

## Panayiotis Christou

### Maximos Confessor on the Infinity Of Man Panayiotis Christou

I have chosen my subject for this conference, stimulated by my studies on the writings of Gregory Palamas, which I have edited with the help of a group of my students in Thessaloniki.

Palamas in his attempt to emphasize difference between knowledge of a thing and participation in it, pretended in one of his treatises that those who praise God through knowledge of his uncreated energies are merely pious, while those who participated in them become without beginning and without end by grace *ἀναρχοί* and *ατελεύτητοι*. He bases his optimistic perspective mainly on Maximos the Confessor, whose thought rules on a high level over his argumentation during the middle period of his literary activity. Gregory Akindynos, against whom that treatise was addressed<sup>1</sup>, of course rejects this aspect<sup>2</sup> and ironically questions how Palamas succeeded in becoming a man without beginning, since all men have a physical beginning<sup>3</sup>. In the sequel he refers to that haeresiarch, who was expelled from the Church on the grounds that he merely had said that the human body of Jesus Christ was without beginning and heavenly. He obviously meant Apollinarius.

Palamas needed to return again to this subject and dedicated a few pages of his *Antirretics*<sup>4</sup>. Though he was more extensive this time, he could not state all the complex thoughts, which led Maximos to the formation of his doctrine on this point.

Man may certainly be considered as *ἀναρχος* and *ατελεύτητος* in the neoplatonic system, where all beings are of the same essence with the One. They come forth from the One and return to it. In this case however, there is no question of a personal existence, but only the idea of man or the common existence of humanity. The position of Maximos is personalistic and at first it certainly seems strange and inconceivable that man can enter the course of the uncreated. The uncreated is that which really exists, and is not subjected to number and movement, the unique. On the other hand the created is that which came from nothing, which is subjected to number and movement, the multiform<sup>5</sup>. Maximos sententiously states this fundamental doctrine of Christian theology: «the distance and difference between the uncreated and the created is infinite»<sup>6</sup>. The words he uses in this reference *κτιστόν* and *ἀκτιστόν*,

differing from each other only by the privative alpha-prefix, express two realities not merely different, but strange to each other, two realities standing on two levels which do not meet each other anywhere. By limiting his reference only to man he characterises this distance as immense, as a «chasma», as a gulf: «there is a real «chasma», tremendous and great, between God and man»<sup>7</sup>.

It is not very difficult, though, to understand that the opinion of Maximos on the dignity of man is suitably set in the whole system of his doctrine, and even constitutes its height. Indeed a title like «the cause of creation towards God» might be the most convenient inscription at the top of his entire literary production. True to the eastern orthodox tradition, he presents relations between the two categories of existence, the divine and the worldly, in a two-fold manner, i.e. at the same time strange to each other and in close contact. In this way he could escape the danger of dualism, either philosophical or gnostic. He especially thinks of man as one who combines and mediates between the two extremes and who by beginning with the removal of his own division into male and female might unite all the other divisions in the universe and reach God as the cause of all<sup>8</sup>. The relation between the uncreated and created nature, is expressed in terms of transcendence as well as goodness. In the first case, we might point out that the uncreated nature remains inaccessible as infinitely surpassing the created nature; in the second, we might point out that the uncreated nature essentiated and produced the knowledge preexisting eternally in itself<sup>9</sup>.

Goodness transferred to the level of created beings receives the name of ἐρώς from Maximos. This name expresses all the impulse of creation toward its perfection and acts in both directions being ἐρώς of God and ἐρώς of man. «The divine as being eros and agape, is moved, while as an object of eros and agape, it moves towards itself those who are capable of receiving eros and agape. To state it clearer, it is moved with the aim of causing an inward relation of eros and agape in those who are capable of receiving this activity and moves as naturally attracting the desire of those who are moved for this reason»<sup>10</sup>. Goodness is the cause of creation; eros is its perfecting power.

All beings, although they have come forth from nothing according to the will of God and in appropriate time, have their λόγοι, reasons, preexistent eternally within the one Logos, i.e. within God<sup>11</sup>. Each one was made according to a corresponding reason, its logos, which defines its genesis and its essence. From this origin, creation dynamically rushes to its completion.

The term Logos, with its long tradition both pre-Christian and Christian, takes a particular meaning in Maximos connected with his teaching in image, likeness and participation<sup>12</sup> «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 μοίρα Θεού, particle of God"<sup>13</sup> "Every man is a μοίρα Θεού, but not under any condition: he was created as a μοίρα Θεού and remains as such as long as he moves according to his logos, otherwise he collapses and may return again to non-being»<sup>14</sup>. At any rate, the logoi constitute the first found-action of man's ability to be raised above his natural state. By raised above his natural state» we mean an elevation which transforms nature to person, the φύσις to πρόσωπον. This is another fundamental distinction in the theology of Maximos, followed, by a number of other conjunctions, like κίνησις and ενέργεια, φυσικόν θέλημα and γνωμικόν θέλημα, εικόν and ομοίωσις.

Nature or essence, is the common content of all species; person or hypostasis is the nature, together with its distinctive marks in each individual<sup>15</sup>. Here anthropology corresponds to theology, in which the divine nature hypostasised in the three persons.

Movement is a distinctive property of creation, beginning with the foundation of the world as its consequence and involving a state of change. Everything which moves is subject to change and naturally God being immovable is unchangeable<sup>16</sup>.

A basic category of movement is time, which is unfolded alongside movement, and measures the life of the world. Time and perpetuity χρόνος and αωνιότης are categories of creation while eternity is a category of God. Being above any relation, God is above time and age. He is eternal «as are all His energies»<sup>17</sup>.

Now this movement belongs to the nature of created things, the rational as well as the perceptible ones, though different in each case<sup>18</sup>. In rational beings, it is combined with the distinction between the categories of nature and person. As we proceed from nature to person it is transformed into energy.

Though Maximos also accepted energy as a capacity of nature, he does so only in a special case and under terms which facilitated his aim in facing the doctrine of his adversaries about a unique energy in Christ. In Christ each nature has its own energy, not as a nature, but as a correspondence to a person. And indeed, the divine nature is a person, while the human nature, not even a particular person, was developed to such a degree, that it had its movement raised into an energy.

Thus, in general, Maximos 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<sup>19</sup>. The same terminology was used by John of Damascus one century later<sup>20</sup>. For Maximos, nature without energy

would be something absurd, as later it would be for Gregory Palamas. And movement as expressed in each particular being by its own energy, is a power which leads to a purpose, either positively or negatively.

The division of will into two categories corresponds completely to the previous distinction between movement and energy. Natural will is a capacity of the natural being, both appetitive and cohesive, of all properties which belong to the category of nature<sup>21</sup>. On the other hand the gnostic will is a self-determining impulse, executing the turns towards either direction and also a capacity of person<sup>22</sup>. The natural will is, therefore, connected with nature and movement, while the gnostic will is connected with person and energy<sup>23</sup>.

Maximos places the distinction between image and likeness in the same frame. The first belongs to the category of nature and exists in the space between being and well-being, εἶναι and εὖ εἶναι, while likeness belongs to the category of person and points to the perfection of man. It is worth citing a very characteristic chapter of his on this subject:

God, in bringing into existence the rational and intellectual beings, communicated four of the divine attributes, in order to support, to guard and to preserve beings: being, ever-being, goodness and wisdom.

Two of these, being and ever-being, were offered to essence. The other two, goodness and wisdom, were offered to the gnostic capacity, so that creation became by participation that which God is by essence. That is the reason why it is said that man has been made in the image and likeness of God: In the image as being of the being and as ever-being of the ever-being, if not without beginning certainly without end, and in the likeness, as good of the good and as wise of the wise, one by grace of the one by nature. Every rational nature is in the image of God, while only the good and the wise are in the likeness<sup>24</sup>.

According to this type of theology, being and ever-being have been offered to the nature (or essence) and therefore they became properties of the rational beings by nature. The meaning of the image is exactly this, that created essence received the properties of being and ever-being, the second, though, not without end. All rational beings have been created in the image of God, which belongs to their nature. The other two properties, goodness and wisdom, have been given to the gnostic capacity, i.e., to energy. Rational beings are not automatically by their creation endowed with these properties, but obtain them through their free operation; these are ingredients of likeness to God, being attained only by grace. Likeness is connected to personal freedom and consequently belongs to the category of person. The person is not something completed in advance. Rather, it is formed through hard struggle, aiming at

elevation of nature, or rather at its surpassing. For man to form his personality means to transform his movement to energy, his natural will to gnostic will and his image to the likeness to God; it means to be elevated to the level of God and converse with him, person to person.

The purpose put in front of man illuminates clearer Maximos' aspect of a close connection between man and God. The fact that man was made as a particle of God is not a sufficient property and, if this is not accompanied by a participation in the divine glory, it remains meaningless. The Confessor clearly defines man's purpose in analysing the mystery of Christ. He says that the great and hidden mystery is the προεπινοούμενον τέλος for the sake of which God produced the essence of beings. It is, namely, the hypostatic union of God and man in Christ<sup>25</sup>. Certainly, the exact meaning of this passage is given a reverse interpretation, when one concludes that the purpose of man's creation is his union with God of which the hypostatic union in Christ was to be the archetype.

The destiny of man is the communion of the divine nature and the participation in the eternity of God, attainable through God's implanting the respective logos into man in his creation and through his energy within the world as a whole. The distinction according to the λόγος φύσεως is sharply contrasted with the uncreated, while the distinction according to the τρόπος υπάρξεως is not separating but unifying. God is that which is participated in; his energies are goods which may be participated in by rational beings<sup>26</sup>. The achievement of man's high destiny is realized in the terms of that dialectical relation between μετεχόμενον and μεθεκτόν and μετέχον.

The five great divisions of nature<sup>27</sup> were put before man as a labor for unification «by the proper use of the natural faculties»<sup>28</sup>. Beginning with his own division into male and female, he should by an apathetic relation to the divine virtue shake off his nature and become simply «bare man»; then, proceeding through the other divisions he could, at the end, unite the created nature to the uncreated, revealing these two as one and the same by virtue of grace<sup>29</sup>. However, the first man not only was unable to secure a unification of the remaining elements, but even failed to approximate to his prototype, because he was not ready to use properly his natural powers. Therefore, instead of subjecting his senses to himself, he was subjected to the perceptible world, led to further division and came very nearly to non-being<sup>30</sup>. And ever since, all of humanity has followed the same way. In this situation another extraordinary process was initiated: to be not according to nature, nor against nature, but above nature. God himself became man in order to unite the divided and to show the reasons by which it would be possible for union to be realized. The

Logos of God became «a perfect man out of us through us to us, possessing all our properties, except sin»<sup>31</sup>. Of particular importance in this reference is a second paradox; namely, that Christ, through his incarnation, makes human nature another mystery. He elevates it with himself and transforms it<sup>32</sup>. However, elevation has not been realized once for ever. According to the personalistic view of Maximos, God and man are παραδείγματα αλλήλων, examples of each other. God makes himself man out of love for men as much as man deifies himself out of love for God; and God lifts up man to the unknowable as much as man manifests God, invisible by nature, through his virtues<sup>33</sup>. There is one person that imparts grace and another that receives grace; on the other hand, man in general and also each person separately is the one that has given to Christ humanity and Christ is the person that has accepted it.

The one by receiving the human nature enters the creation and the other by achieving a union of his nature with the divine enters the realms of the uncreated. The one descends; the other ascends. Here we find the correct explanation of Maximos' aspect about the position of the incarnation in God's design. On the basis of what has been said in the last few lines one can conclude that the cause of the incarnation should be found in man's fall and its purpose in man's restoration. However, this would be contrary to Maximos' statement that the incarnation of the Logos was the προεπινοούμενον τέλος, being found eternally in the divine design. Indeed, since man's purpose was theosis, which he was not able to achieve by his own means, the descent of God to man would be necessary under any circumstance, in order to facilitate man's ascent. Incarnation is the perfection of man<sup>34</sup>. Man's sin and fall were a fact which did not cause a new decision by God, but added a detail to the eternal design. This is a further elaboration of Athanasius' teaching on the subject as in the De Incarnatione Verbi.

Under conditions prevailing after Christ's incarnation, three factors move and influence the human will. God, nature, and the world<sup>35</sup>. Man remains stagnant if his will is subjected to nature; he becomes mere flesh, if it is conquered by the world; he becomes God by adoption, if it is attracted by God. Therefore, his pursuit is to surpass first the world and then his own nature, in order to reach God. For, these factors do not act by force, but rather propound their motives before man's will. What is of the greatest importance in the process of regulating his life is the αὐτεξούσιον, i.e. the self-determining power, the faculty to transpose appetite from the allowed to the forbidden, from the good to the bad, and conversely; the right to choose between «being attached to the Lord and become one spirit and of being attached to the prostitute and

become one body»<sup>36</sup>. Free choice means a contesting process in the midst of a variety of conditions which are defined by the attitude towards the threefold general law. The third law, i.e. that of grace, prevailing pre-eminently on the field of virtue, teaches the immediate imitation of God and leads to divinization through transformation of nature. Virtue is not a good within the nature or according to nature, but above nature; it is a surpassing of nature and fights against nature, in order to remain unsubdued, as the true theory fights against time and age. The divine likeness comes forth from these two powers, i.e. θεωρία and ἀρετή, theory (or gnosis) and virtue<sup>37</sup>.

The path way is a continuous elevation towards God, from power to power and from glory to glory, beginning with movement given by God and advancing to eros and ecstasy until the traveller is incorporated within the loved one. Eros is the highest stage of man's love for God and of God's love for man. All virtues contribute to the divine eros, and most of all pure prayer, through which the mind obtains wings to pass outside all things and to be elevated from the human things to the divine. So man becomes able to follow Jesus Christ in his ascent to heavens<sup>38</sup>. The one who has been purified by practical philosophy, was taught by natural theory and lastly was led to mystical theology, meets God ineffably in ignorance as within γνόφος, obscurity. Such a one has already become Moses: a spiritual Moses<sup>39</sup>.

As has already been said, movement is a means for pursuing a high purpose, in man's case, perfection. The end is found in the ascent of Creation to God, where rest is prevailing as a consequence and completion of movement. Man's path-way testifies that beginning and end are one and the same<sup>40</sup>. Movement begins with time and rest begins with termination of time; therefore, beginning and end meet each other at one point. And since the beginning defines the movement as caused by the creation of things, it rightly was called also end, where the motion comes to rest as in the movement of things. In this way man searching for his end, his final goal, naturally reaches the beginning which is identified with the end. This proceeding from movement to rest means a transition from time to eternity, a surpassing of the separation between the created and the uncreated, a passage to God, who lies behind time, movement and alteration. This is the κατάπαυσις or σαββατισμός i.e. cessation.

Not all things cease to move, however, but only those governed by time while the things of virtue, being outside time, proceed for ever and, even if they be terminated, move again towards a new increase, for the ends become beginnings of other advances. The state of rest, which is absolute in the ideal world of Plato and Origen, here in the world of spiritual perfection of Maximus is relative. It is an αεικίνητος στάσις and στάσιμος κίνησις, an ever-moving rest

and an ever-remaining movement<sup>41</sup>. Spiritual perfection is without term, as Gregory of Nyssa had taught long ago<sup>42</sup>.

Maximos, in his attempt to elucidate the state of transcendental life, offers the examples of St. Paul and Melchisedek, stressing the second even much more emphatically. Melchisedek, king of Salem, being presented in the book of Genesis as without genealogy, received in time a messianic character. In the Epistle to the Hebrews he is said to be fatherless, motherless, without generation, having neither beginning of days nor an end of life and likened to the Son of God<sup>43</sup>.

Transition to eternity is not just an eschatological question for it belongs to the sphere of spiritual operation, which is independent of temporal or non-temporal conditions. Time and space may be abolished at any point of human life, even on earth, if they are surpassed by reason and virtue. The gulf between God and man is bridged, even when man is still within this world of change and corruption, within the flesh, on the sole condition that he has been removed through his own will from flesh and world<sup>44</sup>.

The adjectives fatherless, motherless and without generation were not attributed to Melchisedek «for the sake of natural and chronical properties», which characterize father and mother and generation, beginning and ends of days, i.e. things which have been abolished by Melchisedek himself. They were given to him «for the sake of divine and blessed properties», for the sake of virtue, through which he transformed his species. In other words he was named so, not on behalf of his nature created out of nothing, according to which he began and ended his life, but on behalf of the divine and uncreated grace, which comes forth from the eternal God and exists forever, above any nature and any time. Man is recognized as having been begotten «gnomicly» in his integrity only through his uncreated grace, having attained that state, because he preferred virtue to his nature. So, he was begotten by the Logos in the Spirit to the divine and endless and immortal substances of God and this brings in itself truly the likeness of God who has begotten him<sup>45</sup>. The one who has mortified his earthly members dies and rises with Christ<sup>46</sup>. And since he has declined worldly goods and mortified the earthly members, he has ceased to reproduce in himself the life measured by time which has a beginning and an end, and is shaken by a multitude of passions. He abandoned these, for the sake of the better, the divine and eternal life of the Logos who dwelled in him<sup>47</sup>. Being released from the bonds of time, he is freed in both extremes and so he becomes not only without end -an aspect easily understandable- but also without beginning, since beginning falls into the frame of time which was abolished. The end of times and ages is the complete unity of the genuine



beginning with the genuine end within man who is saved. And since genuine beginning and end are just God, unity between these two elements within men who are saved constitutes a unity with God. Therefore, we observe first the choosing of things, then the complete unity between beginning and end, and finally theosis<sup>48</sup>.

The one who receives the gifts of the incarnated Logos once, through the sacraments, is forever united with him and keeps his hypostasis forever inside his soul. For Christ is all the time begotten in him secretly and he makes of the soul who begets him a virgin mother<sup>49</sup>. Having the God-man permanently within himself, he is in a continuous and perfect contact with the divine. The one who is able to be elevated into the heavens through the divine Logos, who descended on earth for this purpose; he becomes God just as God became a man<sup>50</sup>. When he supersedes nature, he becomes by grace what the giver of grace himself is by nature; after he stops his natural operations, according to flesh, according to sense and according to mind, he becomes God through participation in the divine grace. So in the proportion of his participation in the theosis he is also deified in soul and body; this is the uncreated *θέωσις*, divinization, which is offered to the worthy. And just as divinization is a divine energy without beginning and end, so also is the person who is deified.

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## Примечания

- <sup>1</sup> - Written at the end of 1341 or the beginning of 1342.
- <sup>2</sup> - Cod. Monac.Gr.223.
- <sup>3</sup> - Apud Palamas, *Antirreticos* 3, 4, 7 (ed. P. Christou 3, 165–166).
- <sup>4</sup> - Ibid., 3, 2, 12ss.
- <sup>5</sup> - Cf. *Carit.* 4, 9; PG 90, 1049B.
- <sup>6</sup> - *Amb. Io.* 7; PG 91, 1077A .
- <sup>7</sup> - Ibid. 10; PG:91, 1172A.
- <sup>8</sup> - Ibid. 41; PG 91, 1305.
- <sup>9</sup> - *Carit.* 4, 4 and 5; PG 90, 1048D.
- <sup>10</sup> - *Amb. Io.* 23; PG 91, 1260C.
- <sup>11</sup> - *Amb. Io.* 42; PG 91, 1329A. Cf. L.Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator. The theological anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, Lund 1965, 78–81. I.-H. Dalmais, *La théorie des logoi des criatures chez S. Maxime le Confesseur*, in: *RSPHTh* 36 [1952] 244–249.
- <sup>12</sup> - *Commentary to On the Divine Names* 2, 3; PG 4, 352.
- <sup>13</sup> - *Amb. Io.* 7; PG 91, 1080A.
- <sup>14</sup> - Ibid.; PG 91, 1081C.
- <sup>15</sup> - *Opusc.* 23; PG 91, 264–265.
- <sup>16</sup> - *Cap. Theol.* 1, 68; PG 90, 1108C.
- <sup>17</sup> - Ibid. 48–19; 1100C-1101 A.
- <sup>18</sup> - *Amb. Io.*7; PG 91, 1072B.
- <sup>19</sup> - *Amb. Th.* 5; PG 91; 1057B. Cf. Thunberg, 94.
- <sup>20</sup> - *De Fide orth.* 3, 15; PG 94, 1048.
- <sup>21</sup> - *Opusc.* 3; PG 91, 45D.
- <sup>22</sup> - Ibid, 16; PG 91, 192.
- <sup>23</sup> - Cf. J.-M.Garrigues, *Maxime le Confesseur. La chariti, avenir divin de l'homme*, Paris 1976, 91f.
- <sup>24</sup> - *Carit.* 3, 25; PG 90, 1024B.
- <sup>25</sup> - *Qu.Thal.* 60, PG90, 620–621.
- <sup>26</sup> - *Cap. Theol.* 1, 48; PG 90, 1100–1101.
- <sup>27</sup> - Uncreated and created, reasonable and perceptible, heaven and earth, paradise and oecumene, male and female.

- 28 - Amb. Io.10; PG 91, 1148A.  
29 - Ibid. 41; PG 91, 1305–1308.  
30 - Ibid., PG 91 1308C.  
31 - Ibid., PG 91, 1308D.  
32 - Amb. Th. 5: PG 91 1048D-1049A.  
33 - Amb. Io. 10; PG 91, 1113 BC.  
34 - A.Riou, Le monde et l' iglise selon Maxime le Confeseur, Paris 1973,  
96f.  
35 - Ep. 9, PG 91, 445.  
36 - Amb. Io. 7; PG 91, 1092D.  
37 - Ibid. 10, PG 91, 1140A.  
38 - Cap. Theol. 2,18; PG 90, 1133B.  
39 - Amb. Io. 10; PG 91, 1149BC.  
40 - Qu. Thal. 59; PG 90, 613C.  
41 - Ibid. 65, scholion 44; PG 90, 781C.  
42 - Vita Mos.; PG 44, 300D.  
43 - Hebr 7, 1–22.  
44 - Amb.Io.10; PG 91, 1172A.  
45 - Ibid.; PG 91, 1140CD.  
46 - Ibid. 47; PG 91, 1360CD.  
47 - Amb. Io.10; PG 91, 1144C.  
48 - Qu. Thal. 59; PG 90, 609A.  
49 - Or. dom.; PG 90, 889C.  
50 - Amb. Io. 60; PG 91, 1385.

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