

GRACE AND METAPHYSICS IN MAXIMUS CONFESSOR

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ABSTRACT

Post-Tridentine Western Christian theology introduced the notion of *natura pura*, which holds that one can know created nature in fact without reference to God or divine grace. The orders of grace and nature are thus on different plains. This ontology creates an extrincism between God and the world. Maximus Confessor's doctrine of grace offers the paradox of nature already presuming grace but awaiting the supernatural grace of deification at the resurrection. Further, divine grace, or energy in Maximus's theology, are not separate ontological realms between God and the world. Grace does not separate God's essence from his energies. The Incarnation of the created and uncreated natures in Christ fully manifests the paradox of God's grace as being fully on the side of creation and on the side of God, without remainder. Finally, Maximus's theurgic ecclesiology in his *Mystagogy* reinforces the mediation of grace through created reality. All of these aspects of Maximus the Confessor's theology of grace provide a Christian rendering of participation that does not result in the extrincism of grace from nature, their conflation together, or a real distinction in the being of God.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers.
<i>Capita 150</i>	Saint Gregory of Palamas: <i>The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters</i>
CCSG	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca</i> , Brepols, Turnhout.
CH	Pseudo-Dionysius: <i>De Coelesti Hierarchia</i>
CHLGEMP	Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy
CWS	Classics of Western Spirituality.
DN	Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite: <i>De Divinis Nominibus</i>
EH	Pseudo-Dionysius: <i>De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia</i>
ET	Proclus: <i>Elements of Theology</i>
Enn.	Plotinus, <i>Enneads</i>
KL	Hans Urs von Balthasar (trans. Brian Daley): <i>Kosmic Liturgy</i> .
MCF	Maximus Confessor, Fribourg Conference Proceedings, 1982.
MT	Pseudo-Dionysius: <i>De Mystica Theologia</i>
NPNF	<i>Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i>
PG	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca</i>
PL	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina</i>

PT	Proclus: <i>Platonic Theology</i>
SCh.	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i>
SCG	Thomas Aquinas: <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i>
ST	Thomas Aquinas: <i>Summa Theologiae</i> .

The Works of St. Maximus Confessor

<i>Ad Thal.</i>	<i>Quaestiones ad Thalassium.</i>
<i>Amb.</i>	<i>Ambiguorum Liber</i>
<i>Cap. Gnost.</i>	<i>Capita Theologica et Oeconomica.</i>
<i>De Char.</i>	<i>Centuriae de Charitate.</i>
LA	<i>Liber Asceticus.</i>
<i>Myst.</i>	<i>Mystagogia.</i>
<i>Or. Dom.</i>	<i>Orationis Dominicae Expositio.</i>
<i>Pyrrh.</i>	<i>Disputatio cum Pyrrho.</i>
<i>Qu. Dub.</i>	<i>Quaestiones et Dubia.</i>
<i>Th. Pol.</i>	<i>Opuscula Theologica et Polemica.</i>

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

‘Man is a hungry being. But he is hungry for God. Behind all the hunger of our life is God. All desire in finally a desire for Him...All that exists lives by eating...But the unique position of man in the universe is that he alone is to bless God for the food and the life he receives from Him. He alone is to respond to God’s blessing with his blessing...The world was created as the ‘matter,’ the material of one all-embracing Eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament.’¹

1.1 Grace, Nature and the Problem of Extrinsicism

Fr. Schmemmann beautifully comments on one of the signature characteristics of Eastern Orthodox theology: a strong sacramental view of the cosmos. The reason why a Eucharistic cosmos organically expresses the irreducible relationship between God and the world is because grace is not extrinsic to created nature in the Eastern Orthodox theological worldview. This is not to say that God and the world are conflated or mixed in a pantheistic manner, but the Christian East does affirm that created nature already assumes the gift of grace, which then awaits the consummation of supernatural grace and deification.² The grace of creation and supernatural deification are not, as Maximus Confessor attests, ‘a reward given to the saints in requital for righteous works, but is proof of the liberality of the

¹ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), p. 1.

² Maximus Confessor, *Ad Thal.* 60 (CCSG 22: 77).

Creator.³ God is the beginning of creatures as Creator and their end as the giver of eternal life, but the middle journey of existence is up to the creature's free-will.⁴ For Maximus, there is a synergy at work between the human being and God in the process of deification that is at the same time entirely based upon the utter gratuity of divine gift. The synergy of grace and nature provides the foundation for a cosmic dance and harmonious symphony that allows the whole creation to fully and wilfully participate in the *vita Trinitatis*. In Maximus's theology, grace, nature and metaphysics all coalesce into a single theophanic revelation of, and participation in, the triune God.

After the Counter-Reformation of the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century, there emerged an ontology in the West that differed from the patristic and medieval understanding of nature. Post-Tridentine Catholic theology developed the notion of *natura pura*.⁵ Hans Urs Von Balthasar describes three ways in which grace and nature have been understood since this time period: the first path, held by Ripalda, assumes that every act is shored up with grace; the second middle path argues that nature is intact, and then it is intercepted by grace in order to be

³ Maximus, *Th. Pol.* 1 (PG 91: 33A-36A).

⁴ Maximus, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91: 1073B-1076C).

⁵ For a recent argument for *natura pura* and a counter to Henri de Lubac's thesis of nature presupposing grace—and subsequently a rebuff against concerns of some in the contemporary Radical Orthodoxy movement—see Bernard Mulcahy, *Aquinas's Notion of Pure Nature and the Christian Integralism of Henry de Lubac: Not Everything is Grace* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011).

directed towards its supernatural end; and the third path, held by Billot, suggests a finality of pure nature in the world order.⁶ Von Balthasar concludes that after the high scholastic period, all of the systematics of grace and nature removed theology from the identity of nature:

In all these systems that have been developed since the Counter-Reformation, we notice a distinct tendency to protect the concept of nature from the danger of Protestant subversion. But the tendency goes so far that post-Tridentine Catholic theologians not only try to set off nature from sin and grace but also feel obliged to prove that the sphere of nature can be isolated and depicted *in fact*.⁷

A vacuous notion of being and nature did not just develop in post-Tridentine Catholic theology and twentieth century Protestant theology—as for instance in Karl Barth’s resounding ‘Nein!’ to natural theology or any theology relating to the *analogia entis*.⁸ There was an abstraction from nature in the philosophy of Being as well. In Hegel’s *The Science of Logic*, he argues that ‘pure being and pure nothing are therefore the same. The truth is neither being nor nothing, but rather that being

⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1992), p. 289.

⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, p. 289.

⁸ For an in-depth collection of articles on the nuances of the *analogia entis* debate, see Steven A. Long, *Analogia Entis: On the Analogy of Being, Metaphysics, and the Act of Faith* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011). Also, Thomas Joseph White, *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or Wisdom of God?* (Grand Rapids: MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010). Maximus will develop his own *analogia entis*, but it transforms into what I call the *analogia Christus*.

has passed over into nothing and nothing into being” Being is only affirmed through the absolute negation or abstraction from Being. In Hegel’s dialectical philosophy, which subsequently influenced Karl Barth’s refutation of natural theology, abstraction and negation undermine paradox and participation in God. The Post-Tridentine Catholic notion of *natura pura*, the Hegelian abstraction from Being, and the Protestant rejection of natural theology and the *analogia entis* lead to a very extrinsic relationship between nature and grace. As Steven A. Long notes in reference to Thomas Aquinas:

Nature is not merely a negative concept, a sort of empty theological Newtonian space providing a hold ‘place’ or vacuole for grace. And precisely insofar as human nature has an ontological density and proportionate end, just so far is the knowledge of these *essential* to the work of the theologian. This is precisely why St. Thomas held that grace presupposes nature—not as an empty placeholder, but with its own created perfection positively ordered toward God within natural limits while being capable with divine aid of elevation to divine friendship and the beatific vision.¹⁰

In order to avoid nature being merely a ‘vacuole for grace,’ several Catholic and Anglican theologians in the twentieth century argued for an integralist perspective on nature and grace rooted in the church fathers and later Catholic tradition.

1.2 Twentieth Century Debates on Nature and Grace

⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 59-60.

¹⁰ Stephen A. Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. 2.

In 1953, Catholic, Orthodox and Reformed Protestant scholars met at the monastery of Chevetogne in France to discuss the theology of grace that each tradition affirms. After a thorough investigation of their respective positions, the difference between the three groups of Christendom was summarized as follows:

All Christians appear to agree perfectly, until one comes to express in systematic formulae the very complex encounter of divine and human activity in grace. On the one hand, all the Christian confessions accept some change in man, brought about by justification; on the other hand, the Christian life that follows this change is not described in the same way. An Orthodox would say that the change made by grace makes a divine life possible; a Catholic, a holy life; while a Protestant would stress the battle against sin and the Devil. The encounter between God and man, in the process of salvation would be described as a 'synergism' (Orthodox), an 'enduring creation' (Protestantism), or 'actuation créée' par acte increé' (Catholicism)...The divisions due to different systematizations are more serious when we come to the question of created grace, of 'virtues' and gifts. Two things are presupposed here: the first, which explains the scholastic theory of the *habitus*, assumes the philosophical idea of a distinction between the soul and its faculties; the other, much more important, implies different views of the relations between man and the supernatural. For Catholicism, the fundamental distinction is between nature and supernatural, and the problem of grace results from *the nature of man*; for the Protestant, on the other hand, grace is essentially 'what comes down towards the *sinner*.' In short, one side contrasts natural and supernatural, the other sin and grace.¹¹

This summary of the ecumenical meeting of minds at the monastery of Chevetogne illustrates that each tradition attempts to address the question of how a transcendent God connects and relates to His creation. I will briefly discuss the

¹¹ C. Moeller and G. Philips, *The Theology of Grace and the Oecumenical Movement*, trans. R. A. Wilson (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1961), pp. 37-38.

Catholic retrievals of integralism in the twentieth century, and then elucidate how their theology of resourcement will be connected with this study of grace and metaphysics in Maximus Confessor.

Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac argued around the middle of the twentieth century that the extrinsic position on nature and grace was not the patristic and medieval view. Neoscholastic theology held to a two-tier account of nature and grace, where grace is interpreted to be something supernaturally added to human nature, which was already complete and sufficient in itself. It was assumed that this way of thinking would avoid Pelagianism and re-emphasize the Augustinian view of the absolute gratuity of grace. De Lubac believed that there were several critical problems with this viewpoint. If humans have a 'natural desire for the beatific vision' (*desiderium naturale visionis beatificae*), then how can grace be super-added and not destroy human nature? How is an extrinsic understanding of grace to be avoided? De Lubac argues in his book *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, that modern theology:

Sees nature and supernature as in some sense juxtaposed, and in spite of every intention to the contrary, as contained in the same genus, of which they form as it were two species. The two were like two complete organisms; too perfectly separated to be really differentiated, they have unfolded parallel to each other, fatally similar in kind. Under such circumstances, the supernatural is no longer properly speaking another order, something

unprecedented, overwhelming and transfiguring...they will no longer be taken to be anything but affirmations of a purely natural philosophy.¹²

The unprecedented aspect of the supernatural does not correspond to human nature in a two-tiered hierarchy of different orders, but as a paradox of two aspects of the same order.¹³ De Lubac further argues that for the fathers and early medieval theologians, there is permanence between human action and supernatural grace, so that the desire for the beatific vision already points to grace in the creature.¹⁴ This means that grace is not just a potential thing to be given to a person, but already a living reality within nature, a 'promise' already 'inscribed and recognized in the being's very self.'¹⁵ De Lubac holds these two perspectives in a paradox without allowing the collapse of the two ideas or the banality of their separation.

The gift of this natural desire for the supernatural is also not one of necessity for God or the basis for offering the gift of grace.¹⁶ For De Lubac, God freely

¹² Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad Herder), p. 37.

¹³ See John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005); see also Eric Lee, 'Paradoxes of Faith in Kierkegaard and de Lubac' in *Belief and Metaphysics*, eds. Connor Cunningham and Peter Candler (London: SCM Press, 2007). pp. 236-259.

¹⁴ Henri de Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, p. 27.

¹⁵ Henri de Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, p. 207.

¹⁶ Henri de Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, p. 207ff.

gives this desire as the author and creator of nature. Further, patristic and early medieval theologians changed the definition of nature from that of Aristotle, who held that the end of the creature must be reachable using its own resources.¹⁷ *Pace* De Lubac, Rudi te Velde and John Milbank have more recently commented that Aquinas denied this restriction of nature through his real distinction between existence and essence in creatures. Aquinas understood grace from a teleological interpretation of nature, but he still argues that beatitude is a supernatural consummation.¹⁸ Humans were created to participate in the life of the Trinity; however, this natural desire does not have its fulfilment from within the human being.

1.3 The Scope of Maximian Grace

Since the Christian East did not deal with the Augustine vs. Pelagius issue to the same degree as the West, it is sometimes asserted that the East does not really have a theology of grace, but this is far from the case. The Christian East did not emphasize the role of grace to the extent that the West did in their theological development, but grace is the prior term that grounds most of their doctrines. The core of Maximus's metaphysics is the grace of God. Maximus states that deification

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.2 (1024a 20).

¹⁸ Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The Divine Science of the Summa Theologiae* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), p. 150 ff. See also John Milbank and Kathrine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 24-39.

is 'to reunite by love created with uncreated nature, showing the two in unity and identity through the acquisition of grace.'¹⁹ The greatest act in a creature's existence is a union of love with its creator. Maximus, as well as the Greek patristic tradition, holds that this union is only due to the grace of God.

The grace vs. nature debates in twentieth century theology encountered a radical twist in thought of Henri de Lubac his notion of the paradox of grace. This paradox has two main results for Christian theology that follow one upon the other. The first is that grace and nature are two aspects of the same order, not two opposing orders. The second is that grace is both created and mediated within the creation and uncreated with its source in God. Grace is thus a 'suspended middle'²⁰ because there is no ontological intermediary between God and the creation.

Since de Lubac's critique of the neoscholastic reading of Aquinas on the issue of created grace, a new avenue for dialog about grace opens up for Eastern Orthodox and Western Christian traditions. What de Lubac's thesis offers for a study of Maximus Confessor is the schema of paradox with the two-fold result mentioned above. Maximus describes the relationship between divine grace and nature (that is, the natural relationship with grace that the human person has through the *logoi* of

¹⁹ Maximus, *Amb.* 41 (PG: 91, 1308 B).

²⁰ John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*.

created being coupled with the *telos* of deification and beatitude beyond human nature given by God) in several places.²¹ He almost always frames grace and nature within an eschatological consummation of all creation in deification. Paul Blowers describes nature and grace in Maximus as ‘the protological endowment and the eschatological vocation of humanity.’²² The coalescence between grace and nature is a part of Maximus’s created ontology, but the eschatological fulfilment of deification is something that transcends human nature and must be given by God. It is the paradox of something already given and created but awaiting consummation from beyond in the uncreated God:

Deification does not belong to what lies within our potentiality to bring about naturally, since it is not within our power. For no logos of that which transcends nature lies within nature. Therefore deification is not an accomplishment that belongs to our potentiality: we do not possess the potentiality for it by nature, but only through the divine power, since it is not a reward given to the saints in requital for righteous works, but is proof of the liberality of the Creator, making the lovers of the beautiful by adoption that which he has shown to be by nature.²³

Maximus Confessor offers a vision of the whole cosmos that is without the extrincism of post-scholastic theology precisely because he connects created grace and uncreated grace in an irreducible manner, which is exemplified in the

²¹ Maximus, *Cap. Gnost.* 1.55; *De. Char.* 3.25; *Ad Thal* 35; *Th. Pol.* 1.

²² Paul Blowers, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), p. 93 n. 18.

²³ Maximus, *Th. Pol.* 1 (PG 91: 33A-36A).

Incarnation and revealed through his ontology of what I call the *analogia Christus*. Through participation (which is another word for grace in Maximus), his theology holds the divine and natural worlds both together and apart, in union and distinction.

The proposal of this study is that the theology of grace in the thought of Maximus Confessor unites God and the creation together in an irreducible relationship, all-the-while avoiding any hint of pantheism. Further, Maximus does not separate the essence and energies (or grace) of God. Instead, grace is always being created or infused directly in the soul of the creature, and through the soul to the body. The uncreated grace of God is the sharing of the divine nature with the creature through the grace of participation. The Confessor thus offers an alternative model to the extrinsic understanding of grace and nature.

1.4 The Reason for Studying Grace in Maximus

Maximus Confessor (c. 580 – 13 August 662) is a man of both East and West in that, more than any other Eastern patristic writer, he discussed: the role of the will in human anthropology, original or ancestral sin, grace, adoption, justification, the primacy of the Roman Pope, and the *filioque* clause. Sometimes Maximus interprets these theological topics differently than Western theologians, but he shows us that the East was not without some reflection on these supposedly important Latin-Western theological concepts. Maximus also spent time at the Lateran basilica

during the Monothelite controversy (October 649 CE) supporting Pope Martin I against the *Typos* of Constans II.²⁴ His support of the Latins during this period was not due to submission to the Pope *qua* Pope, but more to Pope Martin's adherence to orthodoxy.

In the account of his first trial in Constantinople in June 654 CE written by his disciple Anastasius, Maximus is asked by his questioner, 'Why do you love the Romans and hate the Greeks?' To this the blessed saint replied, 'We have a precept which says not to hate anyone. I love the Romans as those who share the same faith, and the Greeks as sharing the same language.'²⁵ The Confessor moved in the worlds of both Byzantium and Rome, and his thought reflects these relationships. By fully embracing the implications of the paradox of grace and nature in Maximus, both Eastern and Western Christian traditions could find common theological ground once again.

So, then, an analysis on Maximus's doctrine of grace is needed for three key reasons. First, there has not been an in-depth study on grace in the Greek patristic tradition that treats the whole breadth of the literature. While a full analysis of the Greek fathers on grace is well beyond the range of this study, an investigation of

²⁴ Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, The Early Church Fathers Series (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), p. 17.

²⁵ *The Trial of Maximus*, trans. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 26.

grace in Maximus's thought will greatly contribute towards a better understanding of the Greek fathers on the topic. Second, by looking at the diverse and multifaceted reflections on grace in the East, perhaps Western theologians might be compelled to correct interpretations of grace that have contributed to the continuance of extrincism in modern times. In the spirit of De Lubac's *resourcement*, going back to patristic sources can address the problem of extrincism. Finally, as stated above there is an ecumenical imperative in such a study of Maximus's thought. Since the schism of Eastern and Western Christendom in 1054 CE, there has been a great deal of misalignment and misunderstanding between the two great traditions.

While studying grace in Maximus may not dissolve all differences between East and West into some kind of a homogenous unity, there is still the need to bring to the surface a broader recognition of the common ground between the two traditions.²⁶ For Maximus, this is true both for grace and for the other traditionally

²⁶ Since the Second Vatican Council's *Decree on Ecumenism* and *Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches*, there have been several developments in ecumenism between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. The North American Catholic-Orthodox theological dialogue has produced two major agreements: 1) the Eastern Orthodox signatories to a detailed study and 'Consultation Statement' on the Filioque (October 25, 2003) are in agreement that the Filioque doctrine should no longer be seen as heretical; and 2) The result of the Agreed Statement on 'Baptism and 'Sacramental Economy,' also issued by the North American Orthodox Catholic Theological Consultation (June 3, 1999), which calls upon the Orthodox Patriarchs to repeal the 1755 decree denying the validity of Catholic baptisms. In relation to the Anglican Communion and the Eastern Orthodox Church, there have been three phrases of dialog by the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue: the *Moscow Agreed Statement* of 1976; the *Dublin Agreed Statement* of 1984; and more recently the *Cyprus Agreed Statement* of 2006. For the Protestant branch of the Church, see eds. John Meyendorff and Robert Tobias, *Salvation in Christ: A Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1992).

Western subsets of it, such as adoption, justification, atonement, sanctification, etc. This study of Maximus Confessor will not seek to ignore the important differences that exist between these two Christian traditions, but simply to point out areas of agreement and continuity between them. The greater ecumenical desire would be to see at least a small step towards reconciliation and communion between the Greek East and the Latin West, and Maximus the Confessor is a key theologian to provide such a bridge.

1.5 The Scope of this Study

I will begin this study on grace and metaphysics in Maximus Confessor in Chapter Two, where the essence and energies distinction will be analysed. This important theological debate between Christian East and West is directly related to the understanding of grace as uncreated *and* created. Then in Chapter Three, I will investigate the divine processions of Pseudo-Dionysius and their relationship to energy and grace in Maximus. Chapter Four will elucidate how the divine processions/energies were received in the Byzantine and Latin traditions, and I will argue that Gregory of Palamas is not an accurate reader of Maximus on the divine energies. I will demonstrate that grace provides the necessary element in understanding what Maximus means by divine energy. Chapter Five will evaluate how Maximus's Christology completely encapsulates his theology of divine grace

and the revelation of the *logoi* of essences through the *analogia Christus*. Finally, in Chapter Six, I will show that Maximus's Ecclesiology is thoroughly theurgic. A strong theology of descending grace is mediated in Maximus's metaphysics through liturgical act.

CHAPTER 2

THE METAPHYSICS OF GRACE: THE FOUNDATION OF THE ESSENCE AND ENERGIES DISTINCTION

‘Christ in his love unites created reality with uncreated reality—How wonderful is God’s loving-kindness towards us!—and he shows that through grace the two are become one. The whole world enters wholly into the whole of God and by becoming all that God is, except in identity of nature, it receives in place of itself the whole God.’¹

2.1 The Essence and Energies Debate: East and West

In order to understand how metaphysics and grace coalesce in Maximus’s theology, one must first query about the nature of God and the problem of how a completely transcendent and simple divine being touches and unites with creation. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition this problem is answered through a distinction between God’s essence (ουσία) and His energies (ενέργεια). Grappling with this dense theological debate is necessary because the position one takes on the essence-energies debate will determine how one understands grace from a metaphysical point of view. On the one hand, if God’s energies are uncreated and transcendent from the world, then God’s grace is also uncreated and transcendent from the world. This is the Eastern Orthodox perspective on the metaphysics of divine grace. On the other hand, if God’s energies are created in the economy of salvation (a

¹ Maximus, *Amb.* 41, (PG 91: 1308B).

simple God cannot have energies proper), then God's grace is also created. This is the Western perspective on the metaphysics of divine grace.

Aside from the *filioque* clause, there are few theological topics between Eastern and Western Christian theology that creates as much division as the theological and metaphysical distinction between the essence and energies of God. Contemporary Eastern Orthodox scholars contend that this distinction (although not a division according to them) in God between His essence and energies has been neglected by the West both philosophically and theologically.² For Western theologians, God is understood to be simple and non-compounded, and there is no room in the Divine nature for a separate metaphysical distinction of energy that would cause a division in the Godhead and create a composite divine nature (σύνθετος).³

In the Western schema of God's essence and energy, energy is understood as his actions in the cosmos as part of his economy, not as something separate from his essence *ad extra*. God's essence and God's existence are also one without remainder.⁴ An analogy would be that a human person has a natural energy through activity,

² David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge; CUP, 2004).

³ Kallistos Ware, 'God Hidden and Revealed: The Apophatic Way and the Essence-Energies Distinction,' *Eastern Churches Review* 7 (1975), p. 135.

⁴ Rowan Williams, 'The Philosophical Structures of Palamism,' *Eastern Churches Review* 9 (1977), p. 39.

but his or her actions and being are not separate from one another. You could not identify a person by his or her being alone without his or her actions. When God acts in the cosmos, his activity is truly his divinity. While the West generally sees the unity of God's nature with his activities as an economic determination in the mind of the creature, there is still adherence to divine simplicity in the nature of God *in se*.

The unity of God with his actions does not elicit ontotheology (that is, God and creatures being on an equivocal scale of being with one another), because the mystery of who God is in himself is not fully comprehensible due to God's infinite nature.⁵ Divine simplicity holds that, with God, His being and his energy (or one could insert any of the divine attributes such as goodness, immutability, omnipresence, etc.) are one and not distinguished from one another. God's energy and his essence are united into pure actuality (*actus essendi*), and the energies that the creation experiences are generally understood as created realities but from a divine source. As Thomas Aquinas notes in the *Summa Theologica*, 'God is the same as His essence or nature.'⁶

⁵ Duns Scotus understands infinity in God as basic to his nature. Divine simplicity and unity would then be secondary to infinity in God, which is the opposite of the Thomistic schema whereby Divine Simplicity is properly basic in God and infinity flows forth from it; see Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 25.

⁶ *Summa Theologica* 1.2 Q. 3.

Not only is God the same as his essence or nature, he is also ‘his own existence’ as pure actuality.⁷ This means that God is fully knowable as pure actuality, but also that His infinite nature makes him incomprehensible to the creature.⁸ Aquinas sees the union of essence and existence in God as central in understanding his nature because if God’s essence were separate from his existence, then he would be a participated being instead of the cause or *suppositum* of Being itself. Thus, there are no real separate accidents in the divine being. However, the activity of God in creation is understood as something separate from God but only in economic terms.⁹ For Thomas, divine simplicity provides a needed barrier between God and world, which prevents both pantheism and a purely materialist ontology. The connection of divine being with divine energy is why the theological understanding of divine simplicity is crucially important for the Eastern and Western Christian debate on the essence-energies distinction.

In the Christian East, the essence and energy of God are distinguished by a ‘real distinction,’ but when the creation participates in the energy or energies

⁷ *Summa Theologica* 1.2 Q. 3.

⁸ Rowan Williams, ‘The Philosophical Structures of Palamism,’ pp. 40-41; Fran O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 24, 55-58.

⁹ This is where the theological principle of ‘created grace’ begins to enter into the West and becomes a part of the common vocabulary of Scholasticism. This phrase will require much qualification in relation to Maximus’s understanding of grace and nature and will be addressed in Chapter Four and Chapter Five.

(*energia, energiai*)¹⁰ of the Godhead, it is really participating in God. Many contemporary Eastern Orthodox scholars, such as Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, argue that the essence-energies distinction in God is a real and objective principle, a '*pragmatiki diakrisis*.'¹¹ What this means philosophically is uncertain, because even Gregory of Palamas (1296–1359), the father of the essence-energies distinction, calls the energy of God a 'quasi-accident' (συμβεβηκός πῶς) of the divine being.¹² A local synodical council under the presidency of Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos in 1351, also called the Fifth Ecumenical Council in the East, established the essence-

¹⁰ Kallistos Ware notes that it is equally legitimate to use the term energy in either the singular or the plural since they refer to the natural energy that God has apart from his essence, but the difference in usage among the Church Fathers, who use *energeia* in the singular far more often, suggests a greater importance in using the term in the singular; see Kallistos Ware, 'God Hidden and Revealed,' p. 130.

¹¹ Kallistos Ware, 'God Hidden and Revealed,' p. 134.

¹² Gregory of Palamas, *Cap. 150, 135*. Torstein Tollefsen points out the term 'accident' (συμβεβηκός) could mean something like 'property' of God in Gregory's argument. Gregory is using this participle as an adjective in this passage. In Porphyry's *Isagoge*, which Maximus's created ontology follows to a great extent in his theology of expansion and contraction, there are four types of meanings that 'property' (τὸ ἴδιον, ἰδίωμα, and ἰδιότης) connotes. One nuance of the term in Aristotle and Porphyry is that it does not define the whatness or essence of a being. Tollefsen presents a way in which God can have a property that does not belong to his essence. He says it is like the capacity a person has to laugh, but laughing is not an essential part of the definition of a human being. This is indeed a helpful analogy to understand what Gregory is here trying to say about energy being a kind of accident, but philosophically this analogy would break down when speaking of the Godhead. From an Aristotelian point of view, a 'quasi-accident' would still not make any sense. Either something is an essential property or it is an added property. This also raises issue with understanding *theosis* and participation being a real ontological reality and not just a logical-causal relation to the divine; see Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus Confessor* (Oxford, UK: OUP, 2008) pp. 142-43.

energies distinction, although this local council did not carry ecumenical authority. The council stated that the essence-energies distinction was not merely a notional one but also ‘in the being of God,’ which moves God’s activities or energies from economy to metaphysics.¹³ Kallistos Ware¹⁴ has extracted eight main points from the proceedings of the 1351 council that I would like to present verbatim:

- (1) There is in God a distinction (διάκρισις) between the essence and the energies or energy. (It is equally legitimate to refer to the latter either in the singular or in the plural).
- (2) The energy of God is not created but uncreated (ἀκτιστος).
- (3) This distinction between the uncreated essence and the uncreated energies does not in any way impair the divine simplicity; there is no ‘compositeness’ (synthesis) in God.
- (4) The term ‘deity’ (θεότης) may be applied not only to the essence of God but to the energies.
- (5) The essence enjoys a certain priority or superiority in relation to the energies, in the sense that the energies proceed from the essence.
- (6) Man can participate in God’s energies but not in his essence.
- (7) The divine energies may be experienced by men in the form of light – a light which, though beheld through men’s bodily eyes, is in itself non-material, ‘intelligible’ (νοερόν) and uncreated. This is the uncreated light that was manifested to the apostles at the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, that is seen during prayer by the saints in our own time, and that will shine upon and from the righteous at their resurrection on the Last Day. It thus possesses an eschatological character: it is ‘the light of the Age to Come.’
- (8) No energy is to be associated with one divine person to the exclusion of

¹³ Kallistos Ware, ‘God Hidden and Revealed,’ p. 134.

¹⁴ Kallistos Ware, ‘God Hidden and Revealed,’ p. 129-30; for the Greek text of the Synodical Tome of 1351, see I. N. Karmiris, ‘*Ta dogmatika kai symbolika mnimeia tis Orthodoxou*,’ in *Katholiki Ekklisia*, Vol. 1 (Athens, 1960), pp.354-410.

the other two, but the energies are shared in common by all three persons of the Trinity.

This synod effectively established the *diakrisis* between God and his energy in the Eastern Christian tradition, and it solidified a mystification of theology for this great branch of Christianity. God in his essence is unknowable, and access to the divine life is only available through a triadic ontology of the imparticipable One—participable energy—and participant. In many respects this qualification and distinction in the divine being is a positive move away from much of the late Scholastic rationalism and Aristotelianism that places God at a great distance from his creation.

In the West, the *theologoumenon* of the essence-energies distinction is seen as a shift in theology away from orthodoxy. The theology certainly did not carry ecumenical authority as a major council of the whole Church. Despite this charge of innovation, Eastern Orthodox theologians retain the belief that creatures cannot know the inner *ousia* of God, which is what they appear to understand as being the Western position.¹⁵ Knowledge of God for the Orthodox is only obtained through the

¹⁵ Rowan Williams notes that in the Aristotelian framework an *ousia* is not really an inner core of a thing but merely a marking of what kind of thing one is talking about. It is important to add that the Iamblician neoplatonic tradition did hold that you can know the *ousia* of a thing, even God, but that with God this was really inconceivable given the limitless nature of God as being not on the same scale as the being of creation. In the neoplatonic metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas, God is knowable, but given his unlimited and infinite nature, any beautiful vision of God is a revelation of grace; see Rowan Williams, 'The Philosophical Structures of Palamism,' p. 32. For an examination into the

uncreated energies of God, which is described as a theophany of the uncreated glory to created eyes much like the transfiguration of Jesus to the disciples. In order to explain how God can be simple and separate from the creation, yet intimately connected to it, Gregory of Palamas argued that ‘nature and energy are not identical.’¹⁶

Despite the anthropomorphism of such a statement, Gregory’s dialectic of *ousia* and *energia* provides a way for him to describe how the unparticipable transcendent God can divinize creation. Gregory believes that deification (θέωσις) is the reason why this distinction must be made real in God. Without the energies in God being distinct from the essence, the Christian is not deified or touched by the uncreated light of glory. Much like the Messalian heresy, Gregory thinks that understanding energy as created rather than uncreated would remove God’s grace from deification. Palamas even goes so far as to say that deification, in relation to the essence-energies distinction, is ‘enhyposstatic’ like the persons of the Holy Trinity. Quoting Maximus’s *Ad Thal.* 61, Gregory remarks that:

Deification is an enhyposstatic and direct illumination which has no beginning, but appears on those who are worthy as something exceeding their comprehension. It is indeed a mystical union with God, beyond

apophatic nature of Aquinas’s Trinitarian theology, see Karen Kilby, ‘Aquinas, the Trinity and the Limits of Understanding,’ *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 7/4 (2005), pp. 414-427

¹⁶ Gregory Palamas, *Capita* 143. trans. and ed. Robert E. Sinkewicz, *150 Chapters* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1988), p. 249.

intellect and reason, in the age when creatures will no longer know corruption. Thanks to this union, the saints, observing the light of the hidden and more-than-ineffable glory, become themselves able to receive the blessed purity, in company with the celestial powers. Deification is also the invocation of the great God and Father, the symbol of the authentic and real adoption according to the gift of grace of the Holy Spirit, thanks to the bestowal of which grace the saints become and will remain the sons of God.¹⁷

The proceedings of the 1351 council also indicated that the enhypostatic nature of the energies was rooted in the Trinity itself and commonly shared among the persons:

[God] is not revealed in his essence (*ousia*), for no one has ever seen or described God's nature (*physis*); but he is revealed in the grace (*charis*), power (*dynamis*) and energy (*energia*) which is common to Father, Son and Spirit. Distinctive to each of the three is the person (*hypostasis*) of each, and whatever belongs to the person. Shared in common by all three are not only the transcendent essence--which is altogether nameless, unmanifested and impalpable, since it is beyond all names, manifestation and participation--but also the divine grace, power, energy, radiance, kingdom and incorruption whereby God enters through grace into communion and union with the holy angels and the saints.¹⁸

¹⁷ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, in the *Classics of Western Spirituality* series, ed. John Meyendorff, trans. Nicholas Gendle (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), p. 84. The term enhypostatic in reference to deification and the energies of God is a term derived from the Christology of Leontius of Byzantium (c. 485 – c. 543); see F. LeRon Shultz, 'A Dubious Christological Formula: From Leontius of Byzantium to Karl Barth,' *Theological Studies* 57 (1996), p. 436. For the Cyrillian roots to Leontius's distinction, see John J. Lynch, 'Leontius of Byzantium: A Cyrillian Christology,' *Theological Studies* 36 (1975), pp. 455-71. For a study on *enhypostatic* and other words in Leontius, see A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995) pp. 180-205. Maximus will revise Leontius's Christology into a synthetic hypostasis with two natures (*Ep.* 14, PG 91: 489BC); see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to St. Maximus Confessor* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2003) pp. 240-60.

¹⁸ trans. Kallistos Ware, 'God Hidden and Revealed,' p 408.

Gregory also discusses the ‘three realities’ in God of substance, energy, and the three hypostases of persons in his work *150 Chapters*.¹⁹ The importance of this book for our study on grace in Maximus Confessor is the equivalence of the terms ‘grace,’ ‘power,’ ‘energy,’ and ‘radiance.’ Many Orthodox theologians use these common theological terms as synonyms when speaking about divine activity. The same is also true whether one is speaking about one or many energies of God.²⁰ There is a similar connectivity between power, grace, and energy in Maximus’s thought that is crucial for understanding the essence-energy distinction. My argument is that divine grace is the best filter to interpret Maximus’s metaphysics in the essence-energy question. By interpreting the divine energies as grace, and then rooting grace in the Incarnation of Christ, we will avoid reading Maximus as either a Palamite or a Neo-Thomist. In both perspectives the full paradox of grace as being both uncreated and created at the same time is lost.

With the essence-energies distinction in the East there is a type of paradoxical leap, although not paradoxical enough, into the incomprehensible divine life. The union which emerges from this leap is not a fusion of essences; rather, everything that God has is communicated through his uncreated energies.

¹⁹ Gregory of Palamas, *Cap. 150*, chapter 75, trans. and ed. Robert E. Sinkewicz, *150 Chapters*, p. 171.

²⁰ Kallistos Ware, ‘God Hidden and Revealed,’ p. 130.

However, in the Eastern perspective, there is not a *tertia quid* even if the logic of their explanation of the distinction points in this direction. The energies of God are not a *thing* that can come in between God and the creation. However, if the energies have an ontological reality, then they technically are a third thing between God and creation.

We will first need to examine how the doctrine of the essence-energies distinction emerged in the fourteenth century in Byzantium before discussing whether or not this distinction is present in Maximus Confessor. I will argue that reading the essence-energies distinction back into Maximus is not justifiable textually or theologically, even though many individual passages in his writings could lend to the distinction. Gregory did not establish the essence-energies distinction in a vacuum. While there are many difficult passages in the Church Fathers's writings that could provide a basis for the distinction, Maximus's metaphysics of grace presents a better solution to the question of the relationship between God and world than a metaphysical distinction.

2.2 The Emergence of Palamism

Gregory of Palamas was a monk, archbishop of Thessalonki, and a preeminent theologian of Hesychasm. In the words of the great twentieth-century theologian John Meyendorff, Gregory's theology centralized around one essential truth: 'The living God is accessible to personal experience, because He shared His

own life with humanity.²¹ Growing up in the court of Byzantine Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos, Gregory received an extensive classical education in philosophy. Gregory's father was a courtier of the emperor until his early death, and the emperor saw to his upbringing and education.

Instead of pursuing a secular life in government, Gregory retreated into the Vatopedi monastery on Mount Athos at the age of twenty. After moving around to a couple of monasteries on Athos due to the growing threat of Turkish invasions, Gregory founded a community of hermits in Veria just outside of Thessaloniki. The practice of hesychasm was common within the communities of monks on Mount Athos. The term hesychasm comes from the root *hesychia* (ἡσυχία), which means 'stillness,' 'rest,' 'quiet,' or 'silence.'²² Hesychasm stemmed from an ancient eremitic tradition of prayer found in the communities of the desert of Skete. Hesychasts in the Eastern Orthodox tradition practiced the discipline of stillness. Palamas taught that when the hesychast is in deep prayer, he or she sees the theophany of the divine in an uncreated light with spiritual eyes. The divine ray or energy is not something graspable by the created intellect because it transcends the created sphere. Gregory asserts one 'should hold that intellectual activities are entirely

²¹ John Meyendorff, 'Introduction,' Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, in the *Classics of Western Spirituality* series, ed. John Meyendorff, trans. Nicholas Gendle (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), p. 1.

²² eds. Ken Parry, David Melling, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity* (Malden, MA.: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), p. 230.

bypassed by the light of union and by the action of this light.²³ Since the light is the direct uncreated experience of God, it cannot be reduced to a created entity or energy. Thus, for Palamas the grace and energy of God are an uncreated phenomenon that transcend the immanent world yet penetrate it at the same time. Coterminous with the experience of the true uncreated divine energies is the non-experience of the essence of God in his simplicity. The simple and utterly transcendent divine essence cannot be identified with the experience of the divine energies. As Gregory notes time and again, ‘it [divine illumination] is uncreated and not identical to the divine substance.’²⁴

Around the year 1330, Barlaam of Calabria (Seminara in southern Italy more specifically) came to Constantinople and began debating the Latin insertion of the *filioque* clause in the creed. For Barlaam, the Trinity and the procession of the Holy Spirit were completely unknowable.²⁵ He took this agnostic stance based upon a selection of writings from the fifth or sixth century theologian Pseudo-Dionysius. In Barlaam’s reading of Pseudo-Dionysius’s work *The Divine Names*, he emphasized the negative or apophatic method of knowing God. Pseudo-Dionysius made numerous

²³ Gregory of Palamas, *The Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle, *The Triads*, p. 91.

²⁴ Gregory of Palamas, *150 Chapters*, chapter 65, trans. and ed. Robert E. Sinkewicz, *150 Chapters*, p. 159.

²⁵ Gregory of Palamas, *Dialogue Between an Orthodox and a Barlamite*, trans. Rein Ferwerda, intro. Sarah J. Benning-Bolle (Binghamton: NY, Global Publications at SUNY Binghamton University, 1999), p. 3.

statements on apophaticism in his works, such as the following:

God is therefore known in all things and is distinct from all things. He is known through knowledge and through unknowing. Of him there is conception, reason, understanding, touch, perception, opinion, imagination, name, and many other things...He is not one of the things that are and he cannot be known in any of them.²⁶

Palamas communicated through several letters that Barlaam did not read the full text of Pseudo-Dionysius, which showed that there are participations and aspects of God that can be known through mystical experience.²⁷ Barlaam then sought to completely discredit Gregory by mocking the practices of the Hesychasts on a visit to Thessaloniki:

Miraculous separations and reunions of the spirit and the soul, of the traffic which demons have with the soul, of the difference between red lights and white lights, of the entry and departure of the intelligence through the nostrils with the breath, of the shields that gather together round the navel, and finally of the union of Our Lord with the soul, which takes place in the full and sensible certitude of the heart within the navel.²⁸

Barlaam thought that the monks were committing the heresy of Messalianism, where God's essence was completely knowable by created intellect. Barlaam made a

²⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN 7.3* (PG 3: 872A), trans. Luidheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 108-09.

²⁷ J. Konstantinovsky, 'Dionysius the Areopagite versus Aristotle?' in *Studia Patristica* vol. XLII, eds. Frances Margaret Young, Mark J. Edwards, and Paul M. Parvis (Leuven: Peters, 2006) p. 318.

²⁸ Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in captivity: a study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the eve of the Turkish conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 141.

quip about seeing the divine light, 'I must confess that I do not know what this light is. I only know that it does not exist.'²⁹

Gregory wrote a series of triads in response to Barlaam's attacks, where he develops his argument for the essence-energies distinction. In his triad 'Essence and Energies in God,' Gregory Palamas makes the distinction that there are aspects of God that are not his essence but are also 'unoriginate' powers, such as knowing, prescience, creating and deification.³⁰ With great cleverness, Gregory presents the dialectic that either God acquired these powers subsequently from himself, which would make him not God, or God possessed these faculties and powers from eternity. Therefore, the powers or energies of God are uncreated (the light of Hesychasm). Holy Tradition also requires that God have a single unoriginate essence. The combination of these two theological beliefs about the nature and activity of God led Gregory to affirm both a single unoriginate essence in God and uncreated energies or 'works.'³¹

Gregory cites Basil, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus in several places as teaching the doctrine of the distinction in the

²⁹ Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in captivity: a study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the eve of the Turkish conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 141.

³⁰ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle, *The Triads*, p. 93.

³¹ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle, *The Triads*, p. 93.

nature of God between the essence and the energies.³² St. Cyril of Alexandria said that ‘the divine nature is ineffable and cannot be comprehended by us in its fullest possible form, but only in what it accomplishes and effects.’³³ St. Basil made the same point earlier in the famous debate with Eunomius. In *Letter 234* to Amphilochius Basil writes:

Do you worship what you know or what you do not know? If I answer, I worship what I know, they immediately reply, What is the essence of the object of worship? Then, if I confess that I am ignorant of the essence, they turn on me again and say, so you worship you know not what. I answer that the word to know has many meanings. We say that we know the greatness of God, His power, His wisdom, His goodness, His providence over us, and the justness of His judgment; but not His very essence. The question is, therefore, only put for the sake of dispute. For he who denies that he knows the essence does not confess himself to be ignorant of God, because our idea of God is gathered from all the attributes which I have enumerated. But God, he says, is simple, and whatever attribute of Him you have reckoned as knowable is of His essence...If they [Eunomians] say, yes, let them not ask if we know the essence of God, but let them enquire of us whether we know God to be awful, or just, or merciful. These we confess that we know. If they say that essence is something distinct, let them not put us in the wrong on the score of simplicity. For they confess themselves that there is a distinction between the essence and each one of the attributes enumerated. The operations are various, and the essence simple, but we say that we know our God from His operations, but do not undertake to approach near to His essence. His operations come down to us, but His essence remains beyond

³² See particularly chapters 71-81 in Gregory of Palamas, *150 Chapters*, trans. and ed. Robert E. Sinkewicz; *The Triads*, pp. 167-79.

³³ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John 3.2* (PG 73: 259D-260A), trans. by Russell Norman, *Cyril of Alexandria* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 23.

our reach.³⁴

In this passage, Basil is discussing the way in which the creature can know God. It should be noticed that Basil assails the Eunomians for affirming a distinction between God's essence and his energies. Basil rejects the metaphysical distinction proposed by the Eunomians in order to affirm the limit of human knowledge of God's essence in the realm of epistemology. God's essence is 'incomprehensible' and 'infinite,' says John Damascene,³⁵ and the only truths that we can know about God are his infinity and incomprehensibility. In the midst of conflict with the Eunomians, this appeal to creaturely ignorance is certainly a pious response on Basil's part. The other two great Cappadocian fathers, Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa, also verify this critique of Basil by affirming that no man will ever be able to determine God's essence or nature.³⁶ Gregory of Nyssa avows that only the energies of God come down to creaturely existence, but the essence remains transcendent and unreachable.³⁷ Though there are basic Palamite elements here

³⁴ Basil of Ceasarea, *Letter 234*, trans. by Blomfield Jackson, *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 8., eds. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1895).

³⁵ John of Damascene. *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 1.4 (PG 94: 800B), trans. by E.W. Watson and L. Pullan, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 9, eds. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1899).

³⁶ Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration 28* (PG 36: 25A).

³⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *Homily on the Beatitudes* (PG 44: 1269A).

concerning the essence of God not being reachable and his energies reachable, there are no averting metaphysical distinctions being made in the Cappadocians. Torstein Tollefsen, who consequently does accept the essence-energies distinction in Maximus, acknowledges that at least with Basil and Gregory Nazianzen the conflict with Eunomius supports the view that they are mainly dealing with knowledge of God and not with a metaphysical distinction in God.³⁸ Gregory of Nyssa is more difficult on this point since he does talk about God being within himself and around himself (περί αὐτό),³⁹ but as David Balas points out, the logic of understanding the divine attributes or perfections as lesser than God would render our language about him superfluous.⁴⁰ Gregory states that the essence of God and the Good are not separate but are one and the same.⁴¹ He clearly describes the consequences of not holding the essence and perfections of God together:

If we grant the view of the impious that the good does not reside essentially (κατ' οὐσίαν) in the Vivifying Power (ζωοποιου δυναμοσ) but is added to it (προσγινεσθαι) by participation (εκ μετουσιας), we should not call it good in the proper sense, but would be compelled to regard it as something different...neither will the good be found in it (i.e. in the Vivifying Power) eternally, nor will it be comprehended according to its essence (αὐτό ὄπερ

³⁸ Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus Confessor*, pp. 73, 151.

³⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Homily on the Beatitudes* (PG 44: 1263D).

⁴⁰ David, Balas, *Man's Participations in God's Perfections According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum, 1966), p. 59.

⁴¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 1.19.

ἔστι) in the nature of the good...for if they become good by partaking (το μετεχειν) of the better (τοῦ κρείττονος), it is plain that before the participation (μετουσιας) they were not such.⁴²

This passage from the *Contra Eunomium* demonstrates that an essence-energies distinction is not justifiably present in Gregory of Nyssa's theology. However, in this tractate Gregory does appear to hold both positions that the perfections (i.e., energies) of God are unitary with God, such that He is the giver of Being instead a participant in Being, and also that the perfections come forth from God as being around him (περί αὐτό). Tollefsen⁴³ is right to suggest that this cluster of ideas in Gregory could lend to a Palamite distinction, but there is nothing explicit in Gregory's writings to suggest that the perfections, in which creatures participate, are not created realities. With the Cappadocian fathers there is more of a noetic response to the question of the essence and energies of God rather than a metaphysically real distinction in the Godhead.

There were Eastern Fathers who did unite God's essence with His energy. In book one of his *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, St. John Damascene (or Damascus, c. 675–749 CE) describes the divine nature as a unified single act or energy

⁴² Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, quoted and translated by David, Balas, *Man's Participations in God's Perfections According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa*, p. 58, Greek inserted by me.

⁴³ Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus Confessor*, pp. 156-159.

(ενέργεια).⁴⁴ God is also ‘perfect, without blemish in goodness, and wisdom, and power, without beginning, without end, everlasting, uncircumscribed (απερίγραπτον) and in short, perfect in all things.’⁴⁵ Damascene even states that the energy of the Godhead is simple and one, ‘the Deity is simple and has one simple energy, good and energizing in all things, just as the sun’s ray, which warms all things and energizes in each in harmony with its natural aptitude and receptive power, having obtained this form of energy from God, its Maker.’⁴⁶

Damascene is just emphasizing the Maximian and Cappadocian principle that every existing nature has a natural energy.⁴⁷ Still, the point of this passage by Damascene is to emphasize the unity of God with his actions, and the assertion that God has a natural energy does not thereby mean that it is distinguished from the essence, and by terming the divine energy itself as simple would indicate that Damascene does not note a division between energy and the essence. Similarly, the Apostolic Fathers, such as Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, deal with the unity

⁴⁴ John of Damascene. *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 3.15, trans. by E.W. Watson and L. Pullan, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 9. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1899).

⁴⁵ John Damascene, *The Orthodox Faith* 1.5.

⁴⁶ John Damascene, *The Orthodox Faith* 1.10; see also Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 5.2; Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oration* 37 and 45; Gregory of Nyssa, *On ‘Not Three Gods’ to Ablabius*; and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 1.11, Art. 4.

⁴⁷ Maximus, *Pyrrh.* 33 (PG 91: 340D).

of God in writing against the Marcionites and the Manichæans. Through the Cappadocian Fathers's engagement with the Eunomians, divine simplicity is maintained, and the divine attributes and energies are not separated from the essence of God.⁴⁸

Maximus uses infinity as the basis for not knowing the essence of God: 'For the wonderful grandeur of God's infinity is without quantity or parts, and completely without dimension, and offers no grip to take hold of it and to know what it is in its essence.'⁴⁹ In talking about the nature of the infinity in *Amb.* 10, Maximus states 'if no kind of essential difference can exist from eternity as the infinite's other, then the infinite can be in no way receptive of duality [the dyad].'⁵⁰ The creature cannot circumscribe the Creator or be on par with Him. This is an orthodox Christian belief in the absolute ontological divide between God and all things after God. However, for Maximus this does not mean that the 'divine activity' is divided from the one God or not simple in itself. God is 'shared without division,'

⁴⁸ For a newer study that argues that simplicity does change in the Cappadocian fathers, see Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁴⁹ Maximus, *Myst.* 5 (PG 91: 677A0), trans. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p 192. For comments concerning knowledge of essence in a Christological sense, see *Ad Thal.* 60 (CCSG 7:79).

⁵⁰ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1185A), Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 142; the Greek here for 'essential difference' is οὐσίαν διάφορον.

and this reflects the ‘simplicity and indivisibility’ of His natural energy.⁵¹

2.3 False Generalizations

The methodological tool of divine simplicity takes priority in Latin patristic theology, but that does not mean that this methodology is inconsistent with the Greek fathers understanding of divine simplicity and the participatory framework in which divinization is presented in the Greek tradition. Such an ascription would be incorrect to apply to the Western tradition as a whole.

There are many Western theologians, such as Nicholas of Cusa, who embrace both divine simplicity and full participation in God. In *De Coniecturas* 1.11, Nicholas of Cusa describes the complete paradoxical participation in God yet also non-participation of God at the same time. It is arguably the best statement of full participation⁵² using the paradoxical reading in the Western tradition:

Created minds do not receive into themselves the ray of Divine Light as if by their nature they preceded their partaking [of the Divine Light]. Rather, the intellect’s partaking of that unimpartible, most actual Light constitutes the [respective] quiddity of created minds. Therefore, the actuality of our intelligence consists in its partaking of the Divine Intellect. But since that most actual Power can be received only with a variety-of-otherness (a variety, that is, which is received somehow concurrently with the power), it happens that the participant-minds partake of the most actual Intellect with

⁵¹ Maximus, *Myst.* 5 (PG 91: 677B).

⁵² I am indebted to John Milbank for pointing out this incredible passage of Nicholas of Cusa.

a degree of otherness—i.e., with that degree of actuality which (in relation to the Divine Intellect) is otherness or potency. Therefore, it is rather the case that our entire intelligence consists of participation in the Divine Actuality with a degree of potency. For in this way the ability actually to understand truth, as it is, befits created minds—even as it is proper to our God that the Divine Actuality be partaken of with various degrees of potency by created minds. Therefore, the more Godlike an intelligence is, the nearer its potency is to Actuality as it is; but the more obscure an intelligence is, the more distant [it is from Actuality]. Therefore, Actuality is partaken of differently and variously by near, by remote, and by very remote potency. Moreover, that Inaccessible Loftiness is not to be approached as if there could be no access at all to it. Nor, having been approached, is that Loftiness to be supposed actually to have been [perfectly] apprehended. Rather, [we are to believe] that it can always be approached more closely, while it remains ever unattainable as it is [in itself]. By way of comparison, time advances toward everlastingness, with which it can never attain equality, even though it approaches continually...Let one who keeps in mind these statements make a surmise about participation in the following way. Since whatever can be partaken of is partaken of only with a degree of otherness, it will have to be partaken of in fourfoldness; for oneness both goes forth from itself into otherness and exists in a fourfold way. Whatever is partaken of by something else cannot be received either maximally or minimally or equally. Moreover, since oneness's simplicity is not partaken of insofar as it is simple but is partaken of otherwise, it is partaken of with a degree of compositeness, so to speak, or with a falling away from that simplicity—i.e., with a degree of difference from simplicity. Therefore, simplicity, since it is simplicity, is not partaken of in parts but in the way in which what-is-simple can be partaken of according to itself as a whole. However, since oneness's simplicity is unimpartible maximally, minimally, and equally (for it is partaken of, as it is, [only] by means of a coincidence, as is shown in Learned Ignorance) it will have to be partaken of with a certain fourfoldness that falls short of maximality, minimality, and equality. Therefore, oneness is partaken of not insofar as it is an enfolding simplicity or insofar as it is unfolded in otherness but insofar as its changeable and unfolding power-to-be-partaken-of is understood (by means of a certain coincidence) as a mode-of-power of the enfolding, unpartakeable oneness.⁵³

⁵³ Nicholas of Cusa, *De Coniecturas*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000)

In the essence-energies debate there is much in the way of generalization that causes division instead of understanding. The West can hold that the creation both participates and does not participate in the godhead. Confusion and ideological difference comes into view in the essence-energies debate with the way both Christian traditions understand participation and deification. There is a generalization of the Christian East by the Christian West that the logic of the essence-energies distinction infers a metaphysical distinction in God that was considered in patristic thought to be merely an epistemological point, and thus the Christian East advocates compositeness in God.⁵⁴

Even the then young Rowan Williams in his 1977 article on the essence-energies distinction glossed over the Neoplatonic concept of participation as being only a causative and logic point.⁵⁵ In point of fact, the Neoplatonic absorption of Plato and Aristotle created a harmony between understanding the God as immanent in the world and transcendent from it. So, there is a much greater ontological connection in the philosophy of participation in Neoplatonic thought than the West often will admit, and it is this ontological paradox of participation in God that gives the Orthodox tradition immense explanatory power. However, for a more complete

pp. 189-91.

⁵⁴ Rowan Williams, 'The Philosophical Structures of Palamism,' p. 39.

⁵⁵ Rowan Williams, 'The Philosophical Structures of Palamism,' p. 34.

answer to the problem of participation, Eastern Orthodox theology needs to move towards a more radical trajectory than a real distinction in God between his essence and energies.

Metropolitan Kallistos Ware also notes that the ditheistic charge (i.e., compositeness in God) was laid against St. Gregory of Palamas by his detractor Barlaam the Calabrian (ca. 1290-1348 CE) in the fourteenth century Hesychast controversy, but Gregory was conscientious of the issue of divine simplicity and emphatically affirmed that there is between the essence and energies of God ‘a union without confusion, a distinction without division.’⁵⁶ He used the analogy of the faculties of the soul that are distinct aspects of the one soul.⁵⁷ Despite difficult and conflicting passages on the nature of the essence-energies distinction in Gregory’s argument, he did not move away from the conviction of divine simplicity. As Tollefsen notes, ‘a Palamist, even if he speaks about the ‘energy’ as ‘outside of the essence,’ does not mean that it is established as some kind of quasi-hypostasis ‘between’ the essence and the things on which it operates. The activity does not ‘follow’ the essence in this external fashion.’⁵⁸ From my own reading of Palamas’s

⁵⁶ Kallistos Ware, ‘God Hidden and Revealed,’ p. 135.

⁵⁷ Kallistos Ware, ‘God Hidden and Revealed,’ p. 135.

⁵⁸ Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus Confessor*, pp. 156-156. It appears that Tollefsen is trying to affirm that God is not separate or in between his essence and energies, but if

writings, I would agree that not separating God from his activity is at the heart of his intensions, but he does not add clarity to this intention through the use of muddled definitions, such as the energies being ‘quasi-accidents.’⁵⁹

In defending the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit against Barlaam, as opposed to the Spirit being an energy of God, Palamas affirmed ‘that the divine energy, even though it is referred to somehow as an accident, is nevertheless contemplated in God but does not bring about composition.’⁶⁰ So Gregory rejects the charge that the essence-energies distinction creates a composite or synthetic being.⁶¹ Instead, the energy of God ‘is not separate [from the essence] but is distinct from the substance of God because it is from the substance, though it is participated by creatures.’⁶² In the third triad, Palamas uses the example of the soul, which is simple but has multiple powers to it.⁶³ He further uses the example of the hypostasis of the Trinity that are three yet not separated from the oneness of the Godhead. This may be

there is no separation between them, then this is not philosophically different from the Western Christian position.

⁵⁹ Gregory of Palamas, *150 Chapters*, chapter 135, trans. and ed. Robert E. Sinkewicz, *150 Chapters*, p. 241.

⁶⁰ “Ὅτι ἡ θεία ἐνέργεια, εἰ καὶ συμβεβηκός ἐστιν ὅπως λέγεται, ἀλλ’ ἐνθεωρεῖται τῷ θεῷ καὶ σύνθεσιν,” Gregory Palamas, *Capita* 143.

⁶¹ Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus Confessor*, p. 141.

⁶² ‘διφέρουσαν δὲ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνέργειαν, ὡς ἐξ ἐχέινης οὐσαν, μετεχομένην μέντοι παρὰ τῶν ποιημάτων,’ Gregory of Palamas, *Capita* 126.

⁶³ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle, p. 93.

helpful conceptually in understanding how the essence-energies distinction can be both a separation and union in God, but comparing energy to hypostasis in the Trinity breaks down on a fundamental level.

Maximus verifies the logical breakdown of this argument in his debate against Pyrrhus. In referring to Pyrrhus's position of a single energy in Christ, Maximus counters that Pyrrhus is actually committing an argument *ad absurdum*: 'If, as you [Pyrrhus] say, a person be introduced with an operation, and you support [the fact that] many energies proceed from the same Person of God the Word Incarnate, then you must also support as many persons [in Christ] as there are energies. So His Persons and His energies are found to be infinite!'⁶⁴ For Gregory to apply his Trinitarian analogy in a literal manner, he would have to concede that in God the divine energy would be in three just as there are three hypostatic persons. Also, as Rowan Williams has noted, *ousia* in Aristotelian terms (second substance) generally refers to the 'kind' of thing you are dealing with, not with the inner nature or principle of a thing.⁶⁵ So there is a confusion of terms here when Gregory discusses the divine *ousia*.

Maximus's response to the Monothelite controversy provides another defense of the essence-energies distinction for Gregory and the 1351 council.

⁶⁴ Maximus Confessor, *Pyrrh.* 168, trans. Joseph Farrell, *Dispute with Pyrrhus*, p. 58.

⁶⁵ Rowan Williams, 'The Philosophical Structures of Palamism,' p. 30.

Barlaam says to Gregory, ‘I have heard that this grace and glory [energies] are supernatural and akin to God, for it is said that like is contemplated by like. So, since this reality is uncreated and unoriginate, I say that it is the essence of God.’⁶⁶ Gregory retorts that this is the worst impiety because by equating energy with created realities, one does not allow God to have a natural energy and existence. Palamas reiterates Maximus’s position against Pyrrhus that everything that exists has a natural energy, and if the divine essence had created energies, which were equated with the essence, then the essence of God would also be created.⁶⁷ Gregory argues, following Maximus, that if the divine nature of Christ were created, then there would not be an identifiable distinction between two created natures.

Juan-Miguel Garrigues has pointed out in an important article entitled, ‘L’Energie Divine et Grace chez Maxime le Confesseur,’ that just because the 1351 council affirmed the essence-energies distinction using the theology of the two wills and energies of Christ formula of Maximus does not mean that Maximus therefore thought that the divine nature has a further distinction of the energy from the essence.⁶⁸ Garrigues posits that, ‘If the energies were formally distinct from their essence, nothing prevents the energies of the two natures of Christ from

⁶⁶ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle, p. 104.

⁶⁷ Maximus, *Pyrrh.* 33 (PG 91, 340D).

⁶⁸ Juan-Miguel Garrigues, ‘L’Energie Divine et Grace chez Maxime le Confesseur,’ *Istina*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1974): pp. 272-296.

superseding the natures, such as His divine energy over his human operation.⁶⁹ The logic that Garrigues presses here is that nature and activity in Christ must not be distinct or else the tension between the human and divine gives way to the power of the divine energy over his human nature. Essentially, a Palamite reading of Christology will lose the very synergy that Maximus argues for in his disputation against Pyrrhus. Divine energy would most certainly override human energy, which reverts back to the Monothelite position. In Maximus's Christology, there is a harmoniously equal union of the two natures without confusion.

Gregory has a pious goal throughout his polemics with Barlaam because he wants the worship and experience of God by the creature to be real knowledge and experience of the divine life. At the same time, Gregory does not want to bring the Creator down to the level of the creature. The problem is that Palamas does not allow the paradox of participation that he is arguing for to go far enough into God. A real distinction creates an ontological limbo zone between God and the world that the traditional Christian understanding of creation will simply not allow, and the problem of ontotheology still remains in place.

Gregory paradoxically holds together both truths that God is not participable in his essence but fully particeps in his energies, which are both other

⁶⁹ *'Si les énergies étaient formellement distinctes de leur essence, rien n'empêcherait que les énergies des deux natures du Christ n'en fassent qu'une par la prépondérance de son énergie divine sur son opération humaine,'* Juan-Miguel Garrigues, 'L'Énergie Divine et Grace chez Maxime le Confesseur,' p. 272.

than the essence and God. For Gregory, God ‘also possesses that which is other than substance’ (ἔχει ὁ Θεός και ὁ μὲν ἔστιν οὐσία), which he calls *energeia*. Recent scholarship has pointed out that this dialectic is possibly drawn from the Plotinian idea of a double activity of the One ‘of’ and ‘out of’ the essence (ενέργεια της ουσίας, ενέργεια εκ της ουσίας), but there are no textual links in the Fathers with this concept that I have been able to find.⁷⁰ This double activity is more of a formal distinction than a real distinction within Plotinus and later Neoplatonism (this idea is not the same in Proclus, who is the main source of Dionysius and Maximus’s metaphysics). There is also the issue of internal and external activity in Neoplatonism, which refers to the generation of forms by the hypostasis of Intellect, not the One. Plus, the Athenian school of Neoplatonism never made a real distinction between essence and energy in divinity.⁷¹ Neoplatonism in general held that the higher levels establish the formal reciprocity of the lower levels. This, however, does not fully solve the problem of participation in a Christian context where creation *ex nihilo* requires the ontological difference of the creature from the Creator.

Gregory’s argument for the essence-energies distinction has been compared

⁷⁰ Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus Confessor*, pp. 73, 195-97.

⁷¹ Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Pre-history and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden, 1978), pp. 132ff; 166-67 n. 184.

to the parallel debate in the West over the Scotist ‘formal distinction’ in God. John Milbank notes that Barlaam held the view that God only acts in the world through mediating powers, which are created.⁷² Gregory, much like Duns Scotus, looks at God and the soul on analogous levels. God’s essence is not identical with his energies (nor his omnipresence identical to his essence⁷³), and this distinction is like the soul in that the faculties of the soul, such as hearing or seeing, are not what the soul is in itself.⁷⁴ Milbank contends that Palamas indulges here in a somewhat univocalist and onto-theological association between God and the human being.⁷⁵ Further, by prioritizing infinity (Plotinian transcendence beyond intellection) over simplicity, Gregory brings the same problem of Scotus’s formal distinction into metaphysics.

For Scotus, infinite Being separates God and the soul, but they are still univocally the same with regard to their formal character. So, participation in God’s energies would then be in an intermediate sphere between the concept in the mind and in reality. This would cut deification off from the whole of the Godhead, which is in opposition to what Gregory is attempting to do in his defense against Barlaam. Torstein Tollefsen posits the question whether the term ‘real’ in the ‘real

⁷² John Milbank, ‘Christianity and Platonism: East and West’ (forthcoming).

⁷³ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle, p. 96-97.

⁷⁴ *Triads*, III 2.22. This passage is not in Meyendorff’s edition of the Greek text.

⁷⁵ John Milbank, ‘Christianity and Platonism: East and West’ (forthcoming).

distinction' is the problem that causes misunderstanding.⁷⁶ It appears though that Palamas's pious and creative theology of the essence-energies distinction creates a problem for deification whether it is metaphysically formal or real. However, interpreting the essence-energies distinction as a formal does open up a pathway for Eastern and Western theology to have dialogue together. But, as postmodernism and secularism in the West has shown, a formal ontology between God and the creation still leads to ontotheological metaphysics.

2.4 Conclusion

The West still continues to affirm that such a distinction between the essence and energies of God in Gregory of Palamas and by the 1351 council violates the holy tradition and logic of divine simplicity.⁷⁷ There are a few contemporary Roman Catholic theologians, such as Jeffrey Finch, who assert that the essence-energies distinction does not posit an insurmountable obstacle to ecumenical relations or theology.⁷⁸ On the other side of the debate is Greek Orthodox theologian Nikolaos Loudovikos, who says that the essence-energies distinction requires a 'non-confessional *esprit large*.' Is there such a spirit in the theology of St. Maximus?⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus Confessor*, p. 141.

⁷⁷ Rowan Williams, 'The Philosophical Structures of Palamism,' p. 32.

⁷⁸ eds. Michael J. Christensen, Jeffery A. Wittung, *Partakers of the Divine Nature* (Cranbury: NJ, Associated University Presses 2007), p. 243-244.

⁷⁹ This statement is from a personal conversation with Prof. Nikolaos Loudovikos.

We will now turn to the emergence of Maximus's concept of divine energy and grace through an examination of the divine processions of Pseudo-Dionysius.

CHAPTER 3

THE METAPHYSICS OF GRACE: PARTICIPATION AND PROCESSION

3.1 Metaphysics and Grace

Maximus Confessor was a remarkable Byzantine theologian who synthesized the theological tradition before him and offered his own unique contributions. One major transformation that Maximus made to Greek patristic theology was the remoulding of the Pseudo-Dionysian doctrine of the divine processions from the Godhead. Instead of emphasizing the procession of divine gifts from God in more emanative language, Maximus generally used the language of divine energy (ἐνέργεια), but as we will see energy is conceived in his system in a dual manner. However, both Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus rejected the theory of emanation as found in several strands of Neoplatonism.¹ Grace in Maximus's theology is metaphysical, in that the divine gifts of God ineffably descend into the cosmos in an infinite sea of effable energies or activities.² For the present chapter, I would like to analyse how Maximus, along with later interpreters, received the divine processions

¹ Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Pre-history and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden, 1978), pp. 217-19.

² Maximus, *Amb. 22* (PG 91: 1257AB).

of Pseudo-Dionysius. Such an analysis will provide a clearer picture as to whether Maximus understands grace to be uncreated, created or both.

3.2 Participation in God According to Neoplatonism, Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus

A student of Patristic theology will know that Christian beliefs often countered many of the philosophic assumptions of Hellenic thought, but they also often adapted philosophic categories to explain or communicate divine mysteries and revelations.³ One of the most radical theological oppositions to Hellenic thought and philosophy is the Christian claim of the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. Maximus will describe this doctrine through his theology of the divisions of nature, in which the first division is between created and uncreated natures (i.e., the world and God).⁴ Despite this strict ontological divide between God and the world, the Divine nonetheless shares the gift of his very self with the intelligible and

³ For an introduction to the relationship between philosophy and theology in Maximus see the following: Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus Confessor* (Oxford, UK: OUP, 2008) pp. 6-16; idem., 'St. Maximus Confessor, Philosopher or Theologian,' in *Byzantino-Nordica 2004: papers presented at the international symposium of Byzantine studies*, eds. Ivo Volt and Janika Päll (Tartu, Estonia: Tartu University Press, 2005), pp. 73-79; A. Edward Siecienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy*, (Oxford: OUP, 2010), pp. 73-86; Polycarp Sherwood, *An Annotated Date-List of the Works of Maximus Confessor*, (Rome: Herder, 1952), pp. 1-2; Eric Perl, 'Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in Saint Maximus Confessor,' (PhD. Dissertation, Yale University, 1991), pp. 1-28; and Melchisedec Toronen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of Saint Maximus Confessor*, (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp. 13-34.

⁴ Maximus, *Amb.* 41 (PG 91: 1308A-C).

sensible cosmos. The gift of existence itself is derivative from the highest levels of ontology to the lowest.

In *Amb.* 7, Maximus attacks the substance of what is perhaps falsely understood and termed the ‘Origenist myth.’ In this myth, there is an original fall of souls from a primitive *henad* before the creation (due to a desire of something other than God).⁵ The Origenist cosmology contains the triad of rest—movement—creation, while the Confessor reverses this order to be creation—movement—rest.⁶ It is impossible, says Maximus, ‘to have movement before something has come into being.’⁷ It is also untenable to hold that rest can occur before movement, for ‘unless that which is ultimately desirable is possessed, nothing else is of such a nature as to bring to rest what is being driven by desire.’⁸ If souls were driven by desire for something other than God and subsequently fell into movement, then Maximus

⁵ Origen, *De Principiis*. 2.9.1. Origen uses the term ‘Primitive Monad’ to describe this original unity before Creation. Evagrius uses the term ‘Henad.’ See John Bamberger’s discussion concerning these terms in Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos*, Cistercian Studies Series: Number Four (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1970) pp. lxxv-lxxix. Guillaumont also analyzes the Henad, *Les 'Kephalaiia Gnostica' D'evagre Le Pontique*, in *Patrologiae Orientalis* vol. 28, ed. R. Griffin, F. Nau (Paris, 1897-). Later in *De Principiis* 2.9.8, Origen argues that just as there will be a final judgment of all, so there must have been a previous judgment in this pre-existent state that initiated the fall. This metaphysical schema is the basis for the development of the *logoi* (λόγοι) by Maximus.

⁶ Cf. Sherwood Polycarp, *The Earlier Ambigua of St. Maximus the Confessor and his Refutation of Origenism*, (Rome: 1955), pp. 92-3.

⁷ Maximus, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91:1072A).

⁸ Maximus, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91:1069B).

posits that there is nothing to prevent this from happening *ad infinitum*.⁹ Maximus therefore attributes this myth to a *reductio ad absurdum*.

So, as an orthodox theologian, Maximus affirms the Christian understanding of creation *ex nihilo*, which rejects the notion of creation as a fall into corporeality. What Maximus's metaphysics of creation and motion also reveal is a more Aristotelian understanding of the relationship between God and the cosmos. Instead of emanative procession (though Maximus is not without any language of emanation), Maximus uses the language of energy to describe the Neoplatonic notion of participation (μέθεξις) in the One. However, as we will see, Maximus understands participation in divine energy as being that of grace. Before investigating the dynamics of grace and energy in Maximus, we need to ask if it is possible to speak of the philosophical notion of participation in the thought of Maximus?

While Maximus does not directly cite Neoplatonic sources in his writing, many of the philosophical structures and terminology of Neoplatonic thought can be found throughout his *oeuvre*. Even though most of Maximus's philosophical metaphysics were most likely received through the filter of Pseudo-Dionysius and

⁹ Maximus, *Amb. 7* (PG 91:1069C).

the Cappadocian Fathers, the mechanisms of Neoplatonic metaphysics are still essential aspects of his system even if theology and mystical experience transcend the limits of philosophical description and speculation. This is evident throughout Maximus's theology of grace and deification. In a well-known passage from *Amb. 7*, Maximus presses the bounds of logic by describing how the Christian can become god by grace without losing or disintegrating the *logos* of his or her nature: 'he places himself wholly in God alone, wholly imprinting and forming God alone in himself, so that by grace he is God and is called God.'¹⁰ Given that according to traditional accounts, Maximus received a classical education in Constantinople, it would not be over-speculating to say that he would have been familiar with some Neoplatonic philosophy and Aristotelian commentators.¹¹ In terms of method, there is a difficulty in delineating whether there is merely a common vocabulary being employed or if indeed there is a 'despoiling of the Egyptians.' However, I believe the thought of Plotinus (CE 204 - 270) and Proclus (CE 412 - 485) forms the general philosophical background for Maximus's thinking on participation in God (although not directly stated by him) and his theological thinking in relation to participation mostly follows the insights of Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius.

¹⁰ Maximus, *Amb. 7* (PG 91: 1084C), trans. Paul Blowers, *On The Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), p. 60.

¹¹ A. Edward Sicienski, *The Filioque*, pp. 73-86.

Again, it might also be the case that said philosophical influences were filtered through the theological ones.

Participation in Greek philosophical thought has a varied history. In general the verb μετέχειν (and also the noun μέθεξις) means ‘to share in’ or ‘to partake of.’¹² Since physical things cannot have a whole form or an ideal Form, such as in the thought of Plato, there must be a way to understand how the parts can share in the wholes. Forms are also separated from their particulars, and particulars are dependent upon the Forms for their determinant existence.¹³ Plato used several alternative words to describe sharing in the Forms, such as communion (κοινωνία), imitation (μίμησις), and imaging (εἰκασία), but the material implications of μέθεξις leads to a ‘third man’ argument whereby when a part is shared of the whole, then the whole no longer retains simplicity and self-integrity, which requires another connecting aspect, *ad infinitum*.¹⁴ A symmetrical relationship between part and whole, or particular to form, does not hold up to philosophical scrutiny. Later

¹² Maximus also frequently uses ‘μετουσία’ (sharing the essence of something) and τὸ μετέχον (the having of a portion of something, a ἔξις). For a discussion of the various terminology of participation in Maximus, see Torstein Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus Confessor*, pp. 193-94.

¹³ Lucas Siorvanes, *Proclus: Neo-platonic Philosophy and Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 72.

¹⁴ Lucas Siorvanes, *Proclus*, p. 72. See also Vivian Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas: Sources and Synthesis*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, vol. 69 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), p. 130.

Neoplatonism affirms an asymmetrical relationship between copies and patterns of Forms. Proclus demonstrates the asymmetrical relationship of particulars to principles in his *Elements of Theology* through an elaboration on the four ontological levels of unity: substantive being, intellect, soul and body.

For all knowledge which subsists through reasoning and language, pertains to beings, and in beings possesses the apprehension of truth. For it comes into contact with conceptions, and subsists in intellections. But the Gods are beyond all being. Neither, therefore, that which is divine doxastic [δοξαστόν], or the object of opinion, nor is it dianoetic [διανοητόν], nor intelligible [νοητόν]. For every being is either sensible, and on this account doxastic, or truly existing being, and on this account intelligible, or it is between these, subsisting as being and at the same time generation, and on this account is dianoetic. If, therefore, the Gods are superessential [ὑπερούσιον], and subsist prior to beings, there is neither any opinion of them, nor science and dianoia, nor intellection. But the nature of their peculiarities is known by the beings that are suspended from them. And this by a necessary consequence. For the differences of participants are co-divided conformably to the peculiarities of the participated natures. And neither does every thing participate of every thing; for there is no coordination of things perfectly dissimilar. Nor does any causal thing participate of that which is causal. But that which is kindred is conjoined to that which is kindred, and proceeds from that to which it is allied.¹⁵

Maximus will follow this model for the rules of participation up and down the ontological hierarchy, but he will also transform this metaphysical notion into a Christian metaphysics of grace. This will be important for the larger question of the

¹⁵ Proclus, *ET* 123, trans. Thomas Taylor (Dorset, UK: The Prometheus Trust, 2006), p. 72, Greek inserted by me.

essence-energies distinction because of the notions of necessary ontological intermediaries between the One and the many in some schools of Neoplatonism.

The metaphysical problems of participation just outlined began with the central deliberation of Plato's *Parmenides*: is Being a single reality or monism, or do we have a reality of multiplicity or dualism? Parmenides answered that Being is one, but Plotinus argued that Being or Intellect (his second hypostasis) is understood as multiple and not one. For 'Being itself is manifold within itself, and whatever else you may name had Being.'¹⁶ He uses the language of predication and the categorization of genus and species to describe the nature of Being as one and many at the same time: 'For that which is common and one in many things must employ differentiations which belong to itself and make specific forms and make them in its essential being.'¹⁷ Being is a one-many through a 'wonderful power of one into all, both appearing many and becoming many.'¹⁸ There is in Plotinus's discussion of Being the language of participation, where a single principle is present in each

¹⁶ Plotinus, *Enn.* 5.3.13, trans. Stephen MacKenna, *The Enneads* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 381.

¹⁷ Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.2.10, trans. Perl, 'Methexis,' p. 30.

¹⁸ Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.2.3, trans. Perl, 'Methexis,' p. 30.

participant both as a differentiated and unified whole.¹⁹ Plotinus makes this clear in another passage from the *Enneads*:

Now, in beings whose unity does not reproduce the entire nature of that principle, any presence is presence of an emanant power: even this, however, does not mean that the principle is less than integrally present; it is not sundered from the power which it has uttered...Nor does the placelessness of Being make it surprising that it be present universally to things of place; on the contrary, the wonder would be—the more than wonder, the impossibility—if from a place of its own it were present at all—and, especially present, as we assert, integrally. But set it outside of place, and reason tells us that it will be present entire where it is present at all and that, present to the total, it must be present in the same completeness to every several unity; otherwise something of it is here and something there and at once it is fragmentary, it is body.²⁰

Being and Intellect in Plotinus are thus one and many, unified and differentiated, and transcendent and immanent. Since Being and Intellect are immaterial substances, and not a body that is divisible by parts, the simplicity of the One's nature is retained.²¹ However, Plotinus does affirm that the Intellect-Principle, Ideas and Being are still compounded because 'any member of the realm of Forms is an aggregation, a compound.'²² In order to have an even more simple principle than

¹⁹ Eric Perl, 'Methexis,' p. 30.

²⁰ Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.4.3, trans. MacKenna, p. 442.

²¹ Paulina Remes, *Neoplatonism* (Stocksfield, UK: Acumen, 2008), pp. 70-71.

²² Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.9.2, trans. MacKenna, p. 537.

Being and Intellect, Plotinus affirms an even higher principle, the One, which does not participate in anything nor can anything be predicated of it. ‘The Unity [the One] cannot be the total of beings for so its oneness is annulled; it cannot be the Intellectual-Principle, for so it would be that total which the Intellectual-Principle is; nor is it Being, for Being is the total of things.’²³ The infinite ineffable One that transcends Being and Intellect creates a problem for the metaphysics of participation. How can the ontological gap be bridged between the One and Being without the One losing its status as that which is not participated and Being having its origins in the One? If one concedes that Being participates in the One, then the One becomes intelligible and onto-theological. One would then have to create a higher principle to unify the One and Being, and so on and so on *ad infinitum*. Plotinus does not wish to establish a principle of otherness (a hypostasis of non-being or of matter) outside of the One, so his metaphysical solution is the doctrine of emanation,²⁴ in which the One pours itself out into the lower ontological levels. This still does not address the metaphysical conundrum of difference.²⁵ Proclus will

²³ Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.9.2, trans. MacKenna, p. 538.

²⁴The outpouring of the One’s goodness is also termed by Pseudo-Dionysius as: an effusion (χύσις), overflowing/bubbling over (ὑπερβλύζειν), outflowing or gushing forth (ἐκβλύζειν); see Fran O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 217-18.

²⁵ *Enn.* 5.1.6, Here Plotinus tries to describe emanation of the One in such a manner to be the principle of otherness, but he still does not really offer a logical explanation to show how emanation produces difference from the One without a separate principle of otherness. Maximus will address this Neoplatonic problem through the Christian notion of creation *ex nihilo* and the embracing of all

take up and modify Plotinus's emanation theory of participation into a theory of causation of being. This innovation of Proclus will have the greatest impact on Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus's metaphysics.

All multitude in Proclus's system participates in the One.²⁶ If this were not the case, the whole would not be a whole or the many a part of the whole. Affirming an unparticipated complete distinction of the One from the many will lead to an infinite series of infinities from the multitude.²⁷ Therefore, all multitude must participate in the One to avoid this infinite regress. Proclus further claims that everything which participates of the One is both one and not one.²⁸ Within this tension, the participant is indeed other than the One since it is not the One itself, but the participant is the One as it participates in it. Proclus says that the participant thus 'suffers' the One, or is passive to the One according to participation, which causes a desire in the participant to become one.²⁹ Participation, however, does not operate in the opposite direction from One to multitude. If the One

existence, both λόγος and διαφορά in the providential pre-existing plan of God. Pseudo-Dionysius also makes this an important part of his system in *DN* 5.8-9.

²⁶ Proclus, *ET* 1.

²⁷ Proclus, *ET* 1.

²⁸ Proclus, *ET* 2.

²⁹ Proclus, *ET* 2, 3.

contained or participated in a part, then it would have both One and not one, which would create another infinite regress.³⁰ The same argument can be applied to the existence of multitude alongside the One.³¹ The One as One requires its own self-subsistence prior to all multitude so that all multitude is posterior or after the One.³² Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus will both follow this position by affirming that creatures are always ‘after God.’³³ Christians and Neoplatonists differed over the question of creation *ex nihilo*, but the logical requirements of having an absolute Cause prior to its effects is retained. For Proclus, the importance of affirming the participation of the many in the One and the One being prior to multitude is that without them, there would not be science.³⁴

³⁰ Proclus, *ET* 4.

³¹ Proclus, *ET* 5.

³² Proclus, *ET* 5.

³³ Maximus often uses the expression ‘those after God’ to denote this uni-directional nature of derivation and procession from the One, and the status of being created by the One: ‘And by time, it is indicated that everything is certainly in time, since everything that possesses existence after God possesses this existence in a certain way and not simply’ *Amb.* 10, (PG 91: 1180D). Maximus also applies the phrase to an Aristotelian conception of motion in *Epistle 2* (PG 91: 401A): ‘Nor is it likely that anything may be gathered to what is simple, and the same which has become not the same as itself nor simple, but by inclination is still divided from nature in many parts, unless first through love for humankind the inclination embraces nature, and there is manifest from both an inner meaning [*logos*], peaceful and undisturbed, not at all primarily moved to any of those things that are after God.’ Motion and energy are the ways Maximus utilizes the language of participation more so than the Dionysian terminology of procession and return.

³⁴ Proclus, *ET* 11.

Proclus agrees with Plotinus that the many participate in the One through ontological difference and union, but he alters Plotinus's doctrine of the One by affirming that the One is both imparticipable (ἀμέθεκτον) and participable (μεθεκτόν). The first term in any metaphysical derivation is always imparticipable, but it then produces participable terms that divide and remain in participable beings. The triad of imparticipable (ἀμέθεκτον), participable (μεθεκτόν), and participant (μετέχον) is Proclus's way to account for monism and multiplicity together without falling onto one side or the other of the ontological divide.

For on the one hand the unparticipated...generates terms capable of being participated. For either it must remain fixed in sterility and isolation...or else it will give something of itself, whereof the receiver becomes a participant, whilst the given attains substantial existence as a participated term. Every participated term, on the other hand, becoming a property of that particular by which it is participated, is secondary to that which in all is equally present and has filled them all out of its own being. That which is in one is not in the others; while that which is present to all alike, that it may illuminate all, is not in anyone, but is prior to them all...But a principle which was in all would be divided amongst all, and would itself require a further principle to unify the divided; and further, all the particulars would no longer participate the same principle...Inasmuch, then, as it is both common to all that can participate and identical for all, it must be prior to all: that is, it must be unparticipated.³⁵

³⁵ Proclus, *ET* 23, trans. Thomas Taylor, p. 16.

Proclus answers the question of the One and the Many in Plato's *Parmenides*, by affirming participable terms, the divine henads or unities (ένώσεις), which can unite the One with the Many. Each term in the hierarchy also has both a participable aspect and an imparticipable aspect to it.³⁶ Human thinking cannot access the reason for how the henads can be in both of the higher orders, but it can see the effects of such activities in the lower orders of the hierarchy.³⁷ The henads transcend both thinking and being as a unity in differentiation.³⁸ What is particularly important in this passage of Proclus for our study on Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus is the notion that participated terms take on substantial existence as a participated term. I believe this is what Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus refer to as 'primary beings' (ὄντα πρώτων),³⁹ 'originating and creative beings and substances' (ἀρχικὰς τῶν ὄντων καὶ δημιουργιακὰς οὐσίας καὶ ὑποστάσεις),⁴⁰ and 'participated beings' (ὄντα μετέχοντα).⁴¹ Such primary beings are existents such as being-itself, life-itself, and wisdom-itself.⁴² Maximus also uses the same description of the *logoi*

³⁶ Proclus, *ET* 67.

³⁷ Remes, *Neoplatonism*, p. 73.

³⁸ Proclus, *ET* 123; Remes, *Neoplatonism*, p. 74.

³⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 11.6 (PG 3: 953C).

⁴⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 11.6 (PG 3: 953D).

⁴¹ Maximus, *Cap. Gnost.* 1.48 (PG 91: 1100D).

⁴² Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 11.6 (PG 3: 953C).

that pre-exist in God but receive concrete and substantial existence at the proper time according to divine Providence.⁴³ We will delve further into these intriguing metaphysical principles in Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus below.

The remaining issue with Proclus's formulation of the participle and impartible is the need for further participable terms to unite the participable terms with the One. For if the participable terms are really distinct from the impartible One, then they exist by participation and therefore need further terms to participate, so *ad infinitum*.⁴⁴ The difficulty of the participables could be addressed by understanding them in a non-realist sense as some kind of immaterial substance or hypostasis as attempted by Plotinus (a participation of form). In Proposition 23 of the *Elements of Theology* quoted above, Proclus indicates that a participable obtains substantiality only as a participated term. This would simply mean that the participable was a self-impartation of a cause and would not come into existence until it participates,⁴⁵ but this still leaves open the question of the real existence of the participables, their postulation despite the already established

⁴³ Maximus, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91 1080D); *Amb.* 42 (PG 91: 1329A).

⁴⁴ Perl, 'Methexis,' p. 39.

⁴⁵ This would mean that the participables are merely the process of participation in the One itself. They are not truly autonomous beings or principles outside of the relationship to the originating principle of the One.

doctrine of the Forms, and the existence of some sort of principle of otherness. Further, the non-realist reading would also lead to a Plotinian position where formality trumps essence. Proclus, though, still affirms that the One is both imparticipable and also immanent and participable through the henads. Thus, Proclus brings together identity and difference together without falling into either monism or dualism while still remaining in the logical antinomy of the metaphysics of participation.

The dynamic relationship of imparticipable with participable is captured in the well-known Neoplatonic metaphysical motions of remaining, procession, and return (μονή, πρόδος, and ἐπιστροφή). Basically, this metaphysical motion is where an effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and returns to it.⁴⁶ All three metaphysical motions in Proclus' system are identical to each other ontologically in order to sustain the union of identity and difference through participation.

In so far, then, as it has an element of identity with the producer, the product remains in it; in so far as it differs it proceeds from it. But being like it, it is at once identical with it in some respect and different from it: accordingly it both remains and proceeds, and the two relations are inseparable.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Proclus, *ET* 35.

⁴⁷ Proclus, *ET* 35.

Without any one of the three elements, participation would break down. An effect that proceeded completely from the cause would lose its formal identity, and this principle of differentiation would fall into dualism. Without reversion, or return (in Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus this is connected with deification), the many would not find unity in the universal nor fulfil the principle of participation. Eric Perl summarizes this necessary triadic metaphysical movement:

Thus participation, the ontological presence of cause in effect, of universal in particular, is at once procession and reversion, causing the effect to exist by imparting the form, which both differentiates and unifies particulars. All that the effect is, is the form which it has from the cause. Its coming into being, therefore, is its proceeding from its cause. But this is equally its reception or appropriation of the cause as its form, whereby it comes to be what it is, to participate, and so to exist. Reversion, the return of the effect to its cause, is this appropriation and is therefore the same as procession, now considered from the side of the effect.⁴⁸

Commentators such as Dodds and Gersh have noted how this ‘identity of identity and difference’ through remaining, procession and return truncates the triadic motion into a single point. For if the ontological motions of remaining, procession and return are really identical, then we return to a monist position and only the One is real. There must be some kind of temporality in order to account for

⁴⁸ Eric Perl, ‘Methexis,’ pp. 45-46.

difference, but the Platonic commentators reject this.⁴⁹ Despite trying to reconcile identity and difference through participation, the Neoplatonic system still falls into either monism or dualism from a logical point of view. Instead, the antinomy and paradox of participation as both one and many, identity and difference, and procession and return must be embraced as a metaphysical truth. Plotinus made to jump from the hypostases to the One through contemplative mysticism, but later Neoplatonism made the move towards theurgy as a participation in the divine, which then transcends the gulf of the divine and the material cosmos. The ascent to God and union with him in Plotinus⁵⁰ and Proclus⁵¹ is described by both as being in a state of drunkenness and being in love.

3.3 Participation in God According Maximus

Maximus's understanding of metaphysical participation is most directly related to his embracing of Pseudo-Dionysius's thought, but as Gersh notes, he also moved away from the more emanative language of Pseudo-Dionysius (and the Neoplatonic cosmology of remaining, procession and return) and emphasized

⁴⁹ E. R. Dodds, trans. and comm. Proclus, *Elements of Theology* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 217; Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, pp. 56-57.

⁵⁰ Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.7.20-28, 30.

⁵¹ Proclus, *Commentary on the Chaldaean Philosophy*, Fr. 4, ed. and trans. by É. des Places, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1971).

Aristotelian notions of movement, rest, power and act.⁵² As stated above, it is highly likely that Maximus did read the Platonic and Aristotelian commentators, but the differing accounts of his life do not provide clear information on this point. However, the depth of his comprehension of Neoplatonic and even Aristotelian principles would indicate a familiarity beyond what he could glean from just Pseudo-Pseudo-Dionysius and the Cappadocians.⁵³ The use of the language of philosophical participation in Maximus is not *just* a casual adoption of common terminology within the philosophical parlance of the day, but one must still be cautious in applying the same content of such terms to his thought.

There are three general senses of participation in Maximus: efficient causality, imitation, and supernatural grace. The first two senses of participation are related. In *Amb.* 42 (PG 91: 1329A-B), Maximus describes how the creature participates in God through his or her natural faculty in relation to their *logoi* that pre-existed in God:

Of all the things that do exist or will exist substantially...the *logoi*, firmly fixed, pre-exist in God, in accordance with which all things and have become and abide, ever drawing near through natural motion to their purposed *logoi*. These things are rather constrained to being and receive, according to the kind and degree of their elective movement and motion, either well-being

⁵² Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, pp. 204-227.

⁵³ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, pp. 134, 153-67.

because of virtue and direct progress in regards to the *logos* by which they are, or well-being according to the vice and motion out of harmony with the *logos* by which they exist. Or, to put it concisely: according to the having or the lack, in their natural participative faculty of him who exists by nature completely and unparticipated and who proffers himself entirely simply and graciously by reason of his limitless goodness to all.⁵⁴

Here, Maximus is describing participation in god according to one's *logoi*.

The *logoi* are like the medieval notion of divine ideas in the mind of God that Providentially orders everything that comes into existence. One can live virtuously in accordance with these pre-existing plans or 'divine wills'⁵⁵ for their life or they can live in disharmony with them. Maximus is here speaking about what I would call 'a natural principled participation.' Basically, as long as a person lives and moves, he or she is participating in God. Because Being-itself, which pre-exists as unified in God (as an attribute of God and a *logoi* for created Being with qualification), proceeds into creation, every being participates through existence in Being-itself. This is not substantive participation but principled participation due to efficient causality. Maximus clarifies in *Amb. 7* that this is the basic *scala naturae*:

Through this *Logos* there came to be both being and continuing to be, for from him the things that were made came to be in a certain way and for a certain reason, and by continuing to be and by moving, they participate in God. For all things, in that they came to be from God, participate

⁵⁴ Maximus, *Amb. 42* (PG 91: 1329A), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 60 n. 42.

⁵⁵ Maximus, *Amb. 7* (PG 91: 1085A).

proportionally [*analogia*] in God, whether by intellect, by reason, by sense-perception, by vital motion, or by some habitual fitness.⁵⁶

The second aspect of participation through imitation (often in the realm of morals and virtues) is directly connected with the first. According to Maximus, the virtues are natural for human beings.⁵⁷ Practicing the virtues is direct participation in God because in *Amb. 7*, Maximus states that Jesus Christ is the substance of the virtues.⁵⁸ This context of the *Amb. 7* indicates that Maximus makes moral participation also based on the metaphysical claim that the *logoi* of virtues—and Christ embraces all of the *logoi* in Himself as the *Logos*—pre-exists in God as well as in the world. Moral imitation of God is also ontological participation in God because of the pre-existing *logoi* that one analogically orders their existence to.

The final type of participation in Maximus is that of supernatural grace, which is less defined and clear in his theology. Full ontological participation in God is not within human nature to induce; it must be initiated by the grace of God. Also, Maximus understands complete (I say complete because the creature can partially share now in the future benefit of deification) ontological participation to await the

⁵⁶ Maximus, *Amb. 7* (PG 91: 1080B), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 55.

⁵⁷ Maximus, *Pyrrh.* 88-95 (PG 91: 309B-11A).

⁵⁸ Maximus, *Amb. 7* (PG 91: 1081D).

resurrection. This type of participation is still a full participation in God through the obtaining of divine attributes, but it must be understood to be by grace and fully realized in the future age of deification.⁵⁹ We will come back to this type of participation in Chapter Four when we discuss God's supra-temporal works of grace.

The importance of grace in Maximus's conception of participation, as opposed to participation in Neoplatonism, is that only a completely transcendent God who creates *ex nihilo* and by grace can radically participate without the need for causal intermediaries, such as the emanations and henads of Neoplatonism. This does not mean that Neoplatonists deny participation by grace (I will discuss this in Chapter Six), but Christianity teaches the doctrine of the full Incarnation of the Word in the flesh as the example of perfect participation between the divine and the created realms.

Next, we will look at how Maximus incorporates the Dionysian tradition of procession (πρόοδος), energy (ἐνέργεια), power (δύναμις), grace (χάρισμα), exemplars (παραδείγματα), and *logoi* into his own cosmological vision. We will examine more closely the roots of participation and divine energy in Maximus as found in the theology of divine procession in Pseudo-Dionysius.

⁵⁹ Maximus, *Ad. Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7: 141).

3.4 The Nature of Divine Procession and Energy in Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus

Pseudo-Dionysius's God is similar to the Neoplatonic One, but he takes Proclus's intermediate terms⁶⁰ called henads (ἐνάδες)—which he variously names processions (πρόοδοι), powers (δυνάμεις), activities (ἐνέργειαι), graces (χαρίσματα), divine wills (θελήματα), or exemplars (παραδείγματα)—and he ascribes them to the whole one Godhead.⁶¹ Pseudo-Dionysius also uses the singular henad (ἐνάς) to describe the divine unity instead of the plural henads that Proclus uses as participations after the One.⁶² Often Pseudo-Dionysius uses henad or monad interchangeably to indicate the divine unity. The unified and undifferentiated names (τὰ ἡνωμένα) of God, such as 'transcendently good' (ὑπεράγαθον), are known through denial, not in the sense of a lack or opposition but from what he calls 'super-abundance' (ὑπεροχιχῆς).⁶³ The second type of unifying names in the Godhead has causal implications, such as good (τὸ ἀγαθόν), beautiful (τὸ καλόν), existent (τὸ ὄν), life-giving (τὸ ζωογόνον), and

⁶⁰ For the linguistic and theological connections between Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus, see H. D. Saffrey, 'Nouveaux Liens Objectifs entre le Pseudo-Denis et Proclus,' *Recherches sur le néoplatonisme après Plotin*, 63 (1979); Carlos Steel, 'Deny et Proclus: l'existence du mal,' in *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident*, ed. Ysabel de Andia, (Paris: *Etudes augustinienes*, 1997), pp. 89-116; Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*; and Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London and New York: Continuum Press, 1989).

⁶¹ See Pseudo-Dionysius's *DN* 5-8 for examples of all of these aspects of divine procession.

⁶² Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 131.

⁶³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 2.3 (PG 3: 640B).

wise (τὸ σοφόν).⁶⁴ These causal names as applied to God indicate his name as a ‘good gift.’⁶⁵

Divine Names that express distinction in Pseudo-Dionysius’s system are: Being-itself (τὸ αὐτοεἶναι), Life-itself (ἡ αὐτοζωή), and Wisdom-itself (ἡ αὐτοσοφία). These divine unities are the causal activities of the Godhead proceeding into creation. Unlike Proclus, Pseudo-Dionysius understands the divine processions as being directly accessible to all levels of the hierarchy, and they reach out to all of created reality, including matter. ‘Perfect goodness reaches out to all things and not simply to immediate good neighbours. It extends as far as the lowliest of things.’⁶⁶ God is ‘the being immanent in and underlying the things which are, however they are,’ and ‘he is the essence of being for the things which have being.’⁶⁷ This does not mean that the One is therefore a part of being. Pseudo-Dionysius makes this clear in the *DN* 5.8, ‘He is not contained in being, but being is contained in him. He does not possess being, but being possesses him.’⁶⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius is not affirming the

⁶⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 2.3 (PG 3: 640C).

⁶⁵ Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 100.

⁶⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 4.20 (PG 3: 717D), trans. Colm Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, CWS (New York, NY: Paulinist Press, 1987), p. 86.

⁶⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.4 (PG 3: 817D), trans. Luibheid, p. 98.

⁶⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.8 (PG 3: 824A), trans. Luibheid, p. 101.

transcendence of the Godhead so that he may affirm an essence-energies distinction. Rather, he is establishing the transcendence of the Godhead to secure the participation of the One all the way down through the hierarchy of being. If the monad is on the same plane as the dyad, then participation becomes truly 'a part' of the divine. Only as transcendent monad can the One proceed as a created unity into multiplicity. A possible source for this type of theologizing might be in the anonymous (Hadot ascribes it to Porphyry⁶⁹) *Commentary on the Parmenides 17.23-33*:

The One *beyond* essence and being is neither being nor essence nor act, but rather acts and is itself pure act, such that it is itself being (*einai*) before being (*to on*). By participating this being (the *einai* of the One), the One (*scil.* "who is," i.e., the second One) possesses another being declined from it (the *einai* of the supreme One), which is to participate being (*to on*). Thus being (*enai*) is double: the first preexists (*prouparchei*) being (*to on*); the second is derived from the transcendent One who is absolute being (*einai*) and as it were the idea of being (*to on*).⁷⁰

The author of this commentary emphasizes that the Being who produces being must be absolutely transcendent and pure *energeia* in order to generate the being that can be participated. I believe this two-fold notion of Being in this passage is close to the meaning of Pseudo-Dionysius's metaphysics of procession. For Pseudo-Dionysius,

⁶⁹ Pierre Hadot, 'La métaphysique de Porphyre,' *Porphyre* (Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique XII, Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1960), pp. 127-157.

⁷⁰ *Commentary on the Parmenides*, trans. Richard T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 435.

God is absolute Being-itself in His own divine unity and simplicity, but He produces a level of created being that is derivative and participle. This is still a full participation in the transcendent One, but the full transcendence of the One is what makes the One fully participle.

Other names that indicate differentiation in the Godhead are the Trinitarian persons Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁷¹ Pseudo-Dionysius also includes the Incarnate Word among these differentiating names.⁷² Still, the ‘undifferentiated divine unity’ proceeds generously (as simple and united) out into creation and differentiation.⁷³ Even though the divine unity above unity—as the source and giver of unity—is hidden from creaturely knowledge and comprehension, God nonetheless gives

⁷¹ ‘Pseudo-Dionysius does not mention ‘perichoresis,’ but he uses vocabulary from neo-Platonic philosophy: the ‘Permanence’ and the ‘Ground.’ This vocabulary speaks well of a Permanence or a Ground of hypostasis into each other ... which well indicates the idea of perichoresis, even if the term is absent;’ Ysabel de Andia, ‘La theologie trinitaire de Denys l’Areopagite,’ *Studia Patristica* 32 (1997), p. 295, English translation from the French is mine. The concept of perichoresis (interpenetration) is helpful here to understand that Pseudo-Dionysius is not talking about something that we can really separate. It is mostly a distinction parceled out in our minds (*DN* 2.7, PG 3: 645B). At the same time, Pseudo-Dionysius suggests that we would be ‘at loggerheads’ with Scripture if we did not also talk about distinctions in God (*DN* 2.2, PG 3: 640A). So distinction in the simple Godhead is not something we affirm metaphysically, it is a mental awareness on the part of the creature that is necessary in order to praise the Thearchy. Any distinction in the Godhead is purely what Theology requires (*DN* 2.5, PG 3: 641D). However, Pseudo-Dionysius does affirm that we can talk about the Divine being *qua* or being through the divine processions (*DN*, 5.1, PG 3: 816B).

⁷² Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 2.3 (PG3: 640BC).

⁷³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 2.5 (PG3: 644A).

completely to the creation. When discussing the image of a seal to its impression,⁷⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius states that the seal (i.e., God) ‘gives itself completely and identically to each [impression].’⁷⁵ Nothing in the created realm is without a share in the whole of God; the ‘Godhead is granted as a gift to all things.’⁷⁶ Even ‘soulless and lifeless matter’ partakes of the Good,⁷⁷ and rational creatures can contemplate matter in order to reach the ‘immaterial archetypes’ of the cosmos.⁷⁸ So, while Pseudo-Dionysius appears to affirm that there are *real* differentiations in God, he always relegates the naming of God as differentiation to what theology requires since metaphysics transcends Being and thus intelligibility and knowledge.⁷⁹ This is the gift of grace beyond created nature. With the example of wax and seal in *DN* 2.5, critics of Pseudo-Dionysius raise the question whether the seal is not identical to all

⁷⁴ Here Pseudo-Dionysius is talking about his general theory of causality. In discussing the idea of ‘principle’ (ἀρχή), Pseudo-Dionysius argues that there is not an exact likeness between cause and what is caused. ‘The effects only bear the images of the causes according to their capacity while the causes are above and beyond the effects. To say that life-itself lives or that light-itself is enlightened is not proper unless one intends by this that the qualities of effects [τὰ τῶν αἰτιατῶν] pre-exist exceedingly and substantially [περισσῶς καὶ οὐσιωδῶς προένεστι] in their causes;’ Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 103. Maximus will add to the causal and formal dimensions of participation in Pseudo-Dionysius’s theology with his doctrine of the *Logos/logoi*, which is a similar paradoxical response to the problem of metaphysical participation.

⁷⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 2.6 (PG3: 644C), trans. Luibheid, p. 63.

⁷⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 1.3 (PG3: 589C); *DN* 2.11 (PG: 649B).

⁷⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 4.2 (PG3: 696D).

⁷⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *CH* 2.5 (PG3: 144C).

⁷⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 2.5 (PG3: 641D).

of its imprints. Pseudo-Dionysius rejects this argument by affirming that the seal gives itself completely and individually to each imprint, but the nature of the imprints varies. This creates a plethora of different imprints.⁸⁰ There is a difference in the receptive and participative faculties of creatures that manifests a plurality of processions, but the archetype and seal remain single and united. Additionally, in *DN 2.7*, Pseudo-Dionysius states that the observance of energies in the transcendent God is only apparent to the creature.

What our minds lay hold of is in fact nothing other than certain activities [ἐνέργειαι] apparent to us, activities that deify, cause being, bear life, and give wisdom. For our part, as we consider that hiddenness and struggle to break free of all the working of our minds, we find ourselves witnessing no divinization, no life, no being which bears any real likeness to the absolutely transcendent Cause of all things.⁸¹

Pseudo-Dionysius is not promoting a kind of proto-Nominalism here. In neoplatonism, Being and Intellect are convertible with one another. Thinking and Being are in a metaphysical relationship with one another. Though the human mind is aptly created to be able to notice the works of God in the world, this does not mean that God is working in the same manner as creatures. God manifests Himself in the world, but He remains in his own divine simplicity.

⁸⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN 5.6* (PG3: 644B-644C).

⁸¹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN 5.7* (PG3: 645B), trans. Luibheid, p. 63.

The manifested divine gifts that give being, life, wisdom and deification to creatures are also not in any way related to the unified names in the transcendent God. The creative and deifying gifts (note that all of the divine names are graces or gifts given) that the creature experiences are truly God as cause, but they cannot circumscribe or exhaust the being, life, wisdom and energy of the One God. Pseudo-Dionysius presents us with a fecund paradox that the creature can fully participate in God through his creative gifts, but the wholeness of wholeness that God truly is cannot be participated.⁸²

Pseudo-Dionysius further compounds the paradox of participation in an imparticipable God through divine processions as he seems to describe the αὐτό- realities in a few places (Being-itself, Life-itself, and Wisdom-itself) as being created by God. In *DN* 6.1, Pseudo-Dionysius praises ‘Eternal life’ because Life-itself and all life flow from it. He qualifies this hymn of praise by referencing what he said concerning Being in *DN* 5.5: ‘Just as when talking of Being I said it is an eternity of

⁸² Gersh distinguishes this tension as assumptions 1, 2 and 3: In the first assumption, God is above Being, Life and Wisdom; in assumption two, God is equated to Being, Life and Wisdom; and in assumption 3, God is equated to Being, Life and Wisdom, but there are no real ontological realities in God. See, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, pp. 156-65.

absolute being, so now I say that the divine Life beyond life is the giver and creator of life itself.’⁸³

This quote describes how a primary creative procession, such as Being or Life, can be both God as cause and also as a part of creation through procession. The procession is also the substantial power to allow beings to participate in the primordial gift. Even though Being is a created gift, it still participates in the divine economy of God. More importantly, Being is an ‘eternal abode’ because with the gift of deification at the resurrection, the creature moves from corruptible being to the eternally sustained Being proceeding from the absolute Being of God. The gift of Eternal Being is by the grace of God.

Stephen Gersh argues that Christian Neoplatonists, such as Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus, holds these two tensions together because of their commitment to intermediaries or gods between God and the world.⁸⁴ I agree with Gersh completely on the schema of the two tensions in Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus, but he fails to press the paradox to its conclusion. By predicating the divine processions of the Transcendent God and also of created effect, Pseudo-Dionysius reveals an

⁸³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.5 (PG3: 856B): ‘ὅτι καὶ τῆς αὐτοζωῆς ἐστὶν ἡ ὑπὲρ ζωῆν ἢ θεία ζωή.’ One could translate θεία as father as well, Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, p. 617.

⁸⁴ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, pp. 156ff.

extraordinary mystery. The divine processions are both on the side of creation and on the side of God at the same time. The procession is uncreated because it has God as the direct source of it through his unified divine wills (*logoi*),⁸⁵ but the processions are also on the side of creation because participants participate in them as a participation. As we will see, such a paradox in Pseudo-Dionysius yields some explanation of Maximus's theology of divine energy.

Moving on in the *DN*, if we take the patterns of divine unity and differentiation as presented in *DN* chapter two, the following matrix emerges:

⁸⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.8.

Table 3.1: Divine Unions and Distinctions

	Divine Unity (μονή)	Divine Differentiation (πρόδος)
Names indicating unity (ένώσεις)	<p>Transcending names of the One (ὑπερ-)</p> <p>Transcendently Good Transcendently Divine Transcendently Existing Transcendently Living Transcendently Wise</p> <p>Causal names (τὰ αἰτιολογικά πάντα)</p> <p>Good Beautiful Existent Life-giving Wise</p>	<p>(Gifts)</p> <p>Being-Itself Life-Itself Wisdom-Itself other gifts</p>
Names indicating differentiation (διακρίσεις)	<p>(Trinitarian names)</p> <p>Father Son Holy Spirit</p>	<p>(Incarnation)</p> <p>Jesus</p>

The logical order of the divine processions (i.e., αὐτό-realities) according to Pseudo-Dionysius is as follows: Goodness, Being, Life and Wisdom (though also simple in God and equated to his being).⁸⁶ Life and Wisdom must follow after Being because 'Being in itself is more revered than the being of Life and Wisdom itself and Likeness to divinity itself.'⁸⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius affirms this due to the fact that one cannot have life or wisdom if they do not first exist in being. Therefore, Pseudo-Dionysius ascribes Being as the first gift of God, which is the condition for the creation to be able to praise God as 'He who is' (ὁ ὢν).⁸⁸ All of the divine gifts are

⁸⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius places the processions as simple within God (*CH* 4.1, PG 3: 177; *DN* 1.2, PG 3: 589BC) and also in succession to one another from God as created gifts, and they are the shapers of all creaturely existence according to capacity (*DN* 11.6, PG 3: 956A). I think this is to affirm the paradoxical nature of the processions as created from God and also being from the essence of God. The Christian move of equating the processions to the Thearchy in Pseudo-Dionysius, and thus making them attributes and names, is shifted in Maximus to the divine Logos himself: 'the being of each thing's virtue is the divine Logos' (*Amb.* 7, PG 91: 1089C). This allows for the reading of Maximus whereby God is both immanent and transcendent in the creature at the same time. The interpretive challenge will be to understand how the simple God can communicate divine gifts. For all providence, judgment, grace, energy, and *logoi* (essentially synonyms of the same reality in Maximus but functioning differently) are single and simple in God, but multiple from the perspective of the creature. Maximus can affirm this since procession and return in the Neoplatonic schema are the same and they come from Christ (*Ad Thal.* 60, CCG 22, 75; *Amb.* 7, PG 91: 1081D-1084A). Finally, this perspectival complex is also connected with Maximus's five-fold division of being as the uncreated is discoverable in the created sensible and intelligible realms (*Amb.* 41, PG 91: 1304D).

⁸⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.5 (PG 3: 820A). It should also be noted that the logical order does not presuppose that each of the terms are not mirrored in each other. In proposition 103 of Proclus's *ET*, he mentions that it is true to say of Being, Life and Wisdom that they are both successive stages of unfolding from the One and also three aspects of the same reality. See Dodd's commentary on this topic in proposition 103, p. 254.

⁸⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.6 (PG 3: 820D).

also rooted in the prior cause of Goodness itself (ἀγαθὸν αὐτό),⁸⁹ which ‘by the very fact of its existence, extends goodness into all things.’⁹⁰ The Good preceding the divine processions is crucial for Pseudo-Dionysius’s system because it is the creator of all form, and it is the source and *telos* of all things.⁹¹ For Pseudo-Dionysius, the Good ‘pre-eminently gives form to the formless.’⁹² God is ‘nothing less than the archetypal God, the supra-divine transcendent one God who dwells indivisibly in every individual and who is in himself undifferentiated unity with no commixture and no multiplication arising out of his presence among the many.’⁹³ Pseudo-Dionysius further says that the Good is that ‘which truly is’ (ὡς ὄντως ὄν), and it is the substantive cause (οὐσιοποίησις) of all things—including the being, power, and activity of intelligible and intelligent beings (αἱ νοητὰ καὶ νοεραὶ πᾶσαι οὐσίαι καὶ δυνάμις καὶ ἐνέργειαι).⁹⁴ This is how Pseudo-Dionysius can radically affirm that ‘all

⁸⁹ Following Neoplatonic commentators, Pseudo-Dionysius also equates the Good with God himself, not merely a procession (DN 1.5, PG3: 593B, DN 1.6, PG3: 596A, DN 4.12, PG3: 709BC). In Neoplatonism the Good was generally equated with the first principle, and derivative principles were beneath the One; see Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, p. 159, n. 151.

⁹⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, DN 4.1 (PG 3: 693B).

⁹¹ Pseudo-Dionysius, DN 4.35 (PG 3: 736B).

⁹² Pseudo-Dionysius, DN 4.3 (PG 3: 697A).

⁹³ Pseudo-Dionysius, DN 2.11 (PG 3: 649C), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 67.

⁹⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, DN 5.4 (PG 3: 817C).

beings are *in* him and *around* him' (ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ περὶ αὐτὸν).⁹⁵ The Beautiful is also equivalent to the Good. For the 'Beautiful is the origin (ἀρχή) of all things as their productive cause (ὡς ποιητικὸν)...it is the goal of all things and is loved as final cause (τελικὸν) since all things come to be for the sake of the Beautiful; and it is the exemplary cause (παραδειγματικόν) according to which all things are determined.' In the cosmic hierarchy, all being finds its causal origin and subsistence in the Good and the Beautiful. Finally, Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of the Good as love (ἔρως). Vivian Boland, quoting Pseudo-Dionysius, describes this love as: 'the love of the incomprehensible cause of all loves (ἡ...ἐπέκεινα παντὸς ἔρωτος ἄσχετος αἰτία). Through excess of goodness (δι' ἀγαθότητος ὑπερβολήν) God yearns for (ἐρᾷ), creates (ποιεῖ), perfects (τελειοῖ), conserves (συνέχει), and attracts (ἐπιστρέφει) all things.'⁹⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius summarizes the extent of the causality of God in all of its facets in *DN* 4.10:

To put the matter briefly, all being drives from, exists in, and is returned toward the Beautiful and the Good. Whatever there is, whatever comes to be, is there and has being on account of the Beautiful and the Good. All things look to it. All things are moved by it. All things are preserved by it. Every source exists for the sake of it, because of it, and in it and this is so whether such source be exemplary, final, efficient, formal, or elemental. In short,

⁹⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.4 (PG 3: 817D).

⁹⁶ Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 103. Maximus also connects divine love with grace and deification (i.e., the movements of both procession and return) in his metaphysical system; see *Epistle 2* (PG 91: 392D-408B).

every source, all preservation and ending, everything in fact, derives from the Beautiful and the Good.⁹⁷

Are these divine processions as cause (αἰτία) and principle (ἀρχή) of all created reality divine intermediaries between God and creation? As mentioned earlier, Pseudo-Dionysius rejects, though he does not mention Proclus by name, the doctrine of the henads as being divine ontological intermediaries⁹⁸ between the One and the many:

The absolute being underlying individual manifestations of being as their cause is not a divine or an angelic being, for only transcendent being itself can be the source, the being, and the cause of the being of beings...Being itself, life itself, divinity itself, are names signifying source, divinity, and cause, and these are applied to the one transcendent cause and source beyond source beyond source of all things. But we use the same terms in a derivative fashion and we apply them to the provident acts of power which come forth from that God in whom nothing at all participates.⁹⁹

Instead of Proclus's henads performing the function of intermediaries between the One and the many, which raises the question about an infinite number of third terms for Christian theology—and the issue for an ontological sphere between God

⁹⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 4.10 (PG 3: 705D), trans. Luibheid, p. 79.

⁹⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius also clarifies that angels are not real intermediaries of divinity between God and creatures. See Andrew Louth's excellent discussion on this move by Pseudo-Dionysius, *Denys the Areopagite*.

⁹⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 11.6 (PG 3: 953C-D), trans. Luibheid, pp. 124-25.

and creatures—Pseudo-Dionysius emphasizes God’s direct processions,¹⁰⁰ and *theophanies* into creation.¹⁰¹ They are both prior to creation and dependent on

¹⁰⁰ There is a variance in the way the processions occur in latter Neoplatonic and Christian thought. Pseudo-Dionysius does use procession as from God and also as action towards creatures. In *DN* 11.6, Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of providence and participated goodness as ‘proceeding from the unparticipable God’ (ἐκ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀμεθεκτου προϊοῦσαι, PG 3: 956B). The other dynamic of a cause proceeding to its effects can be found in *DN* 5.1, ‘What I wish to do is to sing a hymn of praise for the being-making procession of the absolute divine Source of being into the total domain of being (ἀλλὰ τὴν οὐσιοποιον εἰς τὰ ὄντα πάντα τῆς θεαρχιχῆς οὐσιαρχίας πρόοδον ὑμνήσαι, PG 3: 816B). The Plotinian model would affirm the first form of procession since it retains the complete transcendence of the One from the second and derivative hypostasis. Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus both hold this primary position in talking about the nature of the Godhead above unity and distinction. The second form arose because this left the causal work of creation up to ontological intermediaries. Here, the divine causal gifts of Being, Life and Wisdom are understood as within the Godhead itself. Thus in order to hold the two together, where transcendence and causal powers are in the divine unity, Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus will affirm that the divine processions of Being, Life and Wisdom are predicated completely of the whole God and also that God is transcendently beyond any categories of unity and distinction. The troubling consequence for this whole dynamic is that it appears that Pseudo-Dionysius suggests something like a God beyond God, which is the direction that Gregory of Palamas goes with the οὐσία of the One beyond energy. Andrew Louth describes the situation in Pseudo-Dionysius this way: ‘The use of the language of procession (if it is not just fashionable late fifth-century language, and confusing as fashions often are) raises problems that Denys does not answer. Procession is logically inferior to the unity from which it proceeds: Denys himself says that ‘in divine matters unions are more important than differentiations’ (*DN* 2.11, PG 3:652A). Does this mean that the Unity within the Godhead is in some sense prior to, more ultimate than, the Trinity of Persons? Sometimes Pseudo-Dionysius seems to indicate that this is far from what he means, and it would certainly be far from the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers...God is not Unity beyond Trinity, but beyond both Unity and Trinity in any way that we can understand these terms. Unity and Trinity, it would seem, are equally ultimate, and equally transcended. But the idea of a Godhead beyond the Trinity is at least suggested by Pseudo-Dionysius’s language, even though it is a suggestion he seems not to take up himself;’ Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, p.91. John D. Jones takes the view of the One beyond Trinity; see John D. Jones, ‘An Absolutely Simple God? Frameworks for Reading Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite,’ *Thomist* 69 (2005), pp. 371-406. Vladimir Lossky argues for the opposite view that Pseudo-Dionysius presents a Trinity above Unity; see Lossky, *Vision of God* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1983 [1948]), p. 101. See also, John N. Jones, ‘The Status of the Trinity in Dionysian Thought,’ *Journal of Religion* 80 (2000), pp. 645-57. For the view of simultaneous unity and differentiation (this would be my reading of Pseudo-Dionysius), see Beierwaltes, ‘Unity and Trinity in East and West,’ in *Eriugena East and West*, ed. Bernard

creation at the same time. According to Eric Perl, ‘as causes, they [πρόοδοι] must be prior to their effects. But since they have no separate subsistence but exist only *qua* causes, they exist only relative to their effects and are thus dependent on them.’¹⁰²

Creation is the self-multiplication of God,¹⁰³ but it is not a pantheistic unity of God with the world (there is not a substantive relation in the processions but a causal one), nor a divine necessity as it is later in Hegel. For Pseudo-Dionysius, ‘God must differentiate himself in order to create, but there must be creatures in order that he

McGinn and Wiernien Otten (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994) pp, 209-31; see also Gersh’s commentary on this problem with the conclusion of simultaneous unity and differentiation (though his language is more that we should hold to a mixture of conflicting elements instead of the embracing of a paradox), *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, pp. 165-67. This Trinitarian ambiguity is related to the nature of the processions (i.e., are the uncreated energies of God or are they created perfections?), which as we will see, is the pivot around which Eastern and Western commentators on Pseudo-Dionysius will see either uncreated grace (Palamas) or created grace (Aquinas) in his metaphysical system.

¹⁰¹ Eric Perl describes Pseudo-Dionysius’s metaphysics as ‘theophanism’ because no other description can contain the unity in appearance that avoids monism or dualism. He says, ‘the relation between appearance and that which appears is irreducible to either unity or duality and cannot be expressed in any terms other than those of appearance, manifestation, image, expression;’ see Eric Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2008), p. 34. For Maximus, the theophany of God into the creation is connected with Christology in the *Logos/logoi*. Thus theophanism becomes ‘Christophanism’ in his metaphysics. For the ‘mystery of the incarnation of the Word contains in itself all the hidden meanings and figures of Scripture as well as the knowledge of visible and intelligible creatures’ (*Cap. Gnost.*, 1.66, PG 91: 1108). This new emphasis is supported by the fact that Maximus believed that the Incarnation would have happened even if sin did not come into the world; see Eric Perl, ‘Metaphysics and Christology in Maximus Confessor and Eriugena,’ in *Eriugena: East and West*, ed. Bernard McGinn (Chicago and Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp. 253-79; see also Hilary Anne-Marie Mooney, *Theophany: The Appearing of God According to the Writings of Johannes Scottus Eriugena* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), pp. 193-94.

¹⁰² Eric Perl, ‘Methexis,’ p. 62.

¹⁰³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 2.11 (PG 3: 649BC).

be differentiated.¹⁰⁴ Creation only exists as it participates in the divine, and it ultimately returns to the divine in rest.¹⁰⁵ This circular dynamic reflects the paradoxical and antinomic nature of the simple God who yet creates the multiplicity found in the world.

The ontology of participation through the divine processions in Pseudo-Dionysius is also based on the free and providential gift of the Creator; it is the gift of grace itself. This moves Neoplatonic philosophy towards a Christian theology of grace.¹⁰⁶ Even though there is a logical connection between procession, remaining,

¹⁰⁴ Eric Perl, 'Methexis,' p. 65.

¹⁰⁵ 'He is the Cause of the rest and of the stability of everything and is himself beyond all stability and all rest;' Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN*, 9.7 (PG 3: 916A). This is the Neoplatonic return to God through deification. Maximus will take up this metaphysical principle in Pseudo-Dionysius and combine it with Gregory of Nyssa's idea of perpetual ascent (ἐπέχτασις) to say that the Christian will be an ever-moving rest; see Paul Blowers, 'Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of 'Perpetual Progress,' *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992), pp. 151-171. This point will also be very important for Maximus in his extensive corrections of the Origenist conception of motion. The important point here in terms of metaphysics is that Maximus combines the beginning of creatures in God (*logoi*) and ends with their return to him through grace and deification. This free act on the part of the Creator that also returns to Him (so that beginning and end are the same) allows for a Christo-centric reconfiguration of motion that reveals to the human person the limits of their nature to achieve the object of their natural desire (i.e., God).

¹⁰⁶Pseudo-Dionysius explains (*CH* 1.2, PG3: 121BC, trans. Luibheid, p. 146): 'Of course this ray never abandons its own proper nature, or its own interior unity. Even though it works itself outward to multiplicity and proceeds outside of itself as befits its generosity, doing so to lift upward and to unify those beings for which it has a providential responsibility, nevertheless it remains inherently stable and it is forever one with its own unchanging identity. And it grants to creatures the power to rise up, so far as they may, toward itself and it unifies them by way of its own simplified unity. However, this divine ray can enlighten us only by being upliftingly concealed in a variety of sacred veils which the Providence of the Father adapts to our nature as human beings.' This is also why Maximus can

and return in Pseudo-Dionysius's theology of the divine *proodoi*, this does not mean that he considers creation a necessary ontological effect of the One's procession. This is the monist trap that Plotinus and Proclus incurred in their metaphysics. Pseudo-Dionysius retains the fully Christian notion of creation and the grace of all three movements of procession, remaining, and return—a theme that Maximus picks up and revises into a more Aristotelian philosophy of movement. Pseudo-Dionysius supports this view of grace when he says, 'For there is nothing at all lacking a share in that One which in its utterly comprehensive unity uniquely contains all and everything beforehand, even opposites. Without the One there is no multiplicity, but there can still be the One when there is no multiplicity, just as one precedes all multiplied number.'¹⁰⁷ In an illuminating passage in DN, Pseudo-

describe the ascent to God through the Word's descending 'divine play' in the world, which makes sense of Pseudo-Dionysius's usage of *ekstasis* in God: 'God who is above all leads us through the historical nature, so to speak, of the appearance of created things to amazement and a kind of ascent through contemplation and knowledge of them, rather in the way in which we care for children, and then introduces the contemplation of the more spiritual meaning [λόγος] within these things, and finally leads us by way of theology up to the most hidden knowledge of himself, so far as possible, in the early stages of purifying us from everything that has form or quality or shape or quantity, whether of multitude or size, and from variety or composition, so that we may reach the goal of contemplation—and this is called 'playing' by the God-bearing Gregory, and 'enchanting' or 'being carried outside himself' by the God-bearing Denys,' *Amb.* 71 (PG 91: 1413C-D), trans. Louth, p. 167. Divine play bridges the gulf between Abraham's bosom and Lazarus according to Maximus in this passage, but the bridge is not understood as ontological hinterland, but the direct sharing or participation of the creature in God as God wills through his Word. God grants a likeness that is a participation, which makes 'divine play' at once uncreated and created grace.

¹⁰⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, DN 13.2 (PG 3: 980A), trans. Luibheid, p. 129.

Dionysius describes how God is both fully partíciple and fully impartíciple by theologizing about the divine creative processions into creation:

On the other hand, if differentiation can be said to apply to the generous procession of the undifferentiated divine unity itself overflowing with goodness and dispensing itself outward toward multiplicity, then the things united even within this divine differentiation are the acts by which it irrepressibly imparts being, life, wisdom and the other gifts of its all-creative goodness.¹⁰⁸ It is according to these gifts that the supreme things which are participated in, but which do not themselves participate in anything higher, are praised through the participations and those who participate. Now this is unified and one and common to the whole divinity, that the entire wholeness is participated in by each of those who participate in it; none participates in only a part.¹⁰⁹

According to Pseudo-Dionysius, the divine gifts paradoxically pour out from the unity of God into the plurality of creation in a unified manner. This outpouring

¹⁰⁸ Luibheid seems to be using a little artistic license in trying to communicate into English the awkward Greek here. A better reading of this line would be, 'The irrepressible things that are imparted according to the divine differentiation are united; [they are] substantifications, the things that give life and those that make [things] wise [and] the other gifts that cause the goodness of all things' (ἡνωμένα μὲν εἰσι κατὰ τὴν θεῖαν διάκρισιν αἱ ἄσχετοι μεταδόσεις, αἱ οὐσιώσεις, αἱ ζωώσεις, αἱ σοφοποιήσεις, αἱ ἄλλα δωρεὰ τῆς πάντων αἰτίας ἀγαθότητος). The phrase 'the acts by which' is not really in the Greek, but Luibheid is probably trying to indicate that Pseudo-Dionysius sees these processions (as multiple and other) as on the side of creation. This may be justified from what Pseudo-Dionysius says later in 6.1, and similarly in other places, 'Just as when talking of Being, I said it was an eternity of absolute being, so now I say that the divine Life beyond life is the giver and creator (or father) of life itself' (ὅτι καὶ τῆς αὐτοζωῆς ἔστιν ἡ ὑπὲρ ζωὴν ἢ θεῖα ζωὴ), PG 3: 856B. Maximus affirms the same attribution of the united energies or 'participations' as being creations of God in *Cap. Gnost.* 1.48-50.

¹⁰⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, DN 2.5 (PG 3: 644A), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 62.

brings about substantification, vivification, wisdom and deification in human beings.¹¹⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius retains the full paradox of participation.

Pseudo-Dionysius creatively reconfigures the metaphysics of participation in Neoplatonism towards an emanative all-creative procession of the Godhead into creation through His creative gifts. Even though Pseudo-Dionysius uses the language of power and activity in the divine processions, he does not intend for the reader to think that he is promoting change or motion in a God of simplicity.¹¹¹ When speaking about Being-itself having its power from God's power, Pseudo-Dionysius qualifies the language used by adding 'if it is proper to speak thus' (εἰ θέμις εἶπεν).¹¹² However, within Dionysian scholarship there is still a debate over the nature of the creative processions from God. Both Eastern and Western Christian theology affirm a separation between the essence of God and the divine

¹¹⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 2.8 (PG 3: 645BC); see also Vivian Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas: Sources and Synthesis*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, volume 69, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), p. 103.

¹¹¹ In Maximus, Panayiotas Christou ('Maximus Confessor on the Infinity of Man,' in *Maximus Confessor: Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur*, ed. Felix Heinzer and Christoph Schonborn, (Fribourg: 1980), pp. 261-72.) believes that movement and energy are separated in Maximus. 'Thus, in general, Maximus does not consider movement and energy as identical; in his mind, the second is a personal elaboration of the first and every created nature is defined by its energy.' This might be the case if one were to equate will with energy, but to my knowledge Maximus never actually does this. Contemporary Eastern Orthodox personalism appears to be the overriding hermeneutic in this case.

¹¹² Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 8.3 (PG 3: 892B).

processions, but the nature of the processions themselves is where the two great traditions part ways. Are the divine processions irreducible uncreated energies separate from the divine essence or are they created processions as hinted at earlier?

3.5 Aquinas and Palamas on the Divine Processions

Thomas Aquinas's commentary on the *DN* of Pseudo-Dionysius in the thirteenth century adds the distinctively Western approach to the problem of the nature of the divine processions. In his commentary, Aquinas affirms that there are two processions of the Godhead: one from within the divine unity, and the other from within the differentiation. 'So in the aforesaid common union there are some things of their own union and differentiation, and even a common differentiation in the aforesaid.'¹¹³ Thomas is basically indicating that with God there is a differentiation in the unity and in the differentiation. He adds, 'There are two kinds of procession: one according to which one Person proceeds from another [Trinitarian persons], and by this the divine persons are multiplied and distinguished. And by this differentiation, properly so called, is the common mode of differentiation; the other procession is according to which the creature proceeds

¹¹³ 'tam in praedicta unitione communi sunt quaedam propriae unitiones et discretiones, quam etiam in praedicta communi discretione;' Thomas Aquinas, *Commentarium in Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus*, 2.2, in *In librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus exposition* (Rome: Marietti, 1950).

from God.¹¹⁴ In the second mode of the double procession, Aquinas reads Pseudo-Dionysius as saying that differentiation of the union applies solely to creatures.¹¹⁵ Aquinas bases the distinction between the two processions on what is shared. Within the Trinity the divine persons share the essence, whereas in divine differentiation in creation the creature does not share the divine essence.¹¹⁶ There are only two realities in Aquinas's system, the divine essence and everything else, which is created. Aquinas explains Pseudo-Dionysius's unusual phraseology in a Proclean manner:

Then when he says 'But differentiations etc..., ' he explains the common mode of differentiation through its opposite. And he says that the previously mentioned teachers call the differentiations processions and manifestations of divinity, which befit it in so far as it is the Good itself, since it is of the notion of the Good that effects proceed from it through its communication. And it must be considered that counter to what he had said above 'hidden and ineffable' he posited adequately and compatibly processions and manifestations, since it is manifested through effects proceeding from it and

¹¹⁴ 'Est autem duplex processio: una quidem secundum quod una persona procedit ab alia et per hanc multiplicantur et distinguuntur divinae Personae et quantum ad hoc attenditur discretio propria in communi modo discretionis; alia est processio secundum quam creatura procedit a Deo,' Thomas Aquinas, *Commentarium in Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus*, 2.3, in *In librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus exposition* (Rome: Marietti, 1950).

¹¹⁵ 'quod sequitur de unitione et discretionem pertinet ad creaturas,' Thomas Aquinas, *Commentarium in Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus*, 2.3, in *In librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus exposition* (Rome: Marietti, 1950). For a discussion on how Thomas interprets Pseudo-Dionysius and John Damascene on this point, see David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge; CUP, 2004), pp. 245-47.

¹¹⁶ Bogdan G. Bucur, 'Dionysius East and West: Unities, Differentiations, and the Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies,' *Dionysius* 26 (2008), p. 126.

in some way deity itself proceeds in effects, while it hands down its similitude to things according to their proportion, nevertheless such that its own excellence and singularity remains in itself, not communicated to things and hidden to us. Therefore these processions are called differentiations, since, unless other things flow out from a first principle, the first principle would not have that from which it could be discerned.¹¹⁷

At the core of the mystery and antinomy that Pseudo-Dionysius is trying to communicate in this difficult passage in the *DN* is the gift of the divine presence in the single act of creation.¹¹⁸ Thomas uses language to describe the seemingly impossible truth that the simple and unified God has made himself divisible in the multitude. Aquinas does not denigrate this participative mystery by emphasizing that despite the differentiation into multitude, the impartible essence is retained, and the singular God multiplies in a singular way in the process. Aquinas reiterates the Dionysian oscillation mentioned above concerning the need for procession from the first principle in order that the first principle be discerned from the multitude.

¹¹⁷ 'Deinde, cum dicit: discretiones et cetera, exponit, per oppositum, communem modum discretionum; et dicit quod praedicti magistri vocant discretiones, processiones et manifestationes deitatis, quae conveniunt ei in quantum ipsum bonum, quia de ratione boni est quod ab eo procedant effectus per eius communicationem. Et considerandum quod contra id quod supra dixerat: occultas et inaccessibiles, satis congrue posuit processiones et manifestationes, quia per effectus progredientes ab ipso manifestatur, et quodammodo ipsa deitas in effectus procedit, dum sui similitudinem rebus tradit, secundum earum proportionem, ita tamen, quod sua excellentia et singularitas sibi remanet, incommunicata rebus et occulta nobis. Hae igitur processiones vocantur discretiones, quia nisi a primo principio alia effluerent, non haberet primum principium a quo discerneretur' (Rome: Marietti, 1950), p. 159 col. 52a.

¹¹⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.10 (PG 3: 825B).

Aquinas and Pseudo-Dionysius also follow the Proclean precept that everything that participates of the One is both one and not one.¹¹⁹ In the commentary on the *DN*, Aquinas illustrates Pseudo-Dionysius's meaning concerning the differentiations using Neoplatonic metaphysics. Creatures are given a similitude or likeness to God that is also a participation in the Godhead. This is different from being given a similitude that participates in a participation. Many Palamite theologians miss this Neoplatonic understanding of participation in Pseudo-Dionysius and Aquinas.

The Latin Doctor also retains the notion that the power of the cause remains in their effects, and this is why everything to the very edge of existence participates in the one God in his system; God resides in the core of his creatures. Aquinas understands being to be predicated of creatures through participation in God's Being.¹²⁰ The essential predication of Being in God is due to God being *ipsum esse per se subsistens*.¹²¹ Aquinas interprets Pseudo-Dionysius's predication of Being in God in

¹¹⁹ Proclus, *ET* 2.

¹²⁰ Aquinas, *Quodlibet*, II 2.1. See also my article, 'The Metaphysics of Christian Ethics: Radical Orthodoxy and Theosis,' *Heythrop Journal of Philosophy and Religion*, 52:3 (July 2011); John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: CUA, 2000), pp. 103-10; Rudi Te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiae* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), pp. 129-31.

¹²¹ Aquinas, *ST* I.3-11.

a more literal manner, but he also retains transcendence in God through the analogy of Being: 'Therefore much less can anything be predicated univocally of God and creatures.'¹²² God is not merely an infinite being on the same scale of being with creatures, this would be a Scotist interpretation of the Being-of-God, but he is transcendent being. This is why Aquinas can emphatically assert that 'it is not possible for God to enter into the composition of anything, either as a formal or a material principle.'¹²³ God and creatures do not share the same formality, as within a species, because God cannot be contained within any genus; he is the 'principle of all genera.'¹²⁴ Instead, creatures participate in God 'according to some sort of analogy; as existence is common to all. In this way all created things, so far as they are beings, are like God as the first and universal principle of all being.'¹²⁵ God is *interior intimo meo*, closer to me than I am to myself.¹²⁶ Because God is the supreme cause of all things, the creature participates in God:

God is in all things; not, indeed, as part of their essence, nor as an accident, but as an agent is present to that upon which it works. For an agent must be joined to that wherein it acts immediately and

¹²² Aquinas *ST* I.13.5.

¹²³ Aquinas, *ST* I.3.8.

¹²⁴ Aquinas, *ST* I.4.3; *ST* I.4.3, rep. 2.

¹²⁵ Aquinas, *ST* I.4.3.

¹²⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.6.

touch it by its power...Now since God is very being by His own essence, created being must be His proper effect; as to ignite is the proper effect of fire. Now God causes this effect in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being; as light is caused in the air by the sun as long as the air remains illuminated. Therefore as long as a thing has being, God must be present to it, according to its mode of being. But being is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally inherent in all things since it is formal in respect of everything found in a thing, as was shown above [Question 7, Article 1]. Hence it must be that God is in all things, and innermostly.¹²⁷

For Aquinas, likeness (*similitudo*) to God—which has been equated with the participated term in the Neoplatonic triad of imparticipable, participated, participant¹²⁸—moves in a one-way direction. A creature can be said to be like God, but God in no way can be said to be like creatures.¹²⁹ Aquinas holds that all perfections in the created order are one in the divine essence (i.e., God's perfections as perfection itself). 'All created perfections are in God. Hence He is spoken of as universally perfect, because He lacks not (says the Commentator [Aristotle], *Metaphysics* v) any excellence which may be found in any genus.'¹³⁰ So, for Aquinas the divine perfections are one with his essence, and all perfections that we find in

¹²⁷ Aquinas, *ST I.8.1*.

¹²⁸ Harry C. Marsh, 'Cosmic Structure and Knowledge of God: Thomas Aquinas's *In librum beati Dionysii de divinis nominibus expositio*' (PhD dissertation at Vanderbilt University, 1994), pp. 105-06; Bogdan G. Bucur, 'Dionysius East and West,' p. 127.

¹²⁹ Aquinas, *ST I.4.3*, rep. 4.

¹³⁰ Aquinas, *ST I.4.2*.

the created order are created perfections and created likenesses¹³¹ to the divine essence.¹³² The power and activity of God in creation (grace) are of formal and efficient causality.¹³³

Gregory of Palamas read the same texts of Pseudo-Dionysius and saw a different trajectory than the ‘created effects’ (i.e., created graces) of Aquinas. He begins by discussing the unity and differentiation in the Godhead according to several passages from the *DN*. Gregory affirms the differentiation of the hypostases of the Holy Trinity, but he adds:

Thus he [Pseudo-Dionysius] clearly shows that there is another distinction alongside that of the hypostases and a distinction belonging to the Godhead. And he says that according to the divine processions and energies God is multiplied and enters multiplicity and at this point he says that the same procession is also processions; but at another point, the Divinity does not enter multiplicity—certainly not!—nor as God is he subject to distinction. For us God is a Trinity but he is not threefold.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Aquinas, *SCG*, 1.26.10.

¹³² Aquinas, *SCG*, 1.75.3.

¹³³ ‘God is the life of the soul after the manner of an efficient cause; but the soul is the life of the body after the manner of a formal cause. Now there is no medium between form and matter, since the form, of itself, ‘informs’ the matter or subject; whereas the agent ‘informs’ the subject, not by its substance, but by the form, which it causes in the matter,’ *ST I-II*, 109.2.

¹³⁴ Gregory of Palamas, *150 Chapters*, chapter 85, trans. and ed. Robert E. Sinkewicz, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1988), p. 185.

One can see the classic Neoplatonic triad of imparticipable, participated, and participant in Gregory's reading of the divine unities and differentiations. He also equates the energies of God with the 'participated' terms of the triad, 'If you take away that which is between the unparticipated and the participating—O, emptiness!—then you separate us from God.'¹³⁵ Palamas strongly affirms that the processions are realities that are participated in but are not things that participate in anything higher, which would make them not creatures.¹³⁶ The logic of Gregory here is very acute, but I do not think that understanding the processions as created realities makes them 'participants' rather than participations. A created perfection that does not participate in anything higher would work in Pseudo-Dionysius's argument.¹³⁷ Really, the strongest argument that Gregory makes, though not generally pointed out by Orthodox scholars, is in *Capita* chapter eighty-six, where he comments on *DN* 2.3-5:

The same divine revealer [Pseudo-Dionysius] who said above that the beneficent procession is a divine distinction adds, 'the incomprehensible

¹³⁵ Palamas, *Triads* 3.2.24, trans. Bogdan G. Bucur, 'Dionysius East and West,' p. 127.

¹³⁶ Gregory of Palamas, *150 Chapters*, chapter 89, trans. and ed. Robert E. Sinkewicz, p. 187-89; Bogdan G. Bucur, 'Dionysius East and West,' p. 159.

¹³⁷ Bucur ('Dionysius East and West') raises an important point in this regard. How would Aquinas account for Pseudo-Dionysius's affirmation that God is the Being of beings as they have being? Aquinas would have to answer using causality of Being instead of being the actual Being of beings, but it is also unclear how Pseudo-Dionysius would avoid the issue of panentheism here.

communications are united according to the divine distinction.’ Thus he took here all the processions and energies together and called them communications and he added that they are incomprehensible lest anyone think them to be created effects, such as the substance of each being or the sensible life of animals or the reason and intellect inhering in rational or intellectual beings. For how could these realities be incomprehensible in God while being created?¹³⁸

Pseudo-Dionysius’s language of the ineffability of the divine unity is related more to the Proclean requirement of an imparticiple One above everything, which provides the basis for differentiation, than to the creation of a new ontological category between God’s essence and creatures, but Pseudo-Dionysius’s language could lean towards such a reading despite the philosophical problems involved. Instead of a mediated principle of participation in between God and the world, it would be better to affirm the paradox of participation on *both* sides of the ontological divide. This model would provide a direct participation in the full life of God while at the same time maintaining each of the natures intact. The Irreducibility of a paradoxical participation prevents one from conflating either side of the ontological divide as well as identifying our energy with divine energy so that creation may be seen as one creation.¹³⁹ Hyperbolic and symbolic language is often difficult to decipher with certainty, and Pseudo-Dionysius is likely retaining a Christian understanding of language about God that is kataphatic but only with an

¹³⁸ Gregory of Palamas, *150 Chapters*, chapter 86, trans. and ed. Robert E. Sinkewicz, p. 185.

¹³⁹ Maximus, *Amb. 10* (PG 91: 1308A).

apophatic reserve. Pseudo-Dionysius is simply not clear enough as to the nature of the processions for one to assert that he is implying here a separation of energies from the essence.

3.6 Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus Confessor and the Essence-Energy

Distinction

The Eastern Fathers never definitively proclaim that God's essence and energies are metaphysically distinct. As we saw in the previous chapter, the essence and energies distinction is cast within the realm of epistemology and the economy of salvation. Pseudo-Dionysius paradoxically states in the *DN* that the Thearchy not only shares its essence but also its transcendent unity. God is the power who lifts all things up to himself by the 'revelation of himself by himself [ἐκφανσις ἑαυτοῦ δι' ἑαυτοῦ], the good procession of his own transcendent unity.'¹⁴⁰ This declaration of Pseudo-Dionysius would certainly lend itself to more of a paradoxical full notion of participation rather than a partial one in the divine energies. Further, the Eastern Fathers predominantly use the singular 'energy' to denote God's activity.¹⁴¹ In the West, John Scotus Eriugena even reads Pseudo-Dionysius's language concerning

¹⁴⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 4.4.14 (PG 3: 712 C).

¹⁴¹ John Milbank, 'Christianity and Platonism East and West' (forthcoming).

procession as part of the second division of nature, which is created. The divine exemplars and processions are considered by Eriugena as ‘*et creatur et creat.*’¹⁴² Both Aquinas and Eriugena are more than likely relying on a statement of Augustine that theophanies of the divine are created realities.¹⁴³ Even Pseudo-Dionysius himself tends towards presenting theophanies as created realities.¹⁴⁴ Divine manifestation in Pseudo-Dionysius’s system is mediated through created reality.

The same argument applies to Maximus in his commentary on the glory of the Transfiguration in *Amb.* 10. With the appearance of Christ in the flesh, the unity of the sensible and intelligible orders becomes more apparent. God’s providence and will also appears in the light of the Transfiguration. Maximus sees every aspect of the experience, from light to the radiant garments of Christ, as being a revelation of the divine. ‘Or everything that is after God and has come into being from God, that is the nature of beings and time, these appear together, so far as is possible, with God who appears as cause and maker.’¹⁴⁵ We can see that Christ is God as cause and

¹⁴² Eriugena, *Periphyseon* 2 (CC 162:41); Lossky notes how the Ideas in Eriugena become the first created essences, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1976), p. 96.

¹⁴³ C.f., Augustine, *De Trinitate* II.5.10-16.28, III.II.21-27; *De Genesi ad Litteram* XI.33-43.

¹⁴⁴ See again Bulcer’s commentary on the theophany tradition in East and West, ‘Dionysius East and West.’ For created theophanies in Pseudo-Dionysius, see Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, (London and New York: Continuum Press, 1989), pp. 37, 51.

¹⁴⁵ *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1164A), trans. Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 130.

creator, but we cannot know him in his essence. Only God knows his own sacred essence.¹⁴⁶ In this reflection on the Transfiguration, Maximus begins with the apophatic denial and ends with the kataphatic affirmation: ‘out of his love for humankind he grants to human beings intimations of Himself in the manifest divine works [θεουργίας] performed in the flesh.’¹⁴⁷

The ultimate divine work in time is that of the Incarnation itself, but Maximus would also include other miracles. These works in the flesh are only ‘intimations’ of the eternal transcendent Godhead, and at the same time they are mediated manifestations ‘in the flesh.’ Both uncreated and created are made manifest together in the Incarnate Christ. The Incarnation is the demonstration of grace as both uncreated (on the non-ontic side of the divine) and created (on the ontic side of creation). There is not an ‘in-between’ the divine and human natures of Christ, only a paradoxical bi-ontological reality of grace-energy that it at once both divine and created.

Maximus further illustrates this point in *Amb.* 42. He describes the nature of miracles in the Bible and in the ministry of Jesus as only altering the mode of

¹⁴⁶ Maximus, *De Char.* 3.24.

¹⁴⁷ *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1168A), trans. Louth, p. 132, Greek inserted by me.

existence and not the underlying nature. For example, Enoch and Elijah were translated 'from life in the flesh, subject to corruption, to a different form of life, not by altering their human nature, but by changing the mode and domain of action proper to their nature.'¹⁴⁸ In this miraculous event, Maximus argues for an understanding of grace and nature that is in harmony. Grace does not override or change human nature, but grace transforms it into a new mode of existence. God acts directly on the human person, but it is a mediated action that results in actual miracles!

Since the Tridentine idea of 'pure nature' is not a part of patristic theology, it would be anachronistic to apply the sharp divide between Creator and creation to the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus. On the other hand, even though there is a more organic connection between Creator and creation in their theology, this does not mean that they would understand the processions as uncreated realities distinct from God's essence. The paradox is that these are real created activities from an uncreated source.

Stephen Gersh presents a strong counter assertion to the essence-energies distinction in Pseudo-Dionysius by Palamites:

¹⁴⁸ Maximus, *Amb. 42* (PG 91: 1344A), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 90.

There is no evidence for the existence of an ontology in which this distinction is made between God's essence and energies in Neoplatonism, with the exception of a doctrine mentioned at Procl. *In Parm.* 1105. 32ff. and perhaps to be associated with the school of Porphyry. However, this doctrine is explicitly rejected by the Athenian School of Neoplatonism which is Ps.-Dionysius's source.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, p. 167 n84. There is also a newer theory, not widely accepted, presented by Sarah Klitenic, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), pp. 44-48, that Pseudo-Dionysius's source for the αὐτό-realities being both in God and beneath God, as it were, can be found in a little known teaching of Porphyry, where he moves the second hypothesis to the first principle. Thus, the 'Father' of the intelligible triad becomes the One. Transcendence though is still retained. This is an interesting theory because it shows a movement in Neoplatonic metaphysics very close to that of the Christian development in Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus. Porphyry does not seem, however, to be a significant source in Pseudo-Dionysius's works. Maximus will later organize his created ontology along the lines of the Porphyrian tree, which is drawn from the widely circulated *Isagogue* of Porphyry. The textual evidence of Porphyry being a source does not really exist in the CA. The preponderance of evidence shows a very close connection to the Athenian school as Gersh notes. Iamblichus is quite clear that energies are the essence and expressive of it. In the *De Mysterioris* 1.4 (11-12), Iamblichus brings into his argument the triad οὐσία-δύναμις-ἐνέργεια. Porphyry (the recipient of this work of Iamblichus) only distinguishes the gods according to energies and not essence (Iamblichus is demonstrating that you cannot logically subsume human souls and gods under the same genus). With the gods, argues Iamblichus, there is not a 'contrast between action and passivity, but their activities are considered to be absolute and unalterable and free of any relation to an opposite,' trans. Emma Clarke, John Dillion, and Jackson Hershbell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), p. 17. Iamblician theology and philosophy holds that ἐνέργεια reveals οὐσία in the gods, and that they should not be distinguished from each other. This is blazingly clear in *De Mysterioris* 2.3 (70): 'So, then, in brief, I declare that their [the gods] manifestations are in accordance with their true natures, their potentialities (δυνάμεις) and activities (ἐνεργείαις). For as they are, so they appear to those invoking them; they display their activities and manifest forms in agreement with themselves and their own characteristic signs,' trans. Emma Clarke, John Dillion, and Jackson Hershbell, p. 87. Iamblichus also holds to a sliding scale of simplicity from the gods down through demons and angels to human souls. A god is completely simple (i.e., no accidental qualities) but human souls are composite; see Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblicus* (University Park, PN: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), pp. 78-79, 219-20; also Carlos Steel, *The Changing Self: A Study on the Soul in Later Neoplatonism: Iamblichus, Damascius and Priscianus* (Brussels: Paleis der Academien, 1978), pp. 54-59. Athenian (and also theurgic) Neoplatonism after Iamblichus does not distinguish the essence of the gods from their manifestation or energies. For Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus, Eric Perl is closer to truth of the matter by deeming the αὐτό-realities as being the gift of participation itself, which

I agree with Gersh in this regard, as I have not been able to locate this teaching in the Athenian school of Neoplatonism. There are also philosophical issues that Gersh does not really go into in his footnote on Palamism. Gersh cites the work of Corsini but does not present his argument. Corsini points out the philosophical flaws in embracing an essence-energies distinction in his study on Pseudo-Dionysius. He rejects a distinction between God's essence and the divine attributes and *logoi* because God's manifestation never exceeds the limits of Being.¹⁵⁰ Corsini concludes that the creature can only participate in created grace. He further adds concerning the divine nature: 'We therefore believe that a real distinction between attributes and divine archetypes is not possible except in the sense of being two aspects of one and the same reality, which is mono-intelligible.'¹⁵¹ God is not divided against Himself.

straddles an infinite rift between uncreated and created, 'Methexis,' pp. 141-43. A participation is not an ontological 'in between' God and creatures, but it is more like two sides of the same coin. A created likeness (or similitude) that is also a divine participation, which is how Aquinas defines it (*In librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus exposition* 4.6, 9.1, and 9.3), allows for an αὐτό-realities to be both created and uncreated, which makes grace both uncreated and created depending on which side of the ontic divide one is speaking about.

¹⁵⁰ E. Corsini, *Il trattato 'De Divinis nominibus' dello Pseudo-Dionigi e I commenti neoplatonici al Parmenide* (Torino, 1962), p. 137

¹⁵¹ E. Corsini, *Il trattato 'De Divinis nominibus' dello Pseudo-Dionigi*, p. 137: 'Pensiamo quindi che una vera e propria distinzione tra attributi divini e archetipi non sia possibile se non nel senso di due aspetti di un'unica e identica realtà, che costituisce il moneio intelligibile.'

Hans Urs von Balthasar also assesses this issue in Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus, and he emphasizes the dual movements of procession and return as the explanatory centre of Pseudo-Dionysius's seemingly contradictory ontology. There is an irreducibility between the participant and that which is participated in, and there is an irreducibility between what is comprehensible and incomprehensible:

The imparting of God is not a realm on its own between God and the world, but that movement of God in creation and grace, which on the one hand with regard to what is imparted coincides with God himself, and on the other (as its goal) with the world...the mystery of creation because of its intimacy cannot dispense with the category of participation...that in which [creatures] participate is itself precisely that in which they cannot participate, for were it not that they would not be participating in God...it is not that some aspects of God are comprehensible while others are not...It is not that one can 'only' know the powers of God *ad extra*, but not the underlying essence; rather, for Denys what is Incomprehensible is to be found in what is really comprehensible, for it is in every case the incomprehensible God in his totality who makes himself comprehensible in his communications.¹⁵²

3.7 Conclusion

In our study of Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus on participation and the divine processions, we have learned that they describe the unity of the divine distinctions using kataphatic theology and the distinction of the divine distinctions using apophatic theology. The existence of an essence-energies epistemology in the Church fathers does not therefore force the theologian to insert a real distinction in

¹⁵² Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Vol. 2: Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles, (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1984), pp. 163, 170, 179, 185, 188.

God. Pseudo-Dionysius moves along a more radical trajectory, where the divine gifts in creation are participations in the fullness of God. Only because God is absolutely imparticipable can He be participated in.

Pseudo-Dionysius also points to a possible solution in understanding the processions as divine archetypes or *logoi* in *DN* 5.8. Maximus will pick up on this point in Pseudo-Dionysius's theology and make it the centre of his metaphysics. Divine procession is understood by Maximus in terms of *logoi* and *energeia*. In the next chapter, I will show how Maximus uses the doctrine of the *logoi* and its eschatological communication to creatures as the essence of divine energies. Though this is a supernatural gift, it is still mediated through human nature. We also began to look at Maximus's doctrine of the Incarnation and theophany. I will also show that Maximus's Christological grounding of divine grace rejects an essence-energies distinction.

CHAPTER 4

THE METAPHYSICS OF GRACE: DIVINE ENERGY AND GRACE

4.1 Divine Energy and Grace

In the previous chapter, I examined Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus's doctrine of participation and divine procession as one of the sources for the Eastern Orthodox distinction between God's essence and energies. I interpreted the divine processions as being on both sides of the ontological divide between God and His creation. This paradox also applies to divine grace in that the creaturely effects of God's action are directly connected to the utterly transcendent God. The Thearchy is wholly imparticipate but directly acts in the world without remainder. There is not a hinterland between the two sides of the ontological divide, nor is there an ontological level of energy between God and his creation. It is the radical notion of participation that does not conflate God and the world nor separate them into unrelated spheres. In the present chapter, I wish to unpack this paradox a little more by examining how Maximus understands essence and energy in relation to God. It will be demonstrated that Maximus does not separate God's essence from His energies due to his doctrine of the *logoi*, and that Christological grace is the best way to understand the paradox of participation in God.

5.1 Divine Procession as Energy and Grace in Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus

Pseudo-Dionysius establishes a rule when speaking about divine unity and differentiation: ‘we are not entitled to make distinctions where there are none or to jumble together what has been distinguished. Rather, we must follow in whatever way we can and we must lift up our eyes to the divine rays [of the revelation of scripture].’¹ The concern here is to maintain the priority of principle in the procession of the Godhead. If God is not transcending principle, then multiplicity is not grounded in unity. Unity, as it were, would disintegrate if the One, as self-subsistent being, were not the transcending principle of multiplicity.² The divine *ousia* is beyond the differentiations and the ground of all differentiation at the same time. This does not mean that the divine *ousia* is really distinct from its knowable activity, but that it is not ‘bound by ‘form,’ ‘essence’ or definition of any kind.’³

The paradox of absolute Unity and differentiation within God must be affirmed according to Pseudo-Dionysius. Throughout the *DN*, Pseudo-Dionysius boldly asserts or predicates a divine name of God based upon remonstrations and derivations from multitude (i.e., makes them into real divine titles). Divine revelation

¹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 2.2 (PG 3: 640A).

² Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 11.3 (PG 3: 980B).

³ Rowan Williams, ‘The Philosophical Structures of Palamism,’ *Eastern Churches Review*, Vol. 9 (1977), p. 39.

through the Holy Scriptures also places a theological requirement on ascribing such terms to the Thearchy. Kataphatic predication is then guarded by an apophatic reserve that guarantees the totality of participation in God as a super-substantial totality. Distinction in God can only be asserted because of the participation of the multitude in the One. Pseudo-Dionysius emphasizes the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of the Trinity in DN:

We must go on now to the name of 'being' which is rightly applied by theology to him who truly is. But I must point out that the purpose of what I have to say is not to reveal that being in its transcendence, for this is something beyond words, something unknown and wholly unrevealed, something above unity itself. What I wish to do is to sing a hymn of praise for the being-making procession of the absolute divine Source of being into the total domain of being.⁴

Pseudo-Dionysius wishes to sing a hymn to One beyond being because this is a knowledge that transcends what can be known (only that which has creaturely being can be known). On the other hand, theology can rightly apply the name 'being' to the Godhead because it is the 'being-making Source of being.' In a later chapter, Pseudo-Dionysius adds this reflection to the limits of what is knowable concerning the Trinity:

You will find nothing in the world, which is not in the One, by which the transcendent Godhead is named. Everything owes to the One its individual

⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.1 (PG 3: 816B), trans. Colm Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York, NY: Paulinist Press, 1987), p. 96.

existence and the process whereby it is perfected and preserved. Given this power of the God's unity, we must be returned from the many to the One and our unique song of praise must be for the single complete deity which is the one cause of all things and which is there before every oneness amid multiplicity, before every part and whole, before the definite and indefinite, before the limited and the unlimited. It is there defining all things that have being, defining being itself. It is the cause of things and of the sum total of things. It is simultaneously there with them and before them and beyond them. It is there beyond the one itself, defining this one. Unity among creatures is a unity of number, and number has its own share of being...There is the transcendent unity of God and the fruitfulness of God, and as we prepare to sing this truth we use the names Trinity and Unity for that which is in fact beyond every name...But no unity or trinity, no number or ones, no fruitfulness, indeed, nothing that is or is known can proclaim that hiddenness beyond every mind and reason of the transcendent Godhead which transcends every being.⁵

Pseudo-Dionysius describes the existence of the Godhead as being prior to oneness amid multiplicity. Oneness is a reference to the primary beings of Being, Life, and Wisdom that he describes in *DN* 2.6 and 11.6. The simple and united God transcends all participations and those that participate in them. For Pseudo-Dionysius, and Maximus following him, numbers (even the number one) are a part of Being. Maximus states that a number 'does not express a reality but points in a direction.'⁶ This is because a number is essentially a sign that indicates quantity and not substance or accident.⁷ Maximus calls number 'a kind of sound and, at the same

⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 11.3 (PG 3: 980C-981A), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 129.

⁶ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1185B).

⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to St. Maximus Confessor* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2003) p. 109 ff.

time, a predicate associated with quantity.⁸ In reality, everything created, whether unified or multiple, has the essential relationship of being both an individual separated from other beings and an individual in relation⁹ to other beings.¹⁰ Further, Maximus applies his critique of Origenist motion, with the understanding of unity and diversity in the One:

The Myriad is the monad in movement, and the myriad without movement is the monad...for the beginning of all nonidentity is the monad, and if the monad is not without origin, it also cannot be without movement. It moves, in fact, by means of number; it starts from atomic units and moves towards a synthetic unity, and then—by dissolution—into atomic individuals. That is its being.¹¹

The unity in the multiplicity of created being in the system of Maximus is only found beyond the realm of the created order (which oscillates between beginning and end through becoming¹²). Maximus clarifies the nature of the monad of the transcendent Godhead by saying, ‘Only the monad is genuinely without

⁸ Maximus, *Ep.* 15 (PG 91: 564D), trans. von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, p. 109.

⁹ Gersh discusses this in relation to Leontius of Byzantium, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Pre-history and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden, 1978), p. 241 n. 173.

¹⁰ von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, p. 109.

¹¹ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 55 (CCG 7, 489, p. 150ff); *Amb.* (10 PG 91: 1185B), trans. von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, p. 112.

¹² Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 55 (CCG 7, 489, 153ff): ‘Every created thing has the divine and ineffable monad, which is God himself, as its origin and its end, because it comes forth from him and ultimately returns to him.’ Becoming for Maximus will be the distention (διάστασις) whereby through free-will one can live according to their *logoi* and towards their end in God.

movement, because it is neither number nor numerable.’¹³ So, even the number one still indicates a synthetic unity of the individual and otherness.¹⁴ This synthesis is in reality one but is perceived in the mind as two. ‘Being-in-itself and being-related, always remains an abstraction—or better, a ‘prescinding’ (*praecisio rationis*).’¹⁵ This is why, in the dominion of essences, numbers can never fully define anything.¹⁶ However, Maximus also says in his *scholia*¹⁷ on the *DN* of Pseudo-Dionysius, that ‘unity, as the cause of numbers, includes all numbers in itself in a unitary way, just as the center or point contains the straight lines of the circle.’¹⁸ The necessity of a transcendent God who, as origin and cause, establishes unity and diversity in creation does not mean that God is not also immanent in creatures. His immanence is to be found in divine *eros* and *agape* towards the creature as the object of *eros* and *agape* created in the creature, as it is able. As Maximus clearly affirms in *Amb.* 23, God is only moved to the extent that he creates *eros* and *agape* in those capable or

¹³ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1185B).

¹⁴ Maximus, *Ep.* 13 (PG 91: 480B): ‘Distinction and unity are in fact not the same thing, although they hold good for and are predicated of the same subject and are even qualities of the same subject.’

¹⁵ Maximus, *Ep.* 13 (PG 91: 477B), trans. von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, p. 110.

¹⁶ Maximus, *Ep.* 15 (PG 91: 564C).

¹⁷ Many of these *scholia*, which that were originally attributed to Maximus, were in fact the works of John of Scythopolis. See Von Balthasar’s study on this textual issue, *Cosmic Liturgy*, pp. 359-87.

¹⁸ Maximus, *Scholia on DN* 13 (PG 4: 321C), trans. von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, p. 114.

worthy to receive it.¹⁹ Movement and divine energy and power are manifested as works in creatures. God Himself is not in movement and does not ‘have’ energy and power. Towards the end of the *DN*, Pseudo-Dionysius discusses the paradox of God being both simple and active in creation. His conclusion is to accept that there is a proper mode in which God proceeds, creates, and sustains.

And yet what do the theologians mean when they assert that the unstirring God moves and goes out into everything? This is surely something which has to be understood in a way befitting God, and out of our reverence for him we must assume that this motion of his does not in any way signify a change of place, a variation, an alteration, a turning, a movement in space either straight or in a circular fashion or in a way compounded of both. Nor is this motion to be imagined as occurring in the mind, in the soul, or in respect of the nature of God. What is signified, rather, is that God brings everything into being, that he sustains them, that he exercises all manner of providence over them, that he is present to all of them, that he embraces all of them in a way which no mind can grasp, and that from him, providing for everything, arise countless processions [πρόοδοι] and activities [ἐνέργειαι]. And yet, in some mode conforming to what befits both God and reason, one has to predicate movement of the immutable God.²⁰

What is interesting in this passage of Pseudo-Dionysius is that he speaks about the motion that must be predicated of God, which also does not reside in the human

¹⁹ Maximus, *Amb.* 23 (PG 91: 1280B).

²⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 9.9 (PG 3: 916C), Greek inserted by me. Luibheid inserts the phrase ‘some mode’ in the Greek sentence ‘Ἀλλὰ καὶ κινήσεις θεοῦ τοῦ ἀκινήτου, θεοπρεπῶς τῷ λόγῳ συγχωρητέον ὑμνῆσαι.’ Quite literally, this sentence would read ‘And yet, befitting god and reason, one must hymn movement of the immovable God.’ I think that Luibheid added the word mode to indicate the manner in which something is fit for God. The idea here is that there is some way that God can act (i.e., create) to bring about his creative processions and energies. Also, using the word ‘hymn’ instead of ‘predicate’ is much more in tune with Pseudo-Dionysius’ theology about transcendence, even though the intent of meaning is the same.

mind and soul, or in the nature (οὐσία) of God. At the same time, this providential activity of God is such that 'no mind can grasp.' The paradox of the movement of an unmoving God gets at the core of the paradox of creation: Why is there something other than God? Pseudo-Dionysius appeals to divine economy as the only explanation for why there is the presence of his creative grace giving processions and energies in the world. There must be some sort of way that the simple God can create and sustain his creation. Affirming a mode befitting God and reason in which God acts to create is very far from a real metaphysical distinction in God between his essence and operations. Also, the apophatic reserve *must* guide the energetic ascriptions to God in Pseudo-Dionysius's writings. Motion in God can only be predicated through remonstrance from beings. This is how God can be both movable and immovable.

Earlier in the same chapter, Pseudo-Dionysius discusses how 'difference' can be predicated of God. The divine can be described as having difference only by the power exercised in divine economy for the salvation of all creation. According to Christian patristic thought rooted in Neoplatonism, deification and the return to God is always the basis for describing God as multiple in operations. However, Pseudo-Dionysius next qualifies the name of 'difference' by saying, 'yet at the same time he remains within himself and in his one unceasing activity he never abandons

his own true identity [τῆς οἰκείας ταυτότητος ἀνεκφοιτήτως κατ' ἐνέργειαν μίαν].²¹ Paradoxically, the difference that is manifested to the creature is really pointing to a direction and meaning above what is manifested as diverse. Pseudo-Dionysius—as well as Maximus²²—uses the example of the soul to the body. If the incorporeal, simple and indivisible soul were manifested in corporeal form as having parts, the observer would see multiple things even though the truth is that there is an underlying simplicity and unity.²³ With quite the reversal from the common understanding of difference thus far in the *DN*, Pseudo-Dionysius enigmatically asserts that creative manifestations of God as multiple really indicate a ‘unity amid many forms and the uniform processions of his fecundity to all.’²⁴ So, despite the manifestation of activities in God, the transcendent God remains in his own identity and ‘unceasing energy.’

Maximus to denies movement in God, but he understands motion from the effects of God’s creating and sustaining the world.²⁵ In the background of Pseudo-

²¹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 9.5 (PG 3: 912D), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 116.

²² Maximus, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91: 1100A-B).

²³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 9.5 (PG 3: 913A), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 117.

²⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 9.5 (PG 3: 913B), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 117.

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas will later make a similar distinction in reference to the act of creation by God. In *SG* 2.17, Aquinas says that ‘God’s action, which is without pre-existing matter and is called creation, is neither a motion nor a change, properly speaking.’ Motion or movement in God can only be predicated through remonstrance from the created order, and it cannot be applied to God in the

Dionysius and Maximus's concept of motion is the Neoplatonic triad of proceeding, remaining and return. Since the power and activity of the cause remains in and proceeds to the effect, Neoplatonists were able to affirm motion and rest in the divine and temporal realms. Gersh notes that this also allows the Neoplatonists to speak of motion in terms of spiritual movement.²⁶ However, in general motion was the principle of otherness for Neoplatonists.²⁷ When carried over into Christian theology, motion was also understood to distinguish the uncreated from the created. Maximus uses the Trinity as an example of this interplay of metaphysical terms in his *Or Dom.*, 'This teaches us [speaking about the unity in plurality of the

same manner that it is predicated of creatures who exist in time. Neoplatonic discussion on motion in the divine realm centered around the controversial statement by Plato in the *Sophist* 249C 10-D4 that the philosopher should reject the notion that rest applies to the whole. Neoplatonists embraced the assumption that both motion and rest are located in material and intelligible worlds. The reason for this is that in the three movements of remaining, procession and return, there is a dual aspect of stability and motion in each of the causal links going down the scale of being. Gersh (*Iamblichus to Eriugena*, pp. 69-70) describes this dual aspect well: 'In brief, the argument seems to be that rest and motion are in a reciprocal relation since each must follow the other in temporal sequence and that, since motion is a kind of rest (for it remains in a state of mobility) and rest is a kind of motion (for it requires that something continues to rest), the reciprocity applies even to the atemporal sphere.'

²⁶ Gersh, *Iamblichus to Eriugena*, p. 68.

²⁷ 'The reduction of motion to otherness naturally emphasizes the plurality implicit in the causal process while the acceptance of motion for itself tends rather to emphasize the unity. Thus a given term may be interpreted both as multiple and as single depending upon the dimension (space or time) in regard to which it is primarily interpreted,' Gersh, *Iamblichus to Eriugena*, p. 72.

Trinity], who have been introduced to the perfect knowledge of truth by a calling of grace and faith, to recognize that the nature and the power of the divinity are one.’²⁸

This passage reflects Maximus’s Trinitarian theology, where God is both a unity in Trinity and a Trinity in unity. He holds the two terms together and emphatically affirms that the Trinity is ‘Unity according to the principle of essence and Trinity according to the mode of existence.’²⁹ Trinitarian activity in its mode of operation (which the creature cannot fully apprehend) shows that Maximus conceives the divine nature to be active, but elsewhere he also states that the sharing of Trinitarian life through the gift/grace of goodness reflects the ‘simplicity and indivisibility of the divine activity [καὶ τὸ ἀπλοῦν καὶ ἰ ἀμερές τῆς θείας ἐνεργείας].’³⁰ Maximus’s meaning in this passage from the *Or. Dom.* is clarified in an important passage in *Amb.* 1, where he analyzes how the creature can have knowledge of the Trinity:

If the Godhead is monad, but not dyad, and triad, but not multitude, as being without beginning, bodiless and undisturbed...For it is not the beginning of everything that comes after it, according to the contraction of expansion, as if it were poured out naturally and led to multitude, but is the existent reality of the consubstantial triad...Thus there is one Godhead that is as monad, and subsists as triad. If, hearing of movement, you wonder how the

²⁸ Maximus, *Or. Dom.*, (PG 90: 892C).

²⁹ Maximus, *Or. Dom.*, (PG 90: 893A).

³⁰ Maximus, *Myst.* 5 (PG 91: 680A).

Godhead that is beyond infinity is moved, understand that *what happens is happening to us and not to the Godhead*. For first we are illuminated with the reason for its being, then we are enlightened about the mode in which it subsists, for we always understand that something is before we understand how it is. Therefore movement of the Godhead is constituted by the knowledge about the fact that it is and how it subsists that comes about through revelation that to those who receive it.³¹

Maximus's emphasis in this passage is the non-ascription of movement to God, and that knowledge of God through activity is restricted to how it affects the creature. Further, knowledge of how God subsists must be *revealed* to the creation through economy (i.e., created effects). God's subsistence or movement is not predicable of Him in essence. The ontological difference between God and creatures requires that motion be predicated of God through remonstrance from creatures.³² Maximus also understands the revelation of Scripture to be the 'divine powers.' In *Cap Gnos.* 2.11, Maximus says that the '*logoi* and forms of the commandments, which are the divine powers, will come as birds from heaven to rest in [the gnostic].'³³

³¹ Maximus, *Amb.* 1 (PG 91: 1036B-C), trans. Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 170, italics mine.

³² Proclus (*PT* 283) offers an insight concerning motion and activity in Neoplatonism that might explain what Maximus means by not predicating movement in God: 'For the Philosopher described its intellectual monad as remaining in the same state because of its eternal nature, but he showed its activity outward moving and participated in by the soul and the whole Cosmos because of its mobility,' trans. Gersh, *Iamblichus to Eriugena*, p. 131. Here Proclus points out that when activity is external to a monad, it is in motion, which means it is manifesting in the sensible world. Motion cannot be predicated of God's essential nature, but He produces effects that are in motion.

³³ Maximus, *Cap. Gnos.* 2.11 (PG 91: 1129B-C): 'τούς δέ λόγους ἑαυτῶ τῶν ἐντολῶν καί τούς τρόπους, ἧ καί τάς θείας δυνάμεις, ὡσπερ πετεινά οὐρανοῦ ἐπαναπαύει.'

Therefore, Palamas's claim about the ineffability of God's energies must be rejected in Maximus because knowledge and experience of God occurs through his created effects. What is ineffable in God's activity is the fact that He somehow goes outside Himself to create.

Connected with movement or motion in God is the issue of divine energy. It is not the case in Maximus's theology that God *has* energy, but it is the case that He *is* energetic or pure act. Divine energy is not separated from God's essence, and it is also not separated from its created effects in creatures. We will examine how Maximus understands divine energy to be communicated to creatures through created grace at the end of this chapter, but there are several points concerning energy that need to be made at this point in our discussion.

In the article introduced in the previous chapter, Juan-Miguel Garrigues shows how this Byzantine theologian conceives of energy and power as being associated with and in the divine essence. Garrigues quotes a passage from the *Th. Pol.* discussing power and energy in the hypostatic union of the Incarnation:

Anything that exists shares in essential and natural existence; and so also, that which is energized or that which energizes properly signifies that which is endowed with power. That which is endowed with power is that which has both essential and natural power. Therefore, the act of confessing that the two³⁴ natures in Christ are not without existence and without energy, does

³⁴ Maximus does not use 'two' natures in the Greek, but it is implied.

not imply that they are not two hypostases or two agents, but this is to confess both their essential and natural existences and energies in an orthodox manner.³⁵

Earlier in *Th. Pol.* 1, Maximus describes the location of the divine power and activity in Christ: ‘the action is from the power and power from the essence and is the essence. It is said therefore that these three things have things from one another: that which is powerful, power, and the empowered. And that which is powerful, one says that is the essence.’³⁶ Natural energy in Maximus is merely the energy inherent in a nature or essence.³⁷ Maximus generally relates natural energy to the energy of God’s Providential care of His creation through continual grace.³⁸ It does not entail a separation of essence from energies. The divine energies (as attributes) are also identified with God’s essence quite clearly in *Ambiguum* 7.

In Maximus’s grand critique of the Origenist fall of a primitive henad of souls, he explains a saying of Gregory Nazianzen that creatures are a ‘portion of God’ that have ‘slipped down’ from above by using the model of the *Logos-logoi*.

³⁵ Maximus, *Th Pol* 16 (PG 91: 205B).

³⁶ Maximus, *Th Pol* 1 (PG 91: 33B).

³⁷ Juan-Miguel Garrigues, ‘L’Energie Divine et Grace chez Maxime le Confesseur,’ *Istina*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1974): pp. 273ff.

³⁸ C.f., *Cap. Gnost.* 1.47.

Maximus describes what the *Logos-logoi* relationship means in different ways.³⁹ One way is through a meditation on the ‘Word of God is the substance of virtue.’ Maximus first identifies Christ with the virtues and then describes how one then participates in Christ:

For our Lord Jesus Christ himself is the substance of all the virtues, as it is written: *This one God made our wisdom, our justice, our sanctification and redemption* (1 Cor 1:30). These things of course are said about him absolutely, since he is wisdom and righteousness and sanctification itself. They are not, as in our case, simply attributed to him, as for example in the expression, a ‘wise man’ or a ‘just man.’ It is evident that every person who participates in virtue as a matter of habit unquestionably participates in God, the substance of the virtues. Whoever by his choices cultivates the good natural seed [i.e., the *logoi* as immanent and substantive or perhaps also the natural participative faculty of the creature] shows the end to be the same as the beginning and the beginning to be the same as the end [i.e., the gift of being and eternal well being].⁴⁰

In the commentaries on *Ambiguum* 7, most Eastern Orthodox scholars neglect this retelling of the ‘portion of God’ ascription of St. Gregory in relation to what Maximus discusses earlier in his commentary. Kataphatically, Maximus is affirming virtue and other attributes to the Logos Christ *simpliciter*. The Incarnate one does not possess or have virtue and wisdom, but he is virtue and wisdom in his essence.⁴¹

³⁹ He actually retells what he means using four forms of explanation; see Sherwood Polycarp, *The Earlier Ambigua of St. Maximus the Confessor and his Refutation of Origenism*, (Rome: 1955).

⁴⁰ Maximus, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91: 1081D-1084A), trans. Paul Blowers, *On The Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), p. 58-59.

⁴¹ Maximus makes an interesting comment in *Myst.* 5. He describes how God is revealed through both truth and goodness: ‘Truth does this when the divine seems to be revealed in its essence, for truth is

Maximus makes a similar affirmation in an important theological passage on holy baptism and deification in *Ad Thal.* 6:

With those undergoing the (second mode of) birth, the Holy Spirit takes the whole of their free choice and translates it completely from earth to heaven, and, through the true knowledge acquired by exertion, transfigures the mind with the blessed light-rays of our God and Father, such that the mind is deemed another 'god,' insofar as in its habitude it experiences, by grace, that which God himself does not experience but 'is' in his very essence [χάριτος ὅπερ οὐ πάσχων ἀλλ' ὑπάρχων κατ' οὐσίαν ἐστὶν ὁ θεός].⁴²

Maximus orientates the philosophy of participation around the theological notions of adoption grace and deification in God through holy baptism. Through true knowledge and moral striving to live according the divine will, the creature can experience in its habitude (or *tropos* of free-will in accord with divine virtue) the essence of God by grace.⁴³ By a *habitus* of unwavering virtuous disposition and action

something simple, unique, one, identical, indivisible, immutable, impassible, all-seeing, and wholly eternal. Goodness on the other hand, reveals God when it manifests him in its activities: for the good is beneficent and provident and protective of everything that comes from it,' trans. Berthold, p. 191. This passage seems to clearly indicate that for Maximus, activity is through economy and Providence.

⁴² Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 6 (CCSG 7:70-71), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 104, Greek inserted by me.

⁴³ In the *Cap. Gnost.* 1.82-83, Maximus makes another intriguing claim about the essence of God in relation to our mind and contemplation of Him: 'For there is no being at all which is by itself a simple essence or thought to the extent of also being an undivided monad. As far as God is concerned, if we say that he is an essence, he has not naturally inherent in him the possibility of being thought because he is not composed; if we say that he is thought he has no essence which by nature is capable of being a subject of thought. But God is himself thought by essence, and wholly thought, and solely thought. According to thought he is himself essence, wholly essence, and solely essence. He is entirely above essence and entirely above thought, since he is an invisible monad, simple and without parts...In the multitude there is diversity, unlikeness, and difference. But in God, who is

in accordance with the divine nature, the creature will be one in energy with the Thearchy such that a perichoretic union emerges. ‘Through the abundant grace of the Spirit it will be shown that God alone is at work, and in all things there will be only one activity [μία...ἐνέργειαν], that of God and those worthy of kinship with God. God will be all in all wholly penetrating [περιχωρήσαντος] all who are his in a way that is appropriate to each.’⁴⁴

The present first fruits of the Spirit in baptism are also connected with the future eternal life of the faithful. In the resurrection, Maximus describes the kingdom of God as ‘the imparting of gifts, according to grace, which belong to God by nature.’⁴⁵ An example of such an eternal gift would be infinity. In the

eminently one and unique, there is only identity, simplicity, and sameness’ (PG 91: 1116A-1117B). Not only does Maximus appear to collapse the first and second hypothesis in the Neoplatonic system of the One and Intellect in a dialogical manner, but provides the context in which we should understand God’s essence. Kataphatically it must be affirmed that God is essence by thought and thought by essence, but apophatically as transcendent cause God is above and prior to thought and essence. This is because God is a totality that cannot be circumscribed and at the same time he utterly exists not bereft of being, life, and wisdom. Maximus also states in *De Char.* 3.25 that God grants the gifts of goodness and wisdom in order that what he is in essence, we might have through participation. Also, in *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1137D) Maximus unequivocally states that God gives by grace and habit what he is in his very essence. There is the identification of essence and attributes in the Confessor’s theology as there is the affirmation through negation of his transcendent existence beyond all that can be known or experienced. This is evident in Maximus’ Trinitarian theology as he warns his reader not to ‘search for states and aptitudes in the simple and infinite substance of the Holy Trinity, lest you make it composite like creatures. To have such notions about God is absurd and impious’ (*De Char.* 4.8).

⁴⁴ Maximus, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91: 1076C).

⁴⁵ Maximus, *Cap. Gnost.* 2.90 (PG 90: 1168C).

resurrection to eternal life, the creature will participate in the gift of infinity. The grace of infinity is a full sharing in the essence of God (since his nature is infinity), but the very same gift of divine infinity is a created grace that the creature can participate in. The eternal gifts of the divine nature must be shared through grace because the gifts are not a sharing in the essence of God, which would destroy the natures of both beings.

These two passages from *Amb.* 6 and 7 are not qualified by an apophatic reserve, but elsewhere in *Amb.* 7, Maximus does enforce an apophatic qualification in speaking about the *Logos* and *logoi*:

We are speechless before the sublime teaching about the *Logos*, for He cannot be expressed in words or conceived in thought. Although he is beyond being and nothing can participate in him in any way, nor is he any of the totality of things that can be know in relation to other things, nevertheless we affirm that the one *Logos* is many *logoi* and the many *logoi* are One. Because the One goes forth out of goodness into individual being, creating and preserving them, the One is many. Moreover the many are directed toward the One and are providentially guided in that direction. It is as though they were drawn to an all-powerful center that had built into it the beginnings of the lines that go out from it and that gathers them all together. In this way the many are one.⁴⁶

The apophatic reserve in this passage guarantees that the transcendence of the divine is maintained while at the same time affirming that creatures really do

⁴⁶ Maximus, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91: 1081B).

participate in the one *Logos*. Maximus is careful not to identify the *logoi* with 'concrete actual existence' or 'being' because of the Origenist theory of the pre-existent henad of souls, but he also does not keep us from identifying the essential nature of each creature with its own being. The truth of every creature of God resides both in the divine model and will, but it must also be the nature of each creature as created. Participation within a Christian context of creation *ex nihilo* can only occur if both sides of the ontological divide are maintained.

If the *logoi* are not one in God prior to creation as pure potentiality and only actually many once the *logoi* receives substantive creation (i.e., material creation, or as Maximus says 'essential'), then how do the *logoi* participate in the *Logos* as Maximus infers in this passage? Maximus is clearly discussing the part to whole participation of the many in the one, both in vocabulary and content. Further, the question of *logoi* participating in the *Logos* is also evidenced by Maximus's retelling of his theory in *Ambiguum* 7 as the Christian being a member of the one body of Christ. Are the many members of the one body of Christ only the divine wills of the *Logos* or are they real creatures participating in the unity of Christ's body through the power of the Holy Spirit? Maximus indicates the latter, and I think his whole argument concerning the 'portion of God' must be understood in a two-fold sense:

in the first instance the *logoi* are something like divine ideas.⁴⁷ Second, by understanding the *Logos-logoi* in this instance within the Eastern Orthodox distinction between the divine essence and energies, as Vladimir Lossky in fact does,⁴⁸ then one would be affirming that the ineffable divine energies participate in the *Logos*. How would God participate in himself? If the divine energies were also the

⁴⁷ Aquinas also develops a notion of a plurality of ideas in the simple God. He bases the plurality on the created effects that can be in relation or participate in their exemplar, not on actual plurality in God. This is how Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus both seem to understand the plurality of existence coming forth from the simple God. In the *De Veritate* (q. 3, a. 3, ad. 3, Leonine ed., vol. 22.1.108: 185-94), Aquinas describes divine exemplars as ideas in both productive and speculative aspects, but in the *In librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, Aquinas states that the exemplars can only be productive ideas, not virtual. Further, he identifies exemplars as divine willings, which is the use that Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus make of the *logoi*. The productive and willing nature of the ideas in God are also retained in the *Summa Theologica* q. 15 and 44. Gregory Doolan (*Divine Ideas as Exemplary Causes*, p. 15) describes how these aspects of ideas in God are present in created particulars, 'he observes that whenever a thing is not generated by chance, its form must be the end of generation. Furthermore, the agent that acts on account of form only does so because some likeness (*similitudo*) of that form exists in it—a likeness that can occur in one of two ways. In one way, a likeness is in a natural agent because the form of the generated thing preexists in the agent according to a natural being (*esse naturale*), as it does in things that act according to their nature. Thus, man generates man and fire, fire. In another way, the likeness of a generated thing can occur in the agent according to an intelligible being (*esse intelligibile*); such is the case with those agents who act by means of intellect. In this way, the likeness of a house preexists in the mind of the builder. 'And this likeness,' Thomas concludes, 'can be called the 'idea' of the house since the artisan intends the house to be like the form that he conceived in his mind.' I think that the best approach to Maximus on the issue of the *Logos-logoi* is to embrace a two-fold understanding of *logoi* as both in God and also as descended in created principles and forms through divine economy and providence. The creature is a portion of God and can participate in the *Logos* because of exemplary causality and residing presence of the Creator in the creature. This is thoroughly Proclean from a metaphysical point of view. Maximus rejects the notion of emanations or henads, and thus develops a more causal understanding of natural participation in God. Supernatural participation in God through grace and deification is of a different order and will be discussed below.

⁴⁸ Vladimir Lossky, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), p. 91.

participations that do not participate in anything higher,⁴⁹ then they would not participate in God (this would be a self-defeating argument). As Polycarp Sherwood notes in relation to these two passages from *Ambiguum* 7, asserting an essence-energies distinction here would be to treat Maximus's theology too casually.⁵⁰ This equally applies to the claim that grace is an uncreated activity separated from the divine essence in the Confessor's thought. This goes beyond what Maximus actually says, and it is also to treat his metaphysics too casually.

There is a paradoxical dynamic at work in Maximus's theology of the *Logos-logoi*. The *logoi* are one in the unity and singularity of the *Logos*, but many as distributed and created in the cosmos. This dynamic polarity is very similar to St. Augustine's notions of the *aeternae rationes*⁵¹ and the *seminales rationes*.⁵² The *aeternae rationes* are held in the *Logos* according to Augustine—he perceives the Ideas as in the Platonic container or reservoir rather than the providential will of God—whereas for Maximus they are not only the paradigms for creatures but also active principles of divine will. For Augustine, the *seminales rationes*, or seminal reasons, denote immanent forms within creation. Both Augustine and Maximus would hold

⁴⁹ Maximus, *Cap. Gnost.* 1.48-49.

⁵⁰ Polycarp, *The Earlier Ambigua of St. Maximus*, p. 179.

⁵¹ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 2.9, 3.13, and 4.16.

⁵² Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 3.13; idem, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, books V and VI.

to a dynamic created reality that is at the same time rooted in a transcendent source. Stephen Gersh articulates this elimination of Platonic ontological intermediaries by Maximus (much more explicit than Pseudo-Dionysius) quite well in his study of Neoplatonism and the Dionysian tradition:

Maximus the Confessor is perhaps the first thinker in the Neoplatonic tradition to tackle the problem [Emanation] head-on when he argues that a created thing participates in God but ‘does not flow forth’ (οὐκ ἀπορρέει) [Amb. 7 1080C]. Elsewhere he argues that the notion of things ‘having flowed down from above’ (ρέυσσαντες δὲ ἄνωθεν) [amb 7 1081C] means simply that the creature is not longer living according to its preordained ‘reason’ (λόγος) in God [Amb. 7 1084B].⁵³

Through his intricate created ontology, Maximus will distinguish the αὐτό-realities (i.e., Being-itself, Life-itself, and Wisdom-itself) from any kind of intermediary hypostasis, as in Proclean Neoplatonism. However, Maximus will still place the source of these realities in God himself as attributes, and they will be more or less synonymous with the pre-existing *logoi* singularly united in the one Logos.

Despite the paradox of the Thearchy being both One and multiple in creation, God is not completely unknowable. Instead, the Godhead is the ground for the knowledge of anything at all; he is the furnisher of both identity and non-identity within each creature.⁵⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius hints that there is an ‘analogy of

⁵³ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, p. 18.

⁵⁴ In his *Theologoumena Arithmeticae* I on the Monad, Iamblichus (?) notes: ‘Nicomachus says that God coincides with the monad, since he is seminally everything which exists, just as the monad is in the

structure between God and the *scala naturae*⁵⁵ in DN: ‘Being in itself is more revered than the being of Life itself and Wisdom itself and Likeness to divinity itself. Whatever beings participate in these things must, before all else, participate in Being. More precisely, those absolute qualities of which things have a share must

case of number, and there are encompassed in it in potential things, which, when actual, seem to be extremely opposed, just as it is seen, throughout the *Introduction to Arithmetic* [of Nicomachus], to be capable, thanks to its ineffable nature, of becoming all classes of things, and to have encompassed the beginning, middle and end of all things (whether we understand them to be composed by continuity or by juxtaposition), because the monad is the beginning, middle and end of quantity, of size or moreover of every quality. Just as without the monad there is in general no composition of anything, so also without it there is no knowledge of anything whatsoever, since it is a pure light, most authoritative over everything in general, and it is sun-like and ruling, so that in each of these respects it resembles God, and especially because it has the power of making things cohere and combine, even when they are composed of many ingredients and are very different from one another,’ On the Monad, in *Theology of Arithmetic*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1988), p. 37. Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus, of course, do not have God and the Monad coincide with one another; they are identified with each other. Still, like Iamblichus, both theologians posit the Pythagorean principle of the One beyond Monad and Dyad (for Maximus see *Amb.* 10, sections 40-41 of Louth’s notation, PG 91: 1184C-1188C). This One beyond both Monad and Dyad (The metaphysical pair is in view here, not the material. The Pythagoreans ascribed material existence to the dyad) and numeration is God without reception of duality (see Maximus, *Amb.* 10, PG 91: 1185A-B). Without this transcendence, then, God cannot be the source of everything and reside in everything, nor can knowledge of anything subsist if it is not grounded in the transcendence of the One. Though God transcends Monad and Dyad, Maximus still collapses the Neoplatonic emanation of hypostases by ascribing God as the Monad in a very Iamblichian passage: ‘Only the monad is properly speaking unmoved, because it is not number, nor numerable, nor numbered (for the monad is neither a part nor a whole nor a relation), and [only the monad] is properly speaking without beginning, because nothing is prior to it, from which, when moved, the monad receives being, and it is properly speaking infinite, because it is the cause of every number and everything numbers or numerable, as transcendent over every relation and every part and whole, and properly and truly and first and solely and simply, but all of this because the monad exists first and alone,’ *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1185B-C), trans. Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, pp. 142-43. This is the basis of Maximus’ understanding of divine simplicity. All movement, being, or simple ‘existence’ in God is only attributed to him. See the discussion below on how this relates to the essence-energies distinction in Maximus.

⁵⁵ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, p. 160.

themselves participate in being itself.⁵⁶ Within the greater context of *DN 5* as well, Pseudo-Dionysius indicates that the divisions of being in the creation are analogous to the divisions in the divine being.⁵⁷ The relationship between the creation and divine is not one of a mirror, which would make Pseudo-Dionysius guilty of ontotheology, but it is an asymmetrical relationship of comparison between two completely different levels. Pseudo-Dionysius is using ἀναλογία here in the classical sense of proportionality.

Maximus affirms this reading of the *scala naturae*⁵⁸ in Pseudo-Dionysius, but adds a Christological focus. ‘And the same (*Logos*) is revealed and multiplied benevolently in all things derived from him according to the analogy⁵⁹ of each...and everything participates in God by coming to be from him analogously either according to intellect, reason, sense, or vital motion, or according to existential and

⁵⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN 5.2* (PG 3: 820A), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 97.

⁵⁷ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, p. 160.

⁵⁸ Maximus, *Amb. 41* (PG 91: 1304D-1316A).

⁵⁹ Blowers translates ἀναλογία in the general sense of ‘proportion’ instead of ‘analogy,’ *On The Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), p. 55. In Neoplatonic and Christian literature, the common phrase ‘according to their capacity’ (κατὰ τὴν σφῶν ἀναλογίαν) indicates participation of higher levels to the lower ones. For the relationship of this disposition within the various levels of being in Plotinus and Proclus, see Lucas Siorvanes, *Proclus: Neo-platonic Philosophy and Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 100ff.

habitual fitness [the *logoi* and energies are in the purview here].⁶⁰ Maximus also affirms that we can have ‘conceptual’ and ‘rational’ knowledge of God through the analogy of created things.⁶¹ There are many ontological levels in which Maximus conceives the human being as participating in God, but the supernatural participation in divine grace awaits the eschaton. In the end of times and the beatific vision, the creature will ‘know none of the *logoi* of the things from which it has withdrawn; in its ineffable vision it knows only that *Logos* whom it approaches in grace.’⁶²

4.2 The Divine Works of God

Can Pseudo-Dionysius’s theology of primary beings (Being-itself, Life-itself and Wisdom-itself) be affirmed as realities on the side of creation beyond just epistemology? A little later in *DN* 10, in discussion of the name ‘Ancient of Days,’ Pseudo-Dionysius hints at this possibility. Pseudo-Dionysius frames our understanding of this divine title by distinguishing God as pre-existing time and

⁶⁰ Maximus, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91: 1080B): ‘καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἕαξ ἄλτοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἐκάστου ἀναογίαν ἀγαθοπρεπῶς δεικνυμένον τε καὶ πληθυνόμενον...πάντα γὰρ μετέχει διὰ τὸ ἐκ θεοῦ γεγενῆσθαι ἀναλόγως θεοῦ, ἢ κατὰ νοῦν ἢ λόγον ἢ αἴσθησιν, ἢ κίνησιν ζωτικὴν, ἢ σύσιώδη καὶ ἐκτικὴν ἐπιτηδειότητα.’

⁶¹ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 60 (CCSG 22: 77).

⁶² Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 64 (CCSG 22: 213).

eternity and also as creator of time and eternity.⁶³ In reading the Holy Scriptures, Pseudo-Dionysius instructs us not to understand things described as time or eternity as ‘the absolutely uncreated, everlasting, incorruptible, immortal, unchanging, and immutable.’⁶⁴ In some mysterious way, there are divine gifts that have a semi-temporal existence as lying ‘midway between things which are and things which are coming-to-be.’⁶⁵ The reason for this semi-temporal existence, says Pseudo-Dionysius, is that ‘eternity is the home of being, while time is the home of things that come to be.’⁶⁶ Among the gracious gifts of God (in this instance subordinated to God as transcendent Eternity and Immortality), there are those that transcend the limits of time because time is not predicated of them, or it is not their home or abode. This simply means that once eternal realities come into being (as in the case of the soul) they never fall from being.

For the created gifts of God that are bound within time, ‘theology tells us...are destined to have a share of eternity when at last we attain the incorruptible, unchanging Eternity.’⁶⁷ This eternity is not, however, to be understood as being ‘co-

⁶³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 10.2 (PG3: 937B).

⁶⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 10.3 (PG3: 937D), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 120.

⁶⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 10.3 (PG3: 940A), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 121.

⁶⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 10.3 (PG3: 940A), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 121.

⁶⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 10.3 (PG3: 937D), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 120.

eternal' with God.⁶⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius would not affirm a created being as 'co-eternal' with the Thearchy, and he explicitly rejects this Greek notion.⁶⁹ 'Being' in this instance is eternal because God created it to last forever into eternity. This is what Maximus will also call 'eternal being.'⁷⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius calls God time and eternity as derivative of Being since He is the cause of time, eternity and ages. God both is Eternity as cause of eternity and transcends eternity as preceding eternity.⁷¹ The names of God in this passage could be included among the 'primary beings' (πρώτων ὄντων) mentioned previously.⁷² Despite the complete transcendence of the One above all unities, the whole God is participated, shared, and named (or 'hymned' as Pseudo-Dionysius must do with the names that imply the One beyond all).⁷³ Pseudo-Dionysius again manages to hold the tension together between the kataphatic designation and the apophatic reserve.

Pseudo-Dionysius provides a linguistic and theological context in which to understand the difficult passage in Maximus's *Cap. Gnost.* 1.48-50 that most Orthodox

⁶⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 10.3 (PG3: 940A).

⁶⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 11.6 (PG3: 953C-956B).

⁷⁰ Maximus, *De Char.* 3.25 (PG 90: 1024C).

⁷¹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 10.3 (PG3: 940A).

⁷² Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 11.6 (PG3: 953C).

⁷³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.1 (PG3: 816B).

scholars point to as evidence of the essence-energies distinction. According to Tollefsen, Bradshaw, Loudovikos and others, Maximus holds to a belief in the energies of God *ad extra*. That is, the activity of God is not only an economic distinction, but it is the activity of God ‘out of the essence’ (ἐνέργεια εκ τῆς οὐσίας) that remains God’s own natural energy (φυσικῆς ἐνέργεια).⁷⁴ In *Cap. Gnost.* 1.47-50, Maximus contemplates the mystery of the Sabbath of God, when the ‘natural activity’ of God takes root in those who are worthy and whose own ‘natural energy’ is transformed by the divine energy.⁷⁵

Maximus then commends that the Zealous people of God to contemplate the works of God that he began to create in time (τὰ ἔργα ὧν ἤρξατο ποιῆσαι) and those that he did not begin to create in time (τὰ ἔργα ὧν οὐκ ἤρξατο ποιῆσαι).⁷⁶ The works of God that did begin in time are all beings which share ‘the different essences of beings for they have nonbeing before being.’⁷⁷ These works consist of everything in

⁷⁴ Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus Confessor* (Oxford, UK: OUP, 2008) pp. 29, 161. This theory of the energy out of the essence is very minimal in Plotinus’ writings. In reference to οὐσίας in general, he ascribes energy to the essence: ‘εἰ...ἔστιν ἡ τῆς οὐσίας ἀύτη ἐνέργεια’ (*Enneads* I 4.9, 22, 23). In reference to the divine, Plotinus emphasizes the energy that the divine essence has: ‘τὸ καλὸν ἐν ταῖς ἐνεργείαις αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ δίκαιον συνεκφέρει (τὸ θεῖον)’ (*Enneads* III 2.13, 31). For an exhaustive list of Plotinus’ use of ἐνέργεια, see J. H. Sleeman and Gilbert Pollet, *Lexicon Plotinianum*, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1980), pp. 274-286.

⁷⁵ Maximus Confessor, *Cap. Gnost.* 1.47 (PG 90: 1100C).

⁷⁶ Maximus Confessor, *Cap. Gnost.* 1.48 (PG 90: 1100D).

⁷⁷ Maximus Confessor, *Cap. Gnost.* 1.48 (PG 90: 1100D).

the cosmos that spans from the lowest particulars of existence to the most universal. Using the straightforward meaning of τὰ ἔργα in Patristic literature, all of the works that begin in time are simply creatures.⁷⁸ But what are the ‘works’ that did not begin in time?

Maximus presents a list of these beings that did not begin in time in the next section of the *First Century*: Immortality itself (αὐτή ἡ ἀθανασία); Life itself (αὐτή ἡ ζωή); Holiness itself (αὐτή ἡ ἀγιότης); Virtue itself (αὐτή ἡ ἀρετή); Goodness itself (αὐτή ἡ ἀγαθότης); and Being itself (αὐτή ἡ ὄντοτης).⁷⁹ These ‘beings’ are works that are participated (τὰ ὄντα μεθεκτά) rather than the works in time, which are participating beings (τὰ ὄντα μετέχοντα). Maximus contrasts the ‘itself’ list of beings that did not begin with time with the participating beings that do begin in time: all immortal things (τά ἀθάνατα πάντα); all living things (τά ζῶντα πάντα); all holy things (τά ἅγια πάντα); all virtuous things (τά ἐνάρετα πάντα); all good things (τά ἀγαθα πάντα); and all beings (τὰ ὄντα πάντα).⁸⁰ So, in this passage of *Cap. Gnost.*, Maximus is articulating the Proclean triad of imparticipable, participable, and

⁷⁸ G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 546-47.

⁷⁹ Maximus Confessor, *Cap. Gnost.* 1.50 (PG 90: 1101B).

⁸⁰ Maximus Confessor, *Cap. Gnost.* 1.50 (PG 90: 1101B).

participant.⁸¹ Does this triad merged with Christian orthodoxy concerning creation necessitate the essence-energies distinction?

Tollefsen and Bradshaw argue that the ‘works of God’ that did not begin in time in *Cap. Gnost.* 1.48 are the divine energies and not created realities.⁸² This assumption is based on the fact that Maximus calls these works ‘participated beings’ instead of ‘participating beings,’ which would indicate that these beings are other than God and also not on the same ontological level as creatures that participate in that which is higher. Tollefsen then argues that the reason why Maximus is using the phrase ‘participated beings’ is due to the Dionysian metaphysics of the divine processions (πρόοδοι). God dispenses the four sequential gifts of Goodness, Being, Life, and Wisdom.⁸³ Pseudo-Dionysius affirms that the being of Life itself and Wisdom itself and Likeness to divinity itself all require a prior participation in Being itself.⁸⁴ This is why the first gift and divine name of God is ‘praised as He who is.’⁸⁵ Being, Life, and Wisdom must also proceed from Goodness itself. These varied processions from the One do not admit of plurality in God nor do they admit of

⁸¹ Proclus, *ET* 23.

⁸² Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology*, p. 160.

⁸³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.5 (PG 3: 816B).

⁸⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.5 (PG 3: 820A); see also Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, pp. 161ff.

⁸⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.5 (PG 3: 820B).

hypostasis between the One and creation: 'I [Pseudo-Dionysius] hold that there is one God for all these good processions and that he is the possessor of the divine names of which I speak and that the first name tells of the universal Providence⁸⁶ of the one God, while the other names reveal general or specific ways in which he acts providentially.'⁸⁷ I agree with Tollefsen that Maximus would understand the divine participations as following upon the primary participation of Being.⁸⁸ For a creature to have life and wisdom, it would need first to reside in Being. Pseudo-Dionysius then discusses how each of these processions are held together in the unity of God in a manner similar to the way in which the Logos/logoi operates in Maximus:

⁸⁶ In Iamblichus' (?) *Theologoumena Arithmeticae* I on the Monad, he brings together the Monad's pre-existing plan for the universe with Providence: 'Every compound of plurality or every subdivision is given form by the monad; for the decad is one and the chiliad is one, and again one tenth is one and one thousandth is one, and so on for all the subdivisions *ad infinitum*. In each of these cases there is the same monad in terms of form, yet different monads in respect of quantity, because it produces itself out of itself, as well as producing them, just as if it were the principle of the universe and the nature of things; and because it maintains everything and forbids whatever it is present in to change, it alone of all numbers resembles the Providence which preserves everything, and is most particularly suited both to reflect the principle of God and to be likened to him, in so far as it is closest to him,' trans. Robin Waterfield, *Theology of Arithmetic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1988), p. 36. This perspective on unity and sharing out by Iamblichus (though he is pointing to the existence of the receptacle embracing all forms in this instance) could explain how Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus understand the unity and diversity of God and the world (and this relationship as Providence). God pre-embraces the world in a unity of form (for Maximus this is the *Logos-logoi* relationship) that is undividedly divided out in shares that are unities in themselves because of the unity of form in the Monad. The plurality of the subsequent monads of numbers (and dyads?) is different only in terms of quantity.

⁸⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.5 (PG 3: 817A), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 97.

⁸⁸ Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology*, p. 162.

Every number preexists uniquely in the monad and the monad holds every number in itself singularly. Every number is united in the monad; it is differentiated and pluralized only insofar as it goes forth from this one. All the radii of a circle are brought together in the unity of the center, which contains all the straight lines brought together within itself. These are linked one to another because of this single point of origin and they are completely unified at this center. As they move a little away from it they are differentiated a little, and as they are to the center point, the more they are at one with it and at one with each other, and the more they travel away from it the more they are separated from each other.⁸⁹

Given the nature of this illustration by Pseudo-Dionysius, it would be difficult to know where God ends and creation begins, but he is here concerned with the connection between the participations that creatures experience as a divine manifestation and the ultimate unified cause behind, or better grounding, that participation.

As we saw earlier, Pseudo-Dionysius also characterizes these creative processions at times as being created by God and receiving substantial existence once they participate. Maximus also presents these ‘participated beings’ as ‘beings’ and ‘works of God’ in *Cap. Gnost.* 1.49, which is generally reserved for creatures. After listing the pairs of participated beings and participating beings in *Cap. Gnost.* 1.50, Maximus declares that ‘God is the creator of all life, immortality, holiness, and virtue, for he transcends the essence of all which can be thought and said.’⁹⁰ Is

⁸⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.5 (PG 3: 821A), tran. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, pp. 99-100.

⁹⁰ Maximus, *Cap. Gnost.* 1.50 (PG 90: 1101B), trans. Berthold, p. 137.

Maximus subordinating the primary participations below God in this instance as their 'Creator'? It appears as if he does in fact do this in 1.48 and 1.50. This is difficult to interpret because he also says in *De Char.* 4.11 that 'God is participated only; the creature both participates and communicates.' Further, in *De Char.* 3.27 Maximus plainly states that 'God is absolute existence, goodness, and wisdom.' He does qualify this as by stating that God transcends all of these as well, but the paradoxical both/and identification of God as Being, Goodness, Life, Wisdom, etc... and the creator of them makes it difficult to understand his intention.

I think Eric Perl is closer to the truth in stating that the divine processions, or energies in the case of Maximus, are simply the acts of participation themselves. This makes the participated beings no less a gift to the creature in nature than it makes God the source and cause of the divinely shared gift. Maximus's Christology of a union without distinction will, I believe, provide a linguistic and metaphysical context in which to understand how we can be deified by God without losing our integrity of nature. Sheldon-Williams and Gersh are also correct that we should see these opposing perspectives of God as transcendent and immanent at the same

time.⁹¹ However, as I stated in the previous chapter, holding together two tensions does not fully embrace the paradox.

There remains the question surrounding the nature of the ‘works of God’ and the ‘participating beings’ in Maximus’s other writings. Does Maximus use ‘works of God’ in a similar fashion elsewhere? He in fact does in the *De Char.* 1.96 and 2.15. These two references take place within the contemplation of God and the ascent to Him in union. Writing to fellow monks on the spiritual journey, Maximus encourages them to climb the ladder of contemplation to God:

Through the working out of the commandments the mind puts off the passions. Through the spiritual contemplation of visible realities it puts off impassioned thoughts of things. Through the knowledge of invisible realities it puts off contemplation of visible things. And finally this it puts off through the knowledge of the Holy Trinity. Just as the sun in rising and lighting up the world manifests both itself and the things which it lights up, so the sun of justice [Christ] in rising on a pure mind manifests both itself and the principles [i.e., principles or *logoi*] which have been and will be brought to existence by it. We do not know God from his being but from his magnificent works and his Providence for beings. Through these as through mirrors we perceive his infinite goodness and wisdom and power.⁹²

Maximus here describes how Christ gives the gift of the revelation of the *logoi* of existence through following the commandments and contemplating visible and

⁹¹ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, p. 167. See also I. P. Sheldon-Williams, ‘The Greek Christian Platonist Tradition from the Cappadocians to Maximus and Eriugena,’ in *CHLGEMP*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: CUP, 1967), p. 532.

⁹² Maximus, *De Char.* 1.94-96 (PG 90: 1121B-C), trans. Berthold, pp. 45-46.

invisible realities. There are certain realities or works of God that are knowable mirrors of the divine nature and attributes. These works of God are also described as being a part of his Provident actions towards creatures (grace as created in the creature), which Maximus associates with the *logoi* in *Amb.* 10.⁹³ In the next century, Maximus uses ‘works of God’ in a similar manner: ‘In applying itself to visible things the mind knows them in accordance with nature through the medium of the senses, so that neither is the mind evil, nor is natural knowledge, nor the things, nor the senses for these are all works of God.’⁹⁴ The works of God and Providence of beings fall on the side of creation and are sensible and intelligible symbols or mirrors of the transcendent divine being and His attributes. This is what Maximus describes in the vision of the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel in the *Mystagogy*. The spiritual world and the sensible worlds are interrelated to one another with signs and symbols that connect them together. ‘In the spiritual world it is in principles [*logoi*]; in the sensible world it is in figures. And their function was like a wheel within a wheel, as says the marvelous seer of extraordinary things.’⁹⁵

⁹³ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1189A-C).

⁹⁴ Maximus, *De Char.* 2.15 (PG 90: 988C), trans. Berthold, p. 48.

⁹⁵ Maximus, *Myst.* 2 (PG 91: 669C), trans. Berthold, p. 189. I am grateful to John Milbank for pointing out this wonderful passage in the *Myst* to me.

Finally, in the third century of the *De Char.*, Maximus discusses the works of God in the context of deification without referring to the works, which deify. Starting with the utterly free choice of the Creator, the Confessor delves into the insatiable participation in the divine: ‘God who is beyond fullness did not bring creatures into being out of any needs of his, but that he might enjoy their proportionate participation in him and that he might delight in his works seeing them delighted and ever insatiably satisfied with the one who is inexhaustible.’⁹⁶ In this passage, ‘works’ seems to be referring to his creatures, but the proportionate participation (ἀναλόγως μετέχοντα) is not described as ‘works of God.’

Neither in these three passages from the *De Char.*, nor elsewhere in his writings other than the *Cap. Gnost.* 1.4-50, does Maximus describe the infinite goodness, wisdom and other attributes as being ‘works of God.’ The closest passage that we have is rooted in the Incarnation of Christ. In *Amb.* 10, Maximus contemplates the two modes of theology (i.e., kataphatic and kataphatic with apophatic reserve) in relation to the Transfiguration of Jesus. Interestingly, Maximus states that Christ became ‘the type and symbol of Himself, and from Himself symbolically to represent Himself.’⁹⁷ Although Christ in his divine nature is ineffable and an utter mystery, ‘out of his love for humankind He grants to human

⁹⁶ Maximus, *De Char.* 3.46 (PG 90: 1029C), trans. Berthold, p. 67.

⁹⁷ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1165D).

beings intimations of Himself in the manifest divine-works [θεουργία] performed in the flesh.⁹⁸ Presumably, Maximus is talking about miracles that Jesus performed, but the immediate context would be the glory of God shown in the Transfiguration itself, which reveals God as incarnate with the principles of created being.

These divine-works, which is a theurgical term derived from later Neoplatonism, are mediated through the ‘flesh’ of Christ. If there are eternal uncreated divine works of God, they are only mirrored or manifest in sensible or invisible realities, most eminently in the incarnated *Logos*. In the age of the grace of the Incarnation, the Christian is blessed with the ‘grace of faith’ since he or she is only given symbols in the sensible world of the ultimate truth that all creation desires to know. In the future age, the grace of the Incarnation will be more fully revealed through the ‘grace of vision,’ and the Christian will participate ‘in [the gifts of the Holy Spirit] in very truth in their concrete reality.’⁹⁹ The disciples were given a glimpse of this final gift and participation of grace in the Transfiguration, but the fullness of this vision remains for the end of the ages.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1168A).

⁹⁹ Maximus, *Myst.*, 24, trans. Berthold, p. 207.

¹⁰⁰ Maximus, *Myst.*, 24, trans. Berthold, pp. 207-8.

Maximus also states in the Transfiguration scene in *Ambiguum* 10 that the light from the face of Christ that the apostles see is at the same time a complete apophatic theology. The divine light reveals that the Trinity is by essence ‘beyond ineffability and unknowability and countlessly raised above all infinity.’¹⁰¹ The creature cannot comprehend how the Godhead can be both one and three at the same time, or can it know how the divine can become incarnate. Christ is the uncreated revelation of God both in this present world and in the age to come. Further, in the scene of the Transfiguration, there is also the affirmative or kataphatic mode of theology. Maximus says that within this mode there is a differentiation between activity (energy) and providence and judgment.¹⁰² The mode of activity, starting ‘from the beauty and magnitude of creatures, introduces the explanation that the God of all is the fashioner, this is shown through the radiant garments of the Lord, which the Word shows to be the manifestation of creatures [i.e., the works of creation].’¹⁰³ Further, the kataphatic mode concerned with providence indicates that God has ‘implant[ed] the divine laws’ because out of

¹⁰¹ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1168A).

¹⁰² Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1168B).

¹⁰³ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1168B), trans. Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 133.

love he wishes to offer humans the ability to rise above corruption and evil in the flesh.¹⁰⁴

Moses represents the providential mode of revelation in the Transfiguration scene. Elijah represents the mode of judgment that punishes according to deed, either virtuous or evil. Maximus then restates the apophatic reserve concerning the ineffable will of God and his providential economy of salvation through time. This does not mean that this spiritual knowledge is not shared with those purified of mind. For Maximus then states such knowledge can be ‘granted’ to those worthy.¹⁰⁵ The unknowable imparticipable God can indeed be shared through grace as He was to Moses and Elijah. What is important in this passage, coupled with the three from the *De Char.*, is that Maximus does not use the phrase ‘works of God’ in description of God’s uncreated energies, nor does he ever label the energies in general as uncreated. Activity, providence and judgment are manifested through the creation itself or as a grace implanted into nature, such as the divine laws of Moses as described in *Ambiguum* 10. God’s activity is divine, rooted in eternity, and will continue beyond time and nature as super-temporal works.

¹⁰⁴ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1168C).

¹⁰⁵ *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1169B).

This is also true in our text from the *Cap. Gnost.* 1.48-50. In 1.47 Maximus mentions the Sabbath rest of God, whereby His singular ‘natural activity,’ that works in an ineffable manner, will reach its end in created nature of beings. Maximus seems to use divine energy here to relate to the activity in creation that will come to an end at the end of all things in deification and return. However, this all-encompassing divine gift of energy relates to the kataphatic mode of theology with activity, providence and judgment as we discussed from *Amb.* 10. The works of God that did begin in time participate fully in God as the participated beings, but this kataphatic affirmation is qualified using the apophatic reserve. Maximus states that the works of God that did not begin in time are ‘implanted by grace in creatures,’ such as ‘an infused power which clearly proclaims that God is in all things.’¹⁰⁶ The supernatural is implanted or created within the cosmos, and the creature will participate fully in these super-temporal works when it is transformed from the grace of faith to the grace of vision, the beatitude of the Incarnate Christ.

Although the passage in *De Gnost.* 1.49-50 could be read with a distinction between God’s activity from eternity and in creation based upon one perspective on the divine *proodoi*, this does not invite the reader to distinguish between God’s essence and energies using a real metaphysical distinction. I believe that Maximus

¹⁰⁶ Maximus, *Cap. Gnost.* 1.49 (PG 90: 1101A), trans. Berthold, p. 137.

presents in *De Gnost.* 1.48-50 Pseudo-Dionysius presents concerning the divine names and processions. *DN* 10.3, cited earlier, could perhaps help understand what Maximus is trying to communicate in *De Gnost.* 1.48-50.

If you will remember, Pseudo-Dionysius distinguishes between that Eternity which is ‘absolutely uncreated, everlasting, incorruptible, immortal, unchanging, and immutable’ and that eternity which ‘is the home of being.’¹⁰⁷ Time, on the other hand, is ‘the home of things that come to be.’¹⁰⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius extols his readers to conceive of these eternal works as not being co-eternal with God, who ‘precedes eternity,’ but he does affirm that these things that ‘share partly in eternity and partly in time’ are to be comprehended ‘as somehow midway between things which are and things which are coming-to-be.’¹⁰⁹ Because God is still the Ancient of Days and cause of time and eternity, he can be predicated with time and eternity. Does Maximus also conceive of created beings in this Dionysian fashion?

In *Amb.* 41, Maximus goes into a discussion of the five divisions of being. The first is the division between uncreated and created (i.e., between God and creation). Pagan Neoplatonists prioritized the distinction between intelligible and sensible

¹⁰⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 10.3 (PG 3: 937C), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 120.

¹⁰⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 10.3 (PG 3: 940A), trans. Luibheid *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 121.

¹⁰⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 10.3 (PG 3: 940A), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 121.

reality.¹¹⁰ For Maximus, the Christian theologian, creation *ex nihilo* is the central dogma to retain in his ontology. Next is the division between the sensible and intelligible worlds. Maximus states that this division ‘is that in accordance with which the whole nature that receives being from creation is divided by God into that which is perceived by the mind [i.e., the intelligible] and that perceived by the senses [i.e., the sensible].’¹¹¹ The third division is the nature perceived by the senses that is divided into heaven and earth. The fourth division is that between paradise and the inhabited world, and the fifth division is the human person into male and female.¹¹² In this schema of the division of being, the human being has the central role mediating all of the divisions into ‘one single creation.’¹¹³ Of interest here is the uniting of the second division between reality perceived through the senses and reality perceived through the mind. The union of the second division thrusts the human being to ‘equality with the angels in its manner of knowing.’¹¹⁴ There is no longer for the microcosm and mediator a division between what it can know or not know. Like the angels, the creature can have ‘knowledge and understanding of the

¹¹⁰ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, pp. 185-87.

¹¹¹ Maximus, *Amb. 41* (PG 91: 1305A), trans. Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 158.

¹¹² David Balais, *METΟΥΣΙΑ ΘΕΟΥ: Man’s Participation in God’s Perfections According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa* (Rome: Herder, 1966), pp. 45-52.

¹¹³ Maximus, *Amb. 41* (PG 91: 1308A), trans. Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 158.

¹¹⁴ Maximus, *Amb. 41* (PG 91: 1308A), trans. Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 158.

logoi in the things that exist.’¹¹⁵ Knowledge of the *logoi* in things that exist is furnished by the infinite gift of ‘true wisdom’ that God ‘pours out...without intermediary.’ Maximus calls this gift a concept of the Divine ‘beyond understanding or explanation.’¹¹⁶

Maximus also presents the first two divisions in an interesting contemplation of the meaning of the Scriptural word concerning Melchisedec, Abraham and Moses as figures of the Incarnate Christ in *Amb.* 10.¹¹⁷ The contemplation begins with the second division in Maximus’s five-fold division of being. After the division between God (uncreated) and creatures (created), there is the division between intelligible and sensible reality. A perplexing statement similar to Pseudo-Dionysius occurs within the second division of nature: ‘There is that which is said to be and is eternal, since it receives the beginning of its being in eternity, and that which is temporal, since it is made in time; there is that which is subject to intellection, and that which is subject to the power of sense perception.’¹¹⁸

Intelligible aspects of creation can include the soul, angels and other creative

¹¹⁵ Maximus, *Amb.* 41 (PG 91: 1308A).

¹¹⁶ Maximus, *Amb.* 41 (PG 91: 1308B).

¹¹⁷ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1153A-C).

¹¹⁸ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1153A).

principles.¹¹⁹ Maximus indicates that the soul is in purview here since he begins a discussion on the unity of and reciprocal communication of the body and the soul, but other intelligibles, such as the created *logoi*, could be included among the list of options.

The key distinction here, as in *DN* 10.3, is that there are created realities that do not begin in time. The works of God that do not begin in time could be interpreted in our passage in *Cap. Gnost.* 1.48-50 as being intelligible or spiritual realities. They would be both works of God and beings in the straightforward sense. I am convinced that given the eschatological nature of *Cap. Gnost.* 1.47-50 and the evidence in Maximus's theology of created realities that begin in eternity instead of time (from a metaphysical point of view), Maximus is talking about the future gift of eternal life. All of the participations listed in this passage are supra-temporal works of grace that are granted to those who are worthy. Further, if the works that did not begin in time are αὐτό-realities as received from Pseudo-Dionysius (Maximus mentions all four of the main processions of goodness, being, life and wisdom/virtue), then the Neoplatonic triad of imparticipable, participable and participant could be read in *Cap. Gnost.* 1.48-50 without an essence-energies distinction.

¹¹⁹ Louth (*Maximus Confessor*, intro. (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 69-71) presents the case that intelligible being consists of souls and angels.

In addition to the lack of textual evidence to prove that Palamas was a faithful reader of Maximus, there are other elements to Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus's theology that compel an economic reading of energy and grace. The Confessor makes several statements concerning the *αὐτό*-realities as being understood through the contemplation of the human mind. This does not make God's being and action contingent on the human mind (although at times Erigena does present this possibility¹²⁰), but it does emphasize the Dionysian formula mentioned above that outside of the mind's reflection on 'certain activities apparent to us' there is no deification, being or life.¹²¹ Maximus makes a similar dynamic between reason and the *αὐτό*-realities:

And again as they combine movement with position, and mixture with difference, they distinguish the substance of all things indivisibly into being and difference and movement, and if they grasp that the cause is to be beheld from the things that are caused differently by an inventive and technical use of reason, they conceive this reverently as being and being wise and being alive.¹²² Thence they are taught the divinely-perfect and saving meaning concerning the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, according to which they are hiddenly illuminated that the meaning of the cause is not simply that of being but are reverently initiated about the mode of existence.¹²³

¹²⁰ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, pp. 271-73.

¹²¹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 5.7 (PG3: 645B).

¹²² Maximus inverts second and third term. See *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1156D). Maximus holds life to be due to knowledge or wisdom of the source or true life or source of the proper food.

¹²³ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1136B), trans. Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 114.

Contemplation on the *scala naturae* and the differences among creatures moves the mind to abstract activities such as Being, Life and Wisdom from the things that are and see the divine cause present behind the veil of sensible reality. God's divine natural activity toward the creation is only apparent to the reasoning mind. As Pseudo-Dionysius states, if the mind were not there to unify the intelligible and sensible worlds, there would be no observation of being, life, wisdom and deification. This is a wonderful example of the Confessor using the tension between the kataphatic and apophatic methods of theology to both affirm God as cause and deny his reduction to created things. Maximus further presses what Von Balthasar calls the 'epistemological solution' in his *Scholia* on DN:

He [Pseudo-Dionysius] is attempting by this to explain that God's being is completely without origin and inconceivable and that he has established the general being of all things in advance, through the preliminary plan of his own ineffable knowledge. For the created mind encounters this being [of God] first of all when it is focused on some thing, and only afterward does it come to know how the thing is. When Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of being-in-itself, he is referring to being as such (τὸ ἀπλῶς εἶναι), not to being in some way (τὸ πῶς εἶναι); so later, when, he speaks of life-in-itself, or similarity-in-itself, and similar concepts, he means the general character of life or life without qualification, not a life that is specifically determined in this or that way, and so on.¹²⁴

Maximus also alludes to this divine order of the cosmos in *De Char.* 3.24.

Intellectual beings can perceive the wisdom found in the ordered nature of being

¹²⁴ Maximus, *Scholia on DN* 5 (PG 4: 317C-320A), trans. von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, p 123.

(i.e., the *logoi* in their distribution). Maximus says that ‘this wisdom exists in the mind [of the intellectual being] as simple and without substance of its own.’ Maximus would not see the united principles of the cosmos as being ontological entities, such as the Neoplatonic divine henads, but they are just the principles of existence without qualification. So, God’s being and the world’s being are not the same, but the divine Being is the transcendent cause of the creature’s being. The eternal divine attributes in the essence of God still remain beyond creatures determined by time and nature, but God grants to those who are worthy a created likeness of these attributes that is the whole God.

When reading this passage in *Cap. Gnost.* 1.47-50 concerning the works that do not begin in time, we must place them in the context of the whole passage, which is dealing with eschatology. This is why the works of God coming after the completion of his natural works of divine energy take place in eternity. The works that do not begin in time are the created modes of resurrected existence! Deification is ‘already’ but ‘not yet’ in Maximus. Von Balthasar, then, is certainly correct in this instance to refer to these works as super-temporal works of God. They are created ‘beings’ that the creature participates in through supernatural deification in the eschaton.

Maximus actually connects the divine energies with the divine *logoi* in supernatural deification at the end of the second century of the *Cap. Gnos.* In a discussion of the different kinds of ‘ages’ mentioned in Scripture, Maximus asserts that there is a realm above time that is called the ‘pure reign of God’—though this realm is above naming.¹²⁵ The creature’s ultimate desire is reached in the pure reign of God because all movement ceases due to the fact that time will not be necessary once the creature enters into the rest of God. This rest is also the vision of truth itself: ‘he has yet to come at the end of the ages to the perfect rest which reveals face to face to those who are worthy the truth as it is in itself.’¹²⁶

At this moment, the creature will not have a part of truth and grace—as in the implanted *logoi* and the seal of the Holy Spirit in this age—but ‘acquire through participation the entire fullness of grace.’¹²⁷ Maximus then strings together three passages from St. Paul to support his point: ‘all of us [those who are saved] will be that perfect man in the measure of the age of Christ’s fullness;’ in whom are hidden the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;’ and when he appears what is in part shall pass away’ (Eph 4:13; Col 2:3; 1 Cor 13:10). The elements of the passage from *Cap.*

¹²⁵ Maximus, *Cap. Gnos.* 2.86 (PG 91: 1165A).

¹²⁶ Maximus, *Cap. Gnos.* 2.87 (PG 91: 1167D).

¹²⁷ Maximus, *Cap. Gnos.* 2.87 (PG 91: 1167D).

Gnos. 1.47-50 begins to come into focus through the revelation and vision of Christ that transforms in knowledge and power the creature.

The final crescendo to Maximus's cosmic recapitulation comes a few chapters later in 2.90. Here, the Confessor discusses the coming of the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God in the beatific vision. The question is posed to Maximus whether there is a substantive difference or notional difference between the two, and he answers:

To them it should be said that they differ but not in their substance, for both substantially are one, but rather their difference is notional. For the kingdom of heaven is the apprehension of the pure eternal knowledge of beings in their inner meaning [*logoi*] of God. On the other hand, the kingdom of God is the imparting through grace of gifts which belong to God by nature. The former refers to the end of beings, the latter, by a notional change, to what comes after their end.¹²⁸

To receive the revelation of the divine *logoi* in the 'pure reign of God' is to receive God's works that do not begin in time, and this is what Maximus means by divine energies. During the present age, the 'natural energy' of God (*Cap. Gnos.* 1.47) is merely the manifesting of the *logoi* in part through created *logoi*, signs and symbols. This energy 'is only apparent to [to the creature]' through its' created effects. The creature's knowledge of God is only conceptual, rational and analogical. In deification and resurrection, there is direct experience of God because the

¹²⁸ Maximus, *Cap. Gnos.* 2.90 (PG 91: 1168D), trans. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, pp. 167-168.

fullness of the divine *logoi* is revealed through the creature's resurrected existence and in the vision of the resurrected Christ. The creature will live the divine life of God because they will have a full knowledge of their original divine purpose: 'For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known' (1 Cor 13:12). Maximus says, 'the Kingdom of God the father is in potency in all those who believe, and in act in those who have completely laid aside all life of body and soul in a natural way to gain the mansion of the Spirit, and who can say 'Not I but Christ lives in me.'"¹²⁹

There are three suggestions for the meaning of the kingdom of heaven that Maximus thinks align with the truth: the life of blessed in heaven, a state of existence like the angels, and the very form of divine beauty.¹³⁰ Even though Maximus conceives of this revelation as beyond nature because of its divine transformation of it, mediation does not drop out of the beatific vision. The idea in all of Maximus's writings on the eschaton and the resurrection is that our bodily limits in this life will be transcended in the future age because the body will be transfigured as like the soul. The *logoi* cannot be revealed in a vacuum. Maximus always mentions the *Logos* as the embodied revelation of the *logoi*. This transformation in the beatific vision will be outlined in chapter six.

¹²⁹ Maximus, *Cap. Gnos.* 2.92 (PG 91: 1169A).

¹³⁰ Maximus, *Cap. Gnos.* 2.93 (PG 91: 1169B).

All of these dimensions within Maximus's metaphysics that we have been traversing lead to a reading of the 'works of God' that did not begin in time in *De Gnost.* 1.48-50 as both divine manifestations created in the creature and uncreated super-temporal works of grace in the age of deification. Maximus holds to a cosmic paradox, whereby God is absolutely transcendent but also immanent in the world through creative and gracious gifts. God's imparticipable transcendence as a totality guarantees the creatures ability to participate in his very being, life, and wisdom. Essence and energy are not separate from each other; they are held together in paradox in order for true participation to occur, but supernatural participation in incarnated *Logos* awaits the *parousia*.

Without an infinite division of divine henads subordinated below the One, Christian Neoplatonism was able to root created realities in the very essence of the divine life itself in a union without confusion of natures. Participation and energy in God can only be understood within the context of the grace of *logoi*, which lay on both sides of the ontological divide. Grace is created as it descends into creation, and it is also uncreated in its source and end in God (*logoi*). With grace, there is a coetaneous presence of God on both sides of the un-crossable chasm between God and creation. The participation of grace is this very dynamic itself, which is held

together by what John Milbank calls an ‘ineffable atunement.’¹³¹ Melchisedec Törönen describes the dynamic of the *logoi* in his book *Union and Distinction in Maximus Confessor*. Though an Eastern Orthodox scholar who accepts the essence-energies distinction, Törönen presents the *logoi* as the theophanic ‘creation song’ of God. He references the song of the Lion Aslan in the classic C. S. Lewis series *The Chronicles of Narnia*.¹³² In the book *The Magician’s Nephew*, Polly hears music coming from out of the Aslan’s head, and the music creates primroses all around her. In Maximus’s version of this creation song, the *logoi* that pre-exist in God manifest directly in creation, and show traces of their existence through created *logoi*, signs and symbols. There are not energies of God in the in between of this process. On one side of the ontic divide is the uncreated grace of the divine essence (the *logoi*), and on the other side of the divide are their theophanies in creation. As Törönen argues, there is a union in distinction in the very nature of the created world that is not pantheistic or completely separated.¹³³

¹³¹ John Milbank, ‘Theurgy and Sophiology: The New Theological Horizon,’ in *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word*, ed. Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009), p. 78.

¹³² Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in Maximus Confessor* (Oxford, UK: OUP, 2007), p. 128.

¹³³ Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, p. 128.

4.3 The Uncreated Grace of Christ

While Neoplatonism only began to speak about the grace of the One in the process of procession,¹³⁴ orthodox Christian thought pressed the boundaries of philosophical theology to affirm a completely radical ontology of grace. This divine grace that is also created in the fabric of created being itself is almost always presented within a Trinitarian perspective. Surprisingly, in the *Cap. Gnost.* 1.48-50, Maximus does not reference the *Logos* or the Father and Spirit whom enlivens the creature to move from the image to the likeness of God, which in turn is the basis for deification. I believe that Maximus presents the dynamic behind the ‘works of God’ (*logoi*) in *Cap. Gnost.* 1.48-50 through a Trinitarian contemplation on divine grace in the figure of Melchisedec in *Ambiguum* 10.

With the five-fold contemplation of Melchisedec in *Ambiguum* 10 (PG 91: 1137D-1145B), Maximus elucidates the transformation into God (i.e., deification) through image and likeness to the divine attributes. In the conclusion of the five-fold contemplation of nature just prior to the reflection on Melchisedec, Maximus describes the results on the ascent up to God the *Logos* by contemplating the *logoi* of creation. Through the contemplation of the *logoi*, the mind through the power of the

¹³⁴ There is a seminal notion of divine grace to the world in Plotinus: ‘The god will come when he is called for – but we must prepare the way,’ *Enneads* V.8.9 [31]. See also John Dillon ‘Plotinus and the Transcendental Imagination,’ in *Religious Imagination*, ed. J. P. Mackey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1986), pp.55-64.

Spirit reaches the ‘*Logos*,’¹³⁵ who is ‘beyond being and goodness.’¹³⁶ Through being united to the ‘natural power that is within them,’ the saint is made ‘by Him so receptive as to be known from the sole one and to possess completely through the divine characteristics [Θεοῦ Λόγου] the form of the whole God the Word, contemplated in the clearest of mirrors, missing none of the ancient characters, by which the human is naturally made known.’¹³⁷ Deification of human nature takes place both in nature by grace and beyond nature by grace. Melchisedec experienced this transcendence of time and nature in union with Christ according to Maximus.

¹³⁵ Louth translates Λόγον here with the lowercase ‘*logos*.’ Migne does not capitalize *logos* here or elsewhere when it is used in reference to Christ. However, Maximus appears to be referring to Christ here since he mentions ‘God the Word’ a couple of sentences later, and the ultimate *logos* is ‘beyond being and goodness.’ Louth probably is using the pattern of interpretation of the *logos* as he does in a paper presentation on the *logoi*, which refers to this ambiguity in *Amb. 7* about the one *Logos-logos* and the many *logoi*. Torstein Tollefsen (*The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus Confessor* (Oxford, UK: OUP, 2008), p. 92) also make the same designation concerning the *Logos-logos* in *Amb. 7*. Eric Perl (‘*Methexis*,’ p. 169) makes the counter assertion in his dissertation on Maximus. Orthodox scholars generally do not connect the *logoi* and the *Logos* together in an ascending scale.

¹³⁶ Maximus, *Amb. 10* (PG 91: 1137C). It is important to note here that Maximus presents the ascension as going through the *logoi* to the *Logos* who transcends them. The Confessor associates the *logoi* of creation, which includes the *logoi* of sensible being and the *Logoi* of the virtues (intelligible being?), with the spiritual or *gnomic* cosmos (γνωμικοῦ κόσμου). Such an observation points to a much larger spiritual or intellectual cosmos than is generally presented in commentaries on Maximus. The *tupoi* are accessible and mysteriously revealing themselves in the sensible world. For Maximus there is both a cosmic liturgy being celebrated and an enchanted universe being displayed through signs and symbols.

¹³⁷ Maximus, *Amb. 10* (PG 91: 1137C).

As the great Melchisedec, the Christian can also be worthy to be called a son of God and be ‘likened to the Son of God.’¹³⁸ Such a transformation was possible for Melchisedec because ‘for as far as possible, he had become such by grace and habit,¹³⁹ as the Giver of grace is himself believed to be by essence.’¹⁴⁰ Maximus attempts to interpret the difficult passage in Hebrews 7:3, where it is stated that Melchisedec was ‘without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever’ (c.f., Gen 14, Psalm 110:4). Being without mother or father or genealogy should be interpreted to mean that Melchisedec has made himself so thoroughly infused with virtue and knowledge that he is deified beyond the limits of created nature, which is governed by time. Adding likeness to the image of God is the spiritual grace given to the creature that makes this ascent possible.

The Confessor contrasts the natural gifts or properties that one receives according to the image with those supernatural gifts or properties that one receives according to the likeness. In *De Char.* 3.25, Maximus describes these two dimensions

¹³⁸ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1137D).

¹³⁹ Louth uses ‘habit’ here with grace (PG 91: 1137D). Habit is usually found in the Greek words *διάθεσις* or *ἕξις*. This is different from habit in the Thomistic tradition as being a faculty given from without to the creature. For Maximus, habit is a natural potency that must be actualized by an external agent (i.e., God). Grace here presupposes nature, but they are neither conflated nor completely and ontologically separated in the creature’s entative being.

¹⁴⁰ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1137D).

of human existence. God communicates four divine attributes to creatures when he brings them into existence: being (τὸ ὄν), eternal being (τὸ ἀει ὄν), goodness (τὴν ἀγαθότητα) and wisdom (τὴν σοφίαν). The first two gifts of being and eternal-being are granted to the essence (οὐσία) of the creature, and the last two gifts of goodness and wisdom are granted to the volitive faculty (γνωμικῆ). These gifts are given in order that what God 'is by essence the creature might become by participation.'¹⁴¹

The participation of the creature in the attributes of God's essence is proportionate according to image and likeness: 'to the image of his being by our being, to the image of his eternal being by our eternal being (even though not without beginning, it is yet without end); to the likeness of his goodness by our goodness, to the image of his wisdom by our wisdom.'¹⁴² Maximus affirms that the first two are by nature, and the second two are by grace. This grace is given in an irreducible reciprocity of virtue on the side of the creature. A sharp division should not be placed here between nature and grace because earlier in the same passage he asserts that being, well-being, and eternal-being are all gracious gifts of God.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Maximus, *De Char.* 3.25 (PG 91: 270D), Berthold trans. p. 64.

¹⁴² Maximus, *De Char.* 3.25 (PG 91: 270D), Berthold trans. p. 64.

¹⁴³ Hans Urs Von Balthasar (*Cosmic Liturgy*, pp. 119-120) and Sherwood Polycarp (*Earlier Ambigua*, pp. 170-72) both hold to a sharp Western distinction between the two orders of being. I believe Eric Perl ('Methexis,' p. 261.) is correct to emphasize the early point in *De Char.* 3.23 that all three elements of the triad of being, well-being and eternal-being are gifts of grace. Grace and nature are more organically intertwined in Maximus' theology. Maximus does, however, emphasize the more radical

Supernatural grace should not be interpreted here using the same Western dialectic of grace vs. nature, but Maximus easily and organically attributes grace to created nature as well. The created volitive faculty in the human being is imbued with divine attributes in such a way (i.e., divine virtue created in them in an unfolding process of deification) that deification is a natural potency within the creature to receive.

Returning to the contemplation of Melchisedec, Maximus distinguishes the properties of nature bound by time (χρονικῶν ἰδιωμάτων) with those divine and blessed characteristics (θείων καὶ μακαρίων γνωρισμάτων) that deify the creature. The first set of characteristics should be understood to be by nature (though also communicated divine attributes), and this would relate to being (τὸ ὄν) and eternal being (τὸ ἀεὶ ὄν) as presented in *De Char.* 3.25. The later divine characteristics are described as ‘the divine, unoriginate and immortal essence of God’ (τάς θείας καὶ ἀνάρχους καὶ ἀθανάτους [οὐσίας¹⁴⁴] τοῦ Θεοῦ).¹⁴⁵ Maximus begins his contemplation

grace of deification in *Ad Thal.* 60: ‘It was indeed necessary that the maker by nature of the essence of things should be also the effector by grace of the deification of created beings; this is in order that the giver of being should appear also as the giver of ever-well-being’ (PG 91: 624D). These two perspectives should not be pitted against one another, but they should be understood within the stages of divine Providence.

¹⁴⁴ Migne’s text supplements οὐσία here based upon the Latin text (*essentia*) since it is not specified in the Greek what the divine, unoriginate and immortal things are in this instance. Louth uses the English word ‘rays,’ which in Orthodox thought carries a much different reading of the text. Perhaps he is thinking about a text in *Amb.* 7 (PG 91: 1077A), where Maximus speaks of the embracing of all sensible and intelligible things in Christ at the end of the ages. He compares it with the light from the

on Melchisedec by discussing the manner in which this Old Testament priest to Abraham was able to transcend time and nature, becoming ‘likened to the Son of God’ (ὁμοιωθῆναι¹⁴⁶ τῷ Υἱῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ).¹⁴⁷ The image of God being likened to the *Logos* is described by the Confessor as occurring in order that through grace Melchisedec could be as the ‘Giver of grace [i.e., Christ] is himself believed to be by essence’ (οἷος αὐτός ὁ δοτὴρ τῆς χάριτος κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπάρχων πιστεύεται).¹⁴⁸ Because of ‘divine virtue’ that is ‘created in him’ or ‘placed inside of him,’ Melchisedec is counted worthy to be an image of Christ and his ineffable mysteries.¹⁴⁹ Christ is not only the central revelation of uncreated grace as the hypostatic holder of all *logoi*,

stars: ‘The stars do not shine in the day. When the greater and incomparable light of the sun appears, they are hidden and cannot be seen by the senses.’ Maximus also calls Christ the ‘Sun of justice’ in *De Char.* 1.95. However, since Maximus refers to participating through grace and habit in what God is in essence (οὐσία) at the beginning of the contemplation (PG 91: 1137D), οὐσία would be a legitimate reading.

¹⁴⁵ *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1140D).

¹⁴⁶ The relation of ὁμοιωθῆναι to Trinitarian theology should not be overlooked. In the next column of Migne (PG 91: 1140A), Maximus describes the Melchisedec’s habit of virtue as an ‘unchangeable’ and ‘godlike virtue.’ The Greek word for unchangeable here is ἀπαραλείπτως, which is generally used as an adverb in Greek Patristic literature (c.f., Gregory of Nazianzen’s *Oration* 36, Chapter 12) in connection with the equality of the divine persons. For the passage in the *Amb.* 10, these linguistic connections are important because it places the grace and revelation of God in a Trinitarian heuristic whereby the Incarnate Logos is the uncreated grace given to the creature.

¹⁴⁷ *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1137D).

¹⁴⁸ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1137D).

¹⁴⁹ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1141C): ‘ἐμποιθεῖσαν αὐτῷ θεῖαν ἀρετὴν εἰκὼν εἶναι κατηξίωται Χριστοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ τῶν ἀπορρήτων αὐτοῦ μυστηρίων.’

but He is the person to whom ‘all the saints are gathered together as to an archetype and source of the good impression that is in each one of them.’¹⁵⁰ This divine imprint in Melchisedec is characterized as containing the ‘patterns of Christ’ (τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὰς ὑποτυπώσεις).¹⁵¹ What is this divine grace that this priest is named after in Maximus’s contemplation? In rare fashion, Maximus describes this divine grace:

Therefore the great Melchisedec is recorded as being *without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life*, as the true word of God-bearing men declares about him, not on account of a nature that is created and from nothing, in accordance with which he began to be and will cease to be, but on account of divine and uncreated grace [χάριν τὴν θεϊάν καὶ ἄκτιστον], which eternally exists beyond every nature and all time, from God who eternally is, in accordance with which alone he is acknowledged as wholly begotten from the whole [God].¹⁵²

This passage is the only instance in Maximus’s writings where he describes the grace, energy, or power of God as being specifically ‘uncreated’ (ἄκτιστον).¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ *Amb. 10* (PG 91: 1141C).

¹⁵¹ *Amb. 10* (PG 91: 1141C).

¹⁵² Maximus, *Amb. 10* (PG 91: 1141B).

¹⁵³ For a breakdown of the scholarly arguments concerning the uncreated grace in this passage, see Antoine Lévy, *Le créé et l’incréé : Maxime le confesseur et Thomas d’Aquin : aux sources de la querelle palamienne* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2006), pp. 41-51. My own reading of this passage as participating in the divine essence is similar to M. Candal, ‘La gracia increada del ‘Liber Ambiguorum’ de San Máximo,’ *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 27 (1961): 131-149. However, participating in the essence of God for Maximus means the creature receives the full revelation of its *logoi*, which has its origin *in* God. Only paradox can keep Maximus from collapsing into pantheism or over-expanding into extrincism. Creatures do fully participate in the essence through principled participation in the divine *logoi*, but the effect of this divine power takes place in the reality of the creature.

Generally, this designation occurs in reference to either the two natures in Christ¹⁵⁴ or the Trinity in general.¹⁵⁵ According to this grace of divine characteristics, the creature can ‘unknowably, after every abstraction from all beings *at the level of mind* he enters into God himself, and made and transformed wholly to the whole, he is manifested in accordance with the verse: *Resembling the Son of God he remains a priest forever.*¹⁵⁶ Wholly in the whole essence by grace, Melchisedec and all the saints who live by divine virtue and knowledge (through their *logoi*) can enter into identity with God. Maximus even goes so far as to say that Melchisedec entered into spiritual generation from the Trinity. After the eternal priest opened his *nous* to the divine grace, ‘he was begotten from God through the Word in the Spirit by grace, and bore in himself safe and true the likeness of God the begetter.’¹⁵⁷

Melchisedec embodied all of the patterns of Christ through the divine grace created in him. The uncreated grace created in the creature through virtue and knowledge—something communicated to the faculty of the will in the soul so that the well-being is dependent on the believer—deifies the mind of the creature and is rooted in the revelation of the Incarnate Christ. In the next section of the

¹⁵⁴ C.f., Maximus, *Th. Pol.* 1: PG 91: 61A-D; 96A; 116D; 120A; 132B; 225B-D; and 269B.

¹⁵⁵ C.f., Maximus, *Amb.* 6 (PG 91: 1168A).

¹⁵⁶ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1141C), trans. Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 117, italics mine.

¹⁵⁷ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1141A), trans. Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 117.

contemplation, Maximus affirms the priesthood of Melchisedec is fulfilled in Christ. Jesus is without genealogy since he is ineffably and pre-eternally begotten from the Father, and he is without beginning and ending of days since he is by nature God.¹⁵⁸ All saints can have a 'share in this grace' (ἀμοιρεῖν τῆς χάριτος) even if Melchisedec is the only figure in the Scriptures who is characterized by it. Maximus concludes:

For God provides equally to all the power that naturally leads to salvation, so that each one who wishes can be transformed by divine grace. And nothing prevents anyone from willing to become Melchisedec, and Abraham, and Moses, and simply transferring all these Saints to himself, not by changing names and places, but by imitating their forms and way of life.¹⁵⁹

The love of Christ is the divine grace that descends into our very created nature through being, eternal being, virtue and knowledge. Maximus encourages all to cling to Christ in union through virtuous and righteous actions, and to put to death the members of their bodies that focus only on sensible things. Through denying one's life on account of divine grace, they will '[posses] the *living and active* and utterly single *Word of God*, who through virtue and knowledge *penetrates to the division between soul and spirit* (Heb. 4:12).'¹⁶⁰ As we saw just a little earlier in this chapter, the divine *logoi* are the uncreated essence of God that is communicated to

¹⁵⁸ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1144A).

¹⁵⁹ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1144A-B), trans. Louth *Maximus Confessor*, p. 118.

¹⁶⁰ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1144C), trans Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 119.

the creature in deification. If this were the end of Maximus's reflection, then it would appear that he is asserting something like an energy distinction through the notion of 'uncreated grace.' However, the deification of energy is actually a notional one of the knowledge of the *logoi* (where the creature gains knowledge of their being in itself) as I demonstrated from *Cap Gnos.* 2.92-3. This notional change is brought about from the face-to-face vision of Christ, who is the revealer of the *logoi*. It is only through hypostatic union of God and human in the person of Christ, that grace is uncreated. So, Maximus is making a bold claim, but he is rooting this claim in orthodox Christology.

4.4 Conclusion

Maximus associates uncreated grace with the Incarnate Christ himself in his reflection on Melchisedec. The different gifts of grace that the creature both has in nature (being and eternal-being) and in potency (virtue and knowledge) are all divine attributes, from which their forms have been modeled.¹⁶¹ Grace is only uncreated through the Incarnate One, who lives and is begotten from all eternity from the Father, and the share of this divine grace is offered to creatures through their own nature as divine grace created and indwelling in them. This can only be

¹⁶¹ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1141A).

understood in Maximus's theology as the communication of the divine *logoi*. In the beatific vision, the resurrected Christ embodies the creature's uncreated *logoi*. Divine grace offers a beatitude consisting of what the divine Giver of grace is in his very essence, but it is always mediated through the Incarnate nature of Christ which appears with the creature as in the Transfiguration. It would appear that divine gifts are always given through created mediations, but this is the only way that the full glory of the Godhead can impart itself so that the creature can be wholly in the whole of God. Grace is beyond the metaphysical in Maximus's theology, but it is always nearer to us than we are to ourselves because through the Incarnation grace now exists in the flesh. Maximus does not separate God from his actions. He roots everything in the cosmic mystery of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, and it is the grace of the Incarnation that we now turn our attention.

CHAPTER 5

CHRISTOLOGICAL GRACE

‘Therefore the mystery of the incarnation of the Word contains in itself the whole meaning of the riddles and symbols of Scripture, the whole significance of visible and invisible creatures. Whoever knows the mystery of the cross and the tomb knows the meaning of things. Whoever is initiated into the hidden meaning of the resurrection know the purpose for which God created everything in the beginning’¹

5.1 Grace and Christology

In the previous three chapters, our study focused on the connection between grace and metaphysics, or more precisely on the relation between divine energies, participation and grace. Maximus’s theological system predicates energy of God, but his reflections on energy do not just stop with this predication because divine energy is rooted in an apophatic understanding of the *logoi* in this age with a kataphatic face-to-face revelation of uncreated grace in the resurrected Christ. There is no separation between God’s essence and his energy, but energy and movement are predicated of God through remonstrance from his created gifts. There are equally strong affirmations by Maximus of energy in God’s providential care of the cosmos (particularly through the

¹ Maximus, *Cap. Gnost.* 1.66 (PG 90: 1108AB).

created natural *logoi*) and movement and energy being only found in creatures as they relate to God.

Maximus quite clearly delineates that movement (and for the interests of this study ‘energy’) is not something that God does, but it is something that happens to creatures through revelation and divine economy.² Maximus makes this point evident in *Amb.* 23, where he states that movement, as in the creation of art, only resides in the recipient of the causal principle (i.e., the idea in the artist). The cause only receives predications (through remonstrations) of the artefacts created, not the passions or *actual* experience of its effects (a very Proclean and Pseudo-Dionysian position).³ God acting in creation through divine energy (ἐνέργεια) should be understood as acting in a principled manner and understood by the mind of the human being through illumination.⁴ Therefore, energy and grace are never understood in a vacuum; they are always in dialectic with the human mind and bodily experience as the microcosmic centre of the macrocosmic universe. God’s grace is always mediated in the world, but this mediation *results* in the paradox of the world’s direct participation in the whole

² Maximus, *Amb.* 1 (PG 91: 1036B-C).

³ Maximus, *Amb.* 23 (PG 91: 1260A-B).

⁴ Maximus, *Amb.* 23 (PG 91: 1260C).

God. We observed at the end of the previous chapter that grace is uncreated and created depending on which side of the ontological divide is under reflection, but grace can only be uncreated as the creature receives the revelation of the pre-existing *logoi* of its being (which would be the divine essence) from the Incarnated Christ who unites uncreated and created natures in Himself. Grace as rooted in the Incarnation eclipses both an overly Tridentine separation of grace and nature and an overly Palamitic ontological distinction in God via a middle term of energy.

Both Eastern and Western Christian theology generally do not allow for the full paradox of the participation of grace as always coming to the world as created but never separated from the divine source and principle from which it comes. Perhaps it is also accurate to say that the East and West focus on the false characterizations of the other's position without addressing the real paradox underlying both viewpoints. Simply put, completely created grace or completely uncreated grace both obscures the full paradoxical nature of the Maximian vision of grace.

For Maximus, God acts directly on the soul of the human person as a direct agent through the process of deification, but he contextualizes the direct giving of divine grace (i.e., grace as God himself) through the Incarnation:

God becomes to the soul (and through the soul to the body) what the soul is to the body, as God alone knows, so that the soul receives changelessness and the body immortality; hence the whole man, through divine works, is divinized by being made God by the grace of God who became man. He remains wholly man in soul and body by nature, and becomes wholly God in body and soul by grace and by the unparalleled divine radiance of blessed glory appropriate to him.⁵

Christ is directly called the ‘grace of God’ in this passage because all metaphysics, anthropology, soteriology and eschatology⁶ are wrapped up, as it were, in the mystery of the Incarnation. The significance of the Incarnation is the radical belief that God took on a human body. While the gifts of creation are observable graces of God, the Incarnation is the supreme embodiment of divine grace. The words of the opening chapter of the Gospel of John emphasize the connection between Christ and the full grace of God:

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testified about Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, “He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.” For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God

⁵ Maximus, *Amb. 7* (PG 91: 1088C), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 63, slightly modified.

⁶ In this chapter, I will use eschaton or eschatology in the general sense of the transformation into the second age of blessedness and deification.

at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.⁷

I hinted in the previous chapter that the paradox of divine grace as being both created and uncreated at the same time is supremely represented in the second person of the Trinity. In this chapter, I would like to delve deeper into the gracious mystery of the Incarnation as it reveals the paradoxical grace of God.

5.2 The Connection Between Grace and Christology Before Maximus

Before examining the Confessor's pristine Christological synthesis as a way of understanding divine grace, it will be helpful to examine the connection between grace and Christology in earlier church fathers. The Christological debates leading up to and following the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE were centred on the person of the incarnate Logos. Throughout the debates over the nature of the Incarnation of the Word, theologians in the East and the West attempted to articulate the way in which the Logos as con-substantial (ὁμοούσιος) with the Father (as determined at the Council of Nicea 325 CE) descended into the world in the human Jesus and subsequently redeemed and saved the world. This kenotic (κένωσις) descent from divinity to humanity is beautifully described by St. Paul in Philippians 2:6-7:

⁷ NASB.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.⁸

The descent of the Word into the human story was universally recognized in the early Church as being faithful to the Holy Scriptures and tradition, but there were differing perspectives on how the divine and human natures in Christ came together. The fourth century raised the question of the relation of Christ with the Father, and the fifth century raised the question of the relation of human and divine natures in the Incarnation. At the core of both disputes was the nature of salvation. This is the reason why theologians such as Gregory of Nazianzen battled the Apollinarian threat to the full Incarnation of the Word. Gregory's famous dictum, 'For that which he has not assumed, he has not healed; but that which is united to his Godhead is also saved,'⁹ echoes the desire during the Christological debates to safeguard both salvation and godly piety over the nature of God.

Until recently, two rival schools of thought, those of Alexandria and Antioch, were believed to have clashed over Christological doctrine in the fifth century.

⁸ NASB.

⁹ Gregory Nazianzen, *Ep.* 101, 32 (SC 208, 50): 'Τὸ γὰρ ἀπρόσληπον, ἀθεράπευτον.'

However, Donald Fairbairn has challenged such easy line drawing in his study, *Grace and Christology in the Early Church*.¹⁰ He challenges here the notion that there was utter Christological disagreement in the fifth century between two rival schools of thought by analysing their use of what he calls 'Christological grace.' That is, Fairbairn argues for more of a consensus between East and West during this pivotal moment in Christological development than for the traditional view of the divisions. According to Fairbairn, this consensus is built upon the Cyrillian¹¹ understanding of grace, where the grace of God is kenotic in the descent of the Logos in the person of Jesus. Grace is not a 'thing' or mere power of God added to Christ for him to communicate to the faithful, but rather, the fullness of grace is the very giving of fullness of God himself as the incarnated Logos.¹² I am convinced by Fairbairn's thesis, and I believe Maximus held to this Cyrillian understanding of Christological grace, although with modifications and additions after the Monothelite Controversy. For the sake our study on Christological grace in Maximus, it will be helpful to trace the general points concerning grace and Christology in earlier Christological battles.

¹⁰ Donald Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology in the Early Church*, (Oxford: OUP, 2003).

¹¹ Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition I: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon*, trans. John Bowden (London: A. W. Mowbray & Co., 1975), pp. 476ff.

¹² J. F. Bethune-Baker, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine*, (London: Methuen and Company Limited, 1933), p 275, cited in Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 9.

5.2.1 Theodore of Mopsuestia

We begin our discussion on Christology and grace with the theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca 350-428 CE) and Nestorius (ca. 386-451 CE) that influenced the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE and later Chalcedon in 451 CE. I will begin with his general understanding of grace and move into its relation to Christology.

For Theodore, bishop of Mopsuestia (modern day Yakapinar), grace is conceived as the empowerment or aid of the Holy Spirit to progress to the second age of blessedness. This is most evident through his discussion of the grace of baptism:

From him [Christ] you possess here the first fruits, because you now receive symbolically the enjoyment of those future benefits. But hereafter you will receive the entire grace, and from it you will become immortal, incorruptible, impassible, and immutable.¹³

The recipient of birth in baptism possesses in himself all the potential of the immortal and incorruptible nature and possesses all its faculties. But he is not now able to put them into action, to make them work, or to show them forth, until the moment fixed by God for us arrives, when we will rise from the dead and be given complete actuality and perfect incorruptibility, immortality, impassibility, and immutability. For here he receives through baptism the

¹³ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homiliae catecheticae* 14.27, in *Les Homélie catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste: Réproduction phototypique du ms. Mingana Syr. 561*, trans. Raymond Tonneau and Robert Devreesse (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1949), p. 457-9, quoted in Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 34.

potential of the very things whose actual realization he will receive when he is no more a natural man but has become completely a spiritual man.¹⁴

Theodore understands the gift of grace in these two passages as stemming from the gift of the Spirit to aid the Christian in his or her own moral and spiritual movement towards the second age. Donald Fairbairn describes this type of salvation arrangement as a ‘two-act’ model, where the believer is elevated from one condition to a higher stage with the assistance of God’s power and grace.¹⁵ Theodore’s understanding of grace, which leads to the second age, is ‘primarily something *by which* we attain to such a condition, rather than the gift of that condition itself.’¹⁶ In describing the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Christian, Theodore also endorses the idea of an empowered gift that is not really or essentially the gift of the Spirit itself:

It was not the omnipresent divine nature of the Spirit that he was going to send to them; but he said this of the gift of the grace poured on them. He is also called the Paraclete, that is the ‘Comforter,’ because he was well able to teach them

¹⁴ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homiliae catecheticae* 14.10, in *Les Homélie catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste: Réproduction phototypique du ms. Mingana Syr. 561*, trans. Raymond Tonneau and Robert Devreese (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1949), p. 423, quoted in Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 34.

¹⁵ Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, pp. 29-34.

¹⁶ Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 34.

what was necessary for the comfort of their souls in the numerous trials of this world.¹⁷

From this short passage, it is evident that Theodore does not see the grace of the Holy Spirit that is sent by Christ as the grace of God Himself, but it is a comforter or advocate to weather the stormy trials of life. This divine aid is also dependent on the moral struggle of the believer to progress to the second age, but this is also placed within the will of God to obtain the life to come in the second age. This divine will does not unilaterally over-run the human moral response and progress in virtue, but it does work in synergy (συνέργεια) with the creature.¹⁸

Since the grace conferred on the Christian is generally understood by Theodore to consist of moral aid and power from the Spirit, one can see how this model translates into his Christological thinking. The divine nature of the eternal *Logos* acts on the humanity of Jesus. Grace is given to the human nature of the Incarnation in such a manner that it is deified, but the manner of sustaining virtue is due to the synergistic aid given to the humanity of Christ by the divine nature of the *Logos*. Theodore

¹⁷ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homiliae catecheticae* 10.7, in *Les Homélie catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste: Réproduction phototypique du ms. Mingana Syr. 561*, trans. Raymond Tonneau and Robert Devreesse (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1949), p. 257, quoted in Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 36.

¹⁸ Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, pp. 36, 38.

illustrates this idea through a discussion on the manner in which the boy Jesus grew in wisdom and grace (Luke 2:52):

And Jesus increased in age and in wisdom and in grace with God and humans.' He [Jesus] increased in age, to be sure, because time moved on, and in wisdom because he acquired understanding to match his advancing years. But he increased in grace by pursuing the virtue, which is attendant upon understanding and knowledge. Because of this, the grace that was his from God received assistance, and in all these ways he advanced in the sight of God and men. People observed this growth, and God not only observed it but also testified [to it] and gave his cooperation with what was happening.¹⁹

Theodore's divisive Christology of the two separately interacting natures is clarified by the notion of grace that appears in this passage. Grace, like the divinity of Christ, is something that happens to the flesh, not something that is given through the union with the humanity of Christ. Theodore also draws upon the birth and death of Jesus to describe how the divinity and humanity are distinguished one from another.²⁰ This separation of grace from Christ as the giver of grace creates a structure in which the personal presence of the Godhead in the world is not necessary.²¹ This can also be seen

¹⁹ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *De incarnatione* 7 frag. 5 (PG 66: 980A), trans. Richard Norris, *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 119, slightly modified.

²⁰ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *De incarnatione* 7 frag. 3, 6; 12 frag. 11.

²¹ Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 40.

in Theodore's dismissal of the Monophysite notion of the divine and human natures becoming one in the incarnate Christ:

In every way, then, it is clear in the first place that the notion of 'mixture' is both exceptionally unsuitable and does not follow, since each of the natures remains indissolubly in itself. Moreover, it is also quite evident that the notion of union is completely in line, for by means of it the natures which are brought together make up one person according to the union...[with Christ] the personal union is not destroyed by the distinction of natures. When we distinguish the natures, we speak of the nature of God the Word as complete and of his person as complete (for there is no hypostasis without its person). Moreover, the nature of the man is complete, and likewise his person. But when we consider the union, then we speak of one person.²²

Though Theodore's frequent language about the perfect alignment of the two natures in Christ is slightly downplayed by Fairbairn in his treatment of his Christology, I think that his argument concerning grace as an aided power in Theodore's Christology is essentially correct. Despite Theodore's emphasis on the union of the two natures, he limits the person (πρόσωπον) or subject of 'Christ' as being in the human nature and not in the *Logos*. The *Logos* gives the aid of grace so that the man Jesus 'can be considered one πρόσωπον with [the *Logos*] and can share in his honour.'²³ What Theodore leaves his readers is really what Fairbairn calls 'Christ as the supreme

²² Theodore of Mopsuestia, *De incarnatione* 7 frag. 7 (PG 66: 981A-B), trans. Richard Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, p. 120, slightly modified.

²³ Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 50.

example of grace.’ Christ is a moral stave of grace for the believer instead of the ontological giver of the grace, which he himself is. Theodore makes this point crystal clear in *De incarnatione* 7 frag. 2, where he denies any ‘indwelling’ of God in the world through essence or activity:

If it be asserted that God is present everywhere by reason of his essence, then absolutely all things must share in his indwelling...if we say that the indwelling is effected in them by essence...The same thing might be said in the case of active operation, for it is necessary in this case too for God to limit his operation to those in whom he dwells...We should then say that he dwells in everything. Therefore, it is impossible to say that God makes his indwelling either by his essence or, further, by his active operation.²⁴

Theodore’s final vision of grace does not directly connect or identify grace with the eternal *Logos*. Because of the lack of a full incarnation of divine grace in the humanity of Christ, grace becomes extrinsic, a moral aid to deification. The full ontological descent of the *Logos* into flesh is needed for a complete ontological salvation. Gregory’s dictum that everything in human nature that is not assumed by Christ is not healed cannot be fulfilled in Theodore’s Christology. Maximus, however, will draw out the full ontological implications of the descent and incarnation of the

²⁴ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *De incarnatione* 7 frag. 2 (PG 66: 972D-974A), trans. Richard Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, pp. 114-15.

uncreated grace of Christ. In several subsequent thinkers in the East, such as Nestorius, the type of Christological grace that Theodore represents is maintained.

5.2.2 Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople

Nestorius was archbishop of Constantinople from 10 April 428 to 22 June 431. He studied at the school of Antioch, and is famous for his battle against the use of the term *Theotokos* (Θεοτόκος), or ‘God-bearer’, for Mary, mother of Jesus. Towards the beginning of his *Sermon 9*, he asks the question, “Is Mary *Theotokos*, ‘they say,’ or ‘is she on the contrary Man-bearer (ἄνθρωποτόκος)?”²⁵ He rejects the former in order to affirm the latter by a simple statement, ‘Mary, my friend, did not give birth to the Godhead (for ‘what is born of the flesh is flesh’ [John 3:6]). A creature did not produce him who is uncreatable.’²⁶ His rejection of this title is rooted in his deep-seated belief in the transcendence of the *Logos* and His impassibility, which meant that any human actions or activities in the life of Christ, such as His birth, death and resurrection, could not be

²⁵ Nestorius, *Sermon 9*, trans. Richard Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, p. 124. I do not have a workable knowledge of the Syriac texts that remain of Nestorius. Therefore, I will be relying on Fairbairn and Norris’s translations as noted.

²⁶ Nestorius, *Sermon 9*, trans. Richard Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, p. 124.

ascribed to Him. Mortal things are fleeting while the divine nature is not. Nestorius poetically begins his sermon with a description of the created world:

The Creator God, after all, fashioned me in my mother's womb, and he is the first and supreme surety that in those hidden places of the interior I am kept in existence. I am born—and I discover fountains of milk. I begin to experience a need to cut my food in bits, and discover that I am equipped with knives of a sort in my teeth. I come to maturity, and the creation becomes the source of my wealth, for the earth nourishes me from beneath, and from heaven above the sun is kindled as a lamp for me. The spring season presents me with flowers, the summer offers me the ripe head of grain, the winter brings rains to birth, autumn hangs its gift out on the vine.²⁷

A created human being grows and is nurtured by the providential care that God instilled in creation to tend to needs of creatures. All of the grain and grapes on the vine will ultimately spoil, and Nestorius contrasts this with the permanence of gold that will not spoil. Like gold, the world was given and adorned with the undefiled gift of the Incarnation of the lord. Nestorius quickly turns his rhetoric against seeing the Word of God as actually becoming a part of creation (in other words, he is emphasizing the impassible nature of the Logos) in the same *Sermon 9* on the *Theotokos*:

That which was formed in the womb is not in itself God. That which was created by the Spirit was not in itself God. That which was buried in the tomb is not itself God. If that were the case, we should manifestly be worshipers of a human being and worshipers of the dead. But since God is within the one who was

²⁷ Nestorius, *Sermon 9*, trans. Richard Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, pp. 123-24.

assumed is styled God because of the one who assumed him. That is why the demons shudder at the mention of the crucified flesh; they know that God has been joined to the crucified flesh, even though he has not shared its suffering.²⁸

Given an extreme form of impassibility, any *real* participation in the events of the life of the human Jesus, according to Nestorius, would mean an essential change in God from divine to human. He also understands this principle of piety to be of a logical character in reference to the *Theotokos*. If someone is born, then they must be *homoousios* (ὁμοούσιος) with the mother or bearer. Nestorius provocatively states that ‘no one gives birth to one older than herself.’²⁹ With this strict logic, Nestorius notably coined the ascription of ‘Christ-bearer’ (Χριστοτόκος) to Mary rather than *Theotokos* for which his opponent, Cyril of Alexandria, argued at the Council of Ephesus in 431. For Orthodox piety there would not really be a rejection of Nestorius’s point here between the uncreated and the created orders—this is certainly an Athanasian principle—but the Nicean Orthodox, and later Chalcedonian Orthodox under Cyril’s theological influence, would equally argue in Gregorian fashion that without the full assumption of the Logos, the Christian is not healed or saved.

²⁸ Nestorius, *Sermon 9*, trans. Richard Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, p. 130.

²⁹ Nestorius, *Epistle 1*, trans. Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 54.

Given the separation between the human and divine natures of Christ in Nestorius's theology,³⁰ it is not surprising to learn that he follows the divisions as laid out by Theodore. Nestorius also pressed further the division between the 'complete' natures of the Incarnate one. As Fairbairn points out, the bishop of Constantinople often uses the word 'Christ' to be predicated of the human nature of Jesus aside from the divine Logos. Nestorius declares, 'Just as Israel is called 'son' and Moses is called a 'god,' so likewise is Christ to be called 'God,' although he is neither by nature 'God' nor by nature 'Son of God.'³¹ Here we can see that Nestorius does not consider the humanity

³⁰ Nestorius does write that he believes Cyril has not fully represented his understanding of Christ: 'nor do I speak of an adhesion through love and through proximity, as though it were between those which are far apart [and] those united by love and not in the *ousiai*; nor again do I speak of a union in equality of honour and in authority but of the natures and of whole natures, and in the combination of the *ousiai* I concede a union without confusion; but in respect to one honour and of the authority...[I spoke] not of the proximity nor the equality of honour nor of the dignity, but I said that I separate not God the Word himself in his nature from the visible nature, and by reason of God who is not to be separated I separate not even the honour...for he is one thing and his honour is another, and his *ousia* is another and whatsoever belongs to the *ousia* is another. But, although I have said that I separate the natures from one another by a separation of distance, as thou accuses me in thy calumination,' trans. and quoted in Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition I*, p. 515. Cyril's understanding of Nestorius's position is slightly skewed because he begins from the position of the perceiving Christ the *Logos* as a single subject and then the individual natures. Therefore, Nestorius seems to be arguing for a union where the two natures are only placed next to or alongside each other and bonded through mutual love. However, Nestorius here defends the charge that the two natures are not distanced from each other but in union without confusion. Grillmeier terms this a 'mutual compensation' or in the Greek tradition a '*perichoresis*,' see *Christ in Christian Tradition I*, pp. 515ff. This will be very important in Maximus's debates in the monothelite controversy. Prestige counters some of the traditional assumptions surround Nestorius and says that he may not deserve the epithet 'Nestorian.' He says (*God in Patristic Thought*, pp. 143ff) that the 'unorthodoxy of Nestorius was not a positive fact but a negative impotence.'

³¹ Nestorius, *Liber Heraclidis* 2.1, in *The Bazaar of Heracleides*, ed. and trans. G. R. Driver and Leonard Hodgson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 182, quoted in Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 55.

to be identified with the true Son of God the Logos: ‘Since God is within the one who was assumed, the one who was assumed, after being conjoined to the one who assumed him, is called ‘God’ because of the one who assumed him.’³² Further, Nestorius connects and disconnects the assumption of the flesh with the *Christotokos* doctrine, ‘What was consubstantial with us was filled with inseparable divinity as he was born from the virgin.’³³

Nestorius retains the notions of grace that Theodore had argued for previously. Though there are not many linguistic connections between Christology and grace in Nestorius’s writings, he continues the Christology of Theodore in seeing Christ as more of a moral leader or aid in spiritual progress. Nestorius ‘emphasizes the role of the assumed man in redemption by arguing that we associate with that man in his triumph. The man has taken part in our death so that we can participate in the name above all names, a name that he has been given by the grace of the Logos after his resurrection.’³⁴ So, Christ can offer his followers the communication of grace through the power that the man or the flesh received at his resurrection. Grillmeier stresses that for Nestorius

³² Nestorius, *Sermon 9*, trans. Richard Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, p. 130.

³³ Nestorius, *Epistle 9*, trans. Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 55.

³⁴ Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 60.

the absolute freedom and grace from on high on the humanity of Christ is key feature of his Christology:

The Incarnation is not a necessary natural fact, a ἔνωσις κατὰ φύσιν, but a free disposal by the divine dispensation (οἰκονομία). Christ is therefore a ἔνωσις κατ' οἰκονομίαν, or κατ' εὐδοκίαν, or κατὰ χάριν. This is the proper sense of these expressions which have been expounded to fit a 'Bewährungslehre.' They are not meant to loosen the unity in Christ; they merely stress the divine freedom in the work of the incarnation. In none of this is the human freedom of Christ a matter of concern. From Christ's Godhead finally come the honour (τιμὴ), glory (δόξα) and worship which are also bestowed on the man in Christ. Nestorius does not make this equality of honour, worship and grace the ground of unity in Christ; the equality follows from the fact of the taking of human nature by God in Christ.³⁵

Nestorius tries to establish divine freedom as the basis of the unity of Christ, which is a pious action on his part, but it does relegate the giving of grace to a sort of extrinsic gift apart from, or perhaps better alongside, the humanity of Christ. Grace descends from above in the Incarnation, but in Nestorius's theology God's grace in Christ does not appear *with* and *through* created nature as a personal subject as it will for Maximus Confessor. The remaining question in the giving of divine grace according to Nestorius is, who communicates grace to the Christian? As Fairbairn notes, Nestorius is ambiguous about whether the follower of Christ must perform his or her own

³⁵ Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition I*, pp. 514-15.

obedience to Christ in order to access the grace of the resurrection or whether it is the man Christ who gives the gift of deliverance; nevertheless, what is certain is that Nestorius sees that it is the assumed man, that is, Christ, who is the one who brings about this transformation.³⁶ Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria, met Nestorius's two-nature Christology with opposition.

5.2.3 *Cyril of Alexandria*

Cyril of Alexandria was the Patriarch of Alexandria from 412 to 444, and he was a major actor in the Christological controversies of the fifth century. As noted above, he was a key opponent to Nestorius and Nestorianism, a form of dyophysitism whereby Christ had two very loosely connected or united natures. As John McGuckin notes concerning the defeat of Nestorius, 'the Two Sons approach to Christology was utterly wrecked, and exile from the bounds of classical orthodoxy.'³⁷ Cyril left a pervasive legacy in Christology indeed. He was the principle player at the council of Ephesus in 431, which led to the deposing of Nestorius as Patriarch of Constantinople.

³⁶ Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 61.

³⁷ John McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: the Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology, and Texts*, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), p. 223.

At the centre of Cyril's Christology is the unity of Christ as the incarnate Logos. This unification in Christ provides a context where the grace given to humanity in Christ resides in the very giving of the Logos himself. The Alexandrian theme of deification describes salvation as becoming adopted sons of God, or simply gods, by grace. Cyril emphasizes the deification aspect of salvation to the exclusion of what Fairbairn describes as a two-act salvation scheme, where the Christian merely progresses to the second age as going from a lower level of existence to a higher one.³⁸ There is a distinctly ontological element to salvation in Cyril's three-act scheme as the grace of Christ renews human nature and progresses further to the likeness of God. Commenting on the creation of Adam and the giving of the breath of life to him, Cyril says that '[God] desires, therefore, the nature of man to be renewed (ἀνανεοῦσθαι) and moulded anew (ἀναπλάττεσθαι), as it were, into its original likeness, by communion with the Spirit, in order that, by putting on that original grace and being re-shaped

³⁸ Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 63. The three-act scheme of a restoration to the created condition can be observed in a passage from Cyril in the *Commentarii in Johannem* 2.10 (2.719) that Fairbairn quotes (*Grace and Christology*, p. 65), 'From the Father he sought for us the holiness (ἀγιασμόν) that is in and through the Spirit, and he desires what was in us by the gift of God as the first age of the world and the beginning of creation to be rekindled to life (ἀναζωπυρεῖσθαι) in us again.'

(ἀνακομισάμενοι) into conformity with him, we may be found able to prevail over the sin that reigns in this world.³⁹

Notice in this passage that Cyril indicates that the gift of the spirit of life that is rekindled once again through Christ is due to grace and not a natural innate (ἕξις or ἐπιτηδειότης). Earlier in the same passage of the *Commentarii in Johannem*, Cyril emphasizes that salvation is a homecoming to that participation in the life of the Holy Spirit that re-kindles, re-forms, and re-shapes the believer to God.⁴⁰ Essentially, the image of God given in the garden is re-impressed into the creature through the giving of grace and the Holy Spirit. Creation is not the same thing as deification in Cyril's anthropology and soteriology because he does mention that the new gift of grace in the Spirit is more stable than the previous one in the garden (or in some cases between the fallen and redeemed states⁴¹):

Therefore, since our condition had been made wretched, it was necessary for God the Father to send the son himself, in order to transform our condition into one incomparably better than that of old and to rescue us who were on the earth, evidently by freeing us from sin and by destroying both sin's own root

³⁹ Cyril, *Commentarii in Johannem* 2.10 (2.720), trans. and quot. Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 65.

⁴⁰ Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 65.

⁴¹ Walter Burghardt, *The Image of God in Man According to St. Cyril* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), p. 115, also cited in Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 68.

and that death which had sprung from it, and by delivering us from the tyranny of the devil over us.⁴²

The giving of the grace of the Logos provides a stable state for the redeemed that eclipses the ‘tyranny of the devil;’ it is an ‘incomparably better’ (τὸ ἀσυγκρίτως ἄμεινον) ontological condition. Through Cyril’s anthropology and Christology of an initial fall from creation and a subsequent recreation through Christ and the Holy Spirit, grace is understood as the giving of the Logos (and Holy Spirit) himself. Cyril connects the gracious giving of Christ also to adoption and deification: ‘He descended into bondage, not thereby giving anything to himself, but graciously giving himself to us (ἡμῖν ἑατὸν χαριζόμενος), so that we *through his poverty might become rich* [2 Cor. 8:9], and by soaring up through likeness to him into his own proper and remarkable good, we might be made gods and children of God (θεοὶ τε καὶ Θεοῦ τέκνα) through faith.’⁴³ Thus deification in Cyril’s theology is not separated from divine grace given through a person and all of the ontological implications that come with a charitology rooted in Christology. Later in his *Commentarii in Johannem* 2.3, Cyril connects—and practically equates—the ontological implications of grace with the fullness of deity in Christ:

⁴² Cyril, *Epistolae paschales* 16.6 (PG 77: 765b-c), trans. Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 67.

⁴³ Cyril, *Commentarii in Johannem* 1.9 (1.141-2), trans. and quot. Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 69.

For grace was given by measure through the Spirit to the holy prophets, but in our Saviour Christ *all the fullness of deity has been pleased to dwell bodily*, as Paul says [Col 2:9]. Therefore *we have all also received of his fullness*, as John affirmed [John 1:16]. How then will the Giver be on a par with the recipients, or how will the fullness of deity (τὸ τῆς θεότητος πλήρωμα) be reckoned in the portion of the minister?⁴⁴

The primary grace of God in the Incarnation is the full indwelling of God in a human body, but Cyril also sees this indwelling as the grace of deification. For the patriarch of Alexandria, the grace of God kenotically descends into the material world through the personal subject of Jesus Christ. Foreign to this line of thought is seeing grace as extrinsic to the created order. Deification is a gift that must be given, but it is also a divine gift that results from God's self-emptying and incarnation. Participation in the divine grace of God through Christ is complete all the way down into the very matter (ὕλη) of the cosmos. The question that arose in later debates after Cyril's death in 444 CE were concerned with the breadth or extent of the ontological giving of Christological grace. Does Christ's Incarnation affect every element of human existence including a human will? Fairbairn's contrast between mediated presence vs. full direct presence will remain in force in the seventh century conflicts over Monothelitism.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Cyril, *Commentarii in Johannem* 2.3 (1.250), trans. and quot. Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 70.

⁴⁵ Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, p. 10.

5.3 Maximian Christological Grace

For Maximus, grace manifests itself in all areas of the cosmos. One can discover the energy of divine grace through the *logoi* of creation, the Church's mystagogy, and even through works of divine power on the soul and through it the body. Though Maximus does not have a worked out systematic theology of grace, it does not mean grace in his thought does not have a centre. Maximian scholars universally agree that the centre of his theological enterprise is the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Through divine play in and within creation in a thousand different places, without confusion (*ασυγχύτως*) of essence, the *Logos* 'wills always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of his embodiment.'⁴⁶ There is a sense in Maximus of the innate presence of the *Logos* in creation before the historical Incarnation, but the radicalness of this presence is only fully understood (and realized for that matter) through the grace of Christ becoming incarnate as a human being. Following the connection between grace and the giving of the *Logos* through the flesh in Cyril of Alexandria, Maximus very clearly associates grace with the Incarnation itself:

The knowledge of himself in his essence and personhood remains inaccessible to all angels and men alike and he can in no way be known by anyone. But St. John, initiated as perfectly as humanly possible into the meaning of the Word's

⁴⁶ Maximus, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91:1084C-D).

incarnation, claims that he has seen the glory of the Word as flesh, that is, he saw the reason or the plan for which God became man, *full of grace and truth*. For it was not as God by essence, consubstantial to God the Father, that the only-begotten Son gave this grace, but as having in the incarnation become man by nature, and *consubstantial to us*, that he *bestows grace* on us who have need of it. This grace we receive from his fullness always in proportion to our progress. Therefore, the one who keeps sacred the whole meaning of the Word of God's becoming incarnate for our sake will acquire the glory full of grace and truth of the one who for our sake glorifies and consecrates himself in us by his coming: 'When he appears we shall be like him' [1 John 3:2].⁴⁷

There are several theological insights in this passage from Maximus. After a short reference St. Paul's famous saying concerning the partial knowledge of the Word that he received (1 Corinthians 9:13), Maximus brings in St. John's concept of the fullness of grace and truth in the Incarnation. He asks, 'Why did St. Paul state that he only had a partial knowledge of the divine Word?'⁴⁸ He answers that since the divine essence and personhood transcend everything that can be known (the *via negativa*), we can know God only through his creative activities or energies. But Maximus does not stop with only partial knowledge in this passage. Instead, he uses the paradox of divine knowledge and grace, according to John, by offering a picture of divine grace as coming into the world through incarnation.

⁴⁷ Maximus, *Cap. Gnost. 2.76* (PG 90: 1112B), trans. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 164, slightly modified and italics mine.

⁴⁸ Maximus, *Cap. Gnost. 2.76* (PG 90: 1112B).

Maximus retains the Cyrillian notion of Christological grace as the full Incarnation into human existence, not just a permanence of divine presence and aid. Because of the full Incarnation of the Word, God reveals His presence to the farthest ends of created existence. The Logos, who already pre-contains the pre-existing *logoi* of creation, does not come to the world as an essence but as a fully incarnated God-man. The fullness of the Godhead that cannot be shared is paradoxically fully revealed and fully descended into creation in Jesus Christ. The full Incarnation of Christ is the basis for the deification of the creature. In deification the words of St. John are fulfilled: ‘for when he appears we shall be like him.’ Through the grace of God, the creature will also experience the full knowledge of God through the face-to-face vision of Christ: ‘through the leading and guiding of the grace of the all-holy Spirit to those who press on in prayer through a pure and orthodox faith to the perfect *face-to-face* (1 Corinthians 13:12) knowledge of the *great God and Saviour* of all, *Christ* (1 Titus 2:13), and initiation into him.’⁴⁹

Maximus’s critical point of grace as incarnated reinforces the argument, presented in the previous chapters, that divine grace is not granted as an essence to an essence but as existing embodied person to an existing embodied person. Whatever the

⁴⁹ Maximus, *Th. Pol.* 7 (PG 91: 73A), trans. Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 182.

nature of divine grace outside of creation—if it were even possible to speak in this manner—it is revealed to creatures through created means. We only know the Godhead through the mediation of grace in creation; it is a participation in a likeness that is itself already a participation of God and is God. This divine mediation is found in the Incarnation of Christ. In order to see how Maximus extends the Christological gift of grace all the way down into creation, we will need to analyse his response to the Monothelite Controversy.

5.3.1 Monothelitism and Enhypostatization

Monothelitism (meaning ‘one will’) emerged in the early part of the seventh century in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. This Christological movement affirmed that there were two natures in Christ but only one will, which when followed to its logical conclusions meant that there is an aspect of human existence that is not assumed by the Logos. For Maximus, only a fully assumed human nature, which would include the will, can be the basis for salvation. Further, with a dominant divine will in Christ, there emerges the possibility for a monenergistic view of humanity’s salvation, which would limit the efficacy of a creature’s acts of virtue. This is not a theological viewpoint that Maximus, nor many other Byzantine theologians for that matter, would accept. His

position would be a synergism between the grace of God and the works of the human being.

During the Monothelite controversies, there was confusion over the relationship between hypostasis and nature. The Monothelite party held that hypostasis and nature is the same thing. This position, particularly as promoted by Patriarch Sergius I of Constantinople, led to some creative response by Neo-Chalcedonian thinkers (a label suggested by J. Lebon⁵⁰). There are several major players that influenced Maximus, such as Leontius of Jerusalem and Leontius of Byzantium (even the latter was possibly Origenist in his Christology⁵¹). What is creative in their Christology is the way in which they separated hypostasis and nature. The result was a new way of looking at the union of the divine and human in Christ, which they called 'enhypostatic' (ἐνυπόστατος).

Hypostasis changes from being that which something is, its nature or essence, to that which provides the context for two things or natures to come together. In Christology this means that hypostasis is not the union of the divine and human in

⁵⁰ Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition II part II: From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590-604)*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1995), p. 429ff.

⁵¹ David Evans, *Leontius of Byzantium: An Origenist Christology*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies 13 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1970).

Christ itself, but it is that in which the union takes place.⁵² For Leontius of Jerusalem, hypostasis indicates more of a relationship of the coming together more than the essence or nature of a union. John Meyendorff points out that for Leontius:

The characteristic of the hypostasis is therefore to be 'by itself' (καθ' ἑαυτὸ ὑφεστός). One could in this way say that there is *one nature* in Christ, if there existed a 'species of Christs' (εἶδος Χριστῶν); but there is only one Christ, and the only term suitable to designate him is 'one hypostasis,' which is an individual whole made out of parts, each one of which is a complete nature. The term hypostasis reflects essentially and only a connection and a relationship.⁵³

Since hypostasis reflects a relationship between the two natures, Leontius was able to introduce the idea of enhypostatization without going beyond the bounds of orthodoxy. Through enhypostatization, one can conceive of an 'existence within something.'⁵⁴ Leontius is clearly trying to maintain both the position of Cyril, involving the unity of Christ, and the Chalcedonian definition that preserves the operations of the two natures. The distinction between nature and hypostasis is made perfectly clear by Leontius:

⁵² Kenneth Wesche, 'The Defense of Chalcedon in the 6th Century: The Doctrine of 'Hypostasis's and Deification in the Christology of Leontius of Jerusalem,' (Ph.D. Diss., New York: Fordham University, 1986), p. 52; quoted in Michael Butler, *Hyostatic Union and Monothelism*, p. 47.

⁵³ John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, pp. 65-66.

⁵⁴ John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, p. 67.

We say the Logos assumed a certain proper nature of its own from our nature into his own hypostasis. So then, the union is of natures in the hypostasis, that is to say, the union of one [nature] with the other. But from these natures there has not been produced a composite nature, since they are not united by confusion, nor is there a composite hypostasis, since the union is not from hypostases. But the property of the hypostasis of the Logos has become more uncompounded since more properties have been drawn together [in it] after the Incarnation, which proves that neither his nature nor his hypostasis is composite or mutable.⁵⁵

Through Leontius's distinction between hypostasis and nature, Christological thinking could move past the fear that by admitting two natures one would therefore divide the person of Jesus into two or meld them into one. The hypostasis of Christ is still the single divine Logos, but he has hypostatized the human nature (not a hypostasis in Christ) to the divine Logos.

Later, Sophronius of Jerusalem, Maximus's close friend and possible mentor, uses the Neo-Chalcedonian distinction of nature and hypostasis to counter the arguments of the Monothelites in designating a single divine will in Christ:

And the same is acknowledged to be one and two. It is one according to hypostasis and person, and two according to the natures themselves, and their natural properties, from which it obtained single existence and maintained double continuity in nature.

⁵⁵ Leontius of Jerusalem, *Adverses Nestorius* 1.20 (PG 86: 1485C-D), trans. Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelitism*, pp. 48-49.

Whence the same one, remaining one Christ and Son and Only-begotten, is seen undivided in both natures, and operates both essences naturally according to an essential property present in each, or even a natural property. If it had a nature that was single and uncomposite, just as it had the hypostasis and the person...the one and the same would not have perfectly accomplished the things of each nature.⁵⁶

Sophronius ascribes the unity to hypostasis and the operations or essential properties (which would include will) to the natures. Building upon earlier Neo-Chalcedonian thought, Sophronius also uses the logical argument that since the two natures in Christ are not identified, therefore the two operations should likewise not be identified.⁵⁷ This line of thought also continues the Cyrillian emphasis on grace not being extrinsic to the giving of the *Logos* itself. Since the human nature of Christ does not have a hypostasis of its own (i.e., a personal subject or individual), and all the human operations apply only to the human nature, the will is also assumed in the Incarnation. The personal subject of Christ fully acts with the human nature in all of its operations. Grace thus appears *with* and *through* humanity in Christ, and ontologically grace is the full gift of the divine *Logos*. It is grace as made incarnate in time and embodied that reveals the foundational purpose for the cosmos.

⁵⁶ Sophronius, *Epistola Synodica ad Sergium Patriarcham Constantinopolitanum* (PG 87: 3168A-B), trans. Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelitism*, pp. 67-8.

⁵⁷ Sophronius, *Epistola Synodica* (PG 87: 3169D).

Moving on to Maximus's critique of Monothelitism, we see a similar thought frame as that of Sophronius. In his famous dispute with Pyrrhus Maximus deconstructs the argument of the Monothelites that will and hypostasis are identified. After Pyrrhus makes the claim that if Christ is one, then he certainly is only one person willing, Maximus shrewdly retorts:

Now then, if Christ exists as God and man by nature, then did he will as God and man, or only as Christ? But if it was antecedently as God and man that Christ willed, then it is clear that, being one and the same, [He willed] dually and not singly. For if Christ is nothing else than his natures from which and in which he exists, then he obviously [wills] according to each of his natures; being one and the same, he wills and operates as each [nature] is able, if indeed neither is without will or operation. So if Christ wills and operates according to each of his natures, as each one [of the natures] is able to [will and operate], and if he has two natures, then by all means he must have two natural wills, and in equal number, essential energies.⁵⁸

If Christ is fully incarnate, then according to Maximus he must also will through both natures. If Christ is willing from something other than his two natures, then his will becomes a *tertia quid*. Pyrrhus was concerned that by asserting two wills in Christ, one was therefore introducing conflict in Christ. Maximus counters that this does not divide Christ but guards their distinct natures, even in the union.⁵⁹ He even uses

⁵⁸ Maximus, *Pyrrh.* 13 (Butler's numbering, not Farrell) PG 91: 289A-B.

⁵⁹ Maximus, *Pyrrh.* 13 (Butler's numbering, not Farrell), PG 91: 289B-C.

Trinitarian theology (though revealed in economy) to argue his point. If will is connected with hypostasis, then would not the Godhead have three different wills?⁶⁰ The definition of an existing thing is based upon its nature or *logos*, and one recognizes a *logos* through the expression of energy or operation.⁶¹ If hypostasis is the mark of operation and identification, then one would have to ascribe singular operation and will in Christ. Therefore, it is more orthodox to say that will is an operation of nature instead of hypostasis because the Incarnation requires that one recognize human and divine operations in Christ.

A final move that Maximus develops against Monothelism that I would like to briefly touch upon is his own development of enhypostatization. In Neochalcedonianism (especially that associated with Emperor Justinian and Leontius of Jerusalem), the phrases ‘in two natures’ and ‘from two natures’ are both used in reference to Christ.⁶² Maximus is familiar with the ‘in’ and ‘from’ phraseology of the Neo-Chalcedonian theologians, and their distinction between hypostasis and nature as

⁶⁰ Maximus, *Pyrrh.* 15 (Butler’s numbering, not Farrell), PG 91: 289D-92A.

⁶¹ Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, p. 88.

⁶² Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelism*, p. 93ff.

noted above, but as Michael Butler (following Piret⁶³) argues in his dissertation on the Confessor's Christology, Maximus creatively develops the triad 'from which, in which, and which Christ is.'⁶⁴

The importance for the triad, according to Butler, is that Maximus needs to emphasize both that Christ is from two natures, but also that after the union the two natures subsist.⁶⁵ This is critically important because, given the distinction between hypostasis and nature, orthodox Christology must also affirm that each of the attributes of the two natures should truly belong to Christ.⁶⁶ Maximus brings the triad into consideration in *Th. Pol.* 19: 'Those who believe in him in an Orthodox way do not rely upon such reasonings, [which are] like a cobweb of thought in their feebleness, for [the two natures] from which Christ is, Christ is in, and [the two natures] in which

⁶³ Pierre Piret, 'Christologie et théologie trinitaire chez Maxime le Confesseur, d'après sa formule des natures 'desquelles, en lesquelles et lesquelles est le Christ,' in *Maximus Confessor: Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur, Fribourg, 2-5 septembre 1980*, ed. Felix Heintzer and Christoph von Schönborn, *Paradosis: Études de littérature et de théologie anciennes* 27 (Fribourg: 1982), pp. 215-22. For the viewpoint of the third member of the triad not being significant, see Marcel Doucet, 'Est-ce que le monothélisme a fait autant d'illustres victims? Reflexions sur un ouvrage de F.-M. Léthel,' *Science et spirit* 35 (1983), pp. 53-83.

⁶⁴ Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelitism*, p. 99ff.

⁶⁵ Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelitism*, p. 102.

⁶⁶ Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelitism*, p. 102.

Christ is, Christ is. Thus Christ is identically both God and man; he is in the divinity and humanity.⁶⁷

For Maximus, in order to maintain the operation of will in the human nature of Christ, it is important to protect the integrity of the human nature after the union, which would then ground the continuance of the human will.⁶⁸ Therefore, the ‘and which Christ is’ part of the triad maintains the integrity of the human will in the human nature after the union in Christ. In this way, we can say that Christ wills as one but resides in two natural wills at the same time.

The importance of the triad ‘from which, in which, and which Christ is’ for our discussion on Christological grace in Maximus is three-fold. First, the triad re-affirms the concept of grace as deriving from the Logos and through the humanity. Only by conceiving of grace as ontological can the extrinsic notions of grace as mere moral empowerment be overcome (although the moral dimension is certainly important for Maximus). Second, without the ontological giving of grace through the Logos, deification is not possible, and thus the continuance of the Gregorian phrase ‘that which is not assumed is not healed.’ Healing is a dominating motif for salvation in the

⁶⁷ Maximus, *Th. Pol.* 19 (PG 91: 224A), trans. Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelitism*, pp. 101-102.

⁶⁸ Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelitism*, p. 103.

Greek patristic tradition. The incarnate Logos is our healer precisely because he has hypostatically assumed all the characteristics of created human nature save sin.

Finally, the Maximian triad clarifies the Cyrillian notion of the union of grace and nature in Christ by providing a framework in which the uniting of the two can be understood without confusion (*ασυγχύτως*). The Chalcedonian schema of Christological orthodoxy is maintained while the integrity of the individual natures is affirmed even after the union. Maximus's understanding of enhypostatization is the beginning of his many reflections on the paradoxical nature of grace in Christology. *Logos vs. tropos* and *perichoresis* are two other important elements in his Dyothelite Christology that need to be examined in order to see the full picture of Christological grace and the gift of deification in Maximus.

5.3.2 *Logos vs. Tropos*

A common theme in Maximus's Christology, anthropology and soteriology is the distinction between *logos* and *tropos*. Given that *logos* (*λόγος*) can have a plethora of definitions and meanings (word, reason, meaning, principle, etc.), and that there is no truly accurate way to translate it into English, I will retain the scholarly custom of leaving the Greek word un-translated in this discussion. The *logos* of a creature in

Maximus is its definition, cause and nature. Maximus generally uses the phrase *logos* of nature (λόγος φύσεως⁶⁹) to indicate this idea. A *logos* is a pre-existing divine paradigm and will for any created thing that comes into existence. It is an eternal divine idea, and thus it is ineffable according to Maximus, but it also revealed to the creature through grace. We will examine this revealed aspect of *logos* below. The pre-existing *logos* also descends into the created cosmos through natural principles and symbols.

It is important to note that for Maximus a creature's *logos* is fixed and not corruptible.⁷⁰ This is elucidated by Maximus in *Amb.* 42, 'Every innovation, to speak generically, has naturally to do with the mode of the innovated thing but not with the *logos* of nature; because a *logos* innovated corrupts the nature, as not retaining unchanged the *logos* according to which it exists, but the mode innovated manifests miraculous power due to the *logos* being preserved in its nature.'⁷¹

⁶⁹ Earlier Patristic writings sometimes use λόγος οὐσίας; c.f., Sherwood Polycarp, *The Earlier Ambigua*, pp. 155-64.

⁷⁰ Lars Thunberg (*Microcosm and Mediator*, p. 91.) describes λόγος as a 'the fixity of a law' and τρόπος as 'the possibility of degrees of realization of the natural powers.' However, as Thunberg also notes there are instances where *tropos* is understood to have fixity as well. There is a proper mode of existence that one should realize according to *logos*. An example would be 'modes of virtue,' *Ad Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7: 143).

⁷¹ Maximus, *Amb.* 42 (PG 91: 1341D).

As we discussed in the previous two chapters on metaphysics and grace, Maximus distinguishes between the *logos* of nature and the *tropos* of existence. In his *scholia* on the *DN* of Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus (?) notes that God, ‘has established the general being of all things in advance, through the preliminary plan of his own ineffable knowledge. For the created mind encounters this being [of God] first of all when it is focused on some thing, and only afterward does it come to know how the thing is.’⁷² Maximus is clear that there is an essential identity of a thing and a mode as known through existence. The human mind does not really know a nature or essence apart from its mode of existence. As mentioned in the previous chapter, *logos* and *tropos* also relate to the apophatic and kataphatic in Christ as revealed in the Transfiguration in *Amb.* 10. The *tropos* of existence (τρόπος υπάρξεως) is a common phrase in Greek patristic literature that generally describes the difference between essence and hypostasis in the Trinity,⁷³ but Sophronius also uses it in a Christological context.⁷⁴

⁷² Maximus, *Scholia on DN* (PG 4: 317C-320A), trans. von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, p 123.

⁷³ C.f., Athanasius, *Letter 235*, 2 (PG 32: 872C); Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 3.6.14 (PG 45: 773B). For a study of these instances in the earlier Fathers, c.f., Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, p. 246ff; Sherwood Polycarp, *The Earlier Ambigua*, pp. 155-64; Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, pp. 90-3; K. Holl, *Amphilochius von Ikonium in seinem Verhältnis zu den grossen Kappodoziern* (Tubingen, 1904), pp. 240-45.

⁷⁴ See Schönborn’s study on τρόπος υπάρξεως in Maximus that discusses this phrase in Sophronius, ‘Plaisir et douleur dans l’analyse de S. Maxime, d’après les Quaestiones ad Thalassium,’ in *Maximus Confessor: Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur, Fribourg, 2-5 septembre 1980*, ed. Felix Heintzer and

Maximus uses the *logos-tropos* distinction in many different contexts, including Trinitarian ones,⁷⁵ but the Christological passages are important for our study.⁷⁶

I will begin with an exchange between Maximus and Pyrrhus in their great public debate over the Monothelite question. Maximus distinguishes between the faculty of will and its mode of existence:

The will and the mode of willing are not the same, just as sight and the mode of seeing are not the same. For will, like sight, is natural, and is [so] in all those that are of like nature and like origin. But the mode of willing, like the mode of seeing, that is, to will to walk or not to will to walk; or to look to the right or to the left, or up or down; or concupiscence, or to contemplate the *logoi* which are in things, this is the mode of the use of will and sight, [which belongs] only to the user. And the same distinction [may be applied] to other things, following common usage.⁷⁷

The will is a natural faculty, which is apparent from Maximus's answer to Pyrrhus, but there is also the action of engaging those faculties. Creatures generally contain these dual aspects. An analogy would be the Aristotelian concept of potency (*δύναμις*). A

Christoph von Schönborn, *Paradosis: Études de littérature et de théologie anciennes 27* (Fribourg: 1980), pp. 273-84.

⁷⁵ Sherwood Polycarp (*The Earlier Ambigua*, p. 164) notes at least three clear uses of *logos-tropos* by Maximus within a Trinitarian context (in the dialectic of monad and triad): *Myst.* 23 (PG 91: 701A); *Amb.* 67 (PG 91: 1400D); and *Amb.* 1 (PG 91: 1036C).

⁷⁶ For an extended examination of the *logos-tropos* pair in Maximus, see Sherwood Polycarp, *The Earlier Ambigua*, p. 164-8.

⁷⁷ Maximus, *Pyrrh.* 23 (Butler's numbering, not Farrell), PG 91: 292D-93A, trans. Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelitism*, pp. 129-30.

baby can have the innate potential (δύναμις) to learn mathematics, but it will not actually learn mathematics until that potency is activated. Similarly, a creature will not be an actual living creature until it acts in reference to its nature.⁷⁸ All of the human faculties and natural powers would apply here, but Maximus is trying to connect the hypostasis-nature distinction with that of will. In *Th. Pol.* 10, Maximus makes the *logos-tropos* distinction with reference to Christ:

And according to the same text, [Theodore of Pharan] conceals and obscures [the Incarnation], [for he] gave to the person as person the operation that [properly] characterizes nature, instead of [giving to the person] the mode (τρόπον) of the natural accomplishment, by which the difference between the doers and the things done is recognized, [whether it be] according to nature or contrary to nature. For yet as being something chiefly, but not as someone, each of us acts, that is as a human being; so someone, like Peter or Paul, shapes the mode of operation, for example, by decline or progress, and [he] is formed in this way or that by [the mode] according to volition. Whence it is in the mode that the difference between person is recognized with reference to conduct; but it is in the *logos* that the unchangeable [character] of the natural operation [is recognized]. For operation or reason is not [a matter of] more or less, but we all equally have the *logos*, and its operation by nature.⁷⁹

Here Maximus brings together many of the elements of the Christological debates of the sixth century. Both natures have a *logos* of nature that operates in their respective

⁷⁸ Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, p. 88.

⁷⁹ Maximus, *Th. Pol.* 10 (PG 91: 136D-137B), trans. Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelitism*, pp. 130-31, slightly modified.

tropos. The confusion of hypostasis and nature surfaces again as Maximus distinguishes between λόγος φύσεως and τρόπος ὑπάρξεως.

The *logos-tropos* distinction in Maximus's Christology grounds his theology of creation and deification. Grace is not explicitly used in the Christological references to the *logos-tropos* distinction, but it is implied—and also directly used in soteriological passages. For example, in *Th. Pol.* 1, however, Maximus does connect the Christological uses of *logos-tropos* with deification:

And no one who recalls these statements [of mine] should [think that we] assert that the operation of Christ is one. For we do not proclaim that Christ is a deified man, but God who perfectly became man, and by the same ineffable Godhead, the infinite, innumerable and infinitely more than infinite operations of the flesh were, by nature, intellectually animated by a conspicuous power...He operates in a manner befitting his nature and he is an object of belief because of the things through which he operates the reality of those things from which, in which, and which he was.⁸⁰

Christ was not merely a deified man but was truly incarnate in both human and divine operations and in the two operations together (i.e., enhypostatization). We can infer from Maximus's language here that the human nature is deified by being hypostatized to the divine *Logos* and its natural divine energy (acting 'in a manner befitting his nature'). In this sense, Christological grace is not the extrinsic empowerment of the

⁸⁰ Maximus, *Th. Pol.* 1 (PG 91: 36A-C), trans. Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelitism*, pp. 131-32.

human nature in Christ, but it is the personal subject of the *Logos* who ‘perfectly became man.’ Grace fully interpenetrates (περιχώρησις) human nature in salvation, but it does not alter or corrupt the underlying *logos* of that nature. Therefore, the grace of deification relies upon the grace that is conferred by the fully incarnate Christ. As Sherwood Polycarp notes concerning the *logos-tropos* distinction in Maximus, ‘it makes possible the development of a safe doctrine of the Trinity, of grace, of divinization...The second, however, is primary, but does not stand alone. In fact it depends...on the doctrine of the Incarnation.’⁸¹

5.3.3 *The Natural and Gnostic Wills*

Maximus’s theology of the *logos-tropos* distinction in the Monothelite debate could not be separated from a discussion of the natural will (φυσικῆ θέλημα) and the gnostic will (γνωμικὸν θέλημα) in Christ and human beings. While almost every scholar of Maximus finds it difficult to understand what the Confessor actually means by the *gnomic* will, one can distinguish it from the ‘natural will’ by simply defining it as determinative willing.⁸² Maximus himself defines will as ‘a faculty desirous of what is in accordance

⁸¹ Sherwood Polycarp, *The Earlier Ambigua*, p. 165.

⁸² For the purposes of this study, I will not go into the debate concerning whether Maximus created the notion of the faculty of will apart from reason in the modern sense. For an exposition on the theory that Maximus did have a creative and philosophic understanding of the will, see David Bradshaw, ‘Maximus

with nature, which holds together all the attributes that belong essentially to a being's nature.⁸³ For Maximus, the will as a natural faculty or operation must be free and exhibit free choice (προαίρεσις). Paramount to a proper synergistic anthropology is the ability to choose otherwise, and Maximus continues the Greek patristic tradition of holding strongly to an emphasis on free will in the process of salvation. The *gnomic* will, on the other hand, is a will that is in a fallen state of improper human choice in relation to the *logos* of virtue or nature. The concepts of the *gnomic* will and *tropos* are related to one another. Through a creature's free choice to sin, they enter the state of a fallen *gnomic* will. To expound upon this creative distinction in Maximus, it would be helpful to describe the differences between the East and West on the nature of the fall in relation to the *gnomic* will.

5.3.4 *Gnomic Will, Original Sin and the Sin that Originates*

Maximus presents his distinction between the natural and the *gnomic* wills in *Ad Thal.* 42 by illuminating a passage from St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:21, 'For our sake God made him become sin who knew no sin.' The Confessor begins his meditation on this passage

the Confessor on the Will,' (forthcoming). A key issue with Bradshaw's argument is that it could lead to a kind of voluntarism.

⁸³ Maximus, *Th. Pol.* 1 (PG 91: 12C), trans. David Bradshaw, 'Maximus the Confessor on the Will' (forthcoming).

of scripture by stating that Adam's mode of existence was corrupted from its natural design through free choice (προαίρεσις).⁸⁴ The result was that he 'forfeited the grace of impassibility (ἀπάθεια).' Because of this forfeit, sin came into the world.

Maximus never clearly explains why Adam chose a false good by eating the fruit in preference to the sustaining grace of God, but he does affirm that humankind fell into a false *gnomic* mode of existence almost immediately. This is most evidently seen in the opening response of *Ad Thal.* 61, where Maximus discusses the creation of human nature not including sensible pleasure or pain. Instead, humankind was furnished with a type of 'spiritual capacity for pleasure' that would allow it to enjoy God ineffably. But 'at the instant he was created, the first man, by use of his senses, squandered this spiritual capacity—the natural desire of the mind for God—on sensible things.'⁸⁵ So in effect humanity fell at the first instant of creation and not necessarily due to the actual temptation to eat the fruit. There is a bit of dualism implicit in this belief of Maximus. Irenaeus emphasized the goodness of the physical creation of Adam in the garden, but Maximus seems to align physicality with the Fall. Maximus does balance this view in

⁸⁴ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 42 (CCSG 7: 285).

⁸⁵ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22:85), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 131.

other places in his writings with the affirmation of the body, but in the Genesis story he falls short of defending material existence.

The nature of the Fall was also two-fold according to Maximus: the first ‘sin’ was the wilful rejection of the good; the second ‘sin’ was an unintentional putting off of incorruption.⁸⁶ The consequences of these two sins were pain (ὀδύνη), sensible pleasure (ἡδονή), and death (θάνατος) as a ‘natural punishment.’⁸⁷ Maximus ascribes these effects of the fall as providential and according to the ‘economy of salvation.’ He even says that it is not a debt owed for sin, but a vehicle to curb our mind from inclining to sin.⁸⁸

It is from this point that irrational pleasure and pain enter the human story. Maximus states, ‘For every suffering (πόνος), effectively having pleasure as its primary cause, is quite naturally, in view of its cause, a penalty exacted from all who share in human nature.’⁸⁹ Like Augustine, Maximus holds that this *tropos* of being is conferred on all human beings through the pleasure of procreation. Ancestral Sin is not to be seen

⁸⁶ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 42 (CCSG 7: 285).

⁸⁷ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22:87).

⁸⁸ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22:85).

⁸⁹ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22:85), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 132.

here as the passing on of a corrupt nature, but the passing on of a dis-ordered *tropos* of being in the world that includes death and passibility. Maximus's emphasis differs from the Western tradition of Original Sin in that he still distinguishes between nature and *tropos*, and he does not associate the guilt of Adam with his descendants, because this would offend the notion of justice.⁹⁰ The descendants of Adam inherit a fallen mode of existence, but they do not inherit a fallen or corrupted nature.⁹¹

Sin is also not a legal phenomenon but something that affects humanity ontologically, even if it does not ontologically corrupt human nature. Sin is a false

⁹⁰ Augustine makes a contrasting argument against the Pelagians to affirm the need for the passing on of a corrupt nature: 'But how do the Pelagians say 'that only death passed upon us by Adam's means'? For if we die because he died, but he died because we sinned, they say that the punishment passed without the guilt, and that innocent infants are punished with an unjust penalty by deriving death without the deserts of death. This, the catholic faith has known of the one and only mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who condescended to undergo death— that is, the penalty of sin— without sin, for us. As He alone became the Son of man, in order that we might become through Him sons of God, so He alone, on our behalf, undertook punishment without ill deservings, that we through Him might obtain grace without good deservings,' *On Two Letters Against the Pelagians*, 4.6, NPNF I vol. 5, p. 419. The key to understanding the difference between Augustine's and Maximus's positions is to affirm the distinction between nature and *tropos*. Augustine believes that nature can be corrupted (given the Latin more tertiary understanding of nature), and thus original sin must be a communication of this corruption. Following this line of thought, Christ must have also had to conquer this sinful nature in its corruption through death. For Maximus, death is certainly a consequence of the Fall, but it is apart of humankind's *gnomic* and *tropological* existence. Therefore, it is not the essential *logos* of human nature that is corrupted and in need of a savior (for no *logos* can be corrupted), but the *tropos* of existence that needs transformation.

⁹¹ The *logos-tropos* distinction is an important hermeneutical key in reading Maximus's understanding of the Fall. He takes sin very seriously, and there are some passages where he does state that sin corrupted human nature. C.f., *Ad Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7: 285).

simulacrum of created human nature; it is inhuman. Maximus sees the Incarnation as the true substitution for humanity caught in the cycle of pain and suffering. Because of the virgin birth, Jesus was not conceived in a *tropos* of death and ‘a life given over to the passions.’⁹² Jesus’s human nature provided the open capacity that Adam enjoyed in Paradise, but His divine nature eclipsed the possibility of actual sin. For Maximus, the death of Christ on the cross was not a ‘penalty exacted for that principle of pleasure like other human beings, but rather a death specifically directed against that principle’ as a ‘judgment on sin itself.’⁹³ Maximus also relates this principle of exchange to the reciprocity of the two natures in Christ: ‘He exhibited the equity of his justice in the magnitude of his condescension, when he willingly submitted to the condemnation imposed on our passibility and turned that very possibility into an instrument for eradicating sin and death which is its consequence.’⁹⁴

Jesus conquered the mode of sin—rooted in the fallen *gnomic* will—that placed humanity in slavery. The Confessor further comments that, ‘Having given our human nature impassibility through his passion, remission through his toils, and eternal life

⁹² Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22:87).

⁹³ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22:89), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 134.

⁹⁴ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22:89), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 134.

through his death, he restored that nature again, renewing the habitudes of human nature through his own incarnation the supernatural grace of deification.⁹⁵ Finally, Maximus held that Christ did not have a human *gnomic* will but only a natural human will.⁹⁶

Therefore, his humanity, not because of the logos of nature, but because of the new mode of begetting, is different from our humanity. For it is the same [as ours] by essence, but it is not the same because of [its] seedless generation. Thus, it was not in the mere [human nature] that belonged to the one who truly became human for us. His will in a proper sense is natural like us, but it was formed in a divine way transcending us. For just as generation with or without seed does not constitute nature, but are distinctions concerning the same nature, so too are unbegotten and begotten.

If, perhaps, the Logos as man had a different nature from ours because of the seedless generation, then he certainly will have a different essence than the Father because of his generation. For unoriginateness and generation are not the same. So will we have [a different nature] from Adam and Eve of old, who were also begotten without seed. For Adam was a form of the Former, while Eve was a portion of the formed. But the Son is the same as the Father through the Divinity, just as we, related through the humanity, are *homoousios* with Adam and Eve and with God himself who became flesh for us. For unoriginateness and generation are not the essence of God (for who says this?), so neither is generation with or without seed the nature of humanity.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22:91), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 135.

⁹⁶ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 42 (CCSG 7: 287).

⁹⁷ Maximus, *Th. Pol.* 4 (PG 91: 60C-61A), trans. Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelitism*, p. 134.

From this perspective of will, Maximus quite clearly denies that Christ had the same *gnomic* will as human beings.⁹⁸ His underlying human nature contained the full capacity of the passions, but the actualization of that capacity in *tropos* was fully conformed to Christ' divine *tropos* of being. Maximus similarly applies this principle to Thalassius's question in *Ad Thal.* 42:

Therefore the Lord did not know my sin, that is, the mutability of my free choice. Neither did he assume nor become my sin. Rather, he became the sin that I caused; in other words he assumed the corruption of human nature that was a consequence of the mutability of my free choice. For our sake he became a human being naturally liable to passions, and used the sin that I caused to destroy the sin that I commit.⁹⁹

The kenotic descent of Christ brings about a new possibility that Adam did not have, the chance for a 'second nativity for human nature.'¹⁰⁰ Sin 'nailed itself in Adam to the very depths of [human] nature...pressing the nature of all created beings towards mortal extinction,' but Christ 'converted the use of death, turning it into a condemnation of sin but not of human nature itself.'¹⁰¹ The substitution that Maximus affirms is condemnation of our human nature through death because of sin for the

⁹⁸ C.f., also *Amb.* 42 (PG 91: 1317A-C).

⁹⁹ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 42 (CCSG 7: 287), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 120.

¹⁰⁰ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22:91), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 135.

¹⁰¹ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22:93), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, pp. 136-37.

condemnation of sin in Christ because of his righteousness.¹⁰² In this perspective Christ does not suffer and die because of sin, but instead bestows grace in the economy of salvation as the condemnation and destruction of sin and death.¹⁰³ This incarnated conquering is what Maximus sees as the Gospel of God.¹⁰⁴ Because Christ took on the two-fold sins of Adam and their consequences through a double energy of the two natures, humanity has a new way of existing. Christ becomes the 'New Adam' by 'perfectly combining the two parts in himself in a reciprocal relation, he effectively rectified the deficiency of the one with the extreme of the other.'¹⁰⁵ The grace of the double mode of the Incarnation of the Word also brings about reconciliation with God the Father and the eternal and supernatural grace of *theosis*: 'The incarnate Son is God's ambassador and advocate for humanity, and has earned reconciliation to the Father for

¹⁰² Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22:97).

¹⁰³ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22:97).

¹⁰⁴ Adam Cooper summarizes the significance of the suffering of Christ on the behalf of the world and the implicit meaning it has for deification: 'In Christ, in so far as he actually embodies the point at which the future fullness of human deification is realized, *pathos* becomes 'supernatural.' Deification is as much 'suffered' as it is 'achieved.' From the redemptive complex of evidence on display in the 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 possibility of created human nature, are not obstacles to union with God, but the fundamental loci of God's proleptic demonstration and historic realization of humanity's goal of union with him, 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,' *The Body in St. Maximus Confessor*, p. 164.

¹⁰⁵ Maximus, *Amb.* 42 (PG 91: 1317A), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 81.

those who yield to him for the deification that is without origin.¹⁰⁶ We will analyse what Maximus means by the grace of *theosis* below in 5.5.1.

Maximus's anthropological grace is directly connected to his Christological charitology through the grace of the New Adam. The grace of Christ that is transformative in the *tropos* of the believer is truly active to the extremities of human nature. Like the prophet Jonah, Christ went down into the depths of the earth to conquer death and corruption, and he enacted the age of grace, which brings with it the deification of the saints:

Truly he is our repose, our healing, our grace: our repose since, with his timely human life, he freed the law from the situation of its carnal bondage; our healing since, by his resurrection, he cured us of the destruction wrought by death and corruption; our grace insofar as he distributes adoption in the Spirit by our God and Father through faith, and the grace of deification to each who is worthy. For it was necessary, necessary in truth, for him to become the light unto that earth (Jn 1:9), to be the power of our God and Father (1 Cor 1:18) in the earth with its abiding darkness and eternal bars, so that, having dispelled the darkness of ignorance—being the Father's light, as it were—and having crushed the bars of evil insofar as he is the concrete power of God, he might wondrously liberate human nature from its bondage to these things under the Evil One, and endow it with the inextinguishable light of true knowledge and the indefatigable power of the virtues.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22:101), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 141.

¹⁰⁷ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 64 (CCSG 22: 195-97), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 150.

5.3.5 *Perichoresis*

Maximus extends the hypostasis and nature distinction made by Neo-Chalcedonians and Dyothelites through his discussion of the complete *perichoresis* (περιχώρησις) of the divine and human natures without confusing or mixing them into a singular identity of essence. The Confessor's vision also brings divine grace and human nature into a greater reciprocal synergy in his anthropology through the notions of interpenetration that the term *perichoresis*¹⁰⁸ implies. With *perichoresis* there arises, through union, a single energy of God and the human creature (in function), though without confusion (ἀσύγχυτος). As we will explore further below, Christology, anthropology and soteriology really are inter-connected in Maximus's theology.

The term *perichoresis* (περιχώρησις) was generally used in patristic literature in reference to the inner-relations of the Trinity.¹⁰⁹ Maximus was the first theologian to import *perichoresis* from Trinitarian theology to Christology,¹¹⁰ and it becomes a central paradigm for other areas of his theology, such as deification. Thunberg even sees

¹⁰⁸ In the Latin West the term '*circumcessio*' is used

¹⁰⁹ C.f., Karen Kilby, 'Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity,' *New Blackfriars*, 81 (2000), pp. 432-445; also G. W. H. Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, pp. 1077-78; also the excellent study of *perichoresis* by Charles Twombly, 'Perichoresis and Personhood in the Thought of John of Damascus's' (PhD. diss., Emory University, 1992).

¹¹⁰ Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, p. 291ff.

perichoresis as lying at the centre of Maximus's Christology.¹¹¹ The main issue with Maximus's use of the term stems from the varied meanings that it has, particularly when applied to Christology. Prestige argues that Maximus uses *perichoresis* in the primary sense of 'rotation' around something, and when applied to Christ it indicates a 'reciprocity of action' through adhesion.¹¹² Further, Prestige argues that *perichoresis* is always connected with the preposition 'to' (εἰς, πρός) and not 'in.'¹¹³ This would guard the divine aseity, but this reading is not easily applicable in all instances of the term in Maximus. I think that Prestige's position is further supported—although not really discussed in the scholarly literature—by Maximus's contemplation of the Providence of God through the *logoi* in *Amb.* 10. Maximus counters the argument that God knows intelligible things intelligibly and sensible things sensibly by stating that he knows all things as 'acts of his own will.'¹¹⁴ This is a very reminiscent of Thomas Aquinas's discussion of the divine ideas in the *Summa*, but here it provides some basis for saying that God is not fully affected or penetrated by the human nature. God's knowledge of

¹¹¹ Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, pp. 23-37.

¹¹² Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, p. 293; Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, p. 24.

¹¹³ Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, p. 294.

¹¹⁴ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1085B).

creatures goes to the very core of their essential nature, but He does not know creatures in a substantive and existential manner.

Other scholars, such as Wolfson,¹¹⁵ Thunberg¹¹⁶ and Lossky,¹¹⁷ have argued the opposite perspective, namely that Maximus's use of *perichoresis* emphasizes a reciprocal penetration 'through' two subjects, but that the initiation of interpenetration begins with God and is exemplified in the Incarnation.¹¹⁸ It is difficult to not see confessional interpretations at work on this particular issue in Maximus's Christology, but I think that both sides of the debate are actually correct if one maintains the notion of paradox.¹¹⁹ Maximus presents a reciprocal model of *perichoresis* based upon several passages cited by scholars,¹²⁰ but the majority of these passages are in the context of

¹¹⁵ Harry Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 424.

¹¹⁶ Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, pp. 23-37.

¹¹⁷ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 145.

¹¹⁸ Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, p. 25.

¹¹⁹ In order to avoid the ever-tempting false choice fallacy, Maximus could certainly be interpreted as using hyperbolic language to express the completeness of the union of the two natures. Such a reading would be legitimate since he does use other non-penetrative analogies for the same reality. However, other analogies or expressions, such as 'immovably moved,' are still paradoxical.

¹²⁰ Gersh (*From Iamblicus to Eriugena*, pp. 253-60) also attempts to hold the two meanings of circumcession (περιχώρησις) together (i.e., rotation of motion and penetration), but his schema is not particularly clear. Instead of pressing the paradox, he tries to fit each type of circumcession passage together in tension using each of his three types of God-world relations in Christian Neoplatonism: God as transcendent; God

divine economy, which includes both the Incarnation and deification. Still, the language employed in these passages indicates a penetrative interpretation. Michael Butler agrees with Thunberg and Lossky that Maximus's Christology does indicate a bi-directionality in *perichoresis*, but he uses the hermeneutic of the *logos-tropos* distinction to clarify what is meant by 'interpenetration' in the Confessor's Christology. I will proceed by noting the relevant passages in the scholarly literature on *perichoresis*, and then summarize following the *logos-tropos* distinction of Butler. However, I will also draw out the paradoxical implications that neither side of the issue fully develops.

Butler quotes and translates a passage from *Amb.* 5 that I believe to be the most Christologically significant of the *perichoresis* passages. Here, Maximus is affirming the full *perichoresis* of the two natures into each other, but he is also limiting it at the same time. This is what Thunberg¹²¹ and Butler¹²² refer to as the '*tantum...quantum*' ('insofar as' or 'as much as'):

Christ accomplished human things in a super-human way: according to the strong union [of the two natures] that took place without change, and he showed human operation by means of divine power, since the [human] nature,

as immanent, and God as transcendent-immanent. This schema helps to organize the concepts, but it does very little in explaining what Maximus actually means by circumcession.

¹²¹ Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, p. 33.

¹²² Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelitism*, p. 170.

united in an unconfused manner to the [divine] nature, wholly penetrated [it], having nothing whatsoever destroyed by or separated from the divinity united with it by hypostasis.¹²³

Maximus limits the extent of the interpenetration of the two natures in Christ using the Chalcedonian language of ‘without confusion’ (ἀσύγχυτος) and ‘without change’ (ἀτρέπτως).¹²⁴ The distinction of the natures is maintained even though the two in a very real way penetrate each other. A union without confusion is the key to interpreting *perichoresis* in an orthodox manner that does not lead to a Monophysite Christology and charitology of grace as we examined earlier. Maximus does not promote a view of *perichoresis* that would involve blending or mixing into a third thing. However, because the human nature in Christ is hypostasized to the divine *Logos*, Christ has uniquely demonstrated a new mode of being human (see 5.4.3).

The *tantum...quantum* formula emerges in several places in Maximus’s *oeuvre* that are relevant to *perichoresis*. Butler quotes three major passages, but only two will suffice to make our point. The first one is from *Amb.* 10:

They say that God and man are paradigms of each other, and *insofar* as God is hominized for man through his love for man, so too did man empowered through love divinize himself to God; and *insofar* as man is ravished in mind by

¹²³ Maximus, *Amb.* 5 (PG 91: 1053B).

¹²⁴ Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelitism*, p. 172.

God toward the unknown, so too did man by the virtues manifest the naturally invisible God.¹²⁵

Maximus perceives spiritual growth to be a reciprocal engagement between the two extremes of created nature and uncreated nature. This is termed by Maximus as a ‘blessed inversion’ (καλήν ἀντιστροφήν¹²⁶), whereby the incarnation of the *Logos* becomes all that human beings are without losing his divine distinction in essence just as human beings receive all that God is without losing their human distinction of essence. The paradox is that this inversion can take place without mixing or blending in the Neoplatonic sense. Also, love¹²⁷ is at the centre of his cosmic vision for incarnation as the basis of the inversion. Maximus presents the love of God for man as mirrored in human’s love for God in deification. Finally, there is another type of exchange mentioned by Maximus in this passage: mind↔virtue. He hints at the revelation and grace of God to the mind (i.e., the gift of theological *logoi* in deification) that we will explore in section 5.6, but this gift is in reciprocal exchange with the actualization of the virtues in humans. Given that Christ is the ‘substance of the virtue,’

¹²⁵ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1113B-C), trans. Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelitism*, p. 170.

¹²⁶ Maximus, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91: 1084C).

¹²⁷ Interestingly, Maximus does not use ἀγαπή or ἔρος in *Amb.* 7 to describe this reciprocation of love. He uses a beautiful wordplay of φιλόανθρωπον (love of man) and φιλόθεον (love of God). The symmetry here brings out the Chalcedonian notions of full union and *communicatio idiomatum*.

humans participate in God through the practice of the virtues according to habit.¹²⁸

So, to the extent that human beings manifest the invisible God through virtues performed, Christ permeates and deifies the mind of the Christian. Maximus even goes so far as to say that they are ‘paradigms’ (παραδείγματα) of each other.

The second *tantum...quantum* passage is from *Amb.* 60: ‘Man becomes God inasmuch as God becomes man, for man is exalted through (διὰ) God by divine ascensions in the same measure as God is abased through man in achieving without change the extremity of our nature.’¹²⁹ This passage continues the argument from *Amb.* 10 that there is a reciprocal exchange between the divine and human, but this exchange also carries with it a limiting ‘measure’ (τοσοῦτον). The union and *perichoresis* of the two natures in Christ press into each other as far as the extremity of both natures, but there is not a destruction of *logos*.¹³⁰ Maximus does not collapse the

¹²⁸ Maximus, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91: 1081D).

¹²⁹ Maximus, *Amb.* 60 (PG 91: 1385B-C), trans. Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelitism*, p. 171.

¹³⁰ Maximus (*Th. Pol.* 1, PG 91: 36A-C) makes an interesting claim that the operations of the divine and human natures in Christ had an underpinning ‘*logos*.’ This makes sense given that for Maximus no nature is understood through expression (i.e., energy) apart from an underlying *logos*, but he then affirms that Christ had a natural energy or operation that manifested itself since he is the super-essential *Logos* of the Godhead. It is difficult to understand how the divine could be super-essential but also manifest through an operation underpinned by a *logos*, but Maximus generally qualifies the operation of the divine nature by referring to it as a mode befitting the divine. This is similar to what Pseudo-Dionysius says in *DN* 9.9 concerning divine movement of the Godhead as taking place through a mode befitting God and reason.

paradox here, and it is paradox that should enlighten this ambiguous notion of *perichoresis* in his Christology.

The first thing that the *tantum...quantum* passages indicates is a logical need for a *logos-tropos* distinction.¹³¹ Maximus wishes to affirm that the Incarnation goes all the way down into extremities of creation, and also that by an equivocal inversion in the process, the creation ascends to the furthest heights of the divine. A contradiction now emerges. How can such a complete interpenetration of natures in Christ not destroy the natures in the process? Butler argues that the *logos-tropos* distinction provides a model for understanding *perichoresis* as a transformation into a new mode of being rather than an absolute mixing that would corrupt a nature, destroy it, or create a *tertia quid* that would not be a grace that was salvific of human nature. Essentially, I agree with Butler's answer to the problem, but he leaves out the paradox (though I doubt he would dismiss it) that underlies the model he is endorsing.¹³²

The second element that the *tantum...quantum* passages reveal in relation to the equally important emphasis on *perichoresis* is the need for a full paradox of Incarnation

¹³¹ Michael Butler, *Hypostatic Union and Monothelism*, pp. 173ff.

¹³² Andrew Louth also mentions paradox in a few places, *Maximus Confessor*, e.g., pp. 9, 52-54.

and subsequently for a full paradox of grace. In the new mode of being¹³³ that Christ opens up for humanity, there are a movements on the side of the human being that transcends the motion and movement of created beings as well:

Since then the human person is not moved naturally, as it was fashioned to do, around the unmoved, that is its own beginning (I mean God), but contrary to nature is voluntarily moved in ignorance around those things that are beneath it, to which it has been divinely subjected, and since it has abused the natural power of uniting what is divided, that was given to it at its generation, so as to separate what is united, therefore 'natures have been instituted afresh,' and in a paradoxical way beyond nature that which is completely unmoved by nature is moved immovably around that which by nature is moved, and God becomes a human being, in order to save lost humanity.¹³⁴

The task has been given to human beings of mediating the unification all creation through the unique faculty of mind, which was lost in the Fall. Through the divine grace of Christ, the immovable has been immovably moved around human nature to become incarnate. Maximus uses images that are paradoxical here but not the same penetrating ones that *perichoresis* indicates. I believe that Maximus is trying to communicate the same thing with his phrase 'immovably moved' as that of the hypostatic union in *perichoresis*. This is evident in *Ad Thal.* 59, where Maximus identifies

¹³³ At the end of *Amb.* 41, Maximus restates the paradox of the Incarnation, but he adds the paradox of the virgin birth itself being without seed (PG 91: 1313C).

¹³⁴ Maximus, *Amb.* 41 (PG 91: 1308D), trans. Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, pp. 158-59.

perichoresis with participation, which is also nothing more than the reception of divine grace (without confusion).

The Incarnation is as paradoxical in the full *perichoresis* of the two natures as the imparticipable God who nonetheless fully shares himself through grace. Because of the complete aseity of Christ, who is the eternally begotten expressive *Logos* of the Godhead, human nature *can* fully penetrate the divine—paradoxically itself a kenotic gift (Phil 2:7)—through the Incarnation. The priority must be the kenotic initiation on the side of the divine. The *perichoresis* is a paradox to be embraced because it is a paradox rooted in the economy of salvation, but God's aseity does remain intact. If paradox and economy are removed, then Maximus is guilty of idolatry, which would hardly seem likely in this instance.

Maximus's concepts of *logos-tropos* and *perichoresis* are significant contributions and developments to Chalcedonian Christology, but they also explicate the full weight of Cyrillian Christological grace. The super-essential *Logos* does not come to us as an essence but as an incarnate God-man. The utter ontological grace of the eternal *Logos* is united to human nature to create a new mode of being human that can synergistically cooperate with the divine life in a perichoretic manner. While the term *perichoresis* would seem to provide a way around embracing the paradox of Christological grace,

Maximus employs it to emphasize the full and equal Incarnation of the two natures of Christ while still holding on to the notion of paradox in their coming together.

5.4 The Kenotic Grace of Christ

In *Amb. 5*, Maximus asks the question, ‘Who knows how God is made flesh and still remains God?’¹³⁵ His answer of course is that this is only something faith can understand. Logic is pressed beyond its limits when the divine takes on flesh in its entirety. In the previous section we analysed the notion *perichoresis* in Maximus’s thought as the ultimate example of the Biblical idea of the *kenosis* (κένωσις) of God into creation. The communication of the divine grace of the incarnate Christ still needs further elucidation. Although the communication of grace takes place in Maximus’s anthropology and soteriology, it is always rooted in the full paradox of the Incarnation. I use paradox here instead of mystery (although Maximus just as frequently describes the Incarnation as mystery) because of the conflict that bubbles up when one affirms both that the divine is completely impassible and that the divine fully penetrated his human nature to its extremities. This dialectic is compounded with the daring affirmation by Maximus that human nature also inter-penetrates the divine nature of Christ. However, despite the requirement of faith to embrace these conflicting

¹³⁵ Maximus, *Amb. 5* (PG 91: 1057).

affirmations, Maximus does hold that in the next age through deification (though also beginning in this age), all of the *logoi* will be revealed to the human creature in a knowledge that transcends this present age of sensible creation.¹³⁶ Congruent with the revelation of the principles of creation is the *visio beatifica* of the uncreated grace of the divine *Logos*, but the grace of the fullness of truth comes to the present age through kenotic descent. Grace is not extrinsic to nature (nature presupposes it), but it descends into it. In fact, the ascent to God in deification is impossible without a reciprocal constant descending of the Word into creation.¹³⁷ Grace must always be at the centre of salvation.

In *Amb.* 71, Maximus makes a ‘modest’ conjecture concerning the descent of the divine grace into creation, describing it as the ‘foolishness,’ ‘weakness’ and ‘play’ of God.¹³⁸ According to Gregory Nazianzen, ‘The high Word plays in every kind of form,

¹³⁶ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1133A-B).

¹³⁷ John Milbank contends that through true kenosis of the Incarnate Christ, as experienced in bodily temporal existence, is the only viable mediation. Neither the perpetual ascent of Gregory of Nyssa nor the extrinsic participation in the energies of God as espoused by Palamas can offer a direct mediation that avoids ontological limbo between God and the world, what he calls ‘an impossible mediating ladder.’ See ‘Theurgy and Sophiology: The New Theological Horizon,’ in *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word* ed. Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009), p. 78.

¹³⁸ Maximus, *Amb.* 71 (PG 91: 1409A-12B).

mixing as he wills, with his world here and there.’¹³⁹ Maximus reflects on this curious statement of Gregory and understands the mysterious descent of God into creation as being a sticking to the middle between the extremities of intelligible and sensible nature.¹⁴⁰ He is not speaking about an ontological intermediary plane between God and creation¹⁴¹ but about the paradoxical kenotic descent into creation that bridges the gulf between God and creatures, particularly as it will be revealed and communicated fully in the eschaton.¹⁴² Maximus describes the paradox of the grace of divine play in the following way:

¹³⁹ Gregory Nazianzen, *To the Virgins 2* (PG 37: 624).

¹⁴⁰ Maximus will also raise several possible interpretations in this passage, one being the difference between the created world as the creature experiences it now and the next age when the creature experiences the gift of deification. This is why von Balthasar (*Cosmic Liturgy*, p. 124) can interpret the super-temporal works of God as being those works in the eschaton that move the creature to eternity. However, Maximus certainly believes that traces of these future works are implanted in creation now as ‘divine play’ for the future age of deification.

¹⁴¹ Maximus quotes a passage Pseudo-Dionysius from *DN 4.13*, but reads it in a Christological light: ‘And, in truth, it must be said too that the very cause of the universe in the beautiful, good superabundance of his benign yearning for all is also carried outside of himself in the loving care he has for everything. He is, as it were, beguiled by goodness, by love, and by yearning and is enticed away from his transcendent dwelling place and descends within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic power inseparable from himself,’ trans. Leibhold, p. 82, slightly modified. Leibhold translates the last phrase ‘κατ’ ἐκστατικὴν ὑπερούσιον δύναμιν ἀνεκφοίτητον ἑαυτοῦ’ as ‘by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself.’ The most straightforward translation is close to that of Louth ‘by his ecstatic and supernatural power inseparable from himself.’ This is perhaps a good example where God’s essence and his actions are not separable from one another.

¹⁴² Maximus, *Amb. 71* (PG 91: 1413A).

...the play of God spoken of by the great teacher [Gregory Nazianzen] is a kind of keeping to the middle,¹⁴³ staying equidistant from the extremes, by weaving about and quickly changing one's position, or, to put it better, by a flowing that remains still. And this is the paradox: to behold stillness eternally flowing [ῥέουσιν] and being carried away, a flowing, eternally-moving, divinely contrived to contribute providentially to the improvement of the whole divine economy, capable of making wise those who are taught by it to hope always for change, and to believe that the end of this mystery for them is that by an inclination towards God they might be securely deified by grace. By the middle I mean the totality of things visible which now surround the human being or in which the human is; by the extremes I mean the reality of everything not manifest and which is going unfailingly to surround humanity, things that have properly and truly been made and come into being in accordance with the ineffable and pre-eminent purpose and reason of the divine goodness.¹⁴⁴

The Incarnation teaches the human being through the divine descent and enhypostasization with created nature that there is hope for the divine grace of the *Logos* to stabilize and fix the human being's deification through grace. Maximus places the middle movement of play in between God as origin and end to show that God's power is implanted in creation as a manifestation of his providence and care. The eschatological grace of God is manifested visibly in the Incarnation, and the deposit of hope is offered to saints who are deified in proportion to their faith and virtue. So, it is

¹⁴³ The idea of God staying to the middle is a Pythagorean principle, where the Monad is in the middle of the four elements (Iamblichus(?), *Theologoumena Arithmeticae* I on the Monad) and described as a 'hearth' (Euripides, *fragment* 938).

¹⁴⁴ Maximus, *Amb.* 71 (PG 91: 1412C-D), trans. Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 166.

the descent of Christ through *kenosis* that reveals the hope for a grace that will never falter.

A key connection between the *kenosis* of the *Logos* and deification is the unshakable divine will that perfectly deified the human nature of Christ. Maximus believes in the Fall of humankind with its corrupted mode of being and willing, but the underlying *logos* remains intact. Bodily existence is corrupted in its actions not in its nature:

Whoever abandons his own beginning [i.e., *logoi*] and is irrationally swept along toward non-being is rightly said to have ‘slipped down from above,’ because he does not move toward his own beginning and cause according to which and for which and through which he came to be. He enters a condition of unstable¹⁴⁵ gyrations and fearful disorder of soul and body, and though his end remains in place, he brings about his own defection by deliberately turning to what is worse.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Maximus uses ἀσάτω here to indicate instability as the soul and body become disunified. In Neoplatonic thought the identifier ‘Monad’ generally indicated stability since it is derived from the verb μενεῖν (to stabilize or remain). Iamblichus defines the Monad as ‘the non-spatial source of number,’ because of its ‘stability, since it preserves the specific identity of any number with which it is conjoined.’ See his attributed work *Theologoumena Arithmeticae* I on the Monad, trans. Robin Waterfield (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1988), p. 35. This is an important Pythagorean principle in relation to Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus’s understanding of the Monad that gives rise to the dyad (or God beyond both) as being able to maintain the unity of each of its subsequent division or shares in reality.

¹⁴⁶ Maximus, *Amb. 7* (PG 91: 1084D-85A), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, pp. 60-61.

As we saw above, grace and nature are understood differently in Greek and Latin patristic traditions. In terms of *kenosis*, what the incarnate Christ offers creation is the stability of will that is the foundation for the deification of the creature through virtue:

He [Christ], who did not disdain to be created as man because of the creation of the first Adam, and who did not disdain to be born for the sake of his sin, showed by his creation his condescension toward him who had fallen, and by his birth his voluntary emptying [κένωσις] toward him who was condemned. By his creation he became identical to man by nature by means of the life-giving breath by which he received as man the image [of God], and he guarded it without default of his freedom, neither soiled it in his innocence. By his birth in the Incarnation he voluntarily took on, through the form of a slave, similarity to the corrupt man, and he accepted by his own will to be subject like us to the same natural passions, but not to sin, as if he who was without sin were so dependent.¹⁴⁷

In *perichoresis*, human nature touches the divine through the very tips of its being. Through *kenosis*, the eternally begotten Son exchanges his place at the right hand of the Father for the lowly pits of human existence. Happily taking on the role of a slave, Christ inverts weakness to power, and He creates divine grace in each of the saints by offering a divine *tropos* of existence unto deification.

¹⁴⁷ Maximus, *Amb.* 42 (PG 91 1316C-D).

5.5 Christological Charitology and Theosis

The Byzantine doctrine of *theosis* (θέωσις) has a long history in the Greek patristic tradition.¹⁴⁸ Originally starting out as a moral metaphor for the spiritual life,¹⁴⁹ *Theosis* developed into fully ontological principle of salvation. Although *theosis* emerged from the cult of Pharaoh in Egypt and later through the Caesar in Rome, the Christian appropriation of the doctrine focused on the soteriological aspects of being deified by God. Further, the doctrine was grounded in several important Biblical texts. Primary among the Biblical affirmations of *theosis* were Psalm 82:6, 'I say, "You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince,"' and 2 Peter 1:4, 'For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust' (δι' ὧν τὰ τίμια καὶ μέγιστα ἡμῖν ἐπαγγέλματα δεδώρηται, ἵνα διὰ τούτων γένησθε θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως, ἀποφυγόντες τῆς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ φθορᾶς). St. Paul's theology generally used more familial language, according to Semitic tradition, such as 'adoption' and

¹⁴⁸ I will also use 'deification' and 'divinization' interchangeably with *theosis*.

¹⁴⁹ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: OUP, 2006). See also Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ. The Nature of the Human Person*, trans. N. Russell (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987; and more recently, S. Thomas, *Deification in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition: A Biblical Perspective* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008).

'reconciliation,' but he also spoke of a more mystical reality like deification in his sermon on Mars Hill (Acts 17:28), 'For in Him we live and move and exist' (Ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν). Paul also taught a union model of theosis with his mystical statement in Galatians 2:20, 'For it is no longer I that live but Christ in me' (ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός).

The ontological implications for the grace of deification were also associated with Christ in the Alexandrian tradition. Athanasius famously asserted that, 'He [the Logos] became man that we might be deified' (Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐνηνθρώπησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν).¹⁵⁰ Similarly, in his *Defense of the Nicene Definition*, Athanasius avers, 'The Word was made flesh in order to offer up this body for all, and that we, partaking of His Spirit, might be deified, a gift which we could not otherwise have gained than by His clothing Himself in our created body.'¹⁵¹ Here, we see the necessity of the blessed exchange between the human and divine natures in Christ in order to ground salvation. Maximus extends and enriches the 'blessed inversion' motif of the Incarnation and applies it to *theosis*:

¹⁵⁰ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi* (PG 25b: 192B).

¹⁵¹ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi* (PG 25: 448C-448D).

Through them [*logoi*] [man] places himself wholly in God alone, wholly imprinting and forming God alone in himself, so that by grace he himself is God and is called God. By his gracious condescension God became man and is called man for the sake of man and by exchanging his condition for ours revealed the power that elevates man to God through his love for God and brings God down to man because of his love for man. By this blessed inversion, man is made God by divinization and God is made man by hominization.¹⁵²

The *kenosis* and *perichoresis* imagery is certainly in the background of this passage from *Amb. 7*. To the extent that Christ becomes human (the hominization) the human becomes god (divinization) in salvation. God voluntarily descends into human flesh and existence in order to raise or lift humankind up to God, and in short, to make human beings divine. Maximus also connects Christological grace and the blessed inversion in *Amb. 7*, ‘hence the whole man, as the object of divine energy, is divinized by being made God by the grace of God who became man.’¹⁵³ The human being also wholly lives in God by exercising virtue in reference to his or her pre-existing *logoi* securely fixed in God.¹⁵⁴ Because of the Incarnation of the *Logos*, who embraces all *logoi* as Creator, the creature

¹⁵² Maximus, *Amb. 7* (PG 91:10845C), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 60.

¹⁵³ Maximus, *Amb. 7* (PG 91: 1088C), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 63.

¹⁵⁴ Maximus uses participatory language in reference to the *λόγοι* in *Amb. 7* (PG 91: 1084B), ‘For whoever does not violate the *logos* of his own existence that pre-existed in God is in God through diligence; and he moves in God according to the *logos* of his well-being that pre-existed in God when he lives virtuously; and he lives in God according to the *logos* of his eternal being that pre-existed in God.’

can ascend back to God. Maximus's doctrine of the *logoi* is just as important to soteriology as it is to metaphysics.

It is important to note the distinction between the triad, being (τὸ εἶναι), well-being (τὸ εὖ εἶναι), and eternal well-being (τὸ ἀεὶ εὖ εἶναι) in relation to Maximus's Christo-ontological understanding of salvation through the grace of *theosis*. Christ not only descends to exchange the divine life for the human one, and vice-versa, He also ontologically bridges the gulf between Creator and creature that was due originally to the Fall, and which still continues in the wilfully sinful choices of human beings. The Incarnation (also a pre-existing plan of God) provides the foundation for the deification of the creature through free choice (προαίρεσις). Further, deification through grace is not revealed unless humankind's free choice is enacted. Maximus establishes this in

Amb. 42:

...in order to be perpetually born by the Spirit in the exercise of free-choice, and to acquire the additional gift of assimilation to God by keeping the divine commandment, such that man, as fashioned from God by nature, might become son of God and divine by grace through the Spirit. For created man could not be revealed as son of God through deification by grace without first being born by the Spirit in the exercise of free-choice, because of the power of self-movement and self-determination inherent in human nature.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Maximus, *Amb.* 42 (PG 91: 1345D), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 93.

As you will recall from the *De Char.* 3.25, Maximus distinguishes between the gracious gifts of being, well-being and eternal well-being. Being and eternal well-being are the gifts of God according to nature (both having a secure *logoi*), but well-being is due to the free-choice of humans through grace.¹⁵⁶ Free choice does not mean that grace is somehow not necessary for the whole transformation of *theosis* to be possible. ‘All the achievements of the saints were clearly gifts of grace from God. None of the saints had the least thing other than the goodness granted to him by the Lord God according to the measure of his gratitude and love. And what he acquired he acquired only in so far as he surrendered himself to the Lord who bestowed it.’¹⁵⁷ Quite clearly, then, the grace of *theosis* is purely due to the beneficence of God. The reception of grace is due to the human being’s free choice, but the originating foundation for the exchange of such a gift is rooted in God’s movement towards the creature. Maximus beautifully connects how Christ ontologically restores this possibility of well-being in human nature through the grace of baptism a little later in *Amb.* 42:

For the Saviour the order [for my salvation] was: first of all, incarnation and bodily birth for my sake; and so thereupon the birth in the Spirit through

¹⁵⁶ However, the virtues are also natural with proper *logoi* and a mode of participation as well; see *Pyrrh.* 88-95 (Butler’s numbering, not Farrell), PG 91: 309B-11A.

¹⁵⁷ Maximus, *Philokalia*, vol 2, eds. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London, UK: Faber & Faber, 1982), p. 216.

baptism, originally rejected by Adam, for the sake of my salvation and restoration by grace, or, to describe it even more vividly, my remaking (ἀνάπλασις). God, as it were, connected for me the principle of my being and the principle of my well-being, bridging the separation and distance between them that I had caused, and thereby wisely drew them together in the principle of eternal being.¹⁵⁸

Christ bridges the gulf created by human beings by becoming through the Incarnation what Maximus describes in this passage as the three modes of birth: the first is the natural birth; the second birth is the well-being received through the Spirit in baptism; and the third is the transformation through grace to eternal being. Maximus perceives *theosis* to be a restoration (a ‘remaking’) of the human faculties due to the Fall, but he also implies that in the age of deification there is a transcending of the natural faculties to a mode of existence beyond nature. Maximus would certainly fall here under the three-act scheme of Fairbairn.¹⁵⁹ For Western theologians, the emphasis on grace in the process of *theosis* is critically important, but Maximus does not limit grace merely to being outside of nature. Virtues are even natural according to Maximus because human beings have a natural *logos* of virtue as a part of created

¹⁵⁸ Maximus, *Amb.* 42 (PG 91: 1348D).

¹⁵⁹ Maximus does use the image of restoration in his writings, but he very clearly distinguishes the beatitude of the resurrection from that of creation in *Amb.* 7 (PG 91: 1097C), Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 71: ‘For this reason [humankind’s choice not to willfully use their created natural powers for the things of God] another way was introduced, more marvelous and more befitting of God than the first, and as different from the former as what is above nature is different from what is according to nature.’

nature.¹⁶⁰ Being and eternal well-being are also a graces of God, and the human being's essential *logos* already presupposes grace. 'For truly he who is the Creator of the essence of created beings by nature had also to become the very Author of the deification of creatures by grace, in order that the Giver of well-being might appear also as the gracious Giver of eternal well-being.'¹⁶¹ The Western theological dialectic of grace over nature is not equivocal with Maximus's understanding of grace and nature. We will look at the notion of 'natural fitness' (ἐπιτηδειότης) for grace in the next chapter, which deals with theurgy and Neoplatonism, but for now it is vital to understand that Maximus conceives of *theosis* in the next age as being due to a supernatural divine grace. The Confessor makes this very clear in *Th. Pol.* 1:

Deification does not belong to what lies within our potentiality to bring about naturally, since it is not within our power. For no *logos* of that which transcends nature lies within nature. Therefore deification is not an accomplishment that belongs to our potentiality: we do not possess the potentiality for it by nature, but only through the divine power, since it is not a reward given to the saints in requital for righteous works, but is proof of the liberality of the Creator, making the lovers of the beautiful by adoption that which he has shown to be by nature.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Maximus, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91: 1084D).

¹⁶¹ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 60 (CCSG 22, 2:79, 117-120), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 60 n. 43.

¹⁶² Maximus, *Th. Pol.* 1, (PG 91: 33A-36A), trans. Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, p. 277, Greek inserted by me.

According to Maximus, 'grace alone illuminates human nature with supernatural light...and elevates our nature above its proper limits in excess of glory.'¹⁶³ Salvation through *theosis* is a supernatural gift of God beyond created nature, but at the same time Maximus believes that there is a *logos* that qualifies the mode of the faithful's future eternal well-being, which is the unification with the pre-existing *logos* in God, or God himself (i.e., the two-fold order of Ideas).¹⁶⁴ The distinction comes from the *logos* of nature vs. the *logos* of *theosis*. Every gift of God, whether it be being, well-being or eternal well-being is rooted in the pre-existing *logos* and under the creative and providence of the *Logos*. Even though the human being's essential nature also has its pre-existing *logos* in Christ, the *logos* of its deification and eternal being is a future gift of God. So, God offers divine grace through the Incarnation of the *Logos*, but the full grace of the Incarnation (the life of divine qualities) is not complete until the next age. In this way, God is both the giver of the grace of being and the author of the supernatural grace of deification.

¹⁶³ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7: 141).

¹⁶⁴ Maximus, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91: 1084B), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, pp. 59-60: 'But in the future age when graced with divinization, he will affectionately love and cleave to the *logoi* already mentioned that pre-existed in God, rather, he will love God himself, in whom the *logoi* of beautiful things are securely grounded.'

In *Ad Thal.* 22, Maximus describes another aspect to deification in reference to the natural capacity for virtue and the unlimited capacity for spiritual knowledge. He also adds the movement into complete passivity in the *visio beatifica*:

For we are active agents insofar as we have operative, by nature, a rational faculty for performing the virtues, and also a spiritual faculty, unlimited in its potential, capable of receiving all knowledge, capable of transcending the nature of all created beings and known things and even of leaving the ‘ages’ of time behind it. But when in the future we are rendered passive (in deification), and have fully transcended the principles (*logoi*) of beings created out of nothing, we will unwittingly enter into the true Cause of existent beings and terminate our proper faculties along with everything in our nature that has reached completion.¹⁶⁵

Maximus clearly presents the difference between the deification that begins in this life (well-being) and the complete deification in the age to come. The human mind through contemplation (*θεωρία*) and disciplined practice (*πρᾶξις*) has the natural ability to initiate *theosis* in the spiritual life here and now through the virtues. Within the natural powers of rational beings is the ability to contemplate the principles of created beings and transcend them in the future age. In the eschaton, the fullness of the grace of *theosis* will render the creature utterly passive to the power of God. Maximus holds to a realized eschatology (but with a Pauline ‘already but not yet’ formula), whereby the complete potential for *theosis* is given to the creature as a grace in potential, but the

¹⁶⁵ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7: 141), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 117-18, Greek inserted by me.

fullness or actualization of that grace, which must be used by the human agent, awaits the resurrection as symbolized on the day ‘the grace of the new mystery arose.’¹⁶⁶ It is a potency that must be activated by God initially, but proper use of the will lies with the creature.¹⁶⁷

Maximus relates his realized eschatology to the mystery and grace of the Incarnation as well. He divides the divine mystery of grace into the age of the Incarnation and the age of deification in *Ad Thal.* 22. Maximus describes the complete deification of the faithful due to the completion of the mystical work of Incarnation, ‘For if he has brought to completion his mystical work of becoming human...and even descended into the lower regions of the earth where the tyranny of sin compelled humanity, then God will also completely fulfil the goal of his mystical work of deifying humanity in every respect.’¹⁶⁸ The *telos* of the gift of deification is the full assimilation

¹⁶⁶ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* (CCSG 22: 219).

¹⁶⁷ See *Amb.* 6, where Maximus distinguishes between the grace of adoption in faith (in full potency) and the grace of likeness to God beyond faith. The movement is from faith to knowledge, which comes about through ἄσκεισις and θεωρία.

¹⁶⁸ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7: 139), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 116.

to God. 'It is to this exalted position that the natural magnitude of God's grace summons lowly humanity, out of a goodness that is infinite.'¹⁶⁹

As mentioned earlier, the liberality of the Creator does not truncate the responsibility of the creature for its own well-being. It is paramount to Maximus that well-being be the choice of the human being to live by divine virtue or stumble into eternal ill-being through ignorance and vice. The virtues are the means to effecting deification, or better to make deification effective. Christ can make practicing the virtues effective for deification because of the blessed inversion of the Incarnation, but Maximus also sees the practice of virtue as participating in Christ himself. As noted in the previous two chapters, Maximus calls Christ 'the substance of all the virtues' in *Amb. 7*.¹⁷⁰ As long as the human being participates in the virtues through an intentional habit, he or she will be participating in Christ. Through virtue, created likeness of God is added to the image of God in each person.¹⁷¹ The dynamic and spiral movements of Incarnation and deification in relation to the virtues in the last few paragraphs points

¹⁶⁹ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7: 139), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 116.

¹⁷⁰ Maximus, *Amb. 7* (PG 91: 1081D).

¹⁷¹ Maximus, *Amb. 7* (PG 91: 1084A).

to the plan for the gift of Christological grace through *theosis* as summarized by

Maximus in *Ad Thal. 22*:¹⁷²

So it does not seem, then, that *the end of the ages has come upon us* (1 Cor. 10:11) since we have not yet received, by the grace that is in Christ, the gift (δωρεάν) of benefits that transcend time and nature. Meanwhile, the modes of the virtues and the principles of those things that can be known by nature have been established as types (τύποι) and foreshadowings of those future benefits. It is through these modes and principles that God, who is ever willing to become human, does so in those who are worthy. And therefore whoever, by the exercise of wisdom, enables God to become incarnate within him or her and, in fulfilment of this mystery, undergoes deification by grace, is truly blessed, because that deification has no end. For he who bestows his grace on those who are worth of it is himself infinite in essence, and has the infinite and utterly limitless power to deify humanity.¹⁷³

The eschatological union of creature with the pre-existing *logoi* of the Logos will bring about the final divine qualities that transcend time and nature, but the *logoi* of created beings that can be comprehended by the human mind serve as *typoi* for the grace of deification. Through the natural modes of the virtues and the contemplation of nature through the natural *logoi*, the saints can have a real share in divine grace as it is created in them, which Maximus here describes as enabling God to become Incarnate in the

¹⁷² Maximus actually has four slightly different answers to Thalassius's question concerning the end of the age 'already' coming upon us. See Paul Blowers, 'Realized Eschatology in Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thal. 22*,' *Studia Patristica* vol. 32, ed. Elizabeth Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1997), pp. 258-63.

¹⁷³ Maximus, *Ad Thal. 22* (CCSG 7: 143), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 118, Greek inserted by me.

them. All three elements of *Logos-tropos*, *perichoresis* and *kenosis* are all important for understanding Maximus's doctrine of *theosis*. Through the divine descent of the Word and his interpenetration with human nature, He can institute nature afresh through *theosis* without corruption or altering the creature's existing Logos. The grace of *theosis* begins in this life, but awaits a supernatural transformation in a new stable habitual *tropos* of being in the age to come. In the eschaton, Christ—as the only uncreated grace—will appear face-to-face with the divine revelation of the pre-existing *logoi*, and God will then be both the *arche* and *telos* of the movement of created beings.

Maximus also perceives the consummation of the creature in *theosis* not to be a rational understanding of the divine glory, but an active knowledge of it through experience (πεῖρα) of the divine glory. The eternal active experience of God in deification (even when completely passive, as noted above) is also advanced as a fixed stability around God.¹⁷⁴ In relation to the knowledge of divine things, Maximus argues that 'rational knowledge' of God cannot exist alongside of the 'direct experience' (πεῖρα) of God.¹⁷⁵ Rational knowledge is a relative knowledge since it is found in this life through reason and ideas concerning the creation, but there is also a 'truly authentic

¹⁷⁴ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 60 (CCSG 22: 75-77).

¹⁷⁵ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 60 (CCSG 22: 77).

knowledge, gained only through actual experience, apart from reason and ideas, which provides a total perception of the known object through participation (μέθεξις) by grace.¹⁷⁶ Is Maximus contending for an irrational fideism in relation to knowledge of God? I do not believe this to be the case since he gives affirmation of the positive knowledge of God in his apophatic theology. He holds to the Pseudo-Dionysian dialectic of kataphatic affirmation based upon an apophatic reserve. A paragraph later in *Ad Thal.* 60, Maximus defines what he means by rational knowledge of God, ‘I mean the use of the analogy of created beings in the intellectual contemplation of God.’¹⁷⁷ So, the experiential knowledge of God in *theosis*, which is a grace of participation (of likeness), transcends the rational knowledge of God. The rational knowledge of God is what human beings know of him through the remonstrance of creatures (the analogy of being). Since divine ideas transcend finite creatures, knowledge of God in *theosis* must be given in the order of supernatural grace.

5.6 *The Grace of the Logoi in Deification Through The Logos Who Embraces all Logoi*

In the previous section, I suggested that in *theosis* the creature returns to the pre-existing *logoi* in God so that God might be both Creator of essence and Author of

¹⁷⁶ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 60 (CCSG 22: 77).

¹⁷⁷ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 60 (CCSG 22: 77), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 126.

deification (Α and Ω). To my knowledge, Maximus never describes the pre-existing *logoi* as graces, but given that they are ideas in the divine mind this is not surprising. In *Amb.* 10, Maximus evinces that in the resurrection ‘we shall know the meanings [*logoi*], that is to say the ultimate meanings that we long to know.’¹⁷⁸ The *logoi* are the inner ideas and wills of the transcendent God, but they are also hypostatically held in the Logos in a uniform way, similar to Aquinas. After the Incarnation, the eternally expressive Logos as Creator becomes the eternally expressive grace of the *logoi* in *theosis*.

Responding to Thalassius’s question concerning who foreknew Christ before the foundations of the earth (1 Peter 1:20), Maximus states that other members of the Trinity foreknew Christ through the *logoi* of his humanity, not in essence. The cosmic mystery of Jesus Christ was ‘known to the Father by his approval (εὐδοκία), to the Son by his carrying it out (ἀντουργία), and to the Holy Spirit by his cooperation (συνέργεια) in it.’¹⁷⁹ The Incarnation itself reveals the reason why Christ is the beginning and end of cosmic history through the *logoi*:

¹⁷⁸ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1133A).

¹⁷⁹ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 60 (CCSG 22: 79), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 127.

Because of Christ—or rather, the whole mystery of Christ—all the ages of time and the beings within those ages have received their beginning and end in Christ. For the union between a limit of the ages and limitlessness, between measure and immeasurability, between finitude and infinity, between Creator and creation, between rest and motion, was conceived before the ages. This union has been manifested in Christ at the end of time, and in itself brings God’s foreknowledge to fulfilment, in order that naturally mobile creatures might secure themselves around God’s total and essential immobility, desisting altogether from their movement toward themselves and toward each other.¹⁸⁰

In Chapter Four, I mentioned that Tollefsen and Perl both deny participation in the *logoi* given that they are essentially God and his divine wills. Maximus actually affirms the opposite in the age of *theosis* after the resurrection:

Only God, who transcends created beings, and who knows what he himself is in essence, foreknows the existence of all his creatures even before their creation. And in the future he will by grace confer on those created beings the knowledge of what they themselves and other beings are in essence, and manifest the principles [λόγους] of their origin which pre-exist uniformly in him.¹⁸¹

Knowledge of the pre-existing *logoi*, for which creatures only have created *logoi* as types and figures in this life, will be given to the creature in the resurrection. Maximus often labels *logoi* that deal with Providential economy as ‘theological’ or ‘spiritual’ *logoi*, which should conceptually be distinguished from the *logoi* of nature. However, knowledge of created and uncreated principles are both given by God’s grace in Christ:

¹⁸⁰ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 60 (CCSG 22: 76), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 125.

¹⁸¹ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 60 (CCSG 22: 79), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 128.

Who enlightened you with the faith of the holy, adorable, and consubstantial Trinity? Or who made known to you the incarnate dispensation of the one of the holy Trinity? Or who taught you about the principles of incorporeal beings and those concerning the origin and end of the visible world, or about the resurrection from the dead and eternal life, or about the glory of the kingdom of heaven and the awful judgment? Was it not the grace of Christ dwelling in you, which is the pledge of the Holy Spirit? What is greater than this grace, or what is better than this wisdom and knowledge?¹⁸²

Through his doctrine of the pre-existing *logoi*, Maximus is able to refute the Origenist theory of motion, where the pre-existing henad of intellects that were once in stasis fell into being and then movement. Now, the *Logos* as Creator wills (*logoi*) the whole history of the cosmos before time according to Providence. Body and soul do not pre-exist; they are created in being, then progress to movement, and end in rest. At the end of the ages, the faithful saints will receive their origin as their end, but it is an end based upon the grace of *theosis*. The grace of *theosis* is and will be revealed from the uncreated grace of the incarnate Christ. Through the grace of participation, the body of Christ will be fully and perichoretically recapitulated into its head, which is Christ, and God will be all in all.

¹⁸² Maximus, *De Char.* 4.77 (PG 90: 1069A), trans. Berthold, p. 84.

5.7 Conclusion

As we saw in Chapter Four, Maximus does not separate God's essence from His energies. When God acts in the world through his divine energies, Maximus holds that the energies are created effects, which 'happen to us.'¹⁸³ This does not mean that God is related to his creation only through extrinsic action; God never holds back the '[activation] of his grace'¹⁸⁴ in the world. The Incarnation of Christ is supreme revelation of the uncreated grace of God in the flesh. Through kenotic descent and a 'blessed inversion' of characteristics, Christ wholly enters into human life, including the assumption of a natural human will, soul and body. Not only is the Incarnation *the* unique event in world history, since it fully reveals the nature of divine paradox of grace as being both uncreated and created, but the grace of Christ's Incarnation is the foundation for the future deification of the Christian and the revelation of the uncreated grace of the *logoi*. In the next chapter, we will unpack the meaning of the grace of the Incarnation for the material world and human embodiment.

¹⁸³ Maximus, *Amb.* 71 (PG 91: 1036C).

¹⁸⁴ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 64 (CCSG 22: 199).

CHAPTER 6
THE GRACE OF THEURGY

‘Theurgies are the consummation of the theologies.’¹

6.1 The Theurgic Society

In an article by John Rist entitled, ‘Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the Weakness of the Soul,’ there is an intriguing description of the aims of the theurgic Neoplatonic philosopher Iamblichus to create a ‘theurgic society.’² What Rist means by this expression is that theurgic Neoplatonism, as embodied in theurgic rites, resisted the narrow view of many Platonists who saw salvation as accessible to only the select few, the philosophers.³ The search for a *via universalis* (that is, a universal liberation of the soul) accessible to all people led Iamblichus to assert the theurgic rites of the gods over, but not completely against, rational philosophy.⁴ Iamblichus

¹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *EH* 3.3.5 (PG 3: 432B): ‘καὶ ἔστι τῆς θεολογίας ἡ θεουργία συγκεφαλαίωσις.’ In this passage Pseudo-Dionysius is discussing the relationship between the two testaments in the Scriptures and how Jesus is the *theurgia* (θεουργία) of economy.

² John Rist, ‘Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the Weakness of the Soul,’ in *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought: Studies in Honour of Edouard Jeauneau*, ed. Haijo J. Westra (Leiden: Brill, 1992), p. 145.

³ For Plotinus’ disdain for ritual observances, see John Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: CUP, 1967), pp. 203-212.

⁴ John Rist, ‘Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the Weakness of the Soul,’ p. 145. Iamblichus’ position countered his contemporary and mentor Porphyry, who retained the search for the *via universalis* through transcendent philosophy. In *De Civ.* 10.2, Augustine notes that Porphyry could not find the *via universalis* among the any of the philosophical or religious sects, even among the

differs from many of his Neoplatonic predecessors in that he completely affirms material reality as the only true place⁵ for participation in the gods, and theurgy is the universal mechanism for the liberation of the soul. Christian theologians also posed the same criticisms against Platonism that would merely cultivate the souls of the learned few,⁶ but the Christian affirmation of the body and material reality as the location for God's manifestation often struggled up a steep path. However, the body is held to be sacred in orthodox Christian theology because it is rooted in God's plan for creation. Though patristic theologians, such as Origen,⁷ can see the body as

'induction of the Chaldeans.' See Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), pp. 136-41.

⁵ The concept of 'place' and 'sacred space' in theurgic Neoplatonism delimits an 'outside' or 'natural realm' apart from divine action. Iamblichus does distinguish between thing and symbol, or between place and sacred, but natural place is also where the sacred can emerge. For Iamblichus, the making sacred of a 'place' is rooted in its association with divine myths and cosmogony. This cosmic aspect of sacred space declined in later medieval and early modern thought. For a study on this transformation away from a Pseudo-Dionysian and Iamblichian notion of place and on 'sacred place' in early Medieval Neoplatonism, see Michael Harrington, *Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism* (Hampshire: UK, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁶ E.g., Origen, *Contra Celsius*, 5.43. There are Church Fathers who also rejected or criticized the Hellenic theurgic rites, but this does not mean that theurgy as a deifying act is not also implicit in their sacramentalism. For a reflection on this issue in Augustine, see John Milbank, 'Theurgy and Sophiology: The New Theological Horizon,' in *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word*, ed. Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009), p. 75, n. 81.

⁷ For an intriguing argument that Origen also taught a Christian form of theurgy, see Jason Parnell, 'The Theurgic Turn in Christian Thought: Iamblichus, Origen, Augustine, and the Eucharist' (PhD. diss., University of Michigan, 2009).

a fall from a pre-existing ethereal unity with God,⁸ there are equally counter positive affirmations of the body. The Cappadocian doctor Gregory Nazianzen beautifully describes the gift of the body in his *Oration* 38.11:

Intellect and the senses, once distinguished from one another, remained within their own limits, and bore the magnificence of the Creator-Word in themselves, silent praisers and thrilling heralds of His mighty work. The two had not yet mingled due to the mind and the senses not being joined together yet. The mingling would be a mark of greater wisdom and generosity in the creation of living things, but the exceeding goodness of God was not yet made known. Therefore, the Creator-Word, desiring to display this mingling, fashioned a single living being out of both the visible and invisible realities. Taking a body from already existing matter and breathing life into it from Himself, the Word fashioned an intellectual soul made in the image of God as a kind of second cosmos. He placed this creature on the earth, though weak in comparison to other animals, as an angel, able to worship God with the senses as well as the intellect.⁹

Patristic theology did not see sensible creation as a hindrance to fulfilling human nature because from the beginning it was an intrinsic aspect of humankind's anthropological makeup. Gregory envisions the physical body to be an instrument for worship of the Creator, not an object of disdain. As we will see, the sensible is also an intricate aspect of Christian sacramentalism and theurgy, particularly for Maximus.

⁸ Origen, *De Principiis* 2.9.1-8.

⁹ Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 38.11 (PG 36: 321C-324B). Maximus also cites this passage in *Amb.* 7 (PG 91: 1093D-96A).

Iamblichus did not abandon the philosophic quest for truth, but he did challenge the assumption that only the mind could ascend to the gods and unite with them. Unlike Plotinus's Gnosticizing ontology of the soul, Iamblichus believed that the soul was fully descended into the body, not just the lower aspect of it.¹⁰ This principle helped to solidify the need for material theurgic rites to divinize human beings.¹¹ In his classic *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus defends the descent of the gods through what I will call 'Neoplatonic grace' in the theurgic rites:

Granting, then, that ignorance and deception are faulty and impious, it does not follow on this that the offerings made to the gods and divine works are invalid, for it is not pure thought that unites theurgists to the gods. Indeed what, then, would hinder those who are theoretical philosophers from enjoying a theurgic union with the gods? But the situation is not so: it is the accomplishment of acts not to be divulged and beyond all conception, and the power of the unutterable symbols, understood solely by the gods, which establishes theurgic union...Hence it is not even chiefly through our intellection that divine causes are called into actuality; but it is necessary for these and all the best conditions of the soul and our ritual purity to pre-exist as auxiliary causes; but the things which properly arouse the divine will are the actual divine symbols. And so the attention of the gods is awakened by themselves, receiving from no inferior being any principle for themselves of

¹⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.8.1-4. See also A. C. Lloyd, 'The Later Neoplatonists,' in *CHLGEMP*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 287-93.

¹¹ Gregory Shaw convincingly argues that the descent of the soul is not a completely sufficient explanation of the move to the need for theurgy. Given that the ontological separation of higher aspects of the soul were more permanent in Plotinus, Iamblichus more reacted to the newer Gnosticizing aspects of Neoplatonism than to older forms of Platonism that did not make this absolute divide, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1971), pp. 10-17.

their characteristic activity.¹²

Iamblichus's almost postmodern response to an overt rationalism is countered by the affirmation of a pure soul and the engagement in the material theurgic symbols that ignite the interests and powers of the gods. It is also interesting that the last sentence quoted from the *De Mysteriis* 2.11 (96) concerns the utter gratuitousness of the gods's descent in the theurgic rites. There are no receptive 'principles' (ἀρχαί) in lower beings that conjure up the celestial 'energies' (ἐνεργείαι). Though Neoplatonic theurgy is a type of magic, it is not a system of practices that asserts control over the gods.¹³ E.R. Dodds labelled Iamblichus's *De Mysteriis* as a 'manifesto of irrationalism,' and due to obvious bias he instead sings the praises of the beautiful system of Plotinus. Dodds summarizes the choice of ritual over the theoretical in very scathing words:

¹² Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, 2.11 (96), trans. Emma Clarke, John Dillion, and Jackson Hershbell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), p. 115.

¹³ Iamblichus uses a clever distinction in *De Mysteriis* 4.2 (184) between being able to control the gods and being able to control the divine symbols that signal the established hierarchy of the gods (and down through this hierarchy to spirits, angels, demons, etc...): 'The whole of theurgy presents a double aspect. On the one hand, it is performed by men, and as such observes our natural rank in the universe; but on the other, it controls divine symbols, and in virtue of them is raised up to union with the higher powers, and directs itself harmoniously in accordance with their dispensation, which enables it quite properly to assume the mantle of the gods. It is in virtue of this distinction, then, that the art both naturally invokes the powers from the universe as superiors, inasmuch as the invoker is a man, and yet on the other hand gives them orders, since it invests itself, by virtue of the ineffable symbols, with the hieratic role of the gods,' trans. Emma Clarke, John Dillion, and Jackson Hershbell, p. 207. This is a fitting example of divine-human synergy in theurgic Neoplatonism. Humans can enact the power of the gods, but only through the prior establishment of a sacred hierarchy and sacred system of symbols connected with that hierarchy (this could be termed Neoplatonic grace).

To the discouraged minds of the fourth-century pagans such a message offered a seductive comfort. The ‘theoretical philosophers’ had now been arguing for some nine centuries, and what had come of it? Only a visibly declining culture, and the creeping growth of that Christian (ἄθεότης) which was too plainly sucking the life-blood of Hellenism.¹⁴ As vulgar magic is

¹⁴ Contrary to Dodds’ assertion, the life blood of Hellenism, which he probably identifies with the liberation of the soul through rational philosophy, was not vanquished but merely transformed through emergence of Christianity as the supreme religion of the Roman Empire. The Greek spirit remained after the advent of Neoplatonic theurgy, but there was a renewed focus on myths and cosmogony in relation to religious-philosophic practice. As Mircea Eliade elucidates concerning myth in general, ‘Not only is all that is told about the various events that took place and characters who lived mythical, but everything connected, directly, or indirectly, with those primeval events and characters is mythical also...from one point of view, every myth is ‘cosmogonic’ because every myth expresses the appearance of a new cosmic ‘situation’ or primeval event which becomes simply by being thus expressed, a paradigm for all time to come,’ *Patterns in Comparative Religions* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 416. For Eliade, there is a distinction between the cosmogonic myth and other myths such as an origin myth. The ‘new situation’ that he describes is an origin myth tied to a cosmogonic one. Therefore, myth is a dynamic interplay between human actions and the cosmogonic stories of the gods and goddesses. Every new act of human mythic creation, through *mimesis*, is rooted in a foundational cosmogonic context in which to see the drama unfolding. Neoplatonic theurgy provided a religious-philosophic system based upon theurgic ritual in which eclectic Hellenism could take mythic drama and convert it to deifying theo-drama. Iamblichus himself describes his doctrine as being an embodied ritualized cosmogony: ‘And indeed, speaking generally, this doctrine constitutes the ruination of sacred ritual and theurgical communion of gods with men, by banishing the presence of the higher classes of being outside the confines of the earth,’ *De Mysteriis* 1.8 (28), trans. Emma Clarke, John Dillion, and Jackson Hershbell, *On the Mysteries*, p. 35. The *mimesis* of the gods became more than just imitation. Through material ritual, the participant was deified and united (ἔνωσις) with their god, and thus it liberated the soul. The Plotinian and Porphyrian systems of rational philosophy were transcended through descending into materiality in theurgy. Iamblichus connected the myths and cosmogony with participations in the gods through ritual theurgy. For Christian theurgy, the eclectic *via universalis* of the Hellenic theurgists were subsumed under the cosmogony of the *Ecclesia*. With Dionysius and Maximus, the cosmos—with all of its powers and principalities—becomes the Church writ large even though the specific rites in the Church are retained as being special and uniquely deifying. This theurgic transformation does not assert hegemony over natural diversity (as a negative movement), but emphasizes the cosmogonic context of Christian monotheism and a theology of participation that allows for the very possibility of the affirmation of diversity (there is no true *saeculum*). Only the imparticipable One beyond participation can paradoxically give a share of itself with seemingly infinite variety and particularity. This is the brilliant insight of the Neoplatonic theurgists who saw reality both inside and outside the theurgic rites as expressions of, and participation in, the transcendent One. Gregory Shaw asserts

commonly the last resort of the personally desperate, of those whom man and God have alike failed, so theurgy became the refuge of a despairing intelligentsia which already felt *la fascination de l'abîme*.¹⁵

It is quite apparent that *via universalis* sought after by Dodds resides in the 'pristine' expressions of prior Neoplatonic systems.¹⁶ Such bias has more recently been rejected through renewed studies of theurgic Neoplatonism, both in its own Pagan context and in relation to Christianity,¹⁷ but several scholars of early Byzantine

that Christian theurgy under Dionysius cuts off potential for a true plural 'theurgic society' rooted in natural symbols that unite one with their god, 'Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite,' pp. 597-98. I agree with Shaw in terms of Pseudo-Dionysius, but the scope of Christian theurgy is much larger with later commenters of Pseudo-Dionysius, such as Maximus Confessor and John Scotus Eriugena. Michael Harrington describes the movement from Hellenic theurgy to Christian theurgy in this way: 'The Christians, like the Hellenes, have a temple and an altar, but they have moved the altar indoors, and the walls of the church now enclose the space within which things can become symbolic. Where Iamblichus simple says that the sacred place is the medium for divine union, Dionysius begins to explain how this is possible,' *Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism*, p. 12. Christian theurgy indeed grounds the participation in the divine in ecclesial symbols, but the scope expands into a cosmic liturgy, which then unified all reality in the Providential care of the One Λόγος. I hope to show that Dionysius' thoroughly ecclesial theurgy is complimented by Maximus' natural *typoi* (τύποι) in this regard because he makes the Church more an image of the cosmos.

¹⁵ E. R. Dodds, 'Theurgy and its Relationship to Neoplatonism,' *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 37 (1947), p. 59. Since the 1950's, there has been a more positive assessment of Neoplatonic theurgy. For an excellent summary of these developments, see Serio Knipe, 'Recycling the Refuge-Heap of Magic: Scholarly Approaches to Theurgy Since 1963,' eds. Peter Brown and Rita Lizzi Testa in *Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire: The Breaking of a Dialogue (IVth-VIth Century A.D.)*, Proceedings of the International Conference at the Monastery of Bose (Münster: LIT Verlag Münster, 2011), pp. 163-70.

¹⁶ E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

¹⁷ C.f., Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*; also Gregory Shaw, 'Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite,' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7.4 (1999), pp. 573-99; John Milbank, 'Theurgy and Sophiology,' pp. 45-85.

theology, such as Andrew Louth¹⁸ and Vladimir Lossky, articulate the position that the terms and expressions that Christian theologians, such as Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus Confessor, use are more due to the shared Hellenic philosophical vocabulary than to agreement on the content of theurgy.¹⁹ Louth and Lossky are indeed correct that Christian theology and Neoplatonic theology shared a common cultural *milieu*, but the question is not ‘who borrowed from whom.’ Instead, one should ask ‘how do the two traditions correlate in terms of theurgy, properly understood?’

In this final chapter, I would like to introduce an alternative narrative to Dodds’s understanding of theurgic Neoplatonism and to Louth’s²⁰ and Lossky’s

¹⁸ Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow, 1989), pp. 23-24. Louth actually goes into the connections between the Christian and Hellenic versions of theurgy, but his conclusions fall slightly short due to a misreading of grace in the theurgic Neoplatonists.

¹⁹ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), p. 32.

²⁰ To be fair to Louth, he does not reject the efficacy of grace in the sacramental rites of the liturgy. He does, however, distinguish between the Neoplatonic usage of *theurgia* (θεουργία) and the Pseudo-Dionysius’ usage of the similar term *ieurgia* (ιεουργία, the celebration of the liturgy itself, or the individual rites themselves), furning a plethora of passages to demonstrate his point. Louth notes that Pseudo-Dionysius uses *theurgia* mostly in a Christological context, where the liturgy celebrates the works that Christ has accomplished. In this application of the term, theurgy does not apply to the rites being performed. See his ‘Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism in Denys the Areopagite,’ in *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986), p. 435. This analysis, however, does hinge around the understanding of grace in theurgic Neoplatonism, which I think would counter the argument that the influence goes beyond word usage to content. Also, Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus both see the rites as deifying the faithful (even those without understanding), which is a thoroughly theurgic principle. Finally, if sacramental rites are connected with deification and then rooted in Christology, which in fact they are for both theologians, then the *theurgia* of Christ

understanding of a Christian theurgic ecclesiology by analysing the theurgic and sacramental ecclesiology of Maximus Confessor as found in his treatment of the holy *synaxis* (σύναξις) in the *Mystagogy*.²¹ Maximus does not provide a systematic treatise on ecclesiology, but such a theological and dogmatic concern did not really emerge until much later. Maximus's reflections on ecclesiology are also very sparse in his surviving writings. We can, however, gain a sense of the importance of the ecclesial hierarchy and the sacred rites on the basis of his *Myst*.²² Following Pseudo-Dionysius's own *Celestial Hierarchy* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*,²³ Maximus unifies most all of the themes of his metaphysics and Christology into a reflection on the inner meanings of the liturgy.

For centuries scholars did not pay attention to Maximus's *Myst*, because it was perhaps assumed that he did not contribute anything particularly unique to Pseudo-Dionysius's own theology of the liturgy and ecclesiology, or perhaps that

descends into materiality and sensible symbols to deify the faithful and unify them in their ascent to God. There must be an interchange between the sensible symbols and the contemplative ascent.

²¹ Going forward, the *Mystagogy* will be abbreviated as *Myst*.

²² Andrew Louth, 'The Ecclesiology of Saint Maximos the Confessor,' *International Journal of the Study of the Christian Church* 4 (2004), pp. 109-120.

²³ John Meyendorff argues that Maximus corrects Pseudo-Dionysius' separation of theology (θεολογία) from divine works in the liturgy (θεουργία), *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, pp. 98-111. Andrew Louth convincingly debunks this distinction through analysis of Pseudo-Dionysius' Christological focus in *theurgia* and from Maximus' own citations of Pseudo-Dionysius in the actual liturgical rites. See 'St. Denys the Areopagite and St. Maximus the Confessor: a Question of Influence,' ed. E. Livingstone, in *Studia Patristica* 27 (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1993), pp. 166-174.

the *Myst.* merely intends to give a spiritual interpretation of the *synaxis* to the loss of its sacramental materiality. I will argue on the contrary that Maximus thoroughly includes the body and materiality in his *Myst.* of the holy *synaxis*. Despite Maximus's cosmological meditations being intertwined with liturgical practice, worship through liturgical act is always an embodied experience, both individual and collective.²⁴ Through an embodied hierarchy and liturgy, the Church comes in direct contact with the full presence of God. Adam Cooper summarizes this position well:

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. This affirmation does not simply set before us a rhetorical image for mental appreciation, but a profound truth that identifies the liturgically constituted phenomenon which is the Church as the concrete locus whereby Christ is universally identifiable and tangibly accessible in all his salvific splendour.²⁵

Instead of a spiritualizing attitude towards materiality and the body in liturgical practice, Maximus emphasizes the deification²⁶ of grace upon all who attend the

²⁴ Mark Searle, 'Ritual,' eds. Cheslyn Jones *et al*, *The Study of the Liturgy*, 2nd rev. edition (London: SPCK: New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 56, also cited in Adam Cooper, *The Body in Maximus Confessor*, p.165. See Adam Cooper's chapter on 'Corporality and the Church' in Maximus, *The Body in Maximus Confessor*, pp. 165-205; *idem*. 'St. Maximus the Confessor on Priesthood, Hierarchy, and Rome,' *Pro Ecclesia* 10/3 (2001), pp. 346-67.

²⁵ Adam Cooper, *The Body in St. Maximus Confessor*, p. 167.

²⁶ Instead of the Church being just a sub element of Maximus' theology, Larchet has more recently emphasized how the Church is the *locuna* for the deification of human beings: 'It is only in the church that [humankind] could be deified. Indeed it is the Church that bears the power of 'new mystery,' which is that of the Incarnation but also the end in deification. To her the mystery of deification of [humankind] has been given. For Maximus like his predecessors, the Church is the place where we reach union with God, the environment in which deification takes place' (C'est dans l'Église

synaxis regardless of their *philosophical* development,²⁷ and he exhorts the faithful to attend the theurgic rites, which carries them up to God as God descends down to them through the liturgy:

This, indeed, is why the blessed old man²⁸ believed that every Christian should be exhorted—and he never failed to do this—to frequent God’s holy church and never to abandon the holy *synaxis* accomplished therein because of the holy angels who remain there and who take note each time people enter and present themselves to God, and they make supplications for them; likewise because of the grace of the Holy Spirit which is always invisibly present, but in a special way at the time of the holy *synaxis*. This grace transforms and changes each person who is found there and in fact remoulds him in proportion to what is more divine in him and leads him to what is revealed through the mysteries which are celebrated, even if he does not himself feel this because he is still among those who are children in Christ, unable to see either into the depths of the reality or the grace operating in it,²⁹ which is revealed through each of the divine symbols of salvation being accomplished, and which proceeds according to the order and progression

seulement que l’homme pourra être divinisé. C’est l’Église en effet qui porte la puissance du «nouveau mystère», qui est celui de l’Incarnation mais aussi de la divinisation qui en est la fin. C’est à elle que le mystère de la divinisation de l’homme a été confié. Pour Maxime comme pour ses prédécesseurs, l’Église est le milieu où l’on atteint l’union avec Dieu, le milieu où s’opère la divinisation.), *La Divinisation de L’homme*, p. 400.

²⁷ It is important to point out that Maximus does conceive of deification as being both ontological and moral. There is a dual aspect to deification. On the one hand, the Christian shares in the grace of God through imitation of His way of life (*Amb.* 10, PG 91: 1144B) by practicing the virtues. On the other hand, the full ontological transformation of deification awaits completion in the eschaton (*Ad Thal.* 22, CCSG 7: 141). See Norman Russell’s analysis of these two dimensions to deification, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 262-95.

²⁸ Berthold notes that the ‘blessed old-man’ is not identified by Maximus. Following Pseudo-Dionysius’ reference to his master Hierotheos, which could indicate a fictional creation of the Confessor for modesty. However, Berthold notes that it could be St. Sophonius or another acquaintance. See Christoph Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem* (Paris, 1972).

²⁹ Note the passage in Iamblichus’ *De Mysteriis* 2.11 (97) quoted above that emphasizes that the power of the gods works on the participants even though they may not be engaged in intellection.

from preliminaries to the end of everything.³⁰

Grace is at work deifying the participants in the liturgy through the power of the Holy Spirit as each of the ‘divine symbols of salvation’ are accomplished from beginning to end. So then, at the centre of the divine mysteries being performed in the *synaxis* is the deifying grace of God upon the participant. Notice that Maximus does not base deification during the *synaxis* on the ability of the participant to interpret the symbols mentally or spiritually, which would lead to higher contemplation and union. The deifying power of God is a grace working through His holy Church regardless of the contemplative understanding of the faithful.³¹ God’s grace will never be held in check, and no one is able to hold back His ability to ‘activate his grace.’³²

Despite the similarities between Iamblichian, Pseudo-Dionysian and Maximian theurgy, their difference lies in two key areas. First, there is a transformation of the *via universalis* of the Pagan theurgists into the *via ecclesia* of Christian theurgy,³³ particularly in the theurgy of Pseudo-Dionysius. The cosmic

³⁰ Maximus, *Myst.* 24 (PG 91: 702D-704A), trans. George Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, pp. 206-7.

³¹ Later, in chapter 23, Maximus will make a distinction between those in the service who are more active and those who are more gnostic, but the same grace operates in both. He also emphasizes that both groups begin with sensible symbols. We will address this further below.

³² Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 64 (CCSG 22: 199).

³³ For an excellent survey of the Ancient Egyptian mystery rites as a ‘world theater,’ which subsequently provides the social context in later Hellenic culture for a truly Christian Eucharistic

dance of the Pagan gods and celestial powers gives way to the celestial hierarchies of the angels and heavenly powers spiralling round the Triune God and down through the ecclesial hierarchy and through the holy *synaxis*. Christ's Gospel brings about the new age of the Church (the 'new mystery'³⁴) and the kingdom of God. Now, the Church is the ultimate social, the true theurgic society. Maximus will also go beyond the ecclesial symbols to the *typoi* (τύποι) found in nature (similar to Origen's concept of this), which I believe compliments the theurgy of Pseudo-Dionysius. This expanded sense of Christian ecclesiology to include the concept of theurgy truly presents a parallel alternative to Neoplatonic theurgy in that plurality gives way to unity, but at the same time it is a unity under Christ, which grounds a positive diversity with the divine love and providence.

The second area of difference between Christian and Neoplatonic theurgy is the centrality of Christ. Maximus understands the liturgy from an Incarnational perspective. God's divine works of grace, which are summed up in Christ, flow down through the holy symbols, but there is not a magical conjuring up of the divine works of grace by the bishop presiding over the liturgy. The blessed exchange in deification must be due to the synergistic grace of God in reciprocal descent-ascent

drama, see Christine C. Schnusenberg, *The Mythological Traditions of Liturgical Drama: The Eucharist as Theater* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2010). The truly theurgic and participatory elements are needed in Schnusenberg's account to give a full Eucharistic ontology in addition to the Eucharistic theater. See Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology*.

³⁴ Maximus, *Amb.* 42 (PG 91: 1344D).

according to the proportionate fitness of the participant to receive the deifying powers. A viewpoint that understands the theurgical rites to be manipulative of the gods would be a misreading of both Christian and Neoplatonic theurgies.³⁵

6.2 Neoplatonic Theurgy

The first occurrence of someone being termed a theurgist or practicing theurgy (θεουργός) was Julianus in the second century.³⁶ As Dodds notes, this self-ascribed title was probably due to a desire to be ‘acted upon’ by the gods instead of merely speaking about them (θεολόγος). Little is known about the beginnings of theurgy, but most scholars agree that the religious underpinnings of the tradition stem from the *Chaldean Oracles* and the *Corpus Hermeticum*.³⁷ One of the early founders of theurgic Neoplatonism was the Syrian Iamblichus (c. 245-c. 325). His religious philosophy influenced the later Athenian school of Neoplatonism through his chief predecessors Syrianus and Proclus.

Theurgy in late Neoplatonism describes various rites and rituals that evoke the power or presence of the gods with the goal of purifying the soul for liberation and achieving union, or *henosis* (ἕνωσις), with them. Through the rites, the

³⁵ Iamblichus explicitly denies that through the rites the theurgist manipulates the gods as through magic. He consistently affirms that the divine powers received in the rites is the work of the gods alone, which one could interpret these gifts to be by grace: *De Mysteriis* 1.21 (66), 2.11 (96-97), 3.1 (100), 3.22 (153), 3.31 (178).

³⁶ Dodds, ‘Theurgy and its Relationship to Neoplatonism,’ p. 55.

³⁷ Dodds, ‘Theurgy and its Relationship to Neoplatonism,’ pp. 55ff.

participant can possess the power of the gods. As Proclus says in *PT* 1.25, theurgy is ‘a power higher than all human wisdom embracing the blessings of divination, the purifying powers of initiation and in a word all the operations of divine possession.’ Striving for divine possession, however, was not a complete abandonment of the intellectual mysticism of union that was characteristic of Plotinian and Porphyrian Neoplatonism.

Iamblichian theurgic Neoplatonism sought to give the theurgic rites a philosophical underpinning while recognizing the limits of knowledge of the One through mind alone. This balance is seen more in Proclus due to the extensive writings of his that remain. With Iamblichus, we only have fragments and the *De Mysteriis*, but this is mostly a work of religion and not so much of philosophy. If the *Theologoumena Arithmeticae* is the work of Iamblichus, then we have more information concerning his philosophy. There are also fragments of Iamblichus found in the commentary on Aristotle’s *De Anima* by Priscianus (Simplicius?) that yields a lot of information about his psychology.³⁸

Damascius’s *Commentary on the Phaedo* is often cited as a defense of the theurgic over the intellectual: ‘Some honour philosophy more highly, as do Porphyry and Plotinus and many other philosophers; others honour more highly

³⁸ Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, p. 98 n. 2.

the hieratic art as do Iamblicus and Syrianus and Proclus and all the theurgists.³⁹ On the surface this would appear to be a straightforward division of the two strands of thought, but in actuality theurgy was more nuanced than this. Proclus particularly embraced a division between the lower and higher theurgies that unite with the higher world of the intelligible.⁴⁰ The Athenian school of Neoplatonism, of which Proclus was a part, placed education in the theurgic mysteries at the end of the curriculum.⁴¹ Plotinus and Iamblichus, however, had different soteriologies, which influenced their respective philosophical approaches to noetics and theurgy.⁴²

Because the soul had completely descended into the body (unlike Plotinus's understanding of a higher, undescended, aspect of the soul) as an integral part of the human person's essence (also with the paradox of the soul being both mortal and immortal!⁴³), the soul and the intelligible world were truly ineffable realities. This is why Iamblichus went to great lengths to distinguish between human philosophy and the experience of descending divine grace. Gregory Shaw notes that Iamblichus's philosophical position here intended 'to correct the kind of thinking

³⁹ Damascius, *Commentary on the Phaedo* 2.1 (172), trans. Anne Sheppard, 'Proclus' Attitude to Theurgy,' pp. 212-13.

⁴⁰ For the argument of a two-fold theurgy of higher and lower in Proclus, see Laurence J. Rosan, *The Philosophy of Proclus* (New York, NY: Cosmos, 1949), pp. 213ff.

⁴¹ Lucas Siovanes, *Proclus and Neoplatonic Science and Philosophy*, p. 192.

⁴² Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, pp. 108-09.

⁴³ See the whole chapter nine of Gregory Shaw's *Theurgy and the Soul*.

that fails to distinguish between the content of a discursive statement and its evocative and iconic power.’⁴⁴ Iamblichus demonstrated through philosophical analysis, and a re-constructed psychology of the soul, why his system of theurgy was a valid approach to reaching *henosis* with the One (or more specifically the first Hypothesis⁴⁵), but he also understood that the ineffable gap between the One and the human being could not be bridged through mind and contemplation alone. Given the limited noetic horizon of human beings, Iamblichus underscored that the theurgic rites do not guarantee accurate knowledge, but they connect the participant with the truth as revealed in the rites themselves:

I have laboured this point at some length for this reason: that you not believe that all authority over activity in the theurgic rites depends on us, or suppose that their genuine performance is assured by the true condition of our acts of thinking, or that they are made false by our deception. For not even if we know the particular traits that accompany each kind have we then hit upon the truth in regard to the performance of sacred rites. Effective union certainly never takes place without knowledge, but nevertheless it is not identical with it. Thus, divine purity does not come about through right knowledge, in the way that bodily purity does through chastity, but divine union and purification actually go beyond knowledge. Nothing, then, of any such qualities in us, such as humans contributes in any

⁴⁴ Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, p. 109.

⁴⁵ It is unclear in Syrianus and Proclus just how far into the first Hypothesis the soul can unite and participate; see Anne Sheppard, ‘Proclus’ Attitude to Theurgy,’ pp. 214ff. This is in relation to the four *maniai* (μανίαι) in Plato’s *Phaedrus* 244ff: the mantic divination of Apollo; the telestic possession-trance of Dionysus; the poetic from the Muses; and the erotic frenzied love of Eros and Aphrodite. Sheppard argues that Proclus holds theurgy to reach the first three levels of *maniai*, but that the final erotic union with the One is more of a Plotinian mystical union of mind. Iamblichus, however, did hold the theurgies to go all the way up through all four *maniai*.

way towards the accomplishment of divine transactions.⁴⁶

The means of accomplishing the operations of divine possession are multiform; they include prayers, rites, dreams,⁴⁷ sacrifices and contemplation. As stated in the introduction, the magical nature of the theurgy is based upon what Iamblichus calls a ‘double aspect.’ Theurgy, ‘both naturally invokes the powers from the universe as superiors, inasmuch as the invoker is a man, and yet on the other hand gives them orders, since it invests itself, by virtue of the ineffable symbols, with the hieratic role of the gods.’⁴⁸ The gods established a hierarchic system of symbols, but at the same time the theurgist is skilled in accessing these divine systems. One can see an interplay or synergy between the theurgist and the grace of the gods. As noted in the introduction, Iamblichus certainly held to the position of grace in his system of theurgy.

⁴⁶ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 2.11 (98), trans. Clarke, Dillion and Hershbell, *On the Mysteries*, pp. 115-16.

⁴⁷ Iamblichus makes an interesting statement about dreams in *De Mysteriis* 3.3 (106): ‘The soul has a double life, the one with the body, the other apart from all body. When we are awake, in respect of the other life, we use mostly the life in common with the body—except, perhaps, when thinking or engaging in pure thoughts, we detach ourselves wholly from the body. And in sleep we are completely freed, as it were, from chains confining us, and we engage in the life detached from generation. At this time, then, this form of life, whether it is intellectual or divine, which is the same thing, or each one separately, it is aroused in us, and energises according to its own nature.’ Earlier in this passage, Iamblichus ties the dream state with the fitness (ἐπιτηδειότητα) of the recipient to receive the divinization of the gods: ‘But dream-sleep and possession of the eyes, a seizure similar to a blackout, a state of between sleep and wakefulness, and presently a stirring or complete wakefulness, all of these are divine and fit for reception of the gods, and they are sent by the gods themselves, and such things precede it, a part of the divine epiphany.’

⁴⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 4.2 (184).

This viewpoint is evident in his discussion of foreknowledge in *De Mysteriis* 3.1 (100-101). The assertion that foreknowledge (πρόγνωσις) is accessible to the human being by nature would mean that it comes into being or exists in nature. Iamblichus retorts that foreknowledge is 'a thing divine, supernatural, sent from heaven above; both unbegotten and eternal, it take priority by its own nature.' The divine source of foreknowledge of future events is rooted in the gratuitous gift of the gods in the theurgic rites. Iamblichus takes his argument one step further by stating that divination is not due to materiality as such but to the utter gift of the gods in theurgy:

The greatest talisman, then, against all such difficulties is this: to know the principle of divination, to know that it is activated neither by bodies nor by bodily conditions, neither by a natural object nor by natural powers, neither by human disposition nor its related habits...Rather, all of its supreme power belongs to the gods, and is bestowed by the gods. Divination is accomplished by divine acts and signs, and consists of divine visions and scientific insights. All else is subordinate, instrumental to the gift of foreknowledge sent down by the gods.⁴⁹

Another question concerning Iamblichus's understanding of the grace of the gods in Iamblichus is that of the necessity for the emanation of divine powers as in Plotinian metaphysics. I believe Iamblichus most clearly points to the gratuitous nature of grace in the gods while still affirming that it is their nature to give, particularly through theurgic rites, in *De Mysteriis* 5.10 (211):

⁴⁹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 3.1 (100-01), trans. Clarke, Dillion and Hershbell, *On the Mysteries*, p. 119.

[Daemons and terrestrial or encosmic divine powers are] our most immediate superiors in rank; the most perfect and dominant class of causes of the efficacy of sacrifices, however, we declare to be linked to the demiurgic and supremely perfect powers. And since these embrace within themselves all other causes of whatever sort, we declare that in conjunction with these are set in motion at once all others such as have any creative power, and from all these there descends a common benefit to the whole realm of generation, sometimes upon cities and peoples, or nations of all sorts, or other segments of humanity larger or smaller than these, at other times bestowing benefits ungrudgingly upon households or individuals, carrying out this apportionment of their own free will, and not under any pressure from the would-be beneficiaries, making their judgment with an intellect free from passion, out of a sense of affinity and kinship, as to how they should grant their favours, one single bond through an ineffable process of communion.⁵⁰

Not only do the gods ungrudgingly offer assistance to the whole realm of generation, but also there are several key terms in this passage reveal a fundamental dimension to Iamblichus's Hermetic cosmology.⁵¹ According to Iamblichus, the gods have kinship (συγγένεια), affinity (οἰκειότης), and sympathy (συμπάθεια) with human beings. Iamblichus rejects the horizontal understanding of theurgy and divine sympathy that only stays within the *analogia* of the material world, which he perceives to be sorcery.⁵² Instead, Iamblichus emphasizes through *analogia* the cosmogonic activity of theurgy that interacts with divine gifts and powers. The body and the soul are in horizontal sympathy, but the soul and the

⁵⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 5.10 (211), trans. Clarke, Dillion and Hershbell, *On the Mysteries*, pp. 241-43).

⁵¹ Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁵² Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, p. 169.

gods are in vertical sympathy with one another. Through the theurgic rites, the gods chime to the soul's intimations of its connection with divinity,⁵³ and the descent of the gods in theurgy creates a sacred space where the mystical experience of the soul can take place in time and space. These characteristics of theurgic cosmogony offer a tremendous resource for Christian theurgy and religious experience:

But we encourage our awareness of this descent not when we merely look, but when we act in accordance with the processes of nature, which means being alert to the subtle affinities between matter and spirit and between one material thing and another. Mysticism is therefore for Iamblichus entirely liturgical and located, and surprisingly it appears to be this pagan current which bequeathed to Christian mysticism a more rigorously ritual, cosmic, topographical and collective focus.⁵⁴

A final aspect of Iamblichian theurgy and grace in relation to Christian theurgy that I would like to address is that of 'fitness,' which Iamblichus uses the term *epitēdeiotēs* (ἐπιτηδειότης), for the reception of the divine powers. Theurgy requires that theurgist not only practice the correct rites but also have a pure soul to be the proper receptacle for the gods. Since the Liddell and Scott Greek Lexicon does not have an extensive definition of *epitēdeiotēs*, Dodds offers a three option definition of his own in his commentary on Proclus's *Elements of Theology*: (1) an inherent capacity for acting or being acted upon in a specific way; (2) an inherent

⁵³ Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, p. 175.

⁵⁴ John Milbank, 'Theurgy and Sophiology,' p. 77.

affinity of one substance for another; and (3) an inherent or induced capacity for the reception of a divine influence (c.f., *Corpus Hermeticum* 16.15).⁵⁵ The third instance of *epitedeios* is most common in theurgic Neoplatonism, and Dodds even notes that *epitedeios* used in this sense generally refers to a person 'being in a state of grace to perceive the divine presence.'⁵⁶

Fitness for divine reception can take place in a variety of contexts. Iamblichus uses it to refer to the magical rites themselves, to a pure soul, and even to matter (ὕλη) itself. In fact, Iamblichus is one of the most positive affirmers of material existence in the Pagan Neoplatonic tradition. In *De Mysteriis* 5.23 (233), Iamblichus describes why matter is suitable for divine action:

...the primary beings illuminate even the lowest levels, and the immaterial are present immaterially to the material. And let there be no astonishment if in this connection we speak of a pure and divine form of matter; for matter also issues from the father and creator off all, and thus gains its perfection, which is suitable (ἐπιτήδειος) to the reception of gods. And, at the same time, nothing hinders the superior beings from being able to illuminate their inferiors, nor yet, by consequence, is matter excluded from participation in its betters, so that such of it as is perfect and pure and of good type is not unfitted to receive the gods.⁵⁷

The suitability of the recipient of divine action was also seen as an innate aspect of the human being, but it was also activated through the operation of the gods, which,

⁵⁵ Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, 2nd ed., revised text with intro. trans., and comm. By E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 344-45.

⁵⁶ E. R. Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, p. 345.

⁵⁷ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 5.23 (233), trans. Clarke, Dillion and Hershbell, *On the Mysteries*, p. 267.

in other words, would make it subject to grace.

In conclusion, many aspects of the theology and philosophy of mystical union with the divine in theurgic Neoplatonism are wholly consistent with what I have called 'Neoplatonic grace.' Christian theurgy also affirms the necessity of grace in the process of deification, but of course it is much more systematized and developed than in Iamblichus and Proclus. However, the critique of Dodds has been shown to be completely without foundation. Iamblichus's own defense of theurgy in the *De Mysteriis* demonstrates that grace and fitness are absolutely required if the embodied soul is to engage the powers of the gods. Maximus will develop his own theurgic mystagogy that brings a Christological and Ecclesial focus without losing the revelation of the divine in the sensible world.

6.3 Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus on Habitual Fitness

Christian theurgy also contained the notion of *epitedeiotēs* as a receptive and suitable object for divine action and illumination. In *DN* 4.4, Pseudo-Dionysius brings together mental and experiential participation in God. He declares that 'all things desire [the Good]: Everything with mind and reason seeks to know it, everything

sentient yearns to perceive it, everything lacking perception has a living and instinctive longing for it, and everything lifeless and merely existent turns, in its own fashion, for a share of it.⁵⁸ In describing how the Good extends its light to all things, Pseudo-Dionysius states that ‘it illuminates whatever is capable of receiving its light and yet it never loses the utter fullness of its light.’⁵⁹ If there is weakness of light in something in the cosmos, Pseudo-Dionysius believes that it is not due to source of light but to the ‘unsuitability’ (ἀνεπιτηδειότης) of the one receiving the light. So, just as the cleansing of the soul is essential for the reception of the grace of the gods in Neoplatonic theurgy, Christian theurgy requires natural and moral aptitude to be open to divinization.

Maximus also defines the extent of deification and the reception of divine power in *analogia* to the ability of the recipient. This does not mean that there is not a natural fitness for divine imitation, such as the virtues, but that the ability to move towards deification is not a natural faculty; it must be given by God’s grace. Maximus describes some of the natural capacities that are implanted⁶⁰ in human

⁵⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 4.4 (PG 3: 700B), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 75.

⁵⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN*, 4.4. (PG 3: 697D), trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 74.

⁶⁰ ‘Providence has implanted a divine standard or law in created beings, and in accordance with this law when we are ungrateful for spiritual blessings we are schooled in gratitude by adversity, and brought to recognize through this experience that all such blessings are produced through the workings of divine power. This is to prevent us from becoming irrepressibly conceited, and from

nature:

When God created human nature, at the same time as He gave it being and free will He joined to it the capacity for carrying out the duties laid upon it. By this capacity I mean the impulse implanted in human nature on the level of both being and free will: on the level of being, so that man has the power to achieve the virtues; on the level of free-will, so that he may use this power in the right way.⁶¹

In another passage, the Confessor notes how there are natural faculties to accept the divine gifts:

The intellect is the organ of wisdom, the intelligence that of spiritual knowledge. The natural sense of assurance common to both intellect and intelligence is the organ of faith established in each of them, while natural compassion is the organ of the gift of healing. For, corresponding to every divine gift, there is in us an appropriate and natural organ capable of receiving it—a kind of capacity, or intrinsic state or disposition...In each of us the energy of the Spirit is made manifest according to the measure of his faith. Therefore each of us is the steward of his own grace and, if we think logically, we should never envy another person the enjoyment of his gifts, since the disposition which makes us capable of receiving divine blessings depends on ourselves...In other words, divine blessings are bestowed according to the measure of faith in each man. Similarly, the strength of our faith is revealed by the zeal with which we act. Thus our actions disclose the measure of faith, and the strength of our faith determines the measure of grace that we receive. Conversely, the extent to which we fail to act reveals the measure of our lack of faith, and our lack of faith in turn determines the

thinking in our arrogance that we possess virtue and spiritual knowledge by nature and not by grace. If we did this we would be using what is good to produce what is evil: the very things which should establish knowledge of God unshaken within us will instead be making us ignorant of Him,' Maximus, *Philokalia*, vol 2, eds. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London, UK: Faber & Faber, 1982), p. 212.

⁶¹ Maximus, *Philokalia*, p. 193.

degree to which we are deprived of grace.⁶²

In this passage, Maximus indicates that there are natural faculties and dispositions in the human person that are open to the grace of God. However, throughout his writings, Maximus affirms that there is not a natural potency (δύναμις) for deification:

For we are active, insofar as we have an operative rational faculty, productive of the virtues by nature, and a intellectual faculty receptive of all spiritual knowledge, unlimited in potency....And we will be passive when, completely finishing with the *logoi* of beings from nothing, we come unknowingly into the Cause of beings, and cease, along with things limited by nature, from our own faculties, becoming that which is in no way the accomplishment of a potency according to nature, since our nature possesses no faculty apprehensive of what is beyond nature.⁶³

Here, Maximus appears to be talking about the order of grace in deification as being beyond nature, which would be the supernatural. Even though the human being may have a natural disposition, faculty or fitness for reception of the divine participation, Maximus affirms that the accomplishment of divinization is strictly by the grace of God.

For Maximus, the natural is supernaturally orientated towards its own end in deification. This is why the virtues are considered natural (pre-supposing grace),

⁶² Maximus, *Philokalia*, p. 217.

⁶³ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7:141), trans. Cyril Crawford, 'Receptive Potency in Maximus Confessor' (forthcoming).

but the gift of deification is only through the grace and power of the Spirit. This is the summation of the whole purpose behind Maximus's theology of the divine *logoi* that pre-exist in God as origin, are at work in the cosmos and enable human understanding, and that end in rest in God through their revelation to the creature. The *logos* of human nature is fixed and naturally inheres through grace, but the *tropos* of supernatural grace relies on the free will choice of the creature (in well-being) to live according to his or her natural beginning and end in God:⁶⁴

In such a person the apostolic word is fulfilled: *In him we live and move and have our being*. For whoever does not violate the *logos* of his own existence that pre-existed in God is in God through diligence; and he moves in God according to the *logos* of well-being that pre-existed in God when he lives virtuously; and he lives in God according to the *logos* of his eternal being that pre-existed in God. On the one hand, insofar as he is free of unruly passions. But in the future age when graced with divinization, he will affectionately love and cleave to the *logoi* already mentioned that pre-existed in God, or rather, he will love God himself, in whom the *logoi* of beautiful things are securely grounded.⁶⁵

The gift of deification is the supernatural consummation of creatures. Even though there is no natural power inherent in creatures for deification, it is their teleologically oriented end according to Providence. How is grace both natural and

⁶⁴ *Amb. 7* (PG 91: 1081A, C), Greek inserted by me: 'All beings have a preliminary participation in God, according to the analogy of their creation especially rational beings, which according to the reason of creation, are seated in God himself and therefore are called portion of God...Every man is a portion of God, but not under any condition: he was created as a portion of God and remains as such as long as he moves according to his *logos*, otherwise he collapses and may return again to non-being.'

⁶⁵ *Amb. 7* (PG 91: 1084B), trans. Paul Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, pp. 59-60, Greek inserted by me.

supernatural without conflation or separation?

On the surface of things, Maximus is suggesting a contradiction, where the grace of God is both natural and supernatural. This is also a contrast to the much later neoscholastic conception of 'pure nature.' Nevertheless, Maximus's metaphysics surmounts both extremes of conflation and absolute separation by affirming an innate *logos* of nature (as capacity) with the freedom of *tropos* to actualize that innate *logos*.⁶⁶ Because the *logoi* of beings pre-exists in God and end in God, virtue and grace are natural, and because the Word became incarnate, taking on human existence, there is a new *tropos* of grace that exceeds the natural capacity for actualization. All of this cosmic drama hinges around the fact that deification and grace are not the results of a fallen creation, or the necessary reaction to it, but rather, creation is the result of the primordial *logos* for deification of human beings that pre-exists in God. The end is the meaning and purpose for the beginning, and grace lies in the consummation of all things. Grace also works naturally in the

⁶⁶ *Amb.* 42 (PG 91: 1329AB), trans. Paul Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 60, Greek inserted by me: 'Of all things that do exist or will exist substantially...the *logoi* firmly fixed, pre-exist in God, in accordance with which all things are and have become and abide, ever drawing near through natural motion to their proposed *logoi*. These things are rather constrained to being and receive, according to the kind and degree of their elective movement and motion, either well-being because of virtue and direct progress in regard to the *logos* by which they are, or well-being because of the vice and motion out of harmony with the *logos* by which they exist. Or, to put it concisely: according to the having or the lack, in their natural participative faculty of him who exists by nature completely and unparticipated and who proffers himself entire simply and graciously by reason of his limitless goodness to all, the worthy and the unworthy, producing the permanence of everlasting being as each man of himself has been and is then disposed. For these the respective participation or non-participation of the very being, well-being and ever-being is the increase and augment of punishment for those not able to participate and of enjoyment for those who able to participate.'

creature's beginning towards that end. In Neoplatonic fashion, Maximus understands that a creature, which proceeds from God, desires to return to its principle in God.⁶⁷ However, Christian theology also requires that the return to God in beatitude be grounded in the supernatural grace of God.

Maximus describes the soul's natural desire for God by discussing creaturely movement (he is contesting the fall of intellects from a primitive henad): 'For movement driven by desire has not yet come to rest in that which is ultimately desirable. Unless that which is ultimately desirable is possessed, nothing else is of such a nature as to bring to rest what is being driven by desire.'⁶⁸ And a few paragraphs later Maximus concludes, 'No created thing then is at rest until it has attained the first and only cause (from which what exists was brought into being) or has possessed the ultimately desirable.'⁶⁹ The creature naturally desires that the end which is the first principle of all things.⁷⁰

So, in terms of the traditional Western dialectic of nature vs. grace—

⁶⁷ This is also an important aspect of Aquinas' metaphysics, *Summa Theologica* I. Q. 12 a. 1: 'For the ultimate perfection of the rational creature is to be found in that which is the principle of its being; since a thing is perfect so far as it attains to its principle.'

⁶⁸ *Amb. 7* (PG 91: 1069B), trans. Paul Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 46.

⁶⁹ *Amb. 7* (PG 91: 1071C), trans. Paul Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 49.

⁷⁰ In *Ad Thal.* 61 (CCSG 22: 85), Maximus states that the first man, Adam, squandered his spiritual capacity on sensible things. The capacity he is referring to is 'the natural desire of the mind of God' (φύσιν τοῦ νοῦ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἔφεσιν).

although one should be cautious of putting Maximus's thought in the same dialectic—Maximus surmounts both the conflation and the separation of grace with nature. Maximus understands human beings to possess an innate capacity for virtue (which are natural and presuppose grace), but that there are habitudes that must be activated by the divine to reach the exceedingly supernatural grace of deification. Maximus makes this quite clear in *Ad Thal.* 6 when he discusses the grace of baptism. He says that the manner of birth is two-fold: the first is the grace of adoption, which is present in potency (δυνάμει); the second is the grace of the active exertion (κατ' ἐνέργειαν) on the deliberative will (γνωμικῶς) to be reoriented to God.⁷¹ Maximus relates the first birth as a grace of faith in potency, but the second grace is beyond faith where the divine likeness is implanted in the creature. Grace does not destroy or override human nature (in other words, its *logos*), but it carries the human being beyond the capacities of nature and into beatitude.

6.4 Maximus and Theurgy

The *Myst.* of Maximus begins with a humble affirmation of the greatness of Pseudo-Dionysius's own mystagogy according to the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and *Celestial Hierarchy*. Maximus notes that he does not intend to duplicate Pseudo-Dionysius's luminous theological insights. Throughout the whole book, Maximus brings together Pseudo-Dionysius's mystagogy into his own reflections on the

⁷¹ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 6 CCSG 7: 69).

liturgy so that he can explicate the rich spiritual meanings that lie behind and in the rites, which will guide the participants to understand the deifying cosmic drama that is being unfolded before them and through them. Although Maximus engages in a spiritual contemplation on the meaning and symbols (σύμβολον) of the rites performed during the holy *synaxis*, he also affirms the deifying effect that participation has on the material acts of worship. This moves Maximus towards a more theurgical ecclesiological perspective.

6.4.1 *The Linguistic Connection*

Before delving into the substance of the *Myst.*, the issue of the connection between contemplation, sacramentalism and theurgy needs to be established in Maximus's theology. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, Maximus does not develop his ecclesiology with systematic clarity in the *Myst.*, but he does elucidate it in his discussion of the Church's liturgical mystagogy.

The Confessor does not use the word theurgy (θεουργία) in the *Myst.*, but he does use it several times in *Ad Thal.* 22 in the context of a discussion of how human beings are unable naturally to induce deification in themselves; for deification is an act of God's grace that the faithful must suffer (πάθος) in their manner of existing, not in their nature or *logos*. In the resurrection, the faithful will 'undergo the transformation unto deification and no longer be active but passive...at this point

our passion will be supernatural, and there will be no principle restrictive of the divine works in infinitely deifying those who are passive to it.⁷² The divine works of God will be fully demonstrated in the resurrection when the creatures will move to a completely supernatural mode of being. As stated in our discussion of Neoplatonic theurgy and natural fitness, Maximus understands human beings to be naturally orientated towards their supernatural end in union with God, but also that they do not contain the principle of their own deification. There are several gifts of grace, such as baptism, that only implant a potency in individuals.

Generally, Maximus uses theurgy in reference to the Incarnation itself and the miracles that Christ performed. In *Amb. 10*, the Confessor states, ‘...out of his love for humankind he grants to human beings intimations of Himself in the manifest divine works performed in the flesh.’⁷³ This usage in the *Ad Thal. 22* and the *Amb. 10* is in accord with the way in which Pseudo-Dionysius uses theurgy in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and *Celestial Hierarchy*.

Pseudo-Dionysius uses the term theurgy thirteen times in the *EH*, and it mostly refer to the works or actions of Christ working through the sacraments instead of the actions specifically of the priest, which is the general function of the theurgist

⁷² Maximus, *Ad Thal. 22* (CCSG 7: 141), trans. Paul Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 117, slightly modified.

⁷³ Maximus, *Amb. 10* (PG 91: 1168A): ‘δυναμένης πειρίας τὰς ἐκφανεῖς διὰ σαρκός θεουργίας νθρώποις παρέχειν φιλανθρώπως μηνύματα.’

in Iamblichus.⁷⁴ It is also used as an adjective (generally in the plural), which differs from Pagan usages where it generally appears as a noun (e.g., a theurgist).⁷⁵

Pseudo-Dionysius is careful to use theurgy when speaking about God's acts in the liturgy and using *ieurgia* (ἱεουργία, rites/service) for the celebration of the actual liturgy.⁷⁶ Andrew Louth argues that instead of Christian theurgic acts (as celebrated in the liturgy) being efficacious in a performative sense,⁷⁷ as pagan ones were, they are efficacious in the sense that they are understood.⁷⁸ Performing the sacred rites, 'provides a display of sacred symbols, the understanding of which raises us to contemplation.'⁷⁹ Louth further adds that this is not the complete story, and that if a thorough analysis is done on the *Ecclesial Hierarchy*, one will find that divine uplifting (ἀναγωγή) in the liturgy to contemplation is paired with the results of the uplifting: fellowship (κοινωνία) and deification (θέωσις).⁸⁰ These are the gifts from God by grace that are given to the celebrant to be offered back in praise. In

⁷⁴ E.g., 'ἀνδρικῆς τοῦ Ἰησοῦ θεουργίας,' CH 4.4 (PG 3: 181B). See Andrew Louth, 'Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism,' pp. 434ff.

⁷⁵ Andrew Louth, 'Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism,' p. 434.

⁷⁶ Andrew Louth, 'Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism,' p. 435.

⁷⁷ Though as we learned above, making such a clean identification of magic and theurgy in Iamblichus is not tenable. There is an element of the gods' freedom of action throughout Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*.

⁷⁸ Andrew Louth, 'Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism,' p. 435.

⁷⁹ Andrew Louth, 'Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism,' p. 435.

⁸⁰ Andrew Louth, 'Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism,' p. 437

this reading of theurgy in Pseudo-Dionysius, there is a real sense in which sacramentalism can be both participatory and efficacious when experienced as a whole.

Though there are not direct linguistic references to theurgy (θεουργία) in Maximus's *Myst.*, there are other words that point to a Pseudo-Dionysian understanding of Christian theurgy. In *Myst.* 2, Maximus describes the symbolic nature of the nave and sanctuary. 'The nave is the sanctuary in potency by the consecration of the sacrament being sacredly performed (μυσταγωγίας ἱεουργούμενον) towards its end, and in turn the sanctuary is the nave in act by possessing the principles of its own sacrament, which has itself as its beginning.'⁸¹ According to Berthold, the word *mystagogy* (μυσταγωγία) is in this instance a 'sacrament,' which would have had a technical meaning in Byzantine worship at the time.⁸² Berthold describes *mystagogy* in general (and the title of the work by Maximus) as a 'liturgical contemplation on the mystery of the Church,'⁸³ but the

⁸¹ Maximus, *Myst.* 2 (PG 91: 668D): 'ἱερατεῖον μὲν τὸν ναὸν κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν, τῆ ἡ πρὸς τὸ πέρας ἀναφορᾶ τῆς μυσταγωγίας ἱεουργούμενον, καὶ ἔμπαλιν ναὸν τὸ ἱερατεῖον κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τῆς ἰδίας αὐτὸν ἔχον μυσταγωγίας ἀρχήν.'

⁸² George Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 217, n. 33. He is using this translation based upon the observations of R. Bornert, whom he cites in the endnote, *Les Commentaires Byzantins de la divine liturgie du VIIe au XVe siècles* (Paris: 1966), p. 29-31.

⁸³ George Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 214, n. 1. The architecture of Byzantine churches changed significantly during the reign of Justinian and the building of Hagia Sophia. By the time of Maximus' *Myst.*, the connection between liturgy and mystagogy to explain theologically both the rites and the

main aspect to this term in Hellenism is an ‘initiation into divine mysteries.’⁸⁴ The idea of initiation does place a more emphasis on the rites themselves. There is for Maximus a mystery contemplated and a union being completed through the holy rites of the *synaxis*. The *mystagogy* leads to contemplation of the mysteries lying within it, but it is not a contemplation abstracted from bodily engagement. The definition of ‘liturgical contemplation’ is certainly a reasonable start for understanding the full picture of worship in the *Myst.*, but Maximus exhorts the faithful to ‘frequent God’s holy Church’⁸⁵ because of the deifying grace accomplished through the *synaxis*, especially the sacrament (μυσταγωγία) that transforms the nave figuratively into the sanctuary. Maximus connects the mysteries with an embodied liturgical act. It seems likely that *mystagogy* in Maximus’s thought could be understood as the Christian version of the theurgic mystical system of union with God through grace as found in late Neoplatonism.

Given the two specific uses of *mystagogy* in the *Myst.*, we are left to fill in the details of this statement with the help of other passages in the work. However, in

architecture of the building was current in Byzantine religious culture. See Robert Taft, *The Byzantine Rite: A Short History* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), pp. 28-38.

⁸⁴ G. W. H. Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, pp. 890-91.

⁸⁵ Maximus, *Myst.* 24.

Neoplatonic theurgic literature, *mystagogy* is a synonym for the system of theurgy.⁸⁶

Maximus might have been familiar with the Neoplatonic uses of *mystagogy*, but he is obviously here using it in a Christian sense to refer to the mystery of the Eucharist and the whole sacramental mystical system of the *synaxis*. *Mystagogy* is coupled with *ierurgia* (ἱερουργία, as the participle ἱερουργούμενον, ‘being sacramental’) in *Myst.* 2, which Pseudo-Dionysius uses more often for the celebration of the liturgical rites themselves. In Maximus’s *Myst.*, *ierurgia* is also used for the ‘sacraments’ as practiced in the Church. Maximus is describing the veiled mystery of the Church through

⁸⁶ E.g., Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 1.1 (4), trans. Emma Clarke, John Dillion, and Jackson Hershbell, *On the Mysteries*, p. 7: ‘Some questions, then, call for the clarification of issues which have been wrongly confused, while others concern the reason why various things are the way they are, and are thought of in such a way; others, again, draw one’s attention in both directions at once, since they contain an inherent contradiction; and still others call for an exposition of our whole *mystical system* (μυσταγωγίαν).’ In this passage Iamblichus is using μυσταγωγίαν as a synonym for the system of theurgy that he is proposing to Hermes. Proclus also uses this word as a synonym for theurgy in *In Parmenides* 5 (993) and *On Platonic Theology* 1.25-26. For the use of *mystagogy* in Proclus, see Trouillard, *La Mystagogie de Proclus*, (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1982). Finally, Damascius uses μυσταγωγίαν in the same manner in *De Principiis* 131. A θεουργία can include many different types of practices from contemplation, to prayers and sacrifices. The goal of the θεουργία is to prepare the soul for the divinizing powers of the gods; see Paulina Remes, *Neoplatonism*, pp. 170-73. This is why Iamblichus offered his own μυσταγωγία on the symbols of the Egyptian religious cult as a defense of theurgy in *De Mysteriis* 7.1 (250), trans. Emma Clarke, John Dillion, and Jackson Hershbell, *On the Mysteries*, p. 291: ‘I would like to explain to you the mode of theology practiced by the Egyptians. For these people, imitating the nature of the universe and the demiurgic power of the gods, display certain signs of mystical (μυστικῶν), arcane and invisible intellections by means of symbols, just as nature copies the unseen principles in visible forms through some mode of symbolism, and the creative activity of the gods indicates the truth of the forms in visible signs.’ Maximus emphasizes the dual function of created intelligible and sensible symbols in chapter two of the *Myst.*. Though his focus is upon contemplation on the meaning of the liturgy, Maximus sees the sensible *typoi* and symbols as the beginning of the movement to the intelligible causes of all creation (*logoi*) with the final movement beyond intellection and sense (though still embodied), which is the *visio beatifica* and union with God. So, in this sense Maximus’ *Mystagogy* is very much a theurgy.

symbols and signs, but the rites themselves—and, in this passage in *Myst. 2*, the physical worship space—also includes a participatory element that deifies according to grace. Therefore, there is a great deal of commonality with the Iamblichian understanding of theurgy, whereby the body in material ritual act is a mediating conduit to the ascent of the soul and the participation in the divine works of the gods.

Another usage of *ierurgia* appears in *Myst. 21*: ‘The profession ‘One is Holy’ and what follows, which is voiced by all the people at the end of the mystical service (μυστικῆς ἱεραουργίας), represents the gathering and union beyond reason and understanding.’⁸⁷ The symbolism at this point in the liturgy (in which the Eucharist is consecrated here) is that of the eschaton when all will be united in ‘the mysterious oneness of the divine simplicity in the incorruptible age of the spiritual world.’⁸⁸ At the beginning of this chapter Maximus is speaking about the singing of the hymn ‘One is Holy,’ and how it represents the future unity the eschaton, but at the end of the chapter Maximus mentions the Eucharist and how it changes the participant, which emphasizes the connection between sacramental rite, embodiment and deification:

⁸⁷ Maximus, *Myst. 21* (PG 91: 697A), trans. George Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 203.

⁸⁸ Maximus, *Myst. 21* (PG 91: 697A), trans. George Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 203.

After this [the profession of the ‘One is Holy’], as the climax of everything, comes the distribution of the sacrament (μυστήριον), which transforms into itself and renders similar to the causal good by grace and participation those who worthily share in it. To them is there lacking nothing of this good that is possible and attainable for men, so that they also can be and be called gods by adoption through grace because all of God entirely fills them and leaves no part of them empty of his presence.⁸⁹

Maximus is describing the gift of adoption and deification that is received during the Eucharist.⁹⁰ The μυστήριον in this passage is the Eucharistic meal that ‘transforms into itself’ (μεταποιοῦσα πρὸς ἑαυτήν) the participant and renders him or her ‘similar to the causal good by grace and participation’ (ὁμοίους τῷ κατ’ αἰτίαν ἀγαθῷ κατὰ χάριν καὶ μέθεξις). One could not get a clearer picture of the efficacious nature of the Eucharist. The transformation that takes place is a participation in God, through grace, which comes about through the partaking of the sacred meal. Maximus’s theurgic Eucharistic presence as that which deifies and connects the participant with God through grace is modelled on the Christian theurgy found in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and *Celestial Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Dionysius, though with a stronger Christological centre and realism. I would argue that it is similarly the participatory model of deification found in Iamblichus’s theurgy, though with a

⁸⁹ *Myst.* 21 (PG 91: 696D), trans. George Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 203.

⁹⁰ Lars Thunberg gives an examination of the real presence (as opposed to merely a σύμβολον) of Christ in the Eucharist in ‘Symbol and Presence in St. Maximus the Confessor,’ in *Maximus Confessor: Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur, Fribourg, 2-5 septembre 1980*, ed. Felix Heintzer and Christoph von Schönborn, *Paradosis: Études de littérature et de théologie anciennes* 27 (Fribourg: 1980), pp. 285-308.

Christological and an ecclesial centre. The Eucharistic meal is a mediated grace that is fully a participation in the divine. Such a ritual does not conjure up the divine power, but the particular ritual of the Eucharist is a fully deifying descent of the Holy Spirit that in reciprocal movement draws the body of Christ up to the Godhead, this foreshadows what will be experienced in the resurrection.

The Pseudo-Dionysian ‘fellowship’ that results from the divine acts of God that are described in the *Mystagogia* is connected with the gift of deification that takes place in the Eucharist. ‘By Holy communion of the spotless and life-giving mysteries we are given fellowship (κοινωνία) and identity with him by participation in likeness, by which man is deemed worthy from man to become God.’⁹¹ The gift of fellowship and participation in likeness to God is not just a treasure to be obtained at the end of all things; Maximus also affirms through the ‘One is holy’ that ‘in this present life we already have a share in these gifts of the Holy Spirit through the love that is in faith.’⁹² The unification and deification of the faithful is not just a mental contemplation observed through holy rituals and symbols, but it is a real embodied sharing in the grace of God that awaits fulfilment with the resurrection of the faithful and the second coming of Christ. The symbols found within the rites of the *synaxis* connect with the divine in a mysterious way.

⁹¹ Maximus, *Myst.* 24 (PG 91: 704A), trans. George Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 207.

⁹² Maximus, *Myst.* 24 (PG 91: 704A), trans. George Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 207.

6.4.2 *The Grace of Materiality and the Grace of Vision*

Though a major reading of the *Myst.* is oriented towards the spiritual contemplation of the invisible and intelligible pole of reality symbolized in the sanctuary, there is also the theurgic participatory pole of visible and sensible reality as experienced in worship and represented by the nave.⁹³ Maximus's theurgy is not based upon any kind of magical manipulative rites; it is a Christian one that is rooted in Pseudo-Dionysian fashion in the liturgical celebration of the acts of God in embodied rites that results in contemplative uplifting, *κοινωνία*, and deification by grace.

The *sensible* symbols and images contained in the *Myst.* of the *synaxis* of the Church according to Maximus are far from a Gnosticizing spiritualization of embodiment or the liturgical practices of the *synaxis*. Quite the opposite, Maximus fully embraces the active engagement of the body in the spiritual ascent to God.⁹⁴

⁹³ Maximus is not exempt from a critique of dualism. The mind, or *nous*, is strongly emphasized in his ascetic spirituality. This is mostly like due to the influences of Origen and Evagrius on his own theology. An example of an exclusive focus on the mind can be observed at *Amb.* 10 (PG: 91: 1196A), trans. Louth, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 147: 'When they have completely shaken off the senses and everything perceived through them by means of the activity that relates and inclines it to them, their soul can be ineffably assimilated to God by means of the mind alone, and wholly united to him alone ineffably, so that possessing the image of the archetype according to the likeness in mind and reason and spirit.'

⁹⁴ Maximus, *Amb.* 7 (PG 91:1088C), trans. Paul Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 63: 'He [God] gives them life, not the life that comes from breathing air, nor that of veins coursing with blood, but the life that comes from being wholly infused with the fullness of God. God becomes to the soul (and through the soul to the body) what the soul is to the body, as God alone knows, so that the soul receives

Maximus includes the body in spiritual growth through the practice of the virtues, which is also due to the love of God for the body:

...Out of God's great goodness human beings were composed of a soul and body. The rational and intellectual soul given to man is made in the image of its maker and through desire and intense love it holds fast to God and participates in the divine life. The soul becomes godlike through divinization, and because God cares for what is lower, that is the body, and has given the command to love one's neighbour, the soul prudently makes use of the body. By practicing the virtues the body gain familiarity with God and becomes a fellow servant with the soul. God who dwells in the soul uses it as an instrument to relate to the body and through the intimate bond between body and soul makes it possible for the body to share in the gift of immortality. The result is that what God is to the soul the soul becomes to the body, and the one God, Creator of all, is shown to reside proportionately in all beings through human nature.⁹⁵

The mind, soul and body are integrally important for Maximus's spiritual theology.

There is not a separation between the body and the soul in deification, but the unity of the two working in unison. The connection between the body and soul also finds its place in Maximus's theurgic ecclesiology in the *Myst*. Maximus even moves beyond Neoplatonic theurgy because he believes in the creation of the body and the soul together.⁹⁶ The soul does not descend into the body (the Origenist controversy is in the background here) as Iamblichus believed, though he rejected the more

changelessness and the body immortality; hence the whole man, and the object of divine action, is divinized by being made God by the grace of God who became man.'

⁹⁵ Maximus, *Amb. 7* (PG 91:1092B-C), trans. Paul Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 66.

⁹⁶ Maximus, *Amb. 7* (PG 91:1100D-1101A).

negative view of material existence as posed by Plotinus by emphasizing that the only way for the soul's salvation is through the body.⁹⁷ In chapter 7 of the *Myst.*, Maximus re-affirms this interdependent relationship between body and soul: 'both [body and soul] make up one world as body and soul make up one man, neither of these elements joined to the other in unity denies or displaces the other according to the law of the one who has bound them together.'⁹⁸

Though the spiritual and intelligible aspect of human nature is the highest aspect of the human being, Maximus does not therefore reject the body. Instead, he presents the limitations of the body in the movement towards God. Since created intelligible reality is eternal once it comes into being, the body is meant to point the mind upwards to the eternal realm. God manifests these eternal aspects through signs and symbols as found in the sensible order of creation. Similarly, the role of the body in the spiritual life is to be a vehicle for the development and divinization of the soul. Maximus describes this through his emphasis on practicing the virtues in *Ad Thal.* 22. Since the faithful do not yet have the 'grace that is in Christ, the gift of benefits that transcend time and nature,' they must make use of the 'modes (*tropoi*) of the virtues and the principles (*logoi*) of those things that can be known by

⁹⁷ For more details on this dynamic with Plotinus, see Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, pp. 23-27.

⁹⁸ Maximus, *Myst.* 7 (PG 91: 685A).

nature.’ The modes of virtues that can be known have been created ‘as types (*typoi*) and foreshadowings of those future benefits.’

By practicing the modes of the virtues that are the *typoi* of the divine life, the Christian is divinized because also through them Christ becomes hominized. Maximus states, ‘It is through these modes and principles that God, who is ever willing to become human, does so in those who are worthy.’⁹⁹ The body practices the virtues so that the soul can be deified, but also so that the body can taste through the *typoi* the first fruits of eternal incorruption that lie in wait for the creature. Maximus connects the virtues and the receptive fitness of the participant together with the liturgy in an interesting passage in *Ad Thal.* 63:

In a anagogical sense, the beaks of seven flames of the candlestick of the Church are the habitus and provisions capable of receiving the various principles, modes and behaviour that feed and maintain the seven flames, that is to say, the energies of the Spirit, those who were in the Church with different gifts.¹⁰⁰

The gift of embodiment is established in God’s Providential plan for the cosmos, and it is an important component to living the life of spiritual growth and progress, but it is also a gift at the end of the ages when the ‘universal consummation’ of all things will take place. Maximus describes the consummation

⁹⁹ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 22 (CCSG 7: 141-42), trans. Paul Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, p. 118, Greek inserted by me.

¹⁰⁰ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 63 (CCSG 22: 163).

of all things through the beatitude of the resurrection. The resurrection brings about a new mode of being that transforms all of material and sensible reality. Materiality, as such, will not disappear but take on the mode of incorruption. Christ binds all the faithful together while maintaining their natural differences (*Myst.* 7) in this life, but in the *parousia*, Christ will bind the faithful and separate them according to a ‘more mystical arrangement’ (μυστικωτέρας οἰκονομίας):¹⁰¹

...in the time of the expected universal consummation, when the world, as man, will die to its life of appearances and rise again renewed of its oldness in the resurrection expected presently. At this time the man who is ourselves will rise with the world as a part with the whole and the small with the large, having obtained the power of not being subject to further corruption. Then the body will become like the soul and sensible things like intelligible things in dignity and glory, for the unique divine power will manifest itself in all things in a vivid and active presence proportioned to each one, and will by itself preserve unbroken for endless ages the bond of unity.¹⁰²

In the current age the body is limited by the senses, which lacks perspicuity of the spiritual world. The human being as microcosm with a rational mind can see beyond the senses to the eternal and incorruptible. In the next age, the body will be deified and radiantly glorious because it will obtain the measure of eternity that the intelligible and spiritual creation already has in the present age. For this reason, Maximus sees the Gospel as a summit beyond the letter of the law of the Old

¹⁰¹ Maximus, *Myst.* 7 (PG 91: 685B).

¹⁰² Maximus, *Myst.* 7 (PG 91: 685B-C), trans. George Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 197.

Testament. Through the Gospel, all of the meanings of Providence and existing things are united ‘according to a single embracing burst of meaning’ (κατὰ μίαν περιοχῆς δύναμιν ἐνοειδῶς προὔφεστήκασι).¹⁰³ Maximus interprets the symbolism of the Gospel to signify the transcending of the sensible creation.

This does not mean that practicing the virtues and keeping the commandments are of little significance. As Maximus reminds the faithful in *Ad Thal.* 22, the virtues are the created and tangible modes of human existence that are first fruits which are encompassed in the hominization of Christ. The words of St. Paul’s letter to the Romans permeates through Maximus’s imagery in *Myst.* 7:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.¹⁰⁴

Although there is a share in the gifts of God for the body now in this life through practicing the virtues and contemplating the sensible *typoi*, Maximus’s ultimate *desideratum* in the *Myst.* is to:

Pass from the grace which is in faith to the grace of vision, when our Saviour Jesus Christ will indeed transform us into himself by taking away from us the

¹⁰³ Maximus, *Myst.* 23.

¹⁰⁴ Romans 8:22-25, NRSV.

marks of corruption and will bestow on us the original mysteries which have been represented for us through sensible symbols here below.¹⁰⁵

The creature does not yet have the grace that is Christ (*Ad Thal.* 22), which will be the grace of vision, but it does have the grace of faith that is a share in the future benefits through the power of the Holy Spirit. The grace of faith lies in the sensible symbols and bodily actions, such as living the virtues and keeping the commandments. Maximus connects the idea of Christological grace with the grace of vision found in chapter 7 of the *Myst.*. In the next age of vision, the faithful will 'have a share in them [the present gifts as first fruits] in very truth in their concrete reality according to the steadfast hope of [their] faith and the solid and unchangeable promise to which God has committed himself.'¹⁰⁶ The divine works of Christ will be the concrete consummation of the creature in the *parousia* as a gift.

6.4.2.1 *The Visio Beatifica*

Maximus's emphasis on the body in the future age of resurrection and vision is an important compliment to the *visio beatifica* of The Western Christian theological tradition. Admittedly, the body does not play a strong enough role in the final vision of God in eternity according to Augustine and Aquinas. Both theologians hold to the

¹⁰⁵ *Myst.* 24 (PG 91: 705A), trans. George Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, pp. 207-08.

¹⁰⁶ *Myst.* 24 (PG 91: 704D), trans. George Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, pp. 207, slightly modified.

belief in the intellect as the highest aspect of the human nature (although in fact so does Maximus), and the vision of God as intelligible is the *summum bonum* of all intellectual creatures.¹⁰⁷ While God is completely intelligible, He is not fully comprehensible because of the limitation of the creature.¹⁰⁸ For Maximus, the stable rest in God is paradoxically qualified as an ‘ever-moving stability,’ whereby the superabundant glory of God forever enraptures the creature in deification. Fulfilment is eternal, but at the same time the creature finds its natural consummation of creaturely movement in beatitude. This is yet another paradoxical affirmation by Maximus. The contribution that Maximus makes towards understanding beatitude, however, is that the body is completely transfigured into a stable state so that it becomes like intelligible reality.

According to Maximus, uniting with God requires that the Christian leave behind all intelligible and sensible reality, but this leaving behind in deification does not mean the loss of the body. Rather, union requires the faithful to pass through the veil or cloud, which Maximus essentially equates with sensible reality, to super-luminous glory of the spiritual realm.¹⁰⁹ Unlike Gregory of Nyssa’s ever dark striving over an endlessly receding horizon, Maximus portrays beatitude as an eternal

¹⁰⁷ For Augustine, see *On Ideas*, Q. 46; for Aquinas, see *Summa Contra Gentiles* III Q. 25.3.

¹⁰⁸ C.f., Augustine, *Sermon* 117.

¹⁰⁹ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1105C).

revelation of light and clarity of knowledge beyond the limits of natural reason and knowledge. Maximus encapsulates this metaphor of brightness in the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor. The disciples saw the light of Christ's face because the Spirit purified the 'bodily and spiritual senses' in order for the revelatory *logoi* to appear.¹¹⁰ Knowledge of the Word beyond form comes through the spiritual experience of God that is unique to deification.

In *Ad Thal.* 60, Maximus describes two different types of knowledge of God. He says that it is impossible to have rational knowledge of God alongside direct experience (πειρα) of God, nor conceptual knowledge (νόσις) alongside perception (αἴσθησις) of God.¹¹¹ By 'experience,' Maximus means an active engagement that provides knowledge beyond the rational, and by 'perception' he means the experience through participation of the supernatural goods beyond conceptualization.¹¹² In the current age, however, the Christian can have a true science of God through ascetic struggle in virtue and contemplation. In chapter 5 of the *Myst.*, Maximus describes the knowledge gained through reason and the mind, and he summarizes the wisdom and prudence gained through these two faculties: 'In both of these things consist the true science of divine and human matters, the

¹¹⁰ Maximus, *Amb.* 10 (PG 91: 1128A).

¹¹¹ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 22 (CCSG 22: 77).

¹¹² Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 22 (CCSG 22: 77).

truly secure knowledge and term of all divine wisdom according to Christians.¹¹³ Knowledge gained through human reason and mental contemplation is still knowledge, but it must be understood in relation to God, who is transcendent. Commenting on Pseudo-Dionysius's teaching about truth and goodness, Maximus notes how truth seems to reveal the essence of God because of its simplicity, and goodness manifests God through its activities in creation. By imitating God through truth and goodness, through essence and activity, the creature gains an experiential knowledge of divine.

For Maximus, God is not supremely knowable in terms of natural reason—for he must be understood through apophatic remonstrance—but He is supremely experiential. This does not mean that the Christian will not have knowledge of God in the resurrection, but the knowledge that the Christian will receive of God will be of a transcendent order beyond nature. I believe that this transcending knowledge is experiential because of the inclusion of the body in the deified state.

Paradoxically, again, despite the infinite experience of God, the creature will have the grace of vision with the revelation of Christ and the *logoi*. The grace of vision in the *Myst.* is therefore three-fold according to Maximus: in the first aspect of vision, the creature beholds the risen Lord, who is grace, and receives divine

¹¹³ Maximus, *Myst.* 5 (PG 91: 677B).

understanding of their essential essence, even though God is the only one who knows his own essence;¹¹⁴ the second aspect (still connected with the first) is the knowledge and understanding of the Trinity due to the grace of simplicity given to the soul by the divine light (Maximus describes it as ‘a sole ray shining in the single form of one triple-splendored light.’);¹¹⁵ and the final aspect is the luminous glory of God revealed through the deification of the creature such that it becomes a perfect mirror of the divine: ‘[the soul] becomes the image and appearance ‘of the invisible light, an accurate mirror, very transparent, without flaw, undefiled, unstained, receiving in itself, if we are allowed to say this, the splendour of the divine model and purely illuminating in himself, as far as possible, the goodness of the silence of the inner recesses.’¹¹⁶

Maximus does not describe how we see the divine light, but he does refer to it (citing Pseudo-Dionysius) as ‘invisible.’ The other two aspects of vision in beatitude, that of Christ and that of the creature being a deified mirror of the divine glory, do seem to be types of mediation. It is difficult to say whether the final vision in Maximus is a created one or not because in the eschaton the creature will see with spiritual eyes and a body that is then rendered completely intelligible, but the

¹¹⁴ Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 60 (CCSG 22: 79).

¹¹⁵ Maximus, *Myst.* 23 (PG 91: 701B).

¹¹⁶ Maximus, *Myst.* 23 (PG 91: 701C); quoting Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 4.22 (PG 3: 724B).

idea of divine revelation of the creature in the creature is at least suggestive of an uncreated reality being created in the creature. Despite the general theological differences between the Eastern and Western Christian understandings of the *visio beatifica*, Maximus adds a much-needed experiential and embodied emphasis to beatitude.

6.4.2.2 Embodiment, Sensible Creation and the Church

In chapter 3 of the *Myst.*, Maximus makes an important addition to Pseudo-Dionysius's teaching that the Church is a symbol of the world. Just as the Church is a symbol of the sensible world,¹¹⁷ so also 'the world is a Church since it possesses heaven corresponding to a sanctuary, and for a nave it has the adornment of the earth.'¹¹⁸ Not only are the ecclesial symbols found within the Church representative of the cosmos, but the symbology of the cosmos is identified as a church. From this, there is a new direction for theurgy in Maximus's ecclesiology. It is not that Maximus is advocating that the rites within the Church are to be taken outside to participate in God, but the sensible and intelligible aspects of the world are principles and signs pointing to the active engagement with the divine. Whether

¹¹⁷ During the sixth and seventh centuries, the notion of the church or temple as a microcosm developed, just as did the symbolic anthropology of man as microcosm in earlier Greek patristic thought. See Mircea Eliade *Images and Symbols. Studies in Religious Symbolism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952: 1991), pp. 27-51; idem., *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1957: 1959: 1987), pp. 172ff.

¹¹⁸ Maximus, *Myst.* 3 (PG 91: 672A).

one is talking about the body, the Church or the cosmos as the house of God, there is an ‘opening above,’ whereby the worshiper can move or make passage from ‘one mode of being to another, from one existential situation to another.’¹¹⁹ Even so, the rites of the holy *synaxis* offer a special transformation of grace because of the sacred order of the mysteries completed. Maximus even affirms that angels will keep the attendance roster!

Not only is the cosmos a place where the divine is manifested through symbols, but the human being is also a symbol of the Church. Maximus describes the tri-partite makeup of the human being as a Church by dividing it up according to the sanctuary, altar and nave: ‘for the soul it has the sanctuary, for the mind it has the divine altar, and for the body it has the nave.’¹²⁰ Congruent with Maximus’s dialectic of the Church-world/world-Church symbology is the affirmation that the human being is also ‘a mystical church.’¹²¹ Through the nave of the body, the human person can practice the virtues and be brightened through ascetic practice. The sensible body, like the nave of the Church, is an intricate aspect for progression to spiritual and mystical theology. Without the body as the initiation into the

¹¹⁹ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 180.

¹²⁰ Maximus, *Myst. 4* (PG 91: 672B).

¹²¹ Maximus, *Myst. 4* (PG 91: 672B).

mysteries, its own μυσταγωγία, the unity of the whole person will not be accomplished.

In chapter 24 of the *Myst.*, Maximus divides the faithful into the 'active ones' and the 'gnostic ones.' The active faithful are those who are defied by the grace of the liturgy even though they are immature in Christ and do not possess the contemplation of intelligible and spiritual realities. Such Christians cleave to the practice of the virtues and obeying the commandments. Maximus associates this group with the nave of the Church since they have not yet progressed to the pinnacle of the altar. In contrast, the gnostic (or contemplative) ones are those who have learned the practice of moving beyond the symbols and figures found in the liturgy and the cosmos to the intelligible and spiritual worlds operating behind and through them. Maximus associates this group with the sanctuary because they have obtained the principles of the sacrament itself. The grasp of the divine by the gnostic ones is still only fully realized in the eschaton, but the first fruits found in symbols and figures here are accessible to them.

Despite the differences between the two groups, the Church is an image of God because he brings about unity among the faithful no matter what stage in spiritual progress they have achieved. It is also important to note that the faithful all must go through the nave to the sanctuary in the spiritual life. The sensible is the

beginning of engagement with the divine, and the body is its mechanism of virtue. Intelligible perception is the goal of the liturgy as the faithful moves from the nave to the sanctuary and to the altar, but there is one grace transforming all who come to God's holy Church to celebrate the holy *synaxis*.¹²²

Maximus describes the spiritual movement towards unity with God as the movement into adoption as sons of God and by putting on the 'new man' as St. Paul exhorts his readers to do. As an adopted child of God, the participant has 'become as much as possible by deification in grace what God is and is believed by nature and by cause.'¹²³ Similar to his ontology of expansion and contraction of the *Logos* through the differentiated strata of the *logoi* (the vertical ontologically becomes horizontal in expression and activity), Maximus sees the clearest proof of the grace of adoption and the 'new man' in the ethical expansion of the love of God to others in need:

...the voluntary disposition of good will toward those akin to us whereby the man who needs our help in any way becomes as much as possible our friend as God is and we do not leave him abandoned and forsaken but rather that with fitting zeal we show him in action the disposition which is alive in us with respect to God and our neighbour.¹²⁴

¹²² Maximus, *Myst. 24* (PG 91: 702D-704A), trans. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, pp. 206-07.

¹²³ Maximus, *Myst. 24* (PG 91: 702D-704A), trans. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, pp. 206-07.

¹²⁴ Maximus, *Myst. 24* (PG 91: 708D), trans. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 211.

The divine grace of adoptive sonship and participation is a gift to be given to others. Maximus bridges the connection between metaphysics, Christology and ethics in this passage by proclaiming, 'And if the poor man is God [i.e., as the *Logos* present in all creatures], it is because of God's condescension in becoming poor for us and in taking upon himself by his own suffering the sufferings of each one and 'until the end of time,' always suffering mystically out of goodness in proportion to each one's suffering.'¹²⁵ The ethical expansion of divine love is the final mark of the gift of materiality and embodiment in the *Myst.*. Giving through service to another, making him or her 'as much as possible our friend as God,' is the reciprocal synergistic gift offered to Christ for the grace of adoption that He extends to all human beings. Practicing charity to the needy is in a special and metaphysical way participation in Christ's divine works of deification for the whole cosmos, a divine gift exchange between the other and God. 'For if the Word has shown that the one who is in need of having good done to him is God...on God's very word, then, he will much more show that the one who can do good and who does it is truly God by grace and participation because he has taken on in happy imitation the energy and characteristic of his own doing good.'¹²⁶ Because of the wonderful grace of

¹²⁵ Maximus, *Myst.* 24 (PG 91: 708D), trans. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 212.

¹²⁶ Maximus, *Myst.* 24 (PG 91: 709A), trans. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 212.

deification and the outward signs that it induces, Maximus again exhorts the faithful to God's holy Church:

Let us, then, not stray from the whole Church of God which comprehends in the sacred order of the divine symbols which are celebrated, such great mysteries of our salvation. Through them, in making each of us who conducts himself worthily as best he can in Christ, it brings to light the grace of adoption which was given through holy baptism in the Holy Spirit and which makes us perfect in Christ.¹²⁷

The *typoi* of sensible creation, as found in the natural world and the Church, signify the divine works of God in creation, and it is particularly through the rites in the *synaxis* that the grace of the Holy Spirit descends and deifies the faithful is a special way. For Maximus, the 'divine precepts of holy Church lead the soul, by a true and active knowledge, to its own perfection.'¹²⁸ Maximus does not divorce the actual participation in the liturgy from the giving of grace in the spiritual life. The gifts of grace experienced in the holy liturgy are not disconnected from the spiritual principles and meanings that the rites communicate to the participant, but the rites can only take root and transform through grace if the participant has a clean heart and a virtuous disposition.

With the importance of sensible reality in the *Myst.* is the Christology that undergirds it. As I stated earlier, the term *theurgy* appears in numerous other works

¹²⁷ Maximus, *Myst.* 24 (PG 91: 708D), trans. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 211.

¹²⁸ Maximus, *Myst.* 22 (PG 91: 698B).

of Maximus to reference the Incarnation itself (the divine works performed in the flesh) and the miracles performed by Christ (affecting the mode of operation not nature). The activities of Christ are also not limited by the historic Incarnation alone, but through expansion Christ ‘plays’ in a thousand different places leaving traces of Himself through the created *logoi* of beings and the sensible *typoi*. In fact, according to Maximus’s conjecture in *Amb.* 71, the ‘high Word’ plays in the world by sticking to the *middle* of created reality, which is the ‘totality of things visible,’ which ‘surrounds the human being or in which the human is.’¹²⁹ Maximus is here focusing on the sensible world, and he reminds his reader that this is why Gregory Nazianzen focused on stones and living things in his *Letter to the Virgins*. Christ can play in a thousand places due to his embracing of all created reality in the Incarnation. This is one of the strongest passages in Maximus’s writings on the importance that the Incarnation gives to sensible reality.

Maximus also says that Christ paradoxically manifests the eternal and uncreated stillness in the flowing of existence.¹³⁰ Grace emerges directly through the created sensible realm, and therein lies the paradox for Maximus. Grace is appearing as created even though the source on the other side of the ontological divide is the eternal God. There are no hinterlands between Christ and the world,

¹²⁹ Maximus, *Amb.* 71 (PG 91: 1412 C).

¹³⁰ Maximus, *Amb.* 71 (PG 91: 1412C).

but they are not reduced to one another. The paradox of grace as a flowing that remains still resides in material creation, and it is through the sensible and tangible that Christ sparks the activity of the mind to see the invisible reality at work beyond the sensible, to move from phenomena to the intelligible world.¹³¹

As we saw in the previous chapter on Christology and grace, the Incarnation is the necessary gift of grace for deification, and this is no less true for Maximus's theurgic ecclesiology. The continual descent of grace in the liturgy is always the necessary element to bring about the reciprocal ascent to God. The *tantum...quantum* formula is very important for Maximus in the *Myst.* because he ties deification directly to the liturgical rites as we saw in the introduction of this chapter and in the kenotic suffering with those in need in chapter 24.

The sensible *typoi* are the focus of Christ's divine play in the world (Maximus does not use *θεουργία* in *Amb.* 71), but in *Myst.* 2 Maximus perceives the created intelligible world to penetrate the sensible as well. Maximus describes this 'compenetration'¹³² of the sensible and intelligible worlds as being like the 'wheel

¹³¹ Maximus, *Amb.* 71 (PG 91: 1408D).

¹³² A. Riou, *Le Monde et l'Eglise selon Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Cerf, 1973), p. 62: 'Saint Maxime la voit aussi préfigurée dans la vision inaugurale d'Ézéchiël, dans cette compénétration des deux roues, cette périchorèse. Et cette image, comme celle du foyer et des rayons, abolit par elle-même les schémas verticaux de participation et de causalité pour leur substituer le symbole d'une union synergique, sans émanation du supérieur dans l'inférieur ni assomption de l'inférieur dans le supérieur, mais par compénétration collaborante, sans pour autant qu'il y ait fusion.' Riou is correct

within a wheel' in the vision of Ezekiel 10: 9-11. There is a mutual reflection between the intelligible (with its principles) and the sensible (with its figures) worlds that teaches the Christian to advance in spiritual contemplation. Maximus sees this principle of reality in St. Paul's affirmation in Romans 1:20, 'the invisible realities from the creation of the world have been perceived and are recognized through the things he has made.' Because of this interconnection, 'the symbolic contemplation of intelligible things by means of the visible realities is spiritual knowledge and understanding of visible things through the visible. For it is necessary that things which manifest each other bear a mutual reflection in an altogether true and clear manner and keep their relationship intact.'¹³³ In order for the body not be led astray in aimless wondering, the intelligible aspects of human nature are to work in synergy with the body to steer the body and the senses towards knowledge of theology and understanding equal to the angels (in grace and deification).¹³⁴

6.5 Conclusion

to note that Maximus is not describing a Neoplatonic emanation from God (as he accuses Pseudo-Dionysius of doing, which in reality is a very generalized reading of Pseudo-Dionysius by mid-twentieth century Orthodox scholars). The idea of 'compenetration' of symbols with intelligible principle is correct in the context, but the intelligible world for Maximus is created, and thus the idea of participation in God needs to be modified in Riou's commentary. The created *logoi* of being are a participation in God as the one who holds them pre-existing in Himself. So the sensible is compenetrating with an intelligible principle that is a participation in God.

¹³³ Maximus, *Myst.* 2, trans. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 189.

¹³⁴ Maximus, *Myst.* 23 (PG 91: 669C).

Maximus's Christo-centric metaphysics calls the Church not only to share in the life of the Trinity through the grace of fellowship, adoption and deification, but also to mediate the recapitulation of all creation into the headship and body of Christ. This mediation is not only accomplished through the contemplation of visible and invisible reality outside the Church, but it is also brought about through the breaking of bread and the worship of God in the Church. Maximus's theurgic ecclesiology calls the Church to the mission of mediation both in the cosmos and in the Church so that in the words of the Apostle, 'Christ might fill all things' (Eph. 4:10). Given the importance of embodiment, sensible reality and Christology in Maximus's ecclesiology, I believe it is possible to argue for a true theurgic ecclesiology in his thought. A theurgic ecclesiology is not just a hegemony of the ecclesial over the natural *typoi*, which reveal the divine, but it is a cosmic liturgy that is more deifying when practiced through embodied ritual in the Church's liturgy among the faithful.

The Christian theurgic ecclesiology of Maximus is not exactly the same as the theurgy of Iamblichus. For while the descent of and access to the power of the gods is based upon grace for both thinkers, Maximus maintained the word *theurgia* for the works of Christ in the flesh and in the giving of the grace of deification. However, if theurgy is not the magical manipulation of the gods through particular rites, but the mediation of the divine through embodiment and sensible reality,

then Maximus is certainly a Christian theurgist. The liberation of the soul for Maximus does not take place without the body even though the focus on sensible reality is transcended to embrace the revelatory knowledge of the essence of created things in the grace of divine vision. The *typoi* are not the end of the spiritual journey for Maximus, but they represent the nave in process of becoming the sanctuary. Further, the rites of the holy *synaxis* for Maximus access and engage the grace of deification. Even if the participant does not yet fully grasp the deeper realities enacted through the rituals, the grace of God works through the rites and transforms the participant into Himself. The final hope of the grace of faith found in Maximus's *Myst.* on the holy *synaxis* is the grace of vision, when the body will be wholly transformed into an eternal mode of being such that it will be rendered like intelligible reality.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Our study on grace and metaphysics in Maximus Confessor began with an ancient and contemporary problem for Christian theology, that of extrincism between grace and nature. This worldview can manifest itself in many different ways, but the concern of our investigation was on Maximus's metaphysics. The proposed solution to the problem of our study is defining the nature of divine grace as a paradox, in that grace is both created and uncreated. However, Christology is the necessary component to understand grace as uncreated in the theology of Maximus.

Through detailed analysis of the Confessor's metaphysical principles—and those received by him from the Byzantine tradition—I showed how grace is to be understood as created and uncreated at the same time. This conception of grace is most evident through Maximus's presentation of the essence and energies of God. While the existence of the later Palamite distinction between divine essence and energy could be read into several passages in the Maximus's *oeuvre*, the broader philosophical context of late Neoplatonism and Pseudo-Dionysius resists creating new ontological realities in the Godhead. Maximus does not separate the divine essence from His energy, and the knowledge of the seemingly infinite number of divine energies is through human remonstrance from created effects. This

remonstration does not separate uncreated grace from the creation. Maximus affirms the implantation of the divine *logoi* in the creation that manifest God's presence. Christ plays in the creation (as the embracing *Logos* of all *logoi*) in a thousand different places, which is manifested through created *tupoi* and *logoi*. Though movement and energy must be predicated of God because of the fact of creation, Maximus goes to great lengths to affirm that this movement and activity is only something that happens to the creature, not the Creator. This is solid Christian epistemology that allows for a true divine science while keeping knowledge claims in check with an apophatic reserve.

Maximus also develops the Pseudo-Dionysian teaching of the *αὐτό*-realities (i.e., Being-itself, Life-itself, and Wisdom-itself) as being both in God as source and created by Him (created in the sense that the creature abstracts through title 'Being without qualification;' I am not saying that the *αὐτό*-realities are a reality between God and creation¹) so that the creature can participate in the whole God. The divine processions are re-defined in terms of energy in Maximus, but the metaphysical

¹ Maximus notes in his *scholia* on Pseudo-Dionysius that he understands the *αὐτό*-realities as simple titles: 'He [Pseudo-Dionysius] is attempting by this to explain that God's being is completely without origin and inconceivable and that he has established the general being of all things in advance, through the preliminary plan of his own ineffable knowledge. For the created mind encounters this being [of God] first of all when it is focused on some thing, and only afterward does it come to know how the thing is. When Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of being-in-itself, he is referring to being as such (*τὸ ἀπλῶς εἶναι*), not to being in some way (*τὸ πῶς εἶναι*); so later, when, he speaks of life-in-itself, or similarity-in-itself, and similar concepts, he means the general character of life or life without qualification, not a life that is specifically determined in this or that way, and so on' (PG 4: 317C-320A), trans. von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, p 123).

construction of created perfections or universals remains the same.

Since Maximus adopts the Proclean Neoplatonic triad of imparticipable, participable and participant, he is able to conceive of God as both imparticipable and participable at the same time. This schema does not see God as divide up into two different parts, one participable and the other imparticipable, but both completely transcendent/imparticipable and immanent/participable. Following Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus endorses the view that the creature participates in the whole God, no part is left out of its sharing. Only by being the One above all things can God completely share Himself with the creation. The Neoplatonic movements of procession and return are also critical aspects to both Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus's metaphysics. However, with Maximus the Christian doctrine of grace teaches that deification, or return to God, is qualitatively different than creation.

Participation in Maximus has a three-fold aspect: there is a 'natural principled participation' in God through the *scala naturae* and the exercise of vital motion; there is a moral or imitative participation in God that relies on the principled method of participation; and finally there is the supernatural participation through grace in the supra-temporal works of God (*logoi*) that are to be enjoyed in the eschaton. Through realized eschatology, Maximus is able to say that the creature can begin to experience the future benefits now in this life even though the final consummation of said benefits lie await in the future. The creature

can contemplate their pre-existing *logoi* through the created *logoi*, forms and *typoi* present in created reality, and he or she can live, move and be in God by living and acting according to their purposed *logoi*. This is how Maximus perceives the creature to be a 'portion' of God. Human beings are not fallen intellects or henads from a pre-existing state. All creatures come into existence, body and soul, at the proper time according to the ineffable Providence of God.

Deification and the revelation of the divine *logoi*, which is also the revelation of the divine essence for Maximus, in the resurrection is the key to understanding grace as being on both sides of the ontic divide in his theology. I demonstrated in chapter four that divine 'works that did not begin in time' and the 'uncreated grace' of God cannot be understood apart from Maximus's doctrines of the *logoi* and the Incarnation. Maximus conceives the pre-existing *logoi* to manifest only in part in creation through *typoi*. This is why the creature's knowledge of God is only rational and conceptual through the *analogia entis* and the remonstrance from created effects. This is also why the energy of God is only apparent to the mind of the human being through abstraction from creatures. Like Aslan creating primroses all around Polly from the music in his head, the *Logos* creates the world through the *logoi* and is active in it. The energies or graces of God really are created effects because mediation is necessary, but their origin is at the same time transcendent in God. There is not a hinterland between God and creation. Grace lies on both sides of

the ontological divide, but Maximus can only speak of ‘uncreated grace,’ which I identified with the *logoi*, because of the Incarnation of Christ. This is why the ultimate knowledge of a creature in itself is only possible through an *analogia Christi*.

The Incarnation is the central manifestation of divine grace in Maximus’s theology. Since the divine has fully entered time and flesh, divine grace is given at the core of creaturely being. The dictum of the Confessor that God comes not as an essence but as a human being illuminates the paradoxical nature of grace. The greatest paradox in the history of the universe is that God became a human being. This is why Christology is so important for understanding the metaphysics of grace as being both uncreated and created at the same time. Such a view of grace as paradox does not devalue the importance of the Incarnation as *the* unique event in history. Instead, the event of the Incarnation most fully manifests the grace of God.

Because of the kenotic descent and assumption of all aspects of human nature by Christ, except sin, the deepest meanings (*logoi*) that every creature longs to know are revealed. Grace transforms the manner of existing for the creature because it grants a transcendent knowledge of his or her nature in itself (i.e., *logoi*). The grace of the Incarnation becomes the full revelation of what each individual human being is in nature. The divine grace of God is thus forever a mediation

because Christ is the eternal *Logos* made flesh. The uncreated nature of God is given and revealed to the creature in deification at the eschaton through the *logoi* (which is also what Maximus means by divine energy and the ‘works that do not begin in time’). The *logoi* are revealed through the face-to-face vision of the Incarnated Christ. Because the uncreated God unites with created nature in Christ, Maximus can describe grace as uncreated. This whole dynamic is encapsulated in *Ad Thal.* 60 on the cosmic mystery of Jesus Christ:

For it was fitting for the Creator of the universe, who by the economy of his incarnation became what by nature he was not, to preserve without change both what he himself was by nature and what he became in his incarnation. For naturally we must not consider any change at all in God, nor conceive any movement in him. Being changed properly pertains to movable creatures. This is the great and hidden mystery, at once the blessed end for which all things are ordained. It is the divine purpose conceived before the beginning of created beings. In defining it we would say that this mystery is the preconceived goal for which everything exists, but which itself exists on account of nothing. With a clear view to this end, God created the essences of created beings, and such is, properly speaking, the terminus of his providence and of the things under his providential care. Inasmuch as it leads to God, it is the recapitulation of the things he has created. It is the mystery which circumscribes all the ages, and which reveal the grand plan of God, a super-infinite plan infinitely pre-existing the ages. The *Logos*, by essence God, became a messenger of this plan when he became a man and, if I may rightly say so, established himself as the innermost depth of the Father’s goodness while also displaying in himself the very goal for which his creatures manifestly received the beginning of their existence.²

Finally, given the mediated nature of divine grace in the Incarnation,

Maximus offers one of the best theological perspectives on the grace of embodiment

² Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 60 (CCSG 22: 75), trans. Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery*, pp. 124-25.

and materiality that cuts off the extrincism of grace and nature. First and foremost, Maximus holds to the natural unity of the body and soul together and created *ex nihilo*. A human being is only predicated or identified through its union of body and soul together. Also, even in beatitude the body is wholly transfigured into the stability of intelligible reality. Deification comes to the body, soul, and mind.

The most pervasive affirmation of the coinherence of grace and nature in Maximus's theology is found in his theurgic Ecclesiology as presented in his *Mystagogy*. Maximus already understands Christ's manifestation in sensible and material reality as 'divine play,' but in worship he sees the full deifying effect of the sacramental rites on the participant. The symbols and *typoi* of the Church guide the participant in ascent to God regardless of his or her *gnosis* the transcendent natures behind the symbols. The Church for Maximus is a theurgic society where Christ is always being revealed and accomplishing His divine works. Maximus expands the Pseudo-Dionysian locality of theurgy to include the sensible world outside the Church and even the human being as microcosm and mediator.

Divine Grace in theology of Maximus Confessor is not an extrinsic participation in God. Divine grace is the participation all the way up into mystical union with God and all the way down into the extremities of created reality. Maximus does not conceive of a hinterland between God and the creation, as would

be the case with a Palamite distinction between the divine essence and energies. He teaches the direct and intimate touching of the creation by the divine. However, this touching is always mediated; grace includes both sides of the ontological divide. Like two sides of the same coin, grace is simultaneously uncreated and created. Maximus's vision of an enchanted cosmos that manifests and mediates the presence and grace of the divine is an enduring one for our world today. By recognizing the human vocation of cosmic mediation of all things back to Christ, perhaps the blindfold of extrincism will fall off, and the brilliant illumination of the resurrected Christ will reveal grace and blessing of life.

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