birth of the body, and incorporates the subject into Christ’s own ‘deifying, divine, and incorporeal birth.’⁷⁷

He who is good and the lover of humankind willingly entered as a human being into our transgression, and voluntarily condemned himself along with us – he who alone is free and sinless. And consenting to be born by bodily birth, wherein lay the power of our condemnation, he mystically corrected it by the Spirit, and having loosed the bonds of bodily birth in himself on our behalf, *he has* through the birth of the Spirit and according to his will *given to those who believe in his name - to us – power to become the children of God* (Jn 1:12) instead of children of flesh and blood.⁷⁸

The Lord’s own bodily birth bestows on the baptised the birth that their fallen human state failed to provide – one brought about not by the carnal desire of a woman for a man (cf. Gen 3:16), but ‘the birth through baptism in the Spirit for my salvation and restoration by grace.’ Baptism brings about human nature’s ‘re-formation’ (ἀνάπλασις),⁷⁹ and thus provides the firm ontological foundation for the moral quest.

It is from this perspective that we can now return to the problem of sexual differentiation and the dialectic of pleasure and pain. By his bodily birth Christ restores to human nature that ‘other way’ for human beings to increase, thereby ‘expelling

⁷⁶ *Amb.Io.* 31 (PG 91.1276B – 1276D).

⁷⁷ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1348A).

⁷⁸ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1348C).

⁷⁹ *Amb.Io.* 42 (PG 91.1348D).

(ἐξωθούμενος) the difference and division of nature into male and female.⁸⁰ The existence of the baptised is thus governed and defined not by a principle of male and female, a principle marked by division and opposition, but by the principle of *anthropos*: simple human being.⁸¹ Yet as we have been eager to prove, the negative and provisional character of sexual differentiation seems to lie not in the fact of genital distinction *per se*, but in the physical necessity of receiving an ontologically unstable existence on account of carnal reproduction, and the egocentric sexual opposition – concretely experienced in the existential dialectic between pleasure and pain – such reproduction propagates. This reminds us of what we pointed out earlier, that the reconciliation or union between male and female does not require the abolition of physical distinctions but is primarily a matter of knowledge; it is a matter of *recognising* the single human nature common to all, male and female, and of practising the dispassionate relating to one another such recognition entails:

Whoever is perfect in love and has come to the summit of imperturbability knows no difference (οὐκ ἐπίσταται διαφορὰν) between what it is his own or what is another's, between believer or unbeliever, slave or free, or indeed between male or female. Rather, having risen above the tyranny of the passions and attending only to the one nature common to all people, he regards all people equally, and is equally disposed toward all. For there is in him *neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female, slave nor free, but Christ is all and is in all* (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11).⁸²

⁸⁰ *Amb.Io.41* (PG 91.1309A). Maximus uses both *διάφορα* (distinction) and *διαίρεσις* (division) in reference to sexual differentiation, and in this particular sentence speaks of τὴν κατὰ τὸ ἄρρεν καὶ θῆλυ διαφορὰν τε καὶ διαίρεσιν. Thus it is unclear to me how in this context at least we can maintain Thunberg's insistence that the two terms for Maximus signify 'two completely different concepts.' See *Microcosm and Mediator*, 57.

⁸¹ *Amb.Io. 41* (PG 91.1305D; 1309D - 1312A).

⁸² *Car. 2.30*.

Our comments so far may be illuminated further by examining a number of important passages in which Maximus likens the male/female dichotomy to that of the passions associated with the soul's so-called irascible and concupiscible faculties respectively. Aggression (θυμός) and desire (ἐπιθυμία) stand in an analogous relationship with male and female not least of all because, like sexual differentiation, they and the other passions 'were not originally created together with human nature, or else they would contribute to the definition of that nature.'⁸³ On this score Maximus explicitly defers to the authority of the Nyssene,⁸⁴ admitting with him that the passions were 'introduced on account of the fall from perfection, being attached to the more irrational part of human nature.'⁸⁵ In the carnally generated, these passions manifest themselves as a *penchant* for deviance.⁸⁶ Aggression typically destroys the exercise of reason, whereas desire 'sets up flesh as more desirable than spirit and renders the enjoyment of visible phenomena more delightful than the glory and brightness of intelligible realities.'⁸⁷ Again, there is no trouble with the actual faculties or the natural passions. The tendencies of the natural and blameless passions for which we are not responsible (οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν) - the passionate drives, the natural appetites and pleasures - in themselves these do not bring guilt upon those who experience them. They are a 'necessary consequence' (ἀναγκαῖον παρακολούθημα) of our created condition.⁸⁸ Indeed, they can even 'become good in the earnest - once they have wisely severed them from corporeal objects and used them to gain possession of heavenly things.'⁸⁹ But under the influence of the liability which Maximus dubs 'generic sin'

⁸³ *Q.Thal.* 1 (CCSG 7, 47.5-7).

⁸⁴ *Greg.Nyss.Virg.* 12.2 (SC 119, 398.1 - 410.70).

⁸⁵ *Q.Thal.* 1 (CCSG 7, 47.7-10).

⁸⁶ See *QD* 93 (CCSG 10, 72.1-10).

⁸⁷ *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 47.343-350).

⁸⁸ *Q.Thal.* 55 (CCSG 7, 487.123-127).

⁸⁹ *Q.Thal.* 1 (CCSG 7, 47.18-20).

(γενικὴ ἄμαρτία)⁹⁰ these natural passions have become the means by which the will, on account of nature's passibility, is impelled towards the corruption associated with the unnatural passions.⁹¹ Hence in the opposition between aggression and desire brought about by the disordered relation of the soul's faculties both to reason (above) and to the material world (below) the soul itself becomes involved in conflicting and contrary dispositions. This is fallen humanity's normal experience. This, like the dichotomy between male and female, is 'second nature.'⁹²

But just as baptism is the point at which the opposition between male and female is reconciled under the single *logos* of *anthropos*, so is it the means by which the distinct activities of the irascible and concupiscible faculties become subordinated to the hegemony of reason and so, under that single *logos*, function harmoniously without opposition. Elijah's successful advance toward God supplies an exemplary type of this at-once ascetic and sacramental self-configuration to Christ:

When he reached the point of having life, movement, and being in Christ, he put far from him the monstrous *genesis* from inequalities, no longer bearing in himself the contrary dispositions of these passions in the way of male and female, lest his reason, changed along with their unstable fluctuations, be enslaved to them.⁹³

With clear baptismal overtones, the rational soul, empowered with divine knowledge, is then said to discard the weaker *genesis* and replace it with the superior by guarding in itself its graced equality with God along with the concrete realisation (τὴν ὑπόστασιν) of the

⁹⁰ *Q.Thal.* 21 (CCSG 7, 127.30).

⁹¹ *Q.Thal.* 21 (CCSG 7, 127.30 – 129.35).

⁹² Blowers, 'Gentiles of the Soul', 69.

⁹³ *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 381-387).

gifts it has received. It is at the level of this concrete realisation that, in an expression echoing that most centripetal Maximian motif,

Christ wills always mystically to be born and to become incarnate through those being saved, thereby turning the soul that gives him birth into a virgin mother who, putting it concisely, is without the marks of nature subject to generation and corruption as in the relation of male and female.⁹⁴

It is no surprise that we recognise here also a theme dear to Gregory of Nyssa. In his treatise *On Virginity*, Gregory says:

What happened corporeally in the case of the immaculate Mary, when *the fullness of the godhead* (Col 2:9) shone forth in Christ through her virginity, takes place also in every soul when it gives birth to Christ spiritually, although the Lord no longer effects a bodily presence. For, Scripture says, *we know Christ no longer according to the flesh* (2 Cor 5:16), but, as the Gospel says somewhere (cf. Jn 14:23), he dwells with us and the Father along with him.⁹⁵

Each Christian, by virtue of baptism, is called to a new kind of procreation in which the soul as both virgin and mother gives birth to Christ 'spiritually' (κατὰ λόγον). For Maximus, we notice however, the Christ who is born of the virgin soul is made flesh in the fully corporeal practice of the virtues. While this is a vocation by no means exclusive to the physically virginal, physical celibacy more closely typifies and prophetically embodies the

⁹⁴ *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 397-402).

⁹⁵ *Greg.Nyss.Virg.* 2.2 (SC 119, 268.18-25).

pregnant virginity of the soul. What is achieved by baptism is not the elimination of a person's gender or sexual, bodily identity, but the dissolution of his or her subjection to a *genesis* 'from corruption, to corruption.' Baptism liberates nature not from its given bodily characteristics - though eventually these are 'overwhelmed by the transcendence of glory',⁹⁶ but from 'the symptomatic passions' (τὰ σημαντικὰ πάθη) – aggression and lust – that are indicative of carnal *genesis*, for these are passions which

do not belong to the life of Christ and the logic according to Christ - if that is we can believe him who said, *for in Christ Jesus there is no male or female* (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). By these words he clearly indicates the signs and passions (τὰ σημεῖα καὶ τὰ πάθη) of that nature subject to corruption and generation. Instead there is only a single deiform principle created by divine knowledge, and a single movement of will that chooses virtue alone.⁹⁷

Let us at this point now turn to see what particular aspects of the Incarnation Maximus envisages as overcoming the related dialectic of pleasure and pain. We recall that under Adam deviant physical pleasure is the means by which sin has fastened itself to the root of human nature.⁹⁸ In just response God has providentially and punitively attached pain (and with it, death) to pleasure to bring an end to nature and so limit the escalation of evil. Unlawful pleasure has its necessary end in lawful death,⁹⁹ for pleasure is, we remember, 'the mother of death.' Both pleasure and pain gain their actual, operative force through nature's corporeal passibility, so that in the hands of sin and death passibility functions as a

⁹⁶ *Th.Oec.* 2.88.

⁹⁷ *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 51.406-414).

⁹⁸ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 95.165-171).

⁹⁹ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 87.36 – 89.76).

weapon against nature.¹⁰⁰ Yet it is this very threat of death which again drives nature again to find solace in pleasure. In a kind of macabre, tragic twist, humanity is slave to a sorry plot.

Christ's own birth, life, and death bring about an almost exact symmetrical reversal of the above pattern. This reversal begins as we have seen with his birth from a virgin. Because his beginning does not issue from unlawful pleasure, sin and death cannot 'use' his natural passibility - a state he voluntarily assumes - as a 'weapon' to effect death. Instead the Word takes up passibility as his own weapon to be wielded for the removal of sin and death from nature.¹⁰¹ Just as Adam introduced to all humanity a source of generation issuing from pleasure and ending in death, so Christ by his birth introduces another, more original source of generation by the Holy Spirit, in which 'all those who are mystically regenerated from him by the Spirit' are liberated from the liabilities incurred through Adam's generation. These then 'no longer have Adam's pleasure of generation, but only the pain from Adam that effects death in them, yet not as a penalty for sin, but as a dispensation against sin....'¹⁰² Christ breaks the inevitable, destructive cycle of pleasure (birth) and pain (death) instigated by Adam by separating their relation as cause to effect through his virginal, impassible birth and his freely chosen death. With these words we are already anticipating a theme we shall address in the final section of this chapter. At this stage we should like simply to point out how it is a distinctly baptismal theme that arises from the dramatic reversal of the Adamic dispensation wrought through the life and death of the incarnate Word.

¹⁰⁰ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 89.90).

¹⁰¹ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 89.77 – 89.90).

¹⁰² *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 91.109 – 93.141).

The temptations of Jesus also feature centrally as salvifically-charged, redemptive moments whose significance chiefly lies in the way they undo Adam's surrender to diabolical seduction. In the incarnate Word's passibility, a corollary of his existence as a flesh and blood human being, there is presented to 'the principalities and powers' (Col 2:15) an apparently easy target for their deceitful schemes.¹⁰³ Their first wave of assault comes to the Lord in the wilderness through his experience of pleasure. Maximus does not indicate precisely what such pleasure involved, but it is likely he means the pleasure Christ enjoyed in living 'by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' The tempter tries to pervert this pleasure by tempting Christ to appease his carnal appetite. It is to this temptation, it seems, that Maximus has Christ proving 'impregnable and untouchable.'¹⁰⁴ Through this victory he 'brings the evil powers to nought'¹⁰⁵ and

presents to us all he corrected as good. For he himself was not prevented from experiencing temptations relating to pleasure.... But he summoned to himself the evil power present in our temptations that he might absorb the attack himself, putting to death the power that thought it could seize him as it had Adam at the beginning.¹⁰⁶

Having defeated the adversaries in his first experience of temptation, the Lord in his passion allows them to advance a second wave of attack in the form of pain and suffering. We are struck in the following explanation by the significance Maximus thrice

¹⁰³ *Q.Thal* 21 (CCSG 7, 129.45-52).

¹⁰⁴ *Q.Thal* 21 (CCSG 7, 129.55).

¹⁰⁵ *Q.Thal* 21 (CCSG 7, 131.70-72).

¹⁰⁶ *Q.Thal* 21 (CCSG 7, 129.56-62).

attributes to ‘the moment of his death’¹⁰⁷ at which point the public ‘stripping’ of the principalities and powers (Col 2:15) is definitively enacted:

He did this in order that, having completely destroyed in himself the corrupting arrow of their evil, he might, like a fire, consume it, completely abolishing it from nature, *stripping the principalities and powers* by his timely death on the cross, while remaining impregnable to sufferings, or rather showing himself formidable in death, detaching from nature the passibility of pain.... Hence on the one hand the Lord escaped from the principalities and powers by his first experience of temptation in the wilderness, healing in its entirety nature’s susceptibility to pleasure. And on the other hand, *he stripped them* at the moment of this death, similarly detaching from nature its susceptibility to pain. Out of his love for humankind he made nature’s correction, which is our responsibility, his own; or rather in his goodness he reckoned to us the record of his own good deeds.¹⁰⁸

The Lord’s escalating agony from Gethsemane to Golgotha not only fails to yield an opening for the demons to spawn their evil domination, but actually functions as ‘his means for consuming our culpable passions in his refining fire, the new Adam pioneering his eschatological humanity....’¹⁰⁹

Only in baptism is this grace-filled ‘opportunity’ (*kairos*) that the Word exploited in time to condemn sin in the flesh ‘in general’ (γενικῶς) made accessible at the level of the particular (ἰδικῶς).¹¹⁰ We are reminded that as long as we are in this body baptism is as much about death as it is about resurrection; or rather, baptism initiates bodily human

¹⁰⁷ κατὰ τὸν τοῦ θανάτου καιρὸν (*Q.Thal.* 21 [CCSG 7, 131.79]); κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τοῦ θανάτου (*Q.Thal.* 21 [CCSG 7, 131.89-90]); ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τοῦ θανάτου (*Q.Thal.* 21 [CCSG 7, 131.96]).

¹⁰⁸ *Q.Thal.* 21 (CCSG 7, 131.76-93).

¹⁰⁹ Blowers, ‘The Passion of Jesus Christ in Maximus the Confessor’, 371.

¹¹⁰ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 99.236-241).

beings into a divine mode of life whose corporeal contours are experienced primarily under the form of suffering, hardship, trial and death. But just as the experience of Adamic pleasure is the mother of death, so is this experience of baptismal suffering and death, which is actually nothing else than real participation in the death of the Lord and anticipation of his resurrection, ‘the father of everlasting life.’¹¹¹

Faith, Love and the Use of the Passions

At this point we temporarily suspend discussion on baptismal participation in the death of Christ until our final section. In the intervening comments however in which we examine the relation between faith, love, and the use of the passions, our focus on baptism and the bodily dimensions of the deified life will be no less pronounced.

We may start by citing Sherwood who declares that the benefits bestowed in baptism, summarised by Larchet as purification, illumination, and filial, deifying adoption,¹¹² possess in Maximus’ view a provisional, conditional character.¹¹³ Baptism grants adoption as a potentiality - a ‘seed’ (σπέρμα); its concrete fertilisation and flowering depend on the will and actions of the believing subject.¹¹⁴ Restored freewill (*proairesis*) acts as ‘the guardian and keeper of adoption, the gracious divine birth given from above by the Spirit’, and which ‘by the careful observance of the commandments adorns the beauty given by grace.’¹¹⁵ Insofar as we remain subject to the passions, ‘we have not perfectly attained forgiveness of sins. For we were freed through holy baptism from ancestral sin;

¹¹¹ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 93.137-141).

¹¹² *La divinisation de l’homme selon Saint Maxime le Confesseur*, 415-417.

¹¹³ Sherwood, *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life*, 78.

¹¹⁴ *Q.Thal.* 6 (CCSG 7, 69.1 – 71.51).

¹¹⁵ *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 32.97-102).

but from the sin we had the effrontery to commit after baptism we are freed through repentance.¹¹⁶ In Maximus' theology this relationship between the potential and actual, between the reception of baptismal grace and the keeping of the commands, corresponds to the relationship between faith and love. It is therefore our purpose in this section to tease out further the implications of this relationship for the bodily life and for the re-orientation and right use of the natural passions.

In classical philosophy *pistis* represents a vastly inferior means of knowing. According to E.R. Dodds, '[t]o any one brought up on classical Greek philosophy, *pistis* meant the lowest grade of cognition: it was the state of mind of the uneducated, who believe things on hearsay without being able to give reasons for their belief.'¹¹⁷ That was the early picture. But as Dodds goes on to point out, from the time of Porphyry on in Neoplatonic circles, *pistis* became 'a basic requirement, ... the first condition of the soul's approach to God.'¹¹⁸ We have already seen in this study also that for Maximus as for other Christian thinkers, *pistis* constitutes a direct form of knowledge superior even to that of the intellect. Indeed, it is a divinely-bestowed way of knowing that is 'beyond mind.' Directly echoing Hebrews 11:1 Maximus says, 'Faith alone embraces the [divine] mysteries since it is the concrete realisation (ὑπόστασις) of things beyond mind and reason.'¹¹⁹ Faith 'induces the mind to accede to God (πείθει τῷ Θεῷ προσχωρεῖν τὸν νοῦν).'¹²⁰ Elsewhere Maximus equates faith with Christ: 'The word of faith (Rom 10:8) that we seek is Christ himself.'¹²¹ He is ἡ ἐνυπόστατος πίστις: in him we see in concrete actuality what faith

¹¹⁶ *LA* 44 (CCSG 40, 119.1013-1017).

¹¹⁷ *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, 121.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹¹⁹ *Cap. XV* (PG 90.1184CD). See also *Th.Oec.* 1.9.

¹²⁰ *Q.Thal.* 49 (CCSG 7, 351.28).

¹²¹ *Th.Oec.* 2.35.

really is.¹²² At the same time faith is also ‘the first premise in matters of religion, assuring the one with it of the existence of God and of divine realities, and that much more surely than the eye that, by looking on the appearances of sensible things, forms an opinion (δόξαν) about them for those who see.’¹²³ In other words, while faith grants union with God in all its consummative fullness, it is also the first step on the way to such a union.

But while Maximus accords remarkable status and power to ‘faith alone’ (πίστις μόνη), he is equally adamant that ‘mere faith’ - ἡ ψιλὴ πίστις - is inadequate for salvation:

*Do not say, says divine Jeremiah, that you are the Lord’s temple (Jer 7:4). Nor then ought you to say, ‘mere faith in our Lord Jesus Christ can save me.’ For this is impossible unless you acquire love for him through works. For in what concerns mere believing, even the demons believe and tremble (Jam 2:19).*¹²⁴

Again in the words of the monastic master he speaks largely to the same effect, though adds some detail as to what right believing might entail:

Now perhaps someone will say, ‘I have faith, and faith in him is enough for salvation.’ But James contradicts him, saying *even the demons believe and tremble (Jam 2:19)*, and again, *faith by itself without works is dead (Jam 2:26)*, as are works without faith.¹²⁵ In what manner then do we believe in him? Is it that we believe him about future things, but about transient and present things do not believe him, and are therefore immersed in material things, living by the flesh and warring against the Spirit? But those who truly believed Christ and, through the commandments, made him to dwell wholly within themselves spoke in this way: *I live,*

¹²² *Q.Thal.* 25 (CCSG 7, 159.30-31).

¹²³ *Ep.* 2 (PG 91.393CD).

¹²⁴ *Car.* 1.39; cf. 1.31.

yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life I live now in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:20). That is why they suffered for his sake for the salvation of all... By their words and deeds Christ, who works in them, was made manifest.¹²⁶

This distinction between *fides nuda* or faith ‘by itself’ (καθ’ ἑαυτήν), and what Maximus’ later scholiasts would call *fides subsistens* or ἡ ἐνυπόστατος πίστις,¹²⁷ may be illumined further by returning to a passage we discussed in an earlier chapter in which we examined the distinction Maximus draws between image and likeness. There we saw that Maximus envisages two ways of being born from God, or at least speaks of the one birth from God under two aspects. In the first God gives the whole grace of adoption, but only as a *potentiality* (δυνάμει). In the second this same *virtual* grace of adoption becomes an *actuality* (κατ’ ἐνέργειαν). The first mode of birth grants grace ‘potentially present as faith alone.’ The second ‘brings about in addition to faith the most divine likening’ to God.¹²⁸

The all-important and necessary addition of actual likening to God turns upon the subjective orientation of the human will, or, if you will, upon the exercise of faith. As long as the human will is bound up in carnal attachments, as long as it retains even an occasional inclination to sin, grace remains unrealised at the level of potentiality, ‘for the Holy Spirit does not give birth to an unwilling will (γνώμην μὴ θέλουσαν), but reshapes a willing will to bring it to deification.’¹²⁹ This ‘willing will’ (γνώμην βουλομένην) is the product of an often long and arduous journey through ascetic practice in which the Christian learns in imitation of Christ to subject himself to the reformatory work of the Spirit. Maximus’

¹²⁵ The addition ‘as are works without faith’ may come from Greg.Naz.Or. 40.45.

¹²⁶ LA 34 (CCSG 40, 73.639 – 77.660).

¹²⁷ See *Scholium* 3, *Q.Thal.* 25 (CCSG 7, 167.8-11).

¹²⁸ *Q.Thal.* 6 (CCSG 7, 69.8-16).

conclusion reinforces the distinction between ‘faith alone’ and that fully-adorned faith by which grace has been realised in its total actuality:

Hence we may possess the Spirit of adoption, which is the seed intended to endue the begotten with the likeness of him who sowed it, but [at the same time] not possess alongside it a will that has been purified from deviating towards other things. This is why – even *after* the birth from water and the Spirit – we willingly sin. But if through knowledge we were to equip the will to receive the *activity* of water and the Spirit, then through ascetic struggle the mystical water would continually cleanse the conscience, and the life-giving Spirit would effect the immutable perfecting of the good in us through experiential knowledge. Therefore it most assuredly remains for each of us, who are still able to sin, to will purely in accordance with our will to surrender our whole lives to the Spirit.¹³⁰

We find a similar kind of distinction being made again in *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 33, although this time the actuality/potentiality distinction is coupled with an inner/outer, invisible/visible distinction. Here Maximus identifies the kingdom of God, said by Jesus to be ‘within you’ (Lk 17:21), with faith. But the ‘within you’ suggests to the Confessor an important conceptual distinction. Strictly conceived, faith is the ‘invisible kingdom of God’, whereas the kingdom of God is ‘faith divinely endued with visible form.’ Faith only becomes visible and ‘external to us’ when it is activated through works, that is, through the

¹²⁹ *Q.Thal* 6 (CCSG 7, 69.21-23).

¹³⁰ *Q.Thal* 6 (CCSG 7, 71.38-51).

keeping of the ten commandments.¹³¹ Until then it remains an invisible, latent, virtual reality.¹³² This leads Maximus to conclude:

Now if the kingdom of God is this activated faith (ἐνεργουμένη πίστις), and the kingdom of God creates the immediate union of the rulers of that kingdom with God, then faith has been shown clearly to be the relational potential for or the effectual condition of (δύναμις σχετική ἢ σχέσις δραστική) that perfect, immediate, supernatural union that the believer has with God in whom he trusts.¹³³

There is yet another passage that deserves consultation since it serves to connect what we have been saying about ‘mere’ or virtual faith to Maximus’ understanding of faith’s relation to love and the concrete shape the transition from possessing potential grace to possessing actual grace takes in the Christian life. Commenting on Zorubbabel’s song of praise facing Jerusalem in 1 Esdras 4:58-60, Maximus turns for further elucidation to the prophecy in Zechariah 4:7-10 concerning Zorubbabel’s work of restoring the Temple after Israel’s Babylonian exile. Having identified Zorubbabel as ‘our Lord and God Jesus Christ’, Maximus goes on to uncover the multiple layers of application – both christological and ascetico-practical – imbedded in the various features of the prophecy:

The *stone* (Zech 4:7) is faith in him [Christ]. And it is *in the hand*, because Christ’s faith manifests itself by the practice of the commandments. For *faith without works is dead* (Jam 2:26), as are works without faith. The hand is clearly the symbol for ascetic practice.

¹³¹ *Q.Thal.* 33 (CCSG 7, 229.12-19).

¹³² One of the later *scholia* on this passage confirms the identification of this virtual faith / invisible kingdom with what Maximus calls ἡ ψιλὴ πίστις, ‘since it does not possess the divine likeness that comes from the virtues.’ See *Scholium* 1 to *Q.Thal.* 33 (CCSG 7, 231.1-4).

¹³³ *Q.Thal.* 33 (CCSG 7, 229.19-25).

Consequently by carrying the stone in his hand the Lord teaches us by example to have active faith in him adorned with *the seven eyes of the Lord* (Zech 4:10), that is, with the seven activities of the Holy Spirit.¹³⁴

It is important to note the connection Maximus makes here between the ‘works’ of faith and the seven ‘activities’ (ἐνέργειαι) of the Spirit. Without them as ‘eyes’, faith remains blind and inoperative. The seven activities, which Maximus identifies in order as fear, strength, counsel, understanding, knowledge, intelligence, and wisdom (cf. Is 11:2), are not seven different actions of the one Spirit, but are the graduated, varying effects produced by the Spirit’s one, uniform divine activity in the life of the believer. There is in reality no intrinsic difference between the seven activities. Their apparent differences rather reflect the developing faith and growing state of receptivity of the believing subject, whose ‘works’ actualise, embody and externalise the hidden, latent faith within him. They are the effects produced by his increasing voluntary activation - in co-operation with the singular work of the Spirit - of the virtual faith planted in him through baptism.

All this has been pointed out extensively in a pair of early and little-known articles on this passage by Carmelite Joseph a Spiritu Sancto.¹³⁵ In them he artfully spells out the precise relationship between faith and the seven ἐνέργειαι of the Spirit, which he calls ‘the effects of the Holy Ghost’s continuous operation upon the soul... the vibrations of the strings of the soul at the touch of the Holy Ghost.’¹³⁶ Each effect represents a progressively more advanced stage of spiritual maturity, and is related to faith in terms of the soul’s increasing detachment from created things and its subsequent voluntary actuation of faith

¹³⁴ *Q. Thal.* 54 (CCSG 7, 461.300-308).

¹³⁵ Joseph a Spiritu Sancto, ‘The Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost in Early Greek Theology’, *The Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 26.8 (May, 1926), 820-827 and 26.9 (June, 1926), 930-938.

¹³⁶ ‘The Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost’, 822.

through works of virtue. The first effect of faith is fear – fear of God’s threats and punishments, a fear that compels the believer to exert himself to avoid sin. And, since the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7), at the very pinnacle of faith’s effects is wisdom. Wisdom is simply fully-actuated faith, and therefore equates to a union with God ‘beyond mind.’¹³⁷ Wisdom is where faith leads to and serves as a sign of its complete adornment with virtue. Only as wisdom does faith eventually *become* what it in fact *is*:

Ascending via these ‘eyes’ or, as it were, illuminations of faith therefore, we are drawn together into the divine monad of wisdom. By our gradual ascent through the different virtues we reconcile the differences between the gifts – differences that occurred for our sake – uniting them with their very origin.¹³⁸

If we call these works of faith the *charismatic* virtues, recognising them simultaneously both as the effects of the Spirit’s one divine operation upon the soul and as the good works manifesting the soul’s voluntary actualisation of baptismal faith, what can we say about the relationship between faith and the two remaining theological virtues, hope and love?

One of Maximus’ most lucid reflections regarding the relationship between the three theological virtues is undoubtedly in his letter on love to John the Cubicularius, the Constantinopolitan courtier. ‘Nothing’, Maximus is convinced, ‘is more truly Godlike than divine love, nothing more mysterious, nothing more apt to raise up human beings to deification.’¹³⁹ But ‘divine love’ as far as he is concerned is not exclusively a divine act toward man. While its source and power are truly divine, it is a fully theandric reality; or

¹³⁷ ‘The Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost’, 933.

¹³⁸ *Q.Thal.* 54 (CCSG 7, 463.347-351).

rather, the love the Christian has for God and his neighbour is none other than God's own love: they are 'one and the same and universal.'¹⁴⁰ In 'suffering' it the human soul becomes an active agent of its all-embracing, deifying force. Whereas faith and hope are directed towards the attainment of the good as means to an end, and thus have a limited function, love possesses the good *toute entière*.¹⁴¹ Love is the supreme union in which faith and hope find their true goal:

For faith is the foundation of everything that comes after it, I mean hope and love, and firmly establishes what is true. Hope is the strength of the extremes, I mean faith and love.... But love is the fulfilment of these, wholly embracing the whole of the final object of desire, giving them rest from their movement towards it – from believing something to be and hoping that something will be – and bringing instead, by means of itself, the enjoyment of what is present.¹⁴²

At the heart of love - and this is why bare faith without works is 'dead' - is the incarnation of the Word. Love is the actuated, embodied fullness of what faith tends towards; it is the outward adornment of faith, for in love, 'the most generic' of all the virtues,¹⁴³ God is incarnate and man is deified:

For it is the most perfect work of love and the summit of its activity to make the properties and names of the things united to it fit each other by means of a reciprocal exchange. So the human being is made God and God is called and appears as human.... Love is

¹³⁹ *Ep.* 2 (PG 91.393B).

¹⁴⁰ *Ep.* 2 (PG 91.401D).

¹⁴¹ *Ep.* 2 (PG 91.405B).

¹⁴² *Ep.* 2 (PG 91.396BC). Cf. *Car.* 3.100.

¹⁴³ *Amb.Lo.* 21 (PG 91.1249B).

therefore a great good, and of goods the first and most excellent good, since through it God and men are drawn together in the one who has love, and the creator of humankind appears as human through the undeviating likeness of the deified to God in the good so far as is possible to humankind.¹⁴⁴

Good works, consequently, on account of their being the faithful embodiment of divine love, and without any hint of objectifying what some Reformers much later reacted to as ‘works-righteousness’, can be said to ‘draw down the mercy of God.’¹⁴⁵ Good works are nothing other than God’s mercy at work in the flesh. As such they actually function as a means of grace both for those who perform them and for those to whom they are directed. Indeed as Maximus has it, ‘the Lord’s mercy is hidden in the mercy we show to our neighbour’ (τὸ ἔλεος τοῦ κυρίου ἐν τῇ ἐλεημοσύνῃ τοῦ πλησίον ἐγκέκρυπται),¹⁴⁶ meaning not simply that God has mercy on others through our having mercy on them, but that through our having mercy on others God has mercy on us! The relation between the two is not one of cause and effect: God does not have mercy on us just *because* we have mercy on others. It is rather one of *identification*: our acts of mercy *are* our experience of divine mercy. Through them we become paradigms of and for God: flesh and blood examples according to which we actually call on God to act when we pray, ‘forgive, as we forgive....’¹⁴⁷ Love for God and love for neighbour, the sum total of all the commandments, are therefore simply two aspects of the singular subjective experience of the universal divine love in one’s own particular, bodily existence.

¹⁴⁴ *Ep.* 2 (PG 91.401BC).

¹⁴⁵ *Ep.* 2 (PG 91.408A).

¹⁴⁶ *LA* 42 (CCSG 40, 115.973-974).

¹⁴⁷ *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 64.651-656): καὶ τῷ θεῷ καθίστησιν ἑαυτὸν ἀρετῆς ἐξemplάριον, εἰ τοῦτο θέμις εἰπεῖν, πρὸς μίμησιν ἑαυτοῦ τὸν ἀμίμητον ἐλθεῖν ἐγκελευόμενος.

The opening chapters of Maximus' *Centuries on Love* confirm our present claim that charity is the necessary 'outward vesture' of faith and therefore *is* faith in its subsistent actuality. There in what is not an altogether infrequent use of a deliberate structural strategy by Maximus we find faith at the centre of a chiasmic arrangement of which love forms the outer frame.¹⁴⁸ While Sherwood has noted the inverse symmetrical structure of these verses,¹⁴⁹ in no study to my knowledge have they been set out diagrammatically to highlight their form:

- A 'Αγάπη μὲν τίκτει ἀπάθεια,
 B ἀπάθειαν δέ ἢ εἰς θεὸν ἐλπίς
 C τὴν δὲ ἐλπίδα, ὑπομονή καὶ μακροθυμία
 D ταύτας δέ, ἢ περιεκτικὴ ἐγκράτεια
 E ἐγκράτειαν δὲ, ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ φόβος
 F τὸν δὲ φόβον, ἢ εἰς τὸν κύριον πίστις.
 F' ὁ πιστεύων τῷ κυρίῳ, φοβεῖται τὴν κόλασιν
 E' ὁ δὲ φοβούμενος τὴν κόλασιν, ἐγκρατεύεται ἀπο τῶν παθῶν
 D' ὁ δὲ ἐγκρατευόμενος ἀπο τῶν παθῶν ὑπομένει τὰ θλιβερά
 C' ὁ δὲ ὑπομένων τὰ θλιβερά ἔξει εἰς θεὸν ἐλπίδα
 B' ἢ δὲ εἰς θεὸν ἐλπίς χωρίζει πάσης γήνης προσπαθείας τὸν νοῦν
 A' ταύτης δὲ ὁ νοῦς χωρισθεὶς ἔξει τὴν εἰς θεὸν ἀγάπην.

Here in an elaborate literary construct the formal relationship between the three primary theological virtues is vividly illustrated. In comparing this arrangement to what we have called the charismatic virtues we notice again how fear of God's punishment

¹⁴⁸ *Car.* 1.2-3.

immediately follows upon faith. Such fear however spurs the believer on to master the passions, from which point he progresses through patient, hope-filled endurance in tribulations and separation from earthly attachments towards the fullness of love for God. Divine love and wisdom are thus seen to be the same: they are fully clothed, effectual faith; perfect union with God; actual deification. Joseph a Spiritu Sancto's summary comments are especially pertinent in this connection:

Thus, the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, mark three stages by which man apprehends God in a closer and closer immediate contact with Him, whereas the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost accentuate man's gradual approach to the union with God from the more human side of this mysterious process, in so far as they make us see how, in a soul that is responsive to the energies of the Holy Ghost, the practice of moral virtue in daily life becomes more perfect, more connatural, more divine, so that finally every virtuous act becomes a reflex of a divine perfection. Both the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost and the three theological virtues are the result in man's soul of the continuous, uniform activity of the Spirit of God. The beginning of this activity is faith, and its apex is love or wisdom.¹⁵⁰

It is but a small step to move on from here to consider how the soul's various passible faculties and the passions to which it is naturally subject are involved in this fully incarnate exercise and experience of divine love. In his *Centuries on Love* Maximus famously speaks of the need for 'the blessed passion of holy love' (τοῦ μακαρίου πάθους τῆς ἁγίας ἀγάπης) that binds the intellect to spiritual realities, at the same time persuading it

¹⁴⁹ Sherwood, *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life*, 248 fn2.

¹⁵⁰ 'The Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost', 937-938.

to prefer immaterial, intelligible and divine realities to those of matter and sense.¹⁵¹ There also we find a distinction between ‘the blameworthy (ψεκτόν) passion of love’ that engrosses the mind in material things and ‘the praiseworthy (ἐπαινετόν) passion of love’ that binds it to divine things.¹⁵² It is called a passion because as we have pointed out divine love is as much ‘suffered’ as it is enacted: in the enactment of it, we suffer it. Yet it is also an all-encompassing passion that by nature excludes any other competing or opposing ‘love’. This radical, single-minded and exclusive devotion constitutes the very definition of what it means to love God. He who has his mind fixed (lit. ‘nailed’) on love for God ‘disdains all visible things as alien, even his own body.’¹⁵³

It would be wrong to conclude from such a strong statement however that the body is thereby excluded from participating in the fully integral union concretely realised in love for God and neighbour. As Thunberg has observed, the good use of the concupiscible and irascible faculties of the soul, typically associated with love for God and love for neighbour respectively, features as a primary component in the bodily manifestation of God as love.¹⁵⁴ To risk being repetitive: in being deified, man does not leave his passible faculties behind. On the contrary, ‘charity implies that this “passibility” be restored from its perversion and transformed, and that it thus accompany man through all his life as a human being.’¹⁵⁵ Even those passions that only *on account of the fall* were grafted into the more irrational part of nature such as pleasure, pain, desire, grief and the like, are through the reorienting and purifying work of ascetic struggle and contemplation able to be brought under the mediating hegemony of divinely-informed reason and so transformed in

¹⁵¹ *Car.* 3.67.

¹⁵² *Car.* 3.71.

¹⁵³ *Car.* 1.6.

¹⁵⁴ Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, 102-103.

¹⁵⁵ Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, 104.

character. Maximus explains this shift in the moral status of the passions in terms of the proper ‘use’ (χρησις) of the passible faculties, by this time a well-worn Platonic moral code.¹⁵⁶ The passions are transformed because the manner in which the soul uses its natural faculties has altered at the most fundamental level. We can follow Maximus’ essentially christocentric thinking on this matter by looking at his answer to Thalassius’ perplexing question as to whether such passions are inherently evil, or whether their moral status is capable of changing with their use. We notice in this discussion that the moral status of the passions is contingent above all upon the moral status of the soul using them:

Obviously the passions become good in the zealous (ἐν τοῖς σπουδαίοις) once they have wisely severed them from corporeal objects and put them to work to acquire heavenly things. For example, they turn desire (ἐπιθυμίαν) into an appetitive movement of the intellectual desire for divine things, pleasure (ἡδονήν) into a harmless joy over the activity of the mind enchanted with the divine gifts, fear (φόβον) into a preventative concern about the retributive punishment to come, and grief (λύπην) into a corrective repentance in the face of evil in the present.... Thus the passions happen to be good when used by those who *take captive every thought for obedience to Christ* (2 Cor 10:5).¹⁵⁷

Paul Blowers has made this transformation of the passions the object of a special study in which he concludes that the created passions, which for Maximus are ‘gentiles’ in the native territory of the soul, retain a ‘contingent presence’ in the lived story of human nature. Nevertheless, ‘despite their deviance in connection with the abuse of free will, they still constitute a crucial vehicle by which *incarnational* grace is embodied in the farthest

¹⁵⁶ Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 63.

¹⁵⁷ *Q.Thal* 1 (CCSG 7, 47.18 – 49.33).

reaches of the cosmic order....¹⁵⁸ The Christian struggle to embody divine love does not exclude the passions from the union of the soul with God but rather relies on them as a 'crucial vehicle' through which this union is attained in its created, incarnate integrity. The good use of the soul's faculties eventually leads to that future reversal of the corrupt state when flesh will be 'swallowed up by the soul in Spirit, and the soul swallowed up by God who is the true life so that the soul will possess the whole of God and radiate him alone throughout its entire being.'¹⁵⁹

The passible faculties, whose means of operation depend on the bodily senses, are therefore morally neutral, depending on their use. Their *right* use is determined not only by the subjective moral intent of the particular soul using them, but also by the harmony of that intent and use with the divinely ordained nature of the faculties themselves. This principle extends beyond the soul's faculties to include all created things. Scripture takes away nothing given by God for our use: it forbids neither eating, having children, nor the possession and right management of goods. Rather it restrains immoderation and corrects their irrational use – such as gluttony, fornication, and greed - vices that arise out of an impassioned (ἐμπαθῶς) relationship with created things.¹⁶⁰

The vices, whether of the concupiscible, irascible, or rational faculties, come upon us through the misuse (κατὰ παράχρησιν) of the soul's faculties. Misuse of the rational faculty is ignorance and folly; misuse of the irascible and concupiscible faculties is hatred and intemperance. But the right use of these faculties is knowledge and prudence, love and moderation. And if this is the case, then nothing created and brought into being by God is evil. It is not food that is evil, but gluttony. It is not having children that is evil, but

¹⁵⁸ Blowers, 'Gentiles of the Soul', 57.

¹⁵⁹ *Amb.Io.* 22 (PG 91.1252A).

fornication; not possessions, but greed; not reputation, but vainglory. And if this is the case, then there is nothing evil in created beings except their misuse, which itself stems from the intellect's neglect of its own natural cultivation.¹⁶¹

Even the human being's most basic bodily appetite for food, the crux in man's fall, is capable of a fully 'spiritual' use that does not imply bodily starvation and abuse. As Maximus comments in relation to the petition, 'give us today our daily/supersubstantial bread,' it is

on account of the life in the Spirit that we are content to use the present life in such a way as not to refrain from sustaining it with bread alone or from keeping up its good physical health, so far as it is within our power, not in order to live but rather in order to live for God. This way we establish the body - rendered rational by the virtues - as a messenger of the soul, and by its steadfastness in the good we make the soul a herald of God.¹⁶²

If to use something correctly is to use it according to its true nature or *logos* – a fact determined by its divinely-given, teleologically directed *skopos*, then the *skopos* of all things is itself determined by 'perfect love.' Maximus makes this clear by means of a striking juxtaposition of 'purpose' and 'use' in the following two paragraphs:

God alone is good by nature, and only the one who imitates God is good by will. For it is God's purpose (σκοπός) to unite evildoers to himself who is good by nature that they may become good. That is why when reviled by them, he blesses; when persecuted, he endures;

¹⁶⁰ *Car.* 4.66.

¹⁶¹ *Car.* 3.3-4.

¹⁶² *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 62.619 – 63.625).

when blasphemed, he entreats, when murdered, he intercedes. He does all things in order not to fall away from the purpose of love, which is God himself.

The Lord's commandments teach us to use indifferent things in a correct way. The appropriate use (ἡ εὐλόγος χρῆσις) of indifferent things purifies the state of the soul; the pure state of the soul gives rise to discernment, which gives rise to imperturbability, from which is begotten perfect love (ἡ τελεία ἀγάπη).¹⁶³

There is a certain paradox here that conveniently leads us into our final section on deification as suffering and death. The right use of the soul's passible faculties or of created realities requires a discernment of and living openness to the divine *σκοπος* hidden deep down in the structure of the universe, unveiled in its most naked form as suffering love in the Lord's passion and death, and incarnately filled out through the Christian's own fulfilment of the two-fold command of love. Such 'filling out' involves a mysterious reciprocity between the activity and passivity on the part of the human person. Our proper (active) use of created realities and of our own affective drives is inextricably bound up with our (passive) submission to and experience of the divinely-willed purpose for the whole human microcosm with all its constituent, and even morally marginal, components. We can do no better than to draw on Blowers yet again in support of our concluding remarks:

If passion (πάθος) bespeaks the primal Adamic and historic experience, the tragic loss of integrity suffered within the differentiated levels and aspects of human nature, so ultimately will passion bespeak the profound experience in which that nature regains its wholeness in Christ and receives its full share in the divine life. Not surprisingly, Maximus describes

“deification” in terms not only of perfected spiritual knowledge and virtue, or as the christlike exercise of free choice by the saints in the eschaton, but also, dramatically, as a sublime experience (πεῖρα), a pleasurable suffering (πείσις), a “supernatural passion” (ὑπὲρ φύσιν τὸ πάθος) wherein the creature’s utter *passivity* to divine grace is but a consummation of the *active* powers in human nature.¹⁶⁴

Deification as Suffering and Death

George Berthold once suggestively referred in a footnote to suffering as ‘the tropos of deification,’¹⁶⁵ but did not go on to elaborate upon this theme. Yet as far as I can see it is the nearest one can come to answering the question at the heart of our study as to what happens to the body when it is deified. The short answer is: it suffers. Hidden beneath the outward bodily suffering of the saints, be it imposed voluntarily as *askesis* or involuntarily as tribulation, lies their deifying passage ‘from glory to glory.’ And, not unlike the universal human *pathos* that in Balthasar’s words ‘runs through all gestures of existence’, this deifying suffering also ‘reaches a peak in the riddle of death.’¹⁶⁶

Death, as we have seen for Maximus, can only properly be understood and interpreted christologically. The ‘living death’ that the first Adam ‘fashioned for himself’ and, in him, for the whole of human nature through his eating of the forbidden fruit is nothing more than the inevitable consequence of his rejection of the true bread of heaven, associated with the tree of life, that alone ‘gives life to the world’ (Jn 6:33).¹⁶⁷ Death is not

¹⁶³ *Car.* 4.90-91.

¹⁶⁴ Blowers, ‘Gentiles of the Soul’, 81-82.

¹⁶⁵ *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, 173 fn57.

¹⁶⁶ *Theo-Drama*, volume 4, 117.

¹⁶⁷ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1156C – 1157A).

simply a biological event. It is separation from God.¹⁶⁸ It is a power that interrupts the very *genesis* of human nature from the outset and corrupts its progress in such a way that true life can never quite take hold. As Maximus explains:

For if death is the corruption of generation (φθορὰ γενέσεως), and if the body, generated by a constant flow of nourishment, is naturally corrupted, being dissipated by flux, then Adam preserved death in a flourishing condition by means of the elements that he thought to be the source of life.¹⁶⁹

This is by now a familiar *topos* for us in the Confessor's writings, yet each time he tells the story there are new metaphors and unexpected shades of nuance. And this passage from *Ambiguum* 10 is no exception. Through his fall from divine life, the first man accepted death as 'father of another life' in exchange for the paternal, life-giving Word of God. But as it turns out this surrogate is a cruel tyrant who devours the human nature begotten by him, 'turning us into fodder' (ἡμᾶς βρώσιν ποιούμενος). Thus 'we never actually come to live [in this life] at all, since we are always being eaten up by him through corruption.'¹⁷⁰ Suffering and death under this regime are anything but deifying. They are on the contrary the 'most just' penalty of sin in human nature.¹⁷¹

As we might expect, Maximus follows this pitiful description of the Adamic state with an equally vivid account of its reversal. But in this case Maximus considers not so much the reversal achieved in the particular events of Christ's life and death, but that consequentially learned, taught and practised by the saints as spiritual artisans. They

¹⁶⁸ *Car.* 2.93: θάνατος μὲν ἔστι κυρίως ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ χωρισμός.

¹⁶⁹ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1156D).

¹⁷⁰ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1157A).

¹⁷¹ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 87.36 – 89.76).

recognise that this futile existence of constant change 'is not the life originally given by God', teaching instead that there is 'another, divine life' that can only be attained by putting aside the present life. And 'since there is no putting aside of life without death,'

they devised (ἐπενόησαν) the rejection of carnal affection to be its death, for through this affection death has gained entry into life. Their aim was that, devising a death by means of death, they might cease from living through death and die an honourable death before the Lord, a death that is really the death of death - a death able to corrupt corruption and to provide an entry way in the worthy for the blessed and incorruptible life.¹⁷²

Is Maximus here advocating some kind of masochistic, morbid engagement in a mimetics of violence? Far from it. Bodily suffering has no merit in itself. Those who vainly exalt bodily hardship as though it were an ultimate end 'turn the Word into flesh in themselves in a blameworthy manner (ψεκτώδης).¹⁷³ Suffering only glorifies God when endured 'for the sake of virtue',¹⁷⁴ and virtue itself is subordinate to truth.¹⁷⁵ Even the Saviour became a human being 'not to suffer, but to save.'¹⁷⁶ The ascetic life which, in all its intricate, finely-tuned details – fasting, almsgiving, vigils, psalmody, prayer, not to mention the 'relentless ascesis of social relations'¹⁷⁷ characteristic of a monasticism formed in the desert - amounts to 'the rejection of carnal affection' (τὴν ἀποβολὴν τῆς κατὰ σάρκα στοργῆς), is a sagacious scheme carefully concocted and actively adopted by the saints to bring about the death of death and to furnish a space in the Christian for the reception of real, divine life.

¹⁷² *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1157C).

¹⁷³ *Th.Oec.* 2.42.

¹⁷⁴ *Th.Oec.* 2.72.

¹⁷⁵ *Q.Thal.* 30 (CCSG 7, 219.14-23).

¹⁷⁶ *Opusc.* 3 (PG 91.48C); *Q.Thal.* 63 (CCSG 22, 173.435-438).

¹⁷⁷ Brown, *Body and Society*, 227.

Just as the sheepskins worn by the early Egyptian monks reminded them that through their life of ascetic contest they were bearing about in their bodies the death of Jesus (2 Cor 4:10), the sacrificial lamb,¹⁷⁸ so does the Christian's voluntary adoption of suffering for Christ's sake in the form of self-denial, rigorous spiritual discipline and love of one's enemies fulfil that bodily mortification under which is anticipated and manifested the divine life of the coming age. Future participation in the eschatological glory of Christ's resurrection life presupposes that we have already (ἤδη) become sharers in the likeness of his death (σύμφυτοι ... τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ) through suffering.¹⁷⁹

Baptism, naturally enough, is the sacrament of initiation into this apparently peculiar way of life-through-death. The very dramatic details of the rite – immersion in water and re-emergence from its drowning depths - already mark out on the physical body of the candidate the precise pattern (τύπου) of entombment and resurrection, each of which corresponds to a particular stage in the overall divine economy and whose final archetype is other-worldly.¹⁸⁰ Thus 'he who through baptism fulfils the pattern of entombment and resurrection here in the present (ἐνταῦθα) should expect at the proper time (καιροῖς ἰδίοις) actually to become the all-perfect resurrection.'¹⁸¹ While those baptised into Christ through the Spirit receive 'the first incorruptibility' at a bodily, contingent level (κατὰ σάρκα), they only receive 'the final incorruptibility according to Christ in the Spirit in guarding undefiled the first incorruptibility by augmenting it with good works and the intentional death' of self-mortification.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ *Evag.Prak.prol* (SC 171, 488.37 – 490.41).

¹⁷⁹ *Amb.Io.* 31 (PG 91.1281B). Cf. Romans 6:5.

¹⁸⁰ *QD* 115 (CCSG 10, 84.3-7).

¹⁸¹ *QD* 115 (CCSG 10, 84.9-12).

¹⁸² *Th.Oec.* 1.87.

At another level of interpretation, the Lord's own baptism in blood on the cross prefigures the baptismal, voluntary and intentional (κατὰ πρόθεσιν) sufferings of the Christian for the sake of virtue. "Through these, washing away the stains of conscience, we admit the voluntary death of our faculty of freewill in its preference for visible phenomena....¹⁸³ On behalf of virtue it puts to death our preference for the pleasures of life."¹⁸⁴ Maximus distinguishes this baptism from the 'cup' mentioned by Jesus in the same passage of Scripture (Mk 10:38). The cup which Jesus drinks 'is a type of the involuntary trials for the sake of truth that, contrary to our intent, arise against us out of circumstances. Through these, preferring desire for God to nature itself, we readily submit to the circumstantial death of nature.'¹⁸⁵

With this distinction between voluntary and involuntary sufferings or trials we arrive at an especially prominent aspect of Maximus' ascetic teaching whose roots lie in Origen's *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*. Maximus however makes subtle connections between this and his other distinctions that more clearly allows for the conversion of the evil one's temptations into the God-given instruments for the ascetic's spiritual formation.¹⁸⁶

There are, first of all, two kinds of temptation whose source is devilish and that exploit our sense-based liability to the vicious dialectic of pleasure and pain. One is pleasurable (ἡδονικός), chosen (προαιρετικός), and voluntary (ἐκούσιος); the other is

¹⁸³ The mortification of one's προαίρεσις is a necessary adjunct to the mortification of sin. Both are actively put to death by means of practising virtue. But the practice of virtue also contains a principle of resurrection that, leaving sin dead, raises up a renewed προαίρεσις so that, 'completely dead and wholly separated from anything dead, the faculty of freewill may be insensible to sin, and that, being fully alive in an inseparable union it may become sensible to the totality of living virtue.' See *Q.Thal.* 59 (CCSG 22, 57.190-207).

¹⁸⁴ *Q.Thal.* 30 (CCSG 7, 219.5-8, 14-16).

¹⁸⁵ *Q.Thal.* 30 (CCSG 7, 219.9-13).

¹⁸⁶ One of the more comprehensive treatments of this subject is found in *Q.Thal.* 58 (CCSG 22, 27.1 – 37.180), in which Maximus responds to Thalassius' question as to how it is possible, in accordance with 1 Peter 1:6 and James 1:2, to rejoice in trials when they are the apparent source of grief.

painful (ὄδυνηρός), unwelcome (ἀπροαίρετος), and involuntary (ἀκούσιον). The former begets sin and is to be avoided; the latter constitutes a just penalty for sin, and trials of this sort are to be endured as purificatory and ‘as coming with God’s consent.’¹⁸⁷

The aim of the Christian, however, is to anticipate these physically painful, involuntary trials - *voluntarily*. Self-judgement and self-humiliation are enacted signs that the Christian recognises the salutary character of divine judgement by which he co-operates with God’s corrective, purgative economy. So we find Maximus saying in the *Centuries on Love*:

Nearly every sin is committed for pleasure, and its removal comes about through distress and grief (whether voluntary or involuntary), through repentance, or through any additional dispensation introduced by providence. For it says *if we were to judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged we are being chastened by the Lord lest we be condemned with the world* (1 Cor 11:31-32).

When a trial comes upon you unexpectedly, do not blame him through whom it has come. Instead seek out why it has come, then you will find correction. For whether it comes through one source or through another, you still have to take the bitter wormwood of God’s judgements.¹⁸⁸

The voluntary subjection to trial through the active elimination of passionate attachments to the material order, the relentless scrutiny of vain self-opinions of the soul, and the unceasing elevation of one’s neighbour and even one’s enemies over oneself - all of which from a human perspective look like death, actually spells passage into immortal

¹⁸⁷ *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 72.800 – 73.827).

¹⁸⁸ *Car.* 2.41-42. See also *LA* 22 (CCSG 40, 43.380 – 45.392).

ε.¹⁸⁹ Those who adopt this way of life become insensitive to physical pain.¹⁹⁰ They are ready ‘dead’ and ‘judged in the flesh’ (1 Pet 4:6), for ‘in a hidden way they *bear about in their dy the death of Jesus* (2 Cor 4:10).¹⁹¹ Death no longer threatens the nature which through baptism has been ‘innovated afresh’, but serves only to mortify and condemn sin in it. This is what Maximus calls ‘death’s active use’ (τὴν τοῦ θανάτου χρῆσιν ἐνεργουμένην)¹⁹² – the application at the individual level of what is accomplished universally in Christ - which is initiated at baptism and finds fulfilment through suffering. The Christian who guards his baptism through keeping the commands ‘uses’ death in participatory imitation of Christ as a mysterious escort toward the divine and everlasting life.¹⁹³

From this kind of evidence Maximus can offer a theological verdict and conclude that it is in fact wrong to call the natural termination (τὸ πέρας) of this present life ‘death.’ It is rather

deliverance from death, separation from corruption, escape from violation, the cessation of trouble, the removal of wars, the receding of darkness, rest from labours, the silencing of confused hubbub, quiet from excitement, the veiling of shame, flight from the passions, the disappearing of sin, and, in brief, the termination of all evils. Succeeding at all this through voluntary mortification, the saints commended themselves as *aliens and refugees* in this life (Heb 11:13).¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 66.694-700).

¹⁹⁰ *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 64.646-647).

¹⁹¹ *Q.Thal.* 7 (CCSG 7, 73.28 – 75.41).

¹⁹² *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 99.235-236).

¹⁹³ *Q.Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22, 99.236-260).

¹⁹⁴ *Amb.Io.* 10 (PG 91.1157CD).

The fact that the holy women and men of old are said already to have ‘succeeded’ or achieved (κατορθώσαντες) in this life what normally is only ushered in at bodily death also suggests that there is a way in which this voluntary use of death may be considered the actual visible, outward, physical experience of deification more than simply by hopeful yet unrealised anticipation. Here we shall be led to regard once again Maximus’ abiding sensitivity to the essentially prophetic character of the monastic life, being as it is a liminal, veiled, but nonetheless real embarkation upon the heavenly life. This heightened sense of the liminality of the monk’s bodily life is as much brought on by theological factors as by existential. Perhaps the most exquisite example of Maximian thought in which this problem is addressed is an exegetical meditation on the tension raised by an apparent biblical discrepancy in two references to ‘ages’ (αἰῶνες). For if, Thalassius asks, ‘in the coming ages God will demonstrate his riches’ (Eph 2:7), how then has ‘the fulfilment (τὰ τέλη) of the ages already come for us’ (1 Cor 10:11)?¹⁹⁵

In his answer Maximus first refers to the creator’s plan, established before the beginning of all creation, to become man and to make man God through the hypostatic union. From here he takes the two biblical references to fulfilled and coming ages as an indication that God wisely divided the ages into those intended for the activity of his becoming man, and those intended for the activity of man’s being made God.¹⁹⁶ The former ages, ‘intended for the activity of the mystery of his embodiment’, were accomplished through the events of the incarnation themselves (κατὰ τὴν σάρκωσιν δι’ αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων). Consequently they have reached their proper conclusion (τὸ οἰκεῖον πέρας).¹⁹⁷ The ages intended for ‘the mystical and ineffable deification of

¹⁹⁵ *Q.Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7, 137.1-3).

¹⁹⁶ *Q.Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7, 137.4-16).

¹⁹⁷ *Q.Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7, 137.17-27).

humanity', however, and in which God 'will demonstrate the immeasurable richness of his kindness towards us' (Eph 2:7), still await their actual and total fulfilment.¹⁹⁸

This at least is how Maximus concludes his first meditation on the distinction between the ages of God's incarnation and the ages of man's deification as suggested by the apostle's deliberate distinction between 'fulfilled' and 'coming' ages. It is, he adds, not unlike the distinction between deification by potentiality and deification in actuality.¹⁹⁹ But his point that it is merely a *conceptual* distinction (τῆ ἐπινοίᾳ)²⁰⁰ rather than an actual chronological sequence tells us that he is far from simply putting deification into a future chronological category accessible at the resurrection of the dead. Typically enough Blowers has recognised exactly the same point in his cogent analysis of the text:

To ascribe such a state of being purely to a future glory beyond death... would be inaccurate, for this is in fact a mystery that spans the whole 'natural' life of human creatures. Ontologically speaking, the mystery of deification coincides with the full 'history' of human nature, a nature which receives definition precisely by its ongoing openness to gracious restoration and transformation.²⁰¹

What allows us to draw this conclusion is Maximus' remaining meditation in which he couples the distinction between the 'past' ages of God's incarnation and the 'future' ages of man's deification with 'the principle of activity' or acting (ὁ τοῦ ποιεῖν λόγος) on the one hand and 'the principle of passivity' or being acted upon (ὁ τοῦ πάσχειν λόγος) on

¹⁹⁸ *Q.Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7, 137.28 – 139.49).

¹⁹⁹ *Q.Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7, 139.60–65).

²⁰⁰ *Q.Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7, 139.50).

²⁰¹ Blowers, 'Realized Eschatology in Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 22', 262–263.

the other.²⁰² The ages of the flesh in which we now conduct our lives are characterised by activity, whereas the future ages of the Spirit are characterised by passivity and its transformation under the influence of divine activity. Whereas the potential available to us in this life is only fulfilled by constant ascetic activity by which God is made flesh in the virtues, entry into the coming age is marked by our ceasing from activity and our passive experience of deification by grace, an experience whose bounds are as infinite as the divine activity of the one who enacts them upon us.²⁰³ But now we must quote in full:

For this reason we do not cease from being deified. For at that point passivity is supernatural, and possesses no inherent factor that precludes those who suffer divine activity from being infinitely deified. For we are active insofar as we possess both the rational faculty which being activated naturally performs the virtues, as well as the intellectual faculty which is capable of all knowledge and which at the level of potentiality passes directly through every being we know and leaves all the ages behind it. And we are passive when, completely traversing the inner principles of beings that come from non-being, we come in a state of ignorance to the cause of those beings and bring our own faculties to rest along with those things that are naturally finite, becoming that which our own natural powers could in no way achieve, since nature has no power to grasp that which transcends nature. For nothing created is by nature capable of deification, since it is incapable of grasping God. For it is intrinsic and peculiar to divine grace alone to bestow deification proportionately on beings, for only divine grace illuminates nature with supernatural light and elevates nature beyond its proper limits in excess of glory.²⁰⁴

²⁰² See Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 133 fn19, for the philosophical sources for this distinction.

²⁰³ *Q.Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7, 139.66 – 141.79).

²⁰⁴ *Q.Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7, 79-98).

The remarkable passage of nature from activity to passivity described here hopefully clarifies our claim that deification is manifest bodily as suffering. Deification is concealed and at the same time disclosed in the Christian life through the visible, external marks of ascetic activity and voluntary suffering, both of which simply form the dual modes of faith embodied in love. But of these two modes it is voluntary suffering reaching its summit in bodily death that most poignantly bears witness to the actual presence of God's deifying activity here in 'the shadow of death.'²⁰⁵ Nature's passivity, the full conclusion of its natural activity, provides the raw material *par excellence* with which God's infinite activity elevates that very nature and overwhelms it with his glory. In this sense passivity paradoxically constitutes a superior ontological order that, chronologically speaking, may co-exist with the active state characteristic of nature's progression to its goal by the use of its natural powers. What appears under the outward form of 'dying daily' as the curtailment or diminution of those natural powers is in fact their very fulfilment in passivity, by which Maximus means total submission by grace to God in Christ.

With these comments we come to the end of this chapter. We have seen how the ancient philosophical ideal of making this life a preparation for death is for Maximus inseparable from baptismal participation in the death of Christ and the increasing adornment of faith in him through works of virtue and suffering love. We are reminded of the intensely social dimensions which Maximus' conception of this spiritual journey presumes. Love of those who have only hatred is the first step to liberation from the very things that stand as obstacles in the path toward imitating the God who loves all people equally and 'wants them to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim

²⁰⁵ *Car.* 2.96.

2:4).²⁰⁶ It is on account of its social character - its presupposition of an object other than oneself, that love must above all else be suffered. But in the ecstatic going out of oneself that love demands one enters into actual union with love's object, and so into union with God. Or as Maximus so beautifully has it,

For the sake of love the saints all resist sin to the very end, taking no account of this present life and enduring many forms of death, in order that they may be gathered from this world to themselves and to God, and unite in themselves the torn fragments of nature.²⁰⁷

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Maximus' teaching on deification as suffering and death is the fact that he embodied it in his own life, and most painfully in his trial, torture, exile and death at the hands of his ecclesiastical enemies. Inspired by the biographer who penned the events following his trial and leading to his first exile to Bizya (655), we can perhaps only imagine the aged monk's joy in being called to fill up in his own body the sufferings of Christ. We can only imagine his thanksgiving when crying aloud he exhorted, 'Pray for the Lord's sake that with our humiliation God may perfect his mercy, and may teach us that those who sail along with him experience a savage sea....' All his sufferings and those of his companions he no doubt would have recognised as the gracious gift of God and participation in the death of Christ, gifts offered to man that he might not trust in himself but attribute his salvation to God alone.²⁰⁸ Hunger, thirst, nakedness, chains and prisons, exiles and scourges, cross, nails, vinegar and gall, spitting and slaps and blows and mockings: all this bodily torment has for its end

²⁰⁶ *Car.* 1.61; cf. 1.62; 1.71-74.

²⁰⁷ *Ep.* 2 (PG 91.404D).

a radiant resurrection, bringing peace with it to those who have been persecuted on his account, and joy to those who were afflicted for him, and ascension into heaven and accession at the Father's transcendent throne, and *an appointed place above every principality and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that can be named - whether in this age or in the age to come* (Eph 1:21).²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ RM (CCSG 39, 49.479 – 51.485).

²⁰⁹ RM (CCSG 39, 51.498-504).

CONCLUSION

Can it really be imagined that the patristic tradition, which is still the source of “spiritual life” in a narrow sense of the expression, is no longer of any use in our intellectual inquiries? Is it no longer fertile? Has everything it contained been completely assimilated, digested, systematized, and “surpassed” by subsequent speculation, and is it now a waste of time to turn to it?¹

Having arrived at the conclusion of our essay, we may return to the question raised at the beginning in the introduction: What is the mind of the patristic tradition with respect to the contemporary call for a return to the primacy of the external, material, and bodily in determining what is constitutive of catholic Christianity? I have maintained that Saint Maximus, at once faithful to the primary lines of tradition in the Greek Fathers as well as their creative interpreter, accords to the body - and thus to the historical, social, ecclesial and material cosmic orders - a definitive, constitutive place in God’s creative, saving, and sanctifying economies. The chaotic element in material diversity is overcome not by the elimination of matter, but by its incarnational, ascetic, sacramental and liturgical incorporation in Christ. To the extent that in this life the body is adorned with the virtues, in which God the Word takes on visible, fleshly contours, it - no less than the soul - already ‘suffers’ deification, anticipating under the veil of humility its glorious participation in the soul’s future beatitude.

This does not, however, amount to an unqualified primacy of the bodily, external, or particular. Maximus could never say ‘I am my body’ in the sense advocated by more

¹ Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, trans. Alexander Dru (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 208.

revisionist theologies of the body.² As Lutheran Jeffrey C. Eaton has argued in a recent essay on the philosophy of one-time Bishop of Cloyne, George Berkeley (d. 1753), it is only by giving way to a primacy of spirit that we can restore the material world to its rightful integrity without danger of usurpation. Berkeley's famous maxim, often misunderstood, could well be asserted in support of the present thesis: 'Matter once allow'd. I defy any man to prove that God is not matter.'³ Unlike the soul, the body is not self-subsistent. Its existence comes from outside itself, via the rational soul, and apart from its subordinate relationship to the soul the body drags human nature into the diffuse chaos of material irrationality. We have agreed with Peter Brown that for Christian monks, in contrast to pagan intellectualists, '[t]he material conditions of the monk's life were held capable of altering the consciousness itself.'⁴ But we have also seen that this capability was thought to be conditioned by the principle of 'use', whose rightness is determined by agreement with the divinely given order and purpose of created things according to their respective inherent *logoi*.

All of this might suggest that Maximus' commitment to the primacy of spirit would preclude any concession to the material order of an importance beyond its contingent, secondary ontological status. Yet, on the basis of the mystery of the Incarnation, it is exclusively in the harmony proper to this contingent, subordinate relation that all material phenomena, including the body, exceed their finite boundaries and so become vehicles of divine theophany. The bodily resurrection of Christ and his ascension into heaven adumbrate the passage of the material order with the soul into a transcendent realm where

² Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *I am my Body: A Theology of Embodiment* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

³ Quoted by Jeffrey C. Eaton, 'The Primacy of Spirit', in Eric O. Springsted (ed.), *Spirituality and Theology: Essays in Honor of Diogenes Allen* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 87.

⁴ *The Body and Society*, 237.

the passible and corporeal become entirely transparent to divine glory. Thus the very integrity of the material order lies in its being transcended.

Whatever ambivalence remains, then, is not in Maximus' attitude towards the body, but in the body itself, its senses, and the physical realm. All depends on their being referred to a reality beyond, but not apart from themselves. To enshrine the historical, contingent, material and outward for its own sake draws us not only into '[a]berrant metaphysics'⁵ but into idolatry. The alternative is not 'spiritualisation', if by that we mean reducing the universe to abstraction and irrevocably disengaging from the material order. It is rather 'spiritual life,' or better, life in the Spirit, by which we mean bodily participation in the divine life of the holy Trinity, a mysterious reality rendered accessible sacramentally in the bodily, divine-human life of one of that same holy Trinity. There alone is flesh made holy and human nature wholly deified. There alone is the mystery of deification actualised. There alone is the purpose of the universe fulfilled, and 'God is proclaimed to be truly a Father by grace.'⁶

⁵ Eaton, 'The Primacy of Spirit', 95.

⁶ *Or.dom.* (CCSG 23, 71.791-792).

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