

GOD AS EMBODIED  
*Christology and Participation in  
Saint Maximus the Confessor*

Hans Boersma

ABSTRACT

Does God have a body? The problematic implications of divine embodiment seem obvious: it either makes God human (anthropomorphism) or it confuses Him with the cosmos (pantheism). This lecture turns to Saint Maximus to argue that Christology requires us to treat creation as divine embodiment. The Incarnation tells us how God typically manifests Himself in created form. God's paradigmatic way of acting is visible, therefore, in the Incarnation. The Incarnation—God's original and full manifestation in the flesh—is figuratively present throughout creation. Creation, therefore, is a theophany or embodiment of God.

KEYWORDS: Maximus the Confessor, hypostatic union, Chalcedon, participation, Proclus, Incarnation, embodiment, logoi, disenchantment

DOES GOD have a body? The very idea may seem preposterous: God is not an animal, whether rational or irrational. The higher up we move on the chain of being, the more ethereal its occupants. Even if, as many in the tradition have maintained, angels too have bodies, it would still seem axiomatic to say that God does not.<sup>1</sup> He is spiritual, infinite, invisible—perfections that appear at odds with an embodied God. The problematic implications of divine embodiment seem obvious: it either makes God

<sup>1</sup>Although Thomas Aquinas denies that angels naturally have bodies (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 51, a. 1), most theologians in the earlier tradition affirmed that angels have spiritual or ethereal bodies, including Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Basil, Augustine, and also Franciscan theologians such as Bonaventure and Duns Scotus. See Paul J. Griffiths, *Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 119–29; Nathan A. Jacobs, “Are Created Spirits Composed of Matter and Form? A Defense of Pneumatic Hylomorphism,” *Philosophia Christi* 14 (2012): 79–108.

human (anthropomorphism), or it confuses Him with the cosmos (pantheism).

When Saint Augustine asks whether we can see God with bodily eyes, he is at pains to reject the error of the anthropomorphites: “There are some who presume that God is nothing but a body, supposing that whatever is not a body is not a substance at all. I think that we must oppose them in every way” (*Ep.* 147).<sup>2</sup> Ascribing embodiment to God would seem to drag Him down to the human level. Or, at best, it would place Him alongside the Greco-Roman gods: Zeus had a body, but his sexual escapades make clear that it was the source of endless trouble. We may well end up anthropomorphizing and mythologizing the Christian faith by ascribing a body to God.<sup>3</sup>

The Christian God may not have a body the way that Zeus had a body, but could the entire cosmos be the body of God? Such a claim, too, would seem intolerable: does it not veer dangerously close to confusing creator and creature? Pantheism has always been considered incompatible with the Christian faith, for it destroys the transcendence of God and ends up justifying whatever exists—whether good or evil—as divine. Pantheizing God is no less troubling than anthropomorphizing or mythologizing Him.

And yet, Christianity is not Gnostic. Christians believe in the body as created by God, assumed by God, and raised up by God. And if human bodies matter from *exitus* to *reditus*, from beginning to end, then perhaps we ought to reflect carefully about whether perhaps God too might be embodied.

Our reflections should take their starting point, it seems to me, in the second of the three Christian beliefs just mentioned: the Incarnation. God assumes a body in Jesus Christ. The Chalcedonian

<sup>2</sup>I quote from Augustine, *Letters 100–155*, trans. Roland Teske, ed. Boniface Ramsey, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century II/2* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003), 345.

<sup>3</sup>For a detailed historical study of questions surrounding divine embodiment, see Christoph Marksches, *God's Body: Jewish, Christian, and Pagan Images of God*, trans. Alexander Johannes Edmonds (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019).

Definition (451) serves as the benchmark for an orthodox understanding of the two natures of Christ as unconfused (*ἀσυγχύτως*), unchangeable (*ἀτρέπτως*), indivisible (*ἀδιαιρέτως*), and inseparable (*ἀχωρίστως*) in the one person of the Logos or Word of God. The Incarnation tells us that the eternal Word has taken upon Himself a human nature—body and soul. We most truly know God in and through His condescension in the humanity of Christ, and we best understand man through his deifying union with God in Christ. God is known in man, while man is known in God. God is embodied—at least in Jesus Christ.

What I hope to make clear in this lecture is that Chalcedonian Christology teaches us something also about God's *general* way of doing things, whenever and wherever He manifests Himself: God's *typical*, paradigmatic way of acting is Chalcedonian in character. Chalcedon, therefore, has something to say not just about the Incarnation, but also about creation: as a theophany of God, creation echoes and shares in the truth of Chalcedon.

### *Portion of God*

Saint Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662) famously ponders the link between Incarnation and creation in *Ambiguum* 7.22: “The Logos of God (who is God) wills always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of His embodiment.”<sup>4</sup> Note that Maximus uses the language of “embodiment” (*ἐνσωμάτωσις*). His statement, which has been the topic of much scholarly discussion, is worth reflecting on in some detail.

Maximus' remark is hardly an isolated, standalone maxim. We should explore the larger context of *Ambiguum* 7, in which he comes to grips with a statement from Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the three hierarchs in commemoration of whom we are

<sup>4</sup> Throughout, I use Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Nicholas Conostas, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 28–29 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

together this evening. Gregory, in his oration *On Love for the Poor*, had referred to the human person as a “portion of God” (μοῖραν Θεοῦ), which had “slipped down (ρέυσαντας) from above,” so that “in our struggle and battle with the body” we should always look to God (*Or.* 14.7).<sup>5</sup>

Maximus takes the phrase “portion of God” quite seriously. He insists on using this language to denote the logos or rational principle of each one of us pre-existing in God. When we act in line with this eternal logos of ours, we move up toward God. Maximus’ logoi are closely connected to Platonic Ideas and, historically speaking, ultimately derived from them—though for Maximus they function in a somewhat different manner from how they did for Plato. Every creature, for Maximus, has its own, distinct logos, as does each species and genus (*Amb.* 41.10–11). Logoi are what God eternally has in mind for His creatures—the principles that arrange the essences and ordering of all created beings. Altogether, these logoi are held together in the one Logos of God as the Wisdom of God arranging the order and character of the cosmos.

As such, the logoi are both God’s thoughts and His wills with respect to a creature; they are principles, therefore, that establish the nature or essence of a creature.<sup>6</sup> Maximus borrows here from the sixth-century Syrian monk Dionysius, whom he quotes in *Ambiguum* 7, and who had referred to these logoi as God’s “predeterminations” (προορισμοί) or “wills” (θελήματα) for creatures (*Divine Names* 5.8; PG 3:824C; cf. *Amb.* 7.24). God, then, has these predeterminations or wills for the entire created order and every creature within it.

<sup>5</sup>I am using the translation given by Adam G. Cooper, “Spiritual Anthropology in *Ambiguum* 7,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, ed. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 360–77, at 361.

<sup>6</sup>Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 21, 33, 61–62, 64–67, 85–92. It is important to note, however, that for Maximus, universals are immanent in the created order, and that the logoi determine both particulars and universals. Cf. Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 105.

Maximus, however, was more dynamic in his approach than the Neoplatonic tradition preceding him—more dynamic even than Dionysius. God’s logoi concern not only the natures of individuals, their species and genera, but also the way they live and where they end up eschatologically: Maximus famously distinguishes for each creature a logos of being (εἶναι), of well-being (εὖ εἶναι), and of eternal well-being (ἀεὶ εὖ εἶναι).

Each of these three aspects assumes that we are a portion of God. Maximus explains in this same *Ambiguum* 7 that we are a portion of God because we owe our being, our existence (εἶναι), to God; we are a portion of God also because we owe our well-being (εὖ εἶναι) to Him; and, finally, we are a portion of God because we owe our eternal well-being (ἀεὶ εὖ εἶναι) or divinization to Him (*Amb.* 7.23). In short, we are portions of God in terms of creation, goodness, and divinization. Every aspect of our lives is encapsulated in God—a portion of God—because God has a logos or eternal principle for every stage of our lives, from beginning to end.<sup>7</sup>

The aim of eternal well-being entails, for Maximus, that through humanity the creator may “come to reside in all beings” so that the many will be drawn together into one, with God encompassing all things, enhypostasizing (ἐνυποστήσας) them in Him—or, as Nicholas Conostas translates, “making them subsist in Himself.” As a result, God will be all in all (1 Cor 15.28; Eph 1.23; Col 3.11) (*Amb.* 7.31).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Maximus’ distinction between being, well-being, and eternal well-being implies an *exitus-reditus* schema that takes the historical particularity of each person’s journey seriously. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar’s comment that in Maximus, “Alexandrian speculation about the Logos intersects with a simply linear conception of the divine plan. By conceiving of the Logos—as Origen had done—both as the second Person in God and as the locus of the divine ideas, Maximus is led to conceive the world as an unfolding of the unitary divine Idea and so comes close to the idealist notion of an ‘economic’ return of all things in the world to their Idea in God.” *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe according to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian E. Daley (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 2003), 117.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Vladimir Cvetković, “‘All in All’ (1 Cor 15.28): Aspects of the Unity between God and Creation according to St Maximus the Confessor,” *Analogia: The Pemptousia Journal for Theological Studies* 2/1 (2017): 13–28.

When we lead a virtuous life, we live in line with our logos of well-being, which Maximus also calls our logos of virtue (*Amb.* 7.23). The very essence (*οὐσία*) of every virtue is God or Jesus Christ (*Amb.* 7.21). Maximus insists, therefore, that “anyone who through fixed habit participates (*μετέχων*) in virtue, unquestionably participates (*μετέχει*) in God, who is the substance (*οὐσίας*) of the virtues” (*Amb.* 7.21).

For Maximus, the one Logos or Word of God *is* the many logoi of the creatures, and the many logoi are, all together, the one Logos of God (*Amb.* 7.20). Maximus appears to suggest, therefore, that when we live in line with our logos, we participate in the Logos of God, the one who is virtue or goodness itself.<sup>9</sup> We are portions of God by living in line with God’s logos for us, which is simply another way of talking about participation in God.

Whenever we do *not* live according to our logos of virtue, instead of moving up to God in divinization, we “slip down” (*πέυομαι*), away from God, into nothingness. Maximus thus interprets the great hierarch of Nazianzus as cautioning us that it matters profoundly how, as “portions of God,” we treat the instability and transience of earthly things, and how we respond to the misery we go through in life (*Amb.* 7.32–33)—lest we slip away from God into nothingness.

It is not as though Maximus reluctantly used the language of men as “portions of God,” merely compelled by Gregory the Theologian’s use of the term. The expression fits squarely with Maximus’ own overall understanding of the creator-creature relationship. Elsewhere, he adopts from Gregory’s oration *On the Nativity* the expression of the Logos “becoming thick” (*παχύνομαι*) (*Amb.* 33.1–2). Maximus interprets this term as referring to any one of three

<sup>9</sup> Maximus never states that people *participate* in their logoi. Instead, they are called to live *according to* their logoi. Nonetheless, he does claim that Jesus Christ (or the Logos) is the essence of all the virtues and that we *participate* in this Logos. Maximus does not explain how it is that we do participate in the Logos while we do not participate in our own logos; I think the reason is that the Logos contains not only logoi as principles of the natures of creatures but also other energies or activities such as being itself, goodness itself, etc. It is in these energies that Maximus believed creatures participate.

things: (1) the Logos' manifestation in the flesh, that through words and examples He might teach us mysteries that transcend human speech; (2) the Logos ineffably concealing Himself in the logoi of beings, while being obliquely signified in visible things as if through certain letters; or (3) the Logos being embodied (*σωματωθῆναι*) in letters, syllables, and sounds (*Amb.* 33.2).

In short, the Logos uses multiple words to manifest Himself in the flesh of Christ, in the logoi of creatures, and in the words of the divine Scriptures. In each of these ways, concludes Maximus, the Logos expands Himself (*συστέλλω*) according to the principle or logos of condescension, with the aim of subsequently contracting Himself (*διαστέλλω*) again by raising us up into union with Him (*Amb.* 33.2; cf. 10.89). Incarnation, creation, and inscripturation are all ways in which the Logos becomes thick or expands Himself, in order then to divinize us by contracting Himself again.

The language of “embodying,” “thickening,” and “expanding” indicates that the Logos makes Himself present, whether in Jesus, in creation, or in Scripture. We should not be surprised, therefore, to hear Maximus talk about God “interpenetrating” (*περιχωρήσαντος*) with those who are worthy (*Amb.* 7.12); or suggest that God will be “contained...uncontainably” (*ἀχωρήτως... χωρουμένου*) in the saints (*Amb.* 7.12); or express hope that all created things will be “enveloped” (*περιληφθέντων*) in God's presence (*Amb.* 7.12); or quote Nazianzen as saying that our intellect and reason will “mingle” (*προσμίξωμεν*) with its archetypal kin (*Amb.* 7.13). All this underlines that for Maximus, it was inconceivable to think of creation as separate from the creator.

Maximus' Logos framework tells us that his approach is thoroughly Christological—the eternal Logos embodying Himself in the flesh, creation, and Scripture. Maximus' metaphysic is, therefore, theological, even Christological, not some abstract philosophical framework imported from the outside.

The Confessor is similarly at pains to ground his claim that we are portions of God in the divine Scriptures. He quotes at length



the passages of Ephesians 1.17–23 and 4.11–15, where the Apostle speaks of the saints as members (μέλη) of the body (σῶμα) of Christ (*Amb.* 7.36). Maximus zeroes in on the similarity between Nazianzen's term "portion" (μοῖρα) and Saint Paul's language of "member" (μέλος). "In [Gregory's] passage under discussion," writes Maximus,

the word "portion" [μοῖραν] and the word "member" [μέλει] are the same. For if a "member" [μέλος] is part [μέρος] of the body, and a "part" [μέρος] is the same as a "portion" [μοῖρα], then "member" [μέλος] and portion [μοῖρα] are one and the same thing. (*Ambiguum* 7.39)

Maximus maps Nazianzen's language of us being "portions" of God directly onto the Pauline discourse of us being "members" of the body of Christ.

### *Hypostatic Logic*

Since Maximus makes Christology central to the creator-creature relationship, it is hardly surprising that he also employs Chalcedonian vocabulary.<sup>10</sup> It is not just the human and divine natures of Christ that are unconfused, unchangeable, indivisible, and inseparable. So are creator and creature, and so are the eternal Word and biblical words, as I think Jordan Wood has recently made indisputably clear.<sup>11</sup> In each case, according to Maximus, does the Logos truly embody Himself in creaturely form.

Maximus is particularly clear about his Chalcedonian reading of the creator-creature relationship in his lovely book *On the Ecclesiastical Mystagogy*.<sup>12</sup> I take the entire treatise to be an exposition of

<sup>10</sup> I do not discuss here the historical provenance of Maximus' Chalcedonian logic. Suffice it to say that at least since the publication of Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Cosmic Liturgy* it has been commonly recognized that Maximus employs Chalcedonian language to ground Christologically his understanding of the relationship between God (the Logos) and the world.

<sup>11</sup> Jordan Daniel Wood, *The Whole Mystery of Christ: Creation as Incarnation in Maximus Confessor* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> Quotations are from Saint Maximus the Confessor, *On the Ecclesiastical Mystagogy*,



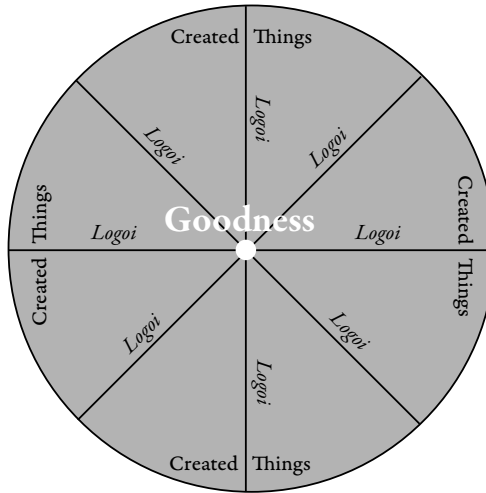
symbology, centered upon the Church. The first half (chapters 1–7) discusses how the Church symbolizes God, the universe, and man, and how man is symbolized not only in the Church, but also in Scripture and the universe. The second half (chapters 8–21) explains the symbolic meanings of the various elements of the Liturgy.<sup>13</sup>

The first half of the book does more, however, than explain how symbol and symbolized (say, Church and God, or Church and universe) relate to each other; it also explains the relationship between elements *within* each of the terms of the comparison. For example, when discussing the church, Maximus does not just ask how it symbolizes God, the universe, and man, but he also discusses the relationship *within* the church between sanctuary and nave. Similarly, *within* the universe, he explores the relationship between the intelligible and the sensible realms; *within* man he looks at how the various faculties are related; and *within* Scripture he examines how Old and New Testaments relate to each other. The entire book expounds symbology.

trans. and ed. Jonathan J. Armstrong with Shawn Fowler and Tim Wellings, Popular Patristics Series 59 (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2019). For analyses, see Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 113–29; Thomas Cattoi, "Liturgy as Cosmic Transformation," *Oxford Handbook*, 414–35, at 420–25; and Paul M. Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 166–95.

<sup>13</sup> Maximus discusses the meaning of liturgical symbols three times in a row (chapters 8–21, 22–23, and 24). It is not exactly clear how the three relate to each other. René Bortner considers the rather lengthy chapter 24 as spurious. *Les Commentaires Byzantins de la divine liturgie du VIIe au XV<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, 1966), 87–90. Cf. George C. Berthold's comments in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. George C. Berthold, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 224n126; Cattoi, "Liturgy as Cosmic Transformation," 431. I am sympathetic to this suggestion: (1) Maximus usually limits the work of the Spirit to the climactic moment of divinization, whereas chapter 24 places most of the Christian life under the rubric of the grace of the Spirit; (2) chapter 24 classifies human beings repeatedly as "practical" and "enlightened" (or as "beginners," "advanced," and "perfect"), which is out of line with the rest of the treatise; and (3) the symbolic meanings advanced in chapter 24 for the "enlightened" often do not differ substantially from the meanings advanced in chapter 23 (allegedly for "practical" believers).

It is a symbology shaped by the logic of Chalcedon. When, in the first chapter, Maximus compares the Church's work to that of God, he explains that God's power of goodness is like the center of a circle.<sup>14</sup>



The circle's radii—the “principles” (ἀρχαίς) or logoi of beings—move like straight lines toward the edge, without being able to move beyond it (*Myst.* 1; CCSG 69:13).<sup>15</sup> The outer limit provides created things with stability and protects them from “non-being” (μη ὄν) or “separation” (χωριζόμενον) from God (*Myst.* 1; CCSG 69:14).

The Church, which symbolizes God as its archetype, creates the same unity:

Even if they are different in their characteristics, and from different places, and have different customs, those who are present [in the Church] are made one according to the same oneness through faith. God himself works [ἐνεργεῖν] this

<sup>14</sup> Maximus uses the same illustration in *Cap. gnost.* 2.4. Cf. the discussion in Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 69–70, 80–81.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Plotinus' similar use of the circle analogy in *Enn.* 5.1.7; 6.5.5. Plotinus does not, however, speak of the circle having an outer edge.

oneness by nature without confusion [ἀσυγχύτως] around the substances of the things that are, alleviating and making identical that which is different around them by the reference to and oneness with himself as their cause [αἰτίαν] and beginning [ἀρχὴν] and end [τέλος], as it has been demonstrated. (*Mystagogy* 1; CCSG 69:14)

God's energy effects the same unity among the Church's members that He also effects in the logoi around Himself, so that the believers are united without confusion (ἀσυγχύτως). By using this key Chalcedonian idiom, Maximus appears to be hinting that the unity of the believers that God creates in and through the Church is grounded in the unconfused unity of the one person of Christ.

The Confessor again uses Chalcedonian language when in the next chapter he discusses how the Church's own unity (of sanctuary and nave) symbolizes the unity of the universe (the intelligible and sensible realms). The Church, he claims, is one hypostasis (ὑπόστασις) consisting of two parts (*Myst.* 2; CCSG 69:15). The universe, suggests Maximus, is similarly ingeniously "interwoven" (συνυφασμένον) (*Myst.* 2; CCSG 69:16).<sup>16</sup> It is one, which is to say, "undivided" (ἀδιαιρέτον), yet "without confusion" (ἀσυγχύτως) (*Myst.* 2; CCSG 69:15).

Maximus piles on the Chalcedonian language in describing the unity of both Church and cosmos. Chalcedon functions as the hermeneutical key to the symbolic relations that *On the Ecclesiastical Mystagogy* examines—whether it is relations in the ecclesial, the cosmic, the anthropological, or the hermeneutical realm.

### *Participatory Logic*

So far, I have tried to show that Maximus grounds his metaphysic Christologically and biblically: the Logos embodies Himself in a

<sup>16</sup>Jonathan Armstrong points out that Lampe observes that Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.28, and Epiphanius, *Panarion* 76.46, use the verb συναφαίνω to describe the union of the two natures in Christ (*Myst.* 2; PPS 59:56 n. 44).

variety of ways, so that we are portions or members of Christ. This does not, however, preclude the impact of Neoplatonism with its notion of participation in the divine. Maximus draws extensively on the Procline tradition to explain the participatory relationship between the Logos, His eternal energies, and created things.<sup>17</sup> Maximus does so throughout his writings, including in *Ambiguum* 7, which we have already looked at.<sup>18</sup>

Proclus (412–485) had posited a threefold hierarchical schema of unparticipated (ἀμέθεκτον), participated (μετεχόμενα), and participants (μετέχοντες).

PROCLUS ON THE ONE AND THE MANY
Unparticipated monad (ἀμέθεκτον)
Participated (μετεχόμενα)
Participants (μετέχοντες)

In Proposition 23 of his *Elements of Theology*, the fifth-century Neoplatonist philosopher deals with the problem of the One and the many. The unparticipated monad produces “out of itself” (ἄφ’ ἑαυτοῦ) the participated hypostases—the realm of divine henads.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Maximus likely drew on Proclus indirectly via John Philoponus and Dionysius. See Jonathan Greig, “Proclus’ Reception in Maximus the Confessor, Mediated through John Philoponus and Dionysius the Ps.-Areopagite: A Case Study of *Ambiguum* 7,” in *Reading Proclus and the Book of Causes*, vol. 3, *On Causes and the Noetic Triad*, ed. Dragos Calma, *Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition* 28 (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 117–67. I assume Maximus’ indirect relationship with Proclus when, in what follows, I speak of Proclus’ impact on him.

<sup>18</sup> Maximus explains that in the eschaton, God is contained uncontainably in the saints “according to the measure of the participation (μετεχόντων) of each” (*Amb.* 7.12). Once our movement comes to rest in God, all that remains for us is the “enjoyment of participation (μετεχομένης) in the infinite and incomprehensible knowledge of God, in the measure that each is able to receive it” (*Amb.* 7.13). The Logos itself is beyond all being (ὑπερούσιος) and hence is not participated (μετέχεται). When, however, we set aside the Logos as beyond being, we see that the Logos is many logoi (*Amb.* 7.20). See also *Amb.* 7.13; 7.21; 7.26; 7.38. Throughout this discussion, Maximus oscillates freely and effortlessly between Christological and participatory discourse.

<sup>19</sup> I quote from Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, trans. and ed. E. R. Dodds, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 26–27. Cf. the discussion in Gerd van Riel, “The One, the Henads, and the Principles,” in *All from One: A Guide to Proclus*, ed. Pieter d’Hoine and Marije Martijn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 73–97.

The monad, therefore, is not sterile or isolated but instead “gives something of itself (ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ)” —namely, the next level of the participated—and passes this on also to the participants at the third level.

Proclus walks a fine line in this proposition. On the one hand, he insists that the monad is not “in any one” of the participated substances at the second, intermediate level. The One remains radically unparticipated, all alone. After all, if it were to divide itself, it would need a yet higher principle to unite it, which would entail an infinite regression. On the other hand, Proclus also insists that the monad is “present to all alike” so as to illuminate all. This presence of the monad to all things remains, however, indirect. It is the participated hypostases that convey the enlightenment of the monad to the participants.

The participated hypostases at the intermediate level pass on the illumination from above by implanting a potency in things: “All that is participated without loss of separateness is present to the participant through an inseparable potency which it implants” (*ET* Prop. 81). For Proclus, because the participated are separate from the participants, they must convey to the participant some kind of potency (δύναμις) or enlightenment (ἐλλαμψις) as a link between the two.<sup>20</sup>

The similarity between Proclus and Maximus is striking.<sup>21</sup> Both have a threefold schema of unparticipated, participated, and participating; Proclus’ treatment of the three levels is similar to Maximus’ circle with its center, radii, and boundary. The relationship between the three levels functions in similar ways in Proclus and Maximus:<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> On Proclus’ understanding, this link is distinct from both participant and participated. Cf. Jonathan Greig, “Proclus’ Doctrine of Participation in Maximus the Confessor’s *Centuries of Theology* 1.48–50,” *Studia Patristica* 75 (2017): 137–48, at 143.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 198–200.

<sup>22</sup> As Greig points out, however, Maximus simplifies Proclus’ system somewhat. For Maximus, the “implanted power” (δύναμις ἐμφυτος) is the presence of the participated activities themselves within created things, not an intermediary link between the participated and participant (as in Proclus). Furthermore, Proclus posits innumerable separate or individual participated hypostases, each present in its own corresponding participant. By contrast, Maximus links the participated activities closely to God, and he sees them as present in every one of the participants (with all creatures participating, for instance, in

For Maximus, God—and hence ultimately also the Logos—is beyond being, unparticipated, much like the Proclean One. For Maximus, creatures participate in the intermediate level of “being itself,” “immortality itself,” “life itself,” “holiness itself,” “virtue itself,” and “goodness itself” (*Cap. gnost.* 1.50).<sup>23</sup> By participating in being itself (or immortality itself, etc.), created, temporal beings participate in the being of God.

Maximus explains that the distinction between participated transcendentals (being itself, goodness itself, etc.) and participating things (beings and good things—plural) maps onto two biblical texts, which seem to contradict each other: John 5.17, where Jesus says that God (as well as Jesus) is working until now; and Genesis 2.3, where Moses comments that God rested on the seventh day from all His works that He began to do.<sup>24</sup> We could sketch Maximus’ exegesis of these two verses as follows:

TWOFOLD WORK OF GOD	
John 5.17	Genesis 2.3
Participated works	Participating works
Works without beginning	Works that God began
Divine activities	Natural activities <i>ad extra</i>
Works that God continues	Works from which God rested
Uncreated, divine	Created, from nothing
Eternal	Temporal
Things around God	
Being itself; immortality itself; life itself; holiness itself; virtue itself; goodness itself	Beings; immortal things; living things; holy things; virtuous things; good things

According to Maximus, John 5 refers to God’s ever continuing works—that is to say, His participated transcendental categories, such as being itself, immortality itself, and the like. These are

divine goodness). Greig, “Proclus’ Doctrine,” 145.

<sup>23</sup> I use the translation in Maximus the Confessor, *Two Hundred Chapters on Theology*, trans. and ed. Luis Joshua Salés, Popular Patristics Series 53 (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the excellent discussion in Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 160–69.

uncreated, divine activities that come from God's essence<sup>25</sup>—and so are called things “around God,” works of God that are eternal, without a beginning.<sup>26</sup> Genesis 2 speaks of God resting from a different kind of work—namely, that of creating particular, participating beings or objects. God has created these sensible things *ex nihilo*; they are the result of natural activities of God that He directs to the outside (*ad extra*)—temporal works that God began to do (*Cap. gnost.* 1.48). Maximus reconciles John 5 and Genesis 2 by arguing that Jesus had in mind transcendental, participated being itself, while Moses spoke of particular, participating beings.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Maximus assumes a doctrine of double activity, which distinguishes conceptually in the divine essence the activity of the essence (*ἐνέργεια τῆς οὐσίας*)—the unparticipated, transcendent Godhead—and the activity out of the essence (*ἐνέργεια ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας*)—the participated energies of God such as Being itself, Life itself, etc. Cf. Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 29–30, 56–57, 159–61. The doctrine of double activity goes back to Plotinus, *Enn.* 5.1.3; 5.4.2; 6.1.22. Cf. Maria Luisa Gatti, “Plotinus: The Platonic Tradition and the Foundation of Neoplatonism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10–37, at 30; Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21–31. Eyjólfur K. Emilsson, *Plotinus* (London: Routledge, 2017), 48–57.

<sup>26</sup> Maximus refers to being itself, immortality itself, etc.—that is to say, the intermediate realm of the participated—as “works.” The reason is that he links the participated with Jesus’ comment about God continuing to “work” in John 5.17. We should not conclude from Maximus’ term “works” that the participated are temporal or created and, as such, linked more closely with creation than with the creator. After all, Maximus regards the participated energies as eternal and without beginning. Treating the “works” as temporal would yield a sharp distinction between the unparticipated divine essence and the participated “itself notions” as divine energies. John A. Demetracopoulous, for instance, wrongly suggests that Maximus “explicitly posed an infinite gap between God’s ‘essence’ and ‘energies’; the former, he stated, ‘stands infinitely infinite times higher’ (*ἀπειράκις ἀπειρώς ὑπερεξήρηται*) than the latter.” “Palamas Transformed: Palamite Interpretations of the Distinction between God’s ‘Essence’ and ‘Energies’ in Late Byzantium,” in *Greeks, Latins, and Intellectual History 1204–1500*, ed. Martin Hinterberger and Chris Schabel, *Bibliotheca* 11 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 263–372, at 279–80. We should keep in mind that Maximus insists that the presence of the energies in created things proclaims loudly that God is “in all beings” (*ἐν πᾶσι ὄντι*) (*Cap. gnost.* 1.49). God Himself—not just things external to Him—is present in created things. Maximus distinguishes God’s essence from His energies without separating them.

<sup>27</sup> Maximus interprets the exegetical difficulty of the same two biblical passages slightly differently in *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 2. For further discussion, see Paul Blowers, *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 159–66.



### *Combining Chalcedon and Proclus*

Maximus, then, combines Chalcedon and Proclus, a Christological account of hypostatic union with a philosophical exposition of participation; or, as Torstein Tollefson might put it, the creation of the creature *ex nihilo* according to its logos of being, establishing the creature's nature or essence; and the creature's participation in divine being according to its *tropos*, establishing the creature's mode of being and its moral fitness.<sup>28</sup> It is tempting to force a choice between these two accounts.<sup>29</sup> I don't think Maximus worked with such a dilemma, and we should not either.<sup>30</sup> Maximus embraced a Christian Platonist metaphysic—convinced that the Christian and the Platonist elements seamlessly fit together. My suggestion is that for Maximus, Christology *requires* participation; Chalcedon and Proclus belong together. The reason is straightforwardly this: the Incarnation of Christ is the completion of a process of creation that develops through an ever-deepening participation in the Logos.

Maximus, following Irenaeus, held to an "Incarnation anyway" position.<sup>31</sup> That is to say, the Incarnation is not only a response to

<sup>28</sup> Tollefson consistently—and rightly, I think—distinguishes in Maximus between the essential principle (grounded in embodiment of the Logos) and the participatory principle (grounded in participation in being and goodness). The former has to do with the essence or nature of things (*logos*), the latter with their mode of being (*tropos*). Tollefson argues that for Maximus, as for Nyssen and Dionysius, "the ontological content of essential being (generic, specific, and particular) is created, but the ontological conditions on which beings exist (Being, Goodness, etc.) are the uncreated divine activities *ad extra*." *Activity and Participation*, 132. Cf. pp. 129, 182. See also *Christocentric Cosmology*, 169–79 (esp. 178), 220–22.

<sup>29</sup> Though he does not dismiss the presence of participation in Maximus, Jordan Daniel Wood downplays it needlessly in favor of enhyposatization of creation in God. See especially *Whole Mystery*, 68–72. The inadequacy of a nearly exclusively Chalcedonian reading of the creator-creature relationship is evident especially when Wood discusses *Cap. gnost.* 1.47–50, a section that, as I have just argued, is grounded squarely in Proclus' participatory metaphysic. See *Whole Mystery*, 77–81.

<sup>30</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, too, had combined proto-Chalcedonian language of the two natures remaining unconfused (*ἀσύγχυτος*) with participation (*μετουσία*) discourse. See Tollefson, *Activity and Participation*, 133–47, esp. 137–38.

<sup>31</sup> I borrow the phrase "Incarnation anyway" from Edwin Chr. van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

sin but is primarily the completion of the process by which God draws the creaturely world perfectly (that is, fully divinized) into Himself in Jesus Christ. Maximus famously claims that the Incarnation is “the blessed end for which all things were brought into existence,” “the preconceived goal for the sake of which everything exists” (*Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 60.3).<sup>32</sup> He suggests that “it was with a view to this end that God created the essences of beings” (*QThal.* 60.3) and that “it is for the sake of Christ—that is, for the whole mystery of Christ—that all the ages and the beings existing within those ages received their being in Christ” (*QThal.* 60.4).

On Maximus’ understanding, if the mystery of the Incarnation was “foreknown before the foundation of the world,” and if it functioned as the end or purpose of creation, then theologically, the Christ event precedes the creation of the world, even if chronologically creation precedes the Incarnation.<sup>33</sup> For Maximus, the Incarnation, therefore, was not an afterthought.<sup>34</sup> All of this suggests to

2008). This approach goes back to Irenaeus, who famously writes: “Inasmuch as the Savior existed beforehand, it was necessary that what was to be saved should also exist, so that the Savior would not be something without a purpose” (*Adversus haereses* 3.2.2.3). See *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies*, trans. Dominic J. Unger, ed. Walter J. Burghardt et al., Ancient Christian Writers 64 (Mahwah, NJ: Newman Press, 2012), 104. See also Bogdan G. Bucur, “Foreordained from all Eternity: The Mystery of the Incarnation according to Some Early Christian and Byzantine Writers,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 62 (2008): 199–215; Vladimir Cvetković, “The Mystery of Christ as Revived Logos Theology,” in *The Architecture of the Cosmos: St Maximus the Confessor: New Perspectives*, ed. Anoine Lévy, Pauli Annala, Olli Hallamaa, and Tuomo Lankila, with Diana Kaley (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 2015), 189–221. For the contrary view, see Jean-Claude Larchet, *La Divinisation de l’homme selon Saint Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Cerf, 1996), 81–105.

<sup>32</sup> I use St Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in Sacred Scripture: The Responses to Thalassios*, trans. Maximus Constatas, Fathers of the Church 136 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018).

<sup>33</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar comments: “It is very significant that Maximus represents the Incarnation of the Logos and the whole historical course of the world’s salvation as both a primeval idea of God and as the underlying structure of his overall plan of the world and that he designates the mystery of the Cross, grave, and Resurrection [of Christ] as the basis and goal of creation.” *Cosmic Liturgy*, 120; square brackets original. Cf. pp. 133–34.

<sup>34</sup> The Confessor, Paul Blowers rightly comments, “does not allow Christ himself to be treated merely as a *deus ex machina* introduced at the most strategic or climactic moment

me that Jordan Wood is correct in his claim that the incarnational language that describes creation is not just metaphorical;<sup>35</sup> creation itself *is* the beginning of Incarnation, in Maximus' thought.<sup>36</sup>

Still, the hypostatic union of Jesus Christ is not strictly identical to the Word's union with creation or with the Church. As we have already seen, theologically, the archetype (the Incarnation of the Logos in Christ) precedes the types (the embodiments of the

in this unfolding drama. Rather, the activity of Christ as the Logos and Wisdom of God saturates the drama from beginning to end." *Maximus the Confessor*, 108.

<sup>35</sup> Tollefsen understands the Logos' "embodiment" in creation and in Scripture as metaphorical language, since here (unlike in the Incarnation of Christ) the embodiment is effected through the logoi of created beings. He concludes, therefore, that there is no hypostatic union of the Logos with the cosmos and Scripture. *Christocentric Cosmology*, 67. It seems to me that this imposes an unwarranted conceptual tidiness on Maximus. As we have seen, for Maximus, in each case the Logos unites Himself to the logoi of creation. Cf. *Amb.* 33.2. In *Activity and Participation*, Tollefsen makes a somewhat different comparison—namely, between Incarnation and deification. He argues that the union of God and man in Christ is distinct from the union of God and man in deification because in the former, the Logos is the hypostatic principle, while in the latter, the human person is the hypostatic principle (p. 179); Tollefsen similarly suggests that whereas in Christ, the Logos assumed a human nature, man does not receive the divine nature into his own hypostasis (p. 161). This is true, I think, and here the reason for the difference seems to me simply that we need to speak of both embodiment *and* participation (or deification), both in Christ and in others. Naturally, then, the embodiment (or Incarnation) of Christ functions differently from the deification of other persons. It remains true, I think, that the incarnate Christ and other persons both undergo this deification *in their human natures*, the former perfectly, the others imperfectly.

<sup>36</sup> Wood, *Whole Mystery*, 3–14. Wood's book is an extended defence of the thesis that Maximus intends his statement that "the Logos of God (who is God) wills always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of His embodiment" (*Amb.* 7.22) to be taken literally. Wood responds to the objection that this approach would undermine the primacy of Christ by arguing that the person (*hypostasis*) of Christ cannot be grasped through the logic of either universality or particularity—both of which are predicates of nature, not person. Wood writes: "Christ is exceptional precisely because he can *be* both universal and particular in his own person....No surprise there. If this 'composed hypostasis' is the identity 'to a supreme degree' of the greatest imaginable 'extremes'—of created and uncreated natures—it is not so remarkable that Christ is also the very identity of all merely created particularity and universality. He therefore does not need to be unrepeatable to be exceptional. His exceptionality lies in the fact that the very mystery he *is*, is repeatable in a nonformal way in and as all creation." *Whole Mystery*, 200. This account regards Christ as exceptional but not as unique or unrepeatable. My own defense of the primacy of Christ, articulated below, will run along somewhat different lines.

Logos in creation, in Scripture, and in the Church). The union of the Logos with the human nature of Christ is the archetype upon which every preceding and subsequent embodiment of the Logos is patterned.

What is more, the archetypal hypostatic union of the Logos in Christ is qualitatively different from every other embodiment—and hence unique, unrepeatable. The reason is that only in the archetypal Incarnation at the center of history do we witness perfect deification, participation, or sacramentality. Christ, we might say, is the *Ursakrament*—the archetypal sacrament—because the incarnate Logos, though tempted in every respect as we are, remained without sin (Heb 4.15). Only the symbolic participation of Christ's human nature in the Logos makes for perfect deification.

Or, we might also say, only in the Incarnation of Christ is the logos of wellbeing fully in sync with the logos of being. Every other embodiment of the Logos is limited and deficient. The journey of human beings depends, in terms of goodness or virtue, upon the shape that the *tropos* or mode of their logos of being takes in their lives and hence depends upon the degree of their participation in the Logos of God. No matter the progress of the journey, no one—either prior to or after the Incarnation of Christ—has attained the kind of perfection we witness in Him.

Much depends upon the new, divine *tropos* or mode, which is meant to shape the deification of man. To be sure, human nature ever remains what it is. The logoi unchangeably are what they are, for they are simply God's eternal determinations of our creaturely being. Logos speaks of the nature itself; *tropos* refers to the personal mode of being. For Maximus, natures (whether human or divine) do not change. Nor are God's purposes for us subject to change. As Maximus puts it in *Ambiguum* 7: Christ's purpose for us—that He might lead us to the stature of the spiritual maturity according to His own fullness (Eph 4.13)—has not changed in its logos (*Amb.* 7.37).

The change in a person's life, therefore, is a change not in his *logos* but in his *tropos*, which is to say, in the actual shape he gives to his life, morally speaking. Jean-Claude Larchet rightly explains that it is the *tropos* or mode of the *logos* of being that changes, in line with the *logos* of well-being.<sup>37</sup> Human nature remains human, then, even in deification. The union is personal (hypostatic), not natural. In no way, therefore, does Maximus confuse God's nature with man's. Maximus may speak of divine embodiment in creation, but this emphatically does not make him a pantheist.<sup>38</sup>

Nonetheless, the new mode or *tropos* that characterizes the renewed person is truly divine. The renewal or innovation (*καινισμός*) pertains to this divine *tropos*. Because in the Fall we rejected the initial *tropos* that enabled us properly to use our natural powers, says Maximus, God "introduced another mode [*τρόπον*] in its place, more marvelous and 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" (*Amb.* 7.38). It is this new, beyond-nature *tropos* that renews and deepens our participation in God;<sup>39</sup> the result is that we are being renewed as portions of God or as members of the body.

In *Ambiguum* 42, Maximus insists even more explicitly that the renewal or innovation takes place in relation to the *tropos* or mode:

<sup>37</sup> Jean-Claude Larchet, "The Mode of Deification," in *Oxford Handbook*, 341–59. Maximus comments in *Opuscula theologica et polemica* 10 (PG 91:137A), "In the *tropos* the changeability of persons is known from the action, in the *logos* the inalterability of natural operation" (my translation). Cf. Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 132.

<sup>38</sup> Tollefsen asks whether Maximus' position of a creaturely participant sharing in the divine activity of Being entails pantheism and responds negatively "because by *nature* the creature does not have a divine character. As a nature it belongs to the created otherness. Further, what is divine, viz. the *Being* of this created entity, does not belong to it as something owned by itself. The power to be is not something that belongs to the creature, but is solely in God's hand." *Christocentric Cosmology*, 209–10.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Tollefsen's excellent discussion of the strengthening of one's initial participation through the deifying change in the *tropos* or mode of being. *Christocentric Cosmology*, 210–14.

“When God innovated [καινοτομήσας] the nature [φύσιν] of the things that were innovated [καινοτομηθέντων], He accomplished this with respect to their mode of activity [τρόπον τῆς ἐνεργείας], not their principle of existence [λόγον τῆς ὑπάρξεως]” (*Amb.* 42.29).<sup>40</sup>

Larchet rightly concludes that for deified persons, the “laws and limits of nature” are abolished: the renewal (καινοτομία) of the *tropos*, suggests Maximus, though it does not change nature itself, does allow it to act outside the limits of its own, natural laws.<sup>41</sup> In other

<sup>40</sup> Both in Christ’s deification and in ours, Larchet points out, human nature reaches beyond itself and operates “as a human being in a way ‘exceeding human.’” Larchet, “Mode of Deification,” 345.

<sup>41</sup> Maximus explains miracles by insisting that they are not against nature (since the *logoi* of nature remain the same); rather, the mode or *tropos* of the event is altered:

Indeed this is exactly what He did from the very beginning, when, in the course of bringing about the unexpected, he wrought magnificent signs and wonders, all by this principle of innovation [καινοτομίας]. Thus He translated the blessed Enoch and Elijah from life in corruptible flesh to another form of life, not by altering their human nature [φύσεως], but by an alteration of its condition and conduct.... He honored His great servants, Abraham and Sarah, with a child, despite the fact that they were long past the age and ordinary limit and time of natural childbearing.... He set alight the burning bush with an unburning fire in order to summon His servant. In Egypt, He transformed water into the quality of blood, without in any way suppressing its nature [φύσιν], since the water remained water by nature [κατὰ φύσιν] even after it turned red.... And the same is true with all the rest of the things that God is said to have done in *the land of possession* [Josh. 22.19], and in the other lands through which the ancient Israelites wandered after they had transgressed—that is, when God innovated [καινοτομήσας] the nature [φύσιν] of the things that were innovated, He accomplished this with respect to their mode of activity [τρόπον τῆς ἐνεργείας], not their principle of existence [λόγον τῆς ὑπάρξεως]. (*Amb.* 42.27–29)

Both in miracles and in deification (which is a miracle of sorts), Maximus describes the innovation or change as taking place in a given nature’s *tropos* rather than in its *logos*. The very laws of nature no longer apply in the change of modality. Cf. Larchet, “Mode of Deification,” 343–44. The implication is that the human being remains human in the process of deification while being changed in his mode of being through supernatural grace. As Larchet puts it, “Their human nature is not transformed into the divine nature and is not confused in any way with it.” “Mode of Deification,” 349.

words, innovation or renewal of the *tropos* takes people beyond nature; they are divinized.<sup>42</sup>

Maximus insists that every one of the renewals of the *tropos* occurs on account of and through the “utterly and truly new mystery” of the Incarnation (*Amb.* 42.29). Born as a “perfect man” (ἄνθρωπος τέλειος) without corruption, God renewed nature with respect to its mode (*Amb.* 42.29). In other words, it is the Incarnation—the perfect humanity of Christ—that enables the renewal of our *tropos*. Maximus comments:

On account of my condemnation, the Lord first submitted Himself to Incarnation and bodily birth, after which came the birth of baptism received in the Spirit, to which He consented for the sake of my salvation and restoration by grace or, to put it more precisely, my re-creation. In this way God joined together [συνάπτοντος] in me the principle [λόγον] of my being [εἶναι] and of my well-being [εὖ εἶναι], and He closed the division [τομήν] and distance [διάστασιν] between them that I had opened up, and through them He wisely drew me to the principle of eternal being [ἄεὶ εἶναι]. (*Amb.* 42.32; translation slightly changed)

Well-being, for Maximus, has to do with goodness and wisdom—and as such with the *tropos* or mode of our being. This well-being is joined back together with being when Christ’s Incarnation and baptism renew our *tropos*. The Word, being good and humane (ἀγαθὸς καὶ φιλόανθρωπος), submitted Himself both to a natural birth without sin (Heb 4.15) and to the spiritual birth of adoption in baptism, thereby abolishing our bodily birth and restoring our birth in the Spirit (*Amb.* 42.32). The renewal of our *tropos* heals the divide between being and well-being.

Maximus does claim, I think, that all of creation is patterned upon the hypostatic union—that it exists as an embodiment of

<sup>42</sup> Larchet, “Mode of Deification,” 347.



God. But it is an embodiment that looks forward to the fullness of Christ. Every embodiment preceding and following Christ is an imperfect, and therefore merely analogous, participation in the Logos—participation is proportionate (*ἀναλόγως*) to its capacity, which depends upon the kind of creature it is and, in the case of man, its moral fitness.<sup>43</sup> Maximus' language of creation as embodiment of the Logos is not mere metaphor; it is, however, analogous discourse: creation is, as Balthasar and others have claimed, analogically related to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Only in Christ, after all, do we have the very stamp of God's nature:

“In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature [ὡν χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ], upholding the universe by His word of power” (Heb 1.1–3).

Yes, creation is patterned upon the Incarnation. Yes, creation is God embodying Himself. And yes, creation begins the long, historical process of God uniting Himself hypostatically to it. But everywhere except in Christ is the Logos symbolized in an immature or imperfect fashion.

It is no doubt true that, for Maximus, the Logos truly embodies Himself throughout creation—for the Logos of God “wills always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of His embodiment” (*Amb.* 7.22). But it is also the case that the embodiment of the Logos in the fullness of time in our Lord Jesus Christ is the archetypal

<sup>43</sup> Maximus comments: “By virtue of the fact that all things have their being from God, they participate in God in a manner appropriate and proportionate [*ἀναλόγως*] to each, whether by intellect, by reason, by sensation, by vital motion, or by some essential faculty or habitual fitness, according to the great theologian, Dionysius the Areopagite” (*Amb.* 7.16).

source of every other embodiment and of the joining together of being and well-being in the process of deification.<sup>44</sup> It is, for that reason, most emphatically *not* the case that each and every personal union that the Logos embarks upon attains the same fullness of perfection.<sup>45</sup> For Maximus, such fullness has entered the world only once, in Christ, and it is His archetypal fullness at which creation aims through the renewal of its *tropos* in the growth of its participation in the Logos by way of being, well-being, and eternal well-being.

For Maximus—and I agree with him here—the Logos truly embodies Himself, hypostatically, throughout creation. The sacramental, real presence of Christ in creation demands no less. At the same time, all such embodiments are mere analogues: their participation is derivative from, inferior to, and dependent upon the glory of the one who bears the very stamp of God's nature (Heb 1.3). The union of the Logos with creation relates to the hypostatic union of Christ by way of analogy rather than by way of strict identity. Both are embodiments of God, but creation's analogous or typical participation in the Logos (by way of an imperfect *tropos*) stems from the original or archetypal participation of Christ's human nature in the Logos (by way of a perfect *tropos*).

### *Creation as Sacramental Theophany*

Creation embodies God because it, like the Incarnation of Christ, is a manifestation of God, a theophany. The Orthodox theologian

<sup>44</sup> It is worth noting perhaps that, as far as I have been able to trace, Maximus uses the language of *σάρκωσις* or *ἐνσάρκωσις* (incarnation) only of the Logos' embodiment in Jesus Christ, while he uses the language of *ἐνσωμάτωσις* (embodiment) more broadly, denoting also the Logos' presence in creation and Scripture. To be sure, we should not press the distinction, for the word *σάρξ* (flesh) would seem naturally fitting in connection with references to Christ's flesh and blood. In other words, the narrow use of *ἐνσάρκωσις* does not as such betray that Maximus' discourse of an embodied creation is metaphorical or analogical.

<sup>45</sup> Maximus explicitly asserts an analogical difference between the Word's embodiment in creation and his embodiment in Christ when he comments: "Nature did not in any way whatsoever obtain unity with God according to mode or principle either of substance or hypostasis," which Maximus contrasts with the Incarnation itself, which he suggests is "unity with God according to hypostasis" (*Amb.* 36.2).

Philip Sherrard uses Maximian language in *The Rape of Man and Nature* when he states that “God is always seeking to work the miracle of His incarnation in all men.”<sup>46</sup> Sherrard may not always express himself with as much precision as Maximus, but on this score, he surely is right: the reason creation teaches us about God is that God embodies Himself in it. Creation is both patterned upon and aims at the Incarnation of Christ.

The embodiment of God in Christ does not preclude His embodiment in creation. Russian philosopher and theologian Semyon Frank asks rhetorically: “The perfect, stable and harmonious combination and balance of the Divine and human natures in [Christ], ‘without division and confusion,’ is exceptional and in that sense miraculous—but does this imply that there can be *no other form* of combining these two principles in human personality?”<sup>47</sup>

We should answer Frank’s rhetorical question with a resounding “No.” Indeed, I think God’s embodiment in Christ *entails* His embodiment also in creation. Why? The relationship between the two is typological or figurative in character. Just as the rock in the wilderness is a type of Christ (1 Cor 10.1–6) and the bronze serpent a figure of the crucifixion (Jn 3.14–15), so creation is a type of the Incarnation of Christ. In each case, the type (as *sacramentum*) has the function of showing forth, in figurative manner, the truth (or *res*) it already embodies. Types always already aim at their climactic truth; figures are called into being for the sake of their fulfilment, as Maximus keenly realized. God does not act aimlessly or randomly when He creates the cosmos: from the outset, His aim with creation is nothing less than a perfectly divinized man, truly and fully united with God.

Sacramental types or figures—rocks, serpents, or creation as a whole—are *like* their ultimate truth in Christ because they are *patterned* upon it. The climactic sacramental truth or reality is the

<sup>46</sup> Philip Sherrard, *The Rape of Man and Nature: An Enquiry into the Origins and Consequences of Modern Science* (Limni, Elva, Greece: Denise Harvey, 1987), 22.

<sup>47</sup> S. L. Frank, *Reality and Man: An Essay in the Metaphysics of Human Nature*, trans. Natalie Duddington (New York: Taplinger, 1965), 140.

archetype—the original exemplar that grounds the types. In God's design, Christ precedes the rock, the cross calls forth the serpent of bronze, and the Incarnation grounds creation. If the Incarnation in the fullness of time is the original, archetypal truth of the creator-creature relationship, then we should expect each of its types analogously to echo it and participate in it. Just as the echo of a voice depends upon the original utterance, so God's embodiment in creation depends upon His embodiment in Christ.

God flings the original, archetypal, or exemplary truth of Christ throughout the cosmos, in time and in space, so that everything that has being reminds us of Chalcedonian truth. The humanizing of God in the Incarnation reverberates, like an echo, in the humanizing of God in creation. True, this downward movement of God in His embodiment begins, *historically*, in creation. But *ontologically*, it originates in the Incarnation. Chalcedon, therefore, speaks truth not just about the Incarnation of the Son of God, but also about every one of God's actions that precedes or follows it. They all embody the truth of the creator God. God embodies Himself—first in Christ, then in all of creation.

Just as the downward or humanizing movement of God (the *exitus* from God) is typologically structured, so too the upward or deifying movement of man (the *reditus* to God) is typologically structured. Also in the Eucharist and in the Church does Christ's embodiment in the Incarnation echo or reverberate. We are saved through figurative or typological means that are patterned on the Incarnation. There is more than a mere *verbal similarity* between the historical body of Christ, on the one hand, and the body of Christ in Eucharist (1 Cor 10.16–17) and Church (e.g., 1 Cor 12.12–27; Col 1.24), on the other hand. There is an *ontological identity* between the three bodies—though they are related analogously, through varying modes of participation.

As Henri de Lubac points out in his seminal work *Corpus Mysticum*, Christ's historical body, eucharistic body, and ecclesial body

are not, actually, three separate bodies; they are one, threefold body.<sup>48</sup> Why? Because the three are typologically linked. In all three, as Maximus might say, the Logos seeks to accomplish the mystery of His embodiment. Redemption is the deifying return of the body of Christ (and thus of all creation) *as* Church, maturing into the fullness of the one who fills all in all (Eph 1.22).

Saint Maximus' language of embodiment (ἐνσωμάτωσις) may be startling. And we do well to be cautious. The dangers of anthropomorphizing, mythologizing, and pantheizing God are not illusory. One could easily use the language of divine embodiment as an excuse to drag God down by reducing Him to the world of becoming, as if God worked out His identity slowly but surely over time. Such an approach meshes God with the world in a deeply problematic manner, for by simply identifying God with this-worldly processes of becoming, one loses sight of His otherness or transcendence in relation to the cosmos. By refusing to bow before the God beyond time and space, Hegelian philosophy and process theology end up with a purely this-worldly or immanent deity—hardly the sovereign God of Saint Maximus and the Christian tradition.

How can we appropriate the Maximian language of divine embodiment without diminishing or belittling God? The term “embodiment” itself gives us the key. I began this lecture with the question, Does God have a body? Maximus never calls creation the “body of God.” That term, though perhaps not problematic *per se*, may well give the impression that God is like us, one being among many: just like we have bodies, so God has a body. But God does not have a body the same way that we have a body, for God *chooses* embodiment. It is an embodiment in which, as Chalcedon teaches, the transcendent God remains transcendent—unconfused (ἀσυγχύτως)—to created being in His union with it.

<sup>48</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

Though “embodiment” is a noun, it speaks of action: God *does* something—namely, embodies Himself. Not under obligation, He is free to do so; He does not have a body by way of external necessity. God *longs* to be embodied and *chooses* to be embodied. Embodiment is an act undertaken by a transcendent God. Utterly beyond the changes and vicissitudes of this-worldly beings, the unparticipated Logos freely assumes man in Christ and freely embodies Himself in creation. Indeed, it is only because God is utterly transcendent that He can also become immanent in the cosmos. Or, to use Maximian language: because God is beyond-being (ὑπερούσιος), He can embody Himself in Christ and creation.

Modernity’s disenchantment has banned any thought of God as embodied. The Maximian antidote to modernity’s vapid materialism is the recognition that in every bit of creation, we witness an echo of God’s Incarnation in Christ. No, Maximus does not take us down the road to pantheism. He does not treat creator and creature as one and the same. He adopts instead a kind of pan-en-theism, for everything that exists has its being within the being of God—a God who remains utterly transcendent, while at the same time embodying Himself in the cosmos that He fittingly but freely has made. The embodiment of God, therefore, means an enchanted world, for, as Maximus already knew, the transcendent creator embodies Himself within creation.

The way we talk about the creator-creature relationship is not a matter of abstract theorizing. To speak of God embodying Himself is to acknowledge that God makes Himself *really* or sacramentally present in the world. When we dismiss the language of divine embodiment, we end up separating nature and the supernatural, or heaven and earth. We relegate God upstairs, so that in the basement we can party alone. This, it seems to me, has been the modern pursuit.

The modern separation between heaven and earth is responsible for the dehumanization of man and the desacralization of nature. Modernity’s disenchantment is reflected in today’s widespread

reluctance to acknowledge that God is embodied and that both the *exitus* (creation) and the *reditus* (redemption) depend upon this divine embodiment. To become modern means to inhabit a disenchanted, disembodied, and ultimately Gnostic universe.

The beauty of Maximian language—God embodying Himself, both in Christ and in creation—is that it reminds us that creation comes *from* Him and returns *to* Him. Creation is not a machine; it does not have being from itself; it is not autonomous. Nothing God makes is *just* stuff, for all of creation is made through hypostatic union with God. Chalcedonian Christianity—the shared inheritance of all orthodox Christianity—teaches the embodiment of God in Christ as the pattern of the cosmos. The Incarnation of Christ unveils the world as theophanic site, suffused with the presence of God.



## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ALEKSANDR ANDREEV (Ph.D., St. Petersburg State University) is a Doctoral Research Fellow at the University of Oslo (Norway).

OLEGS ANDREJEVS (Ph.D., Loyola University Chicago) is a Lecturer at the Department of Theology at Loyola University Chicago.

HANS BOERSMA (Ph.D., University of Utrecht) is the Saint Benedict Servants of Christ Chair in Ascetical Theology at Nashotah House Theological Seminary, WI and a priest in the Anglican Church in North America.

DAVID BRADSHAW (Ph.D., University of Texas) is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, KY.

VIOREL COMAN (Ph.D., KU Leuven) is a Lecturer at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology – University of Bucharest (Romania) and a research associate at Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies – KU Leuven (Belgium).

MAXIMOS CONSTAS (Ph.D., The Catholic University of America) is Professor of Patristics and Orthodox Spirituality and the Director of the Pappas Patristic Institute at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, MA.

DORU COSTACHE (Ph.D., University of Bucharest) is Associate Professor of Theology at the Sydney College of Divinity and Honorary Associate of Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney (Australia).

DANIEL FANOUS (Ph.D., University of Newcastle) is Dean and Associate Professor of Theology & Biblical Studies at St. Cyril's Coptic Orthodox Theological College, Sydney College of Divinity (Australia).

DAVID HEITH-STADE (Ph.D., Lund University) is a Postdoctoral Researcher in Eastern Christian Studies at the University of Vienna (Austria).

PAUL LADOUCEUR (Ph.D., University of Sussex) is Adjunct Professor of Orthodox Theology at Trinity College, University of Toronto, and *professeur associé* at *Faculté de théologie et de sciences religieuses, Université Laval* (Quebec).

JAIME RALL is an M.A. student at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary.

ROBERT F. SLESINSKI (Ph.D., Pontifical Gregorian University) served as Visiting Professor of Philosophy at Mary, Queen of the Apostles Catholic Seminary, Saint Petersburg, Russia, and is an Independent Researcher specializing in Russian religious philosophy. He is a retired priest of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic, NJ.

MATTHEW VEST (Ph.D., University of Nottingham) is Assistant Professor of Bioethics at The Ohio State University Center for Bioethics and Medical Humanities and Assistant Professor of Christian Ethics at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary.