

# THE CHURCH IN ST. MAXIMUS' MYSTAGOGY

BY

GEORGE DION DRAGAS

University of Durham

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## *The Problem and the Orthodox Perspective*

In practice if not in theory, there is still today considerable confusion concerning the Church. This is obvious from the way in which many people write and speak about Her. The Church is all too often identified with the clergy as opposed to the laity, with the Church building (the temple or the chapel) as opposed to other secular places, with the ecclesiastical institution as opposed to the people connected with it, with the liturgical gatherings as opposed to everyday life activities, with the community of believers as opposed to the single individual, etc. Sometimes, of course, these definitions are reversed by way of protest, and then the Church is re-defined as the people of God (the priesthood of all believers) in contrast to the clergy (the historic priesthood), as a basis for social institutions and activities in contrast to strictly religious and liturgical ones, or as a federation of groups of individual believers who decide whether and how they can form some sort of conventional ecclesiastical association, which, however, will never inhibit or suppress their individual rights.

It is not so difficult, for anyone who wants to think more seriously and more realistically, let alone more constructively, about the Church, to realize that such definitions are partially true, and therefore, their dialectical affirmation against one another deprives them of their real significance and turns them into bearers of unreality. The Church, who is by authentic definition, «the pillar and concrete foundation of the truth» (I Tim. 3:15), cannot be identified with any one of the above to the exclusion of the others. She stands for a truth which contains all this plurality and which is totally revealed in all its parts without exclusion or opposition.

Truth and partiality are incompatible. Indeed partiality is the entelechy of error, which stands in opposition to the truth. Above all else, truth means wholeness and unity, whereas error means parti-

ality and fragmentation. But even in saying this, one should be cautious in case he falls into the trap of dialectics. The wholeness of the truth is not totalitarianism as opposed to the error of pluralism. Totalitarianism is as partial as pluralism, and both of them are equally erroneous and equally, though differently, opposed to the truth. Totalitarianism suppresses 'the many' by subordinating them to 'the one', and all this is said and is done allegedly (hence, falsely) in the name of unity and wholeness. Pluralism, on the other hand, subordinates unity and wholeness to 'the many'. Looked at from these two erroneous positions, the truth is asymmetrically related to them and belongs to another level. We might say, using the appropriate Greek expression, that in relation to totalitarianism and pluralism, truth is a *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος*. Here (in the truth) there is unity in multiplicity, the whole in the parts, and vice versa.<sup>1</sup>

With these clarifications in mind we may now return to the partial truths about the Church, which were mentioned in the first paragraph of this essay, and make an attempt to see them in their proper light as parts or aspects of the whole truth. The crucial question is how to relate the Church with the world, the institution with the people, the liturgy with life, the clergy with the laity, the community with the individual, etc., without losing sight of the wholeness of the Church, and without minimizing in any way the truthfulness and significance of Her parts in their capacity to become real openings to the particular truths of one another and to the whole truth. Fortunately I am not the first one to raise this crucial question, and therefore not the first one to attempt an answer. Though the context and the motivation were perhaps somewhat different, in fact this question was raised and was answered in Byzantine times by one of the greatest theological minds of Orthodox Byzantium, Saint Maximus the Confessor and Martyr. I am, of course, thinking here of Saint Maximus' *Mystagogy* (Initiation into the Mystery), which constitutes one of the most seminal literary pearls of Greek Orthodox Byzantine culture and spirituality, whose tremendous importance for our present world is yet to be discovered.<sup>2</sup> In this *Mystagogy*, Saint Maximus presents us above all with

1. See here my article, «Orthodox Ecclesiology in Outline», in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, vol. 26 (1981) pp. 185ff.

2. According to Polycarp Sherwood, who dated the works of St. Maximus, *The Mystagogy* was most probably written around A.D. 628-630. The original text of this work (Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 91: 657-717) was reprinted at Athens with Introduction, notes and a modern Greek translation and published by the

the total mystery of the Church, which embraces all reality in its totality and its parts, and gives it an eternal significance. He is able to do this by employing the Greek Patristic ontological category of the *eikon*. Thus, the Church is presented as a reality, which does not stand over or against the world but alongside, with and for the world, viz as a reality which reveals its proper function. Indeed the Church is the proper *eikon* of the world. She is the world seen in another perspective which is more human, and which is imbued with a divine quality of being and manner of existence. Saint Maximus leads us to see the great mystery of the Church in the specific and realistic *eikons* which constitute our total everyday experience, and which, far from opposing one another, help distribute the light of God's glory and truth from the outer galaxies of heaven to the innermost sanctum of the soul, the human mind. In this perspective the Church is a manner of existence which transforms all creaturely existence in its totality and in its parts without leaving anything outside.

#### *Saint Maximus' Mystagogy*

A careful study of the *Mystagogy* as a whole reveals a threefold general structure. There are three main sections to the treatise, placed between a sizeable Preface (*προοίμιον*) and an extensive Epilogue (*ἀνακεφαλαιώσεις*), and they deal respectively with a) the *eikons* or visions of the holy Church of God (chs. 1-7), b) the holy synaxis (i. e., the divine liturgy) of the Church of God (chs. 8-21), and c) the way in which the divine institutions of the holy Church lead the human soul to her perfection through a true and active understanding (chs. 22-24).<sup>3</sup>

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Apostolic Diaconia of the Church of Greece as first volume in a series called «To the Sources» under the editorship of Panagiotis Nellas. The full title is: *Μυσταγωγία τοῦ ἁγίου Μαξίμου τοῦ Ὁμολογητοῦ, Ἐκδόσεις Ἀποστολικῆς Διακονίας*, Athens, 1973. Charalambos Soteropoulos published an excellent literary study on the *Mystagogy* and the first critical edition in Athens, 1978. The *Mystagogy* was translated into Latin in the 16th Century, into Turkish in 1799 (for the Greeks of Turkey), in Italian by R. Vantarella in 1934, in French in 1936 (by Borodine in *Irenikon*, 13 (1936) 466 ff; cf. also Hamman's *Initiation Chrétienne*, Paris, 1963), and in modern Greek by Ignatios Sakalles in 1973. An English translation has just appeared in America: *The Church, the Liturgy and the soul of man* by Dom Julian Stead O.S.B., St. Bede's Publication, Still River, MA., U.S.A.

3. I prefer this three-fold division instead of the usual two-fold division mentioned by the contemporary exegetes (i. e. chs. 1-7 and chs 8-24; ch. 24 being a recapitulation of the treatise).

In this essay it is the first section of the treatise, a unit of its own, that constitutes the object of analysis and evaluation. But first, a general look at the Preface will serve as a natural introduction to Saint Maximus' doctrine.

The opening sentences of the Preface speak of the mystical visions of a great spiritual Father about the holy Church and the holy gathering which takes place in it as the source of inspiration for the present treatise. Further along in the Preface the identity of this great spiritual Father is disclosed and so is his great work which contains the spiritual visions of the Church. He is the «all-holy and truly revealer of God, Dionysios the Areopagite», and the work under consideration is his treatise on the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.<sup>4</sup>

Maximus explains that his intention in writing his *Mystagogy* is not to treat the same subject as Dionysios, and certainly not to «compete with him on the mysteries which were revealed to the holy man alone by the operation of the Holy Spirit.» Rather, he intends to present on the one hand these things which others have not presented or examined, thinking that Dionysios had included them in his own exposition, and on the other hand those things by which the ray of light, which is communicated through the liturgy is actually perceived<sup>5</sup>. Saint Maximus does not promise to present in sequence all the things which the blessed old man saw in his vision, because, as he admits, he is not himself capable to match the purity of his teacher, and purity (the life of virtue) is regarded as the presupposition for the mind to reach a direct comprehension of the given reality and express its totality in words. Nevertheless, Saint Maximus promises to offer what his memory retains and what the grace of God has given him.

The last point concerning the grace of God constitutes for Maximus the fundamental presupposition of his ecclesiology. No one, he says, can understand and far less express the great mystery of the Church, or the Church's liturgy, without the help of the grace of God, whereby he is delivered from the passions and is raised above «the mind of the flesh.» In other words, the understanding of the divine mysteries is not conditioned merely by man's rational capabilities, but primarily by man's reception of God's grace and purity of life. The «mind

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4. On the relation of the *Mystagogy* to Pseudo-Dionysios' *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* see Ch. Soteropoulos' *The Mystagogy of St. Maximus the Confessor*, Athens, 1978 (in Greek), pp. 55-75. Cf. also G. Bebis: «The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Dionysios the Areopagite», *Gr. O. Th. R.*, vol xix (1974) pp. 159-175.

of the flesh» is the power which governs «the man of passions.» The fleshly desires attach him to the fleshly surface of persons and things and do not allow him to rise above creation to the transcendent Creator. Only by the illumination of man's mind, which is granted by God to him who denies the flesh and seeks God's assistance, is ecclesiological apprehension and exposition possible. This really means that the connection between man's humanity and the Church is fundamental. The one presupposes the other, or the one reveals the other. With these preliminary clarifications, Saint Maximus moves to the first main theme of his treatise, the understanding of the holy Church of God by means of eikons.

*The Church as the Eikon of God the Creator<sup>5</sup>*

First of all the Church is the type and the eikon of God the Creator, because by imitation and in form She does the same work as He does in the world. To clarify this statement Saint Maximus first turns to God's work in Creation and Providence.

Having first brought all things into existence by His immense power, God holds them all together, unites them together, and sets their limits. By His providence, in particular, He unites one thing with another and both of them with Himself, and He also unites the intelligible with the sensible. Holding everything round Himself as their cause, beginning and end, He makes them all adhere to one another's tendency, even though their natures are quite distinct, because of their power which is embedded in their movements towards Him. In accordance with this power, they are all led to an identity of movement and existence which excludes destruction and confusion. Thus, the difference of the natures of the created things does not result in strife. They are all coordinated into one movement because they keep the indissoluble relation and custody of the one principle and cause. Thus, God unites all things by bringing them into relation with Himself.<sup>6</sup>

This relation of the created things with God overcomes all other

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5. Cf. *Mystagogy*, ch. 1.

6. Unity in creation is the goal or the end of creation. It is a gift given to the world by the Creator. For Maximus there is no initial inherent unity in the world which was lost as Creation fell into pluralism. The right scheme is not «unity-fall» but «multiplicity-grace-unity». The key to the right scheme is God's grace in creation and redemption.

relations which belong to the nature of things, and, as it were, overshadows them. This does not mean that the former destroys or corrupts the latter, but rather that it wins them and shines over them and above them, just as a whole reality is above its parts and appears as the cause of the whole. Such a cause of the whole (ἡ αἰτία τῆς ὁλότητος) also reveals the parts of the whole (τὰ τῆς ὁλότητος μέρη) which appear to exist, because their whole cause shines over them. As an example of this, Saint Maximus refers to the sun and the stars. The sun exceeds the brightness of the stars, both in nature and in power, and yet, like the effects of one cause, they all show forth their cause as covering all their existence. As the parts are derived from the whole, so the effects naturally derive their strength from the one cause and are recognized by it. At the same time they surrender their individuality as, by holding hands with each other in their relation to their cause, they receive from it all its quality in accordance with the power embedded in this relationship. Similarly, God is all in all, but this truth becomes visible only to those who have a clear perception. As for clear perception, it is achieved or acquired, when the mind, contemplating the rationality of things, comes to a halt in God Himself, as the cause, the beginning and the end of the creation and generation of everything.

Now, says Saint Maximus, the Holy Church of God works among us in a similar way. This is because God is Her archetype, and She is His eikon. Of course Saint Maximus acknowledges that, that, as in the world so in us, there is a multiplicity of natures. There are, he says, many men, women and children who differ both in race and form, nationality and tongue, manner and custom, as well as profession. In addition, there are many other differences among those who come to the Church and receive Her rebirth and recreation by the power of the Spirit. They have different skills of knowledge, office, fortune, character and disposition. And yet all of them receive from the Church in equal measure one divine form and name, because they all come to exist of and to be called Christians from the one Christ. The Church gives all these people one simple (incomposite) and undivided relation of Faith, which does not allow the human difference, which exists in every person, even to become known, because all are related to it and meet it in a catholic way. They all come to coinhere with each other and be conjoined to one another in the one simple and undivided grace or power of the Faith. This is exactly what Acts 4:32 expresses, when it says of the early Christians, that «the heart and soul

of all was one». They were many and different members, says Saint Maximus, but they constituted one visible body, worthy indeed to be the body of the Very Christ, their true Head.

The divine Apostle, says Maximus, expressed it well when he said, there is no male or female, no Jew and/or Greek, no circumcision or uncircumcision, no Barbarian or Scythian, no servant or freeman, because Christ is all in all» (Gal. 2:28 and Col. 3:11). As the sun shines totally upon the stars, and every star shows forth the same sun in a total way, so Christ enlightens totally all the Christians, and each Christian shows forth the same light of Christ. In this Christocentric vision of the Church Saint Maximus sees Christ as the one who with the one simple and all-wise power of His goodness and grace contains all beings within Himself, and resembles a centre from which rays are projected in accordance with the same simple and unified cause and power (cf. here the rose windows in the Western Cathedrals.) By means of these rays, He does not let the beginnings of the created beings run riot and reach their ends, but limits their projections by encircling them, and bringing to Himself all the distinctions of the creatures which He made. He does not want them to become alienated from each other, or become enemies, because they are creatures of the one God, destined to reveal friendship, peace and identity among themselves, lest by their separation from God their being falls into nothingness.

The holy Church then, is an eikon of God because She brings about the same unity among the faithful as the one which God creates in the universe, even if those who become one body in Her happen to be quite different in their characters, localities and manners.

God brings about this unity in a natural way without causing any confusion in the nature of the beings. He deflects their difference and turns it into identity by relating it to Himself and uniting it with Himself as the only cause beginning and end. Here we have a classic statement of the Christian conception of the inner unity of the world and the Church, i.e. creation and salvation. In spite of their distinction and multiform powers, neither the world, nor the Church can exist in themselves. The key to both is God. In the first instance we have God the Creator and in the second, God the Redeemer. Since the Creator and the Redeemer are the same person, His two activities of Creation and Redemption in the world and the Church enjoy an appropriate inner connection — the one is the eikon of the other. This means that the proper understanding of the world and particularly the mystery of its unity in multiplicity reveals the parallel mystery of the Church

and vice versa. Far from being incompatible, the world and the Church enjoy an inner connection and an inner ontological resemblance because they have the same transcendent ground of existence in the one Creator and Redeemer. The world is for the Church and the Church for the world, because both are for God, and God is the key to the existence of both. The world is multiplicity in the unity of God's creative grace. The Church is multiplicity in the unity of God's Christocentric saving grace. World and Church are eikonically interrelated in the way in which God's creative and saving activities are interconnected.

*The Church as the Eikon of the World<sup>7</sup>*

In the first instance St. Maximus spoke of the Holy Church as a communion of people in the one saving faith and grace of Christ, which exhibits in an eikonic way the union of God with the whole world in Creation. In the second instance he speaks of the Church as the eikon of the world itself, composed of invisible and visible realities (ἀόρατοι καὶ ὄραται οὐσίαι). In line with the classical, Biblical and Hellenic patristic traditions Maximus sees the world as consisting of invisible and visible things, which are at the same time united and distinguished. He finds a similar distinction and union applying to the Church. But here he views the Church not as the mystical body of Christ, but as the liturgical community gathered together in concrete space and location and consisting of priests and laity. The Church as a liturgical community, he says, is one edifice or one house, which admits of a functional distinction among its occupants referring to position or form and expressed in an analogous distinction in space. This is the distinction between the place allotted to the priests and leaders of the liturgy, which we call «the Holy Place» (τὸ ἱερατεῖον), and the place open to all the faithful, which we call «the Temple» (ὁ ναός). The space of the Church however, remains one, without being divided by the division of its parts owing to the functional difference which exists between them. But even these very parts themselves declare their identity by their reference to their own unity which delivers them from their differences of calling. Thus, although these two parts exist in mutual coinherence, the Church reveals what each one of them constitutes in itself. She shows «the Temple» to be «the Holy Place» in a dynamic way, because the latter directs to the former its Divine Liturgy (μυσταγωγία) as its end. At the same

7. cf. *Mystagogy* ch. 2.

time, She shows «the Holy Place» to be «the Temple» because it is from the latter that the Divine Liturgy begins. Thus the Church remains one and the same in both through mutual coinherence.

Now what we see taking place in the space of the Church, says Maximus, is but an eikon of what takes place in the universe of the entire cosmos which is created by God. In the universe we have a division between the intelligible world (*νοητὸς κόσμος*) consisting of intelligible realities (*νοεραὶ οὐσίαι*) and the «sensible or somatic world» (*αἰσθητὸς καὶ σωματικὸς κόσμος*), weaved together as with hands into magnificent combination of many kinds and natures (*εἰδῶν τε καὶ φύσεων*). This «hand-made world» reveals with wisdom another world «made-without-hands», which has another manner of existence. These two worlds resemble the two parts of the Church as a liturgical community gathered in a specific place. Thus the world itself is a «Holy Place» (*ἱερατεῖον*), in as much as it involves «the world above», which has been distributed to the powers above (the angels), but it is also «a Temple» in as much as it contains «the world below», which has been allocated to those who were allotted the life of the senses. And yet, says Maximus, the world is one and is not divided by the division of its parts. On the contrary, by relating them to its unity and by negating all their divisions, it brings under control the division of its parts owed to their particular natures. Thus we are shown that «the world above» and «the world below» are mutually identified with each other and with «the world itself» without confusion, so that the one enters entirely into the other. These parts complete together the totality of the world and the world itself as a totality completes each one of them in their particular unity and integrity. In other words, the entire noetic or intelligible world, which is seen by angels, is mystically typified by means of symbolic representations in the whole sensible world, which is seen by men. Also, the whole sensible world finds its existence inside the noetic world by expanding itself into rational patterns (*λόγοις*). The sensible world is inside the noetic one by means of the rational patterns of its contents, and the noetic world is inside the sensible one by means of types (*τύποις*). However, their function is one, since it is as if there was one wheel inside another, as Ezekiel puts it (Ezek. 1-16). The Apostle spoke about the same thing when he referred to «the invisible things of God being seen from the beginning of the world through the visible ones» (Rom. 1:20). Now, if the unseen things become visible through the things that are seen, the reverse should also apply, i.e. the unseen things should be accessible to those who subject the vi-

sible things to spiritual contemplation. For the symbolic contemplation of the intelligible (noetic) things through the visible things is the spiritual knowledge and understanding of the visible realities on the basis of the invisible ones. The law which applies here is that the things which denote each other should have their mutual denotations in a true and obvious manner and also keep intact or unimpaired whatever relationship is founded upon them.

What Maximus is really saying here is that the Church as a community has a twofold structure, priestly and lay, which, however, forms one unity and is permeated by a law of coinherence or circumincession, whereby each enters totally into the other without losing its distinctive identity. As such the Church is an eikon of the world, the only difference between Her and the world being that the former pertains to the humanity, whereas the latter to creation in general. Man's life in the world and particularly the perception of the duality in unity of intelligibility and matter is an eikon of man's life in the Church and the perception of the duality in unity of the priestly and lay ecclesiastical dimensions. In both perceptions, the cosmic and the ecclesiastical, the emphasis is laid on the activity of coinherence, which is the dynamic basis of the unity of the world and the Church.

#### *The Church as the Eikon of the Sensible World<sup>8</sup>*

In the third place, Saint Maximus sees the Church of God as an eikon of the sensible world alone. If the sensible world consists of heaven and earth, then, these two elements can be paralleled with the divine Holy Place and the Temple respectively. Maximus does not elaborate the meaning of this eikon because he does not explain what he actually understands by the terms heaven and earth. Some commentators think here of the Aristotelian cosmological division which was quite prevalent at the time of Maximus. But this should not be necessarily so. In my view, St. Maximus simply refers to the human empirical distinction between heaven and earth, i.e. to the fact that man cannot move from the one to the other, and not to a sophisticated dualistic cosmology. The brevity of this chapter is probably due to the simplicity of the thought.

With this third eikon of the Church, St. Maximus concludes the cosmological-ecclesiological eikonic coordination and correlation and

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8. cf. *Mystagogy* ch. 3.

passes to the more profound correlation of man and the Church, which is particularly relevant to contemporary culture with its decisively anthropocentric tone.

*The Church as the Eikon of Man*<sup>9</sup>

In the fourth place, the Church of God is an eikon of man and man an eikon of the Church. In this eikonic relationship man's soul is the Holy Place and its mind the divine Altar, whilst the body is the Temple. The basis of this eikon is the fact that both the Church and man are in the image of God. As such, they must also be in the image of each other. In fact this eikonic relationship entails a threefold correlation: Temple - Holy Place - Altar (Church) and body - soul - mind (man). This correspondence is extended to the functions of these ecclesiological and anthropological triads. Thus, with the Temple (the body) the Church puts forward moral philosophy (ἠθικὴ φιλοσοφία); with the Holy Place (the soul) She interprets the natural contemplation (θεωρία φυσικὴ) in a spiritual manner; and lastly with the Divine Altar (the mind), She manifests the mystical theology (μυστικὴ θεολογία). Similarly, man as a sort of mystical church strengthens with his body (as a Temple) the practical capacity of the soul (the Holy Place), by means of the virtuous observance of the commandments in accordance with moral philosophy; with the soul (as a Holy Place) he offers to God with its reason (λόγους) which derive from the senses during the undertaking of the natural contemplation, when they receive the pure spiritual circumcision from matter; finally with the mind (as an Altar) he enters, by means of an «outspoken or talkative silence», the silence of the Godhead, inside the adyton of the dark and incomprehensible voice. In doing this it communicates to man, as far this is possible to him, the mystical theology, so that he becomes (as he must always be) worthy to be visited by God and be sealed with his all-luminous effulgence.

*The Church as the Eikon of the Soul*<sup>10</sup>

In the fifth place the Church is for St. Maximus an eikon of the human soul itself. As this is the most intimate eikon for every human being, St. Maximus elaborates its various aspects by means of a profound psychological analysis. We might say that here the holy father searches

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9. cf. *Mystagogy* cf. 4.

10. cf. *Mystagogy* ch. 5.

into the very depths of the human soul and illuminates them with the light of the Church. He gives the human soul an ecclesiastical formation and character, and thus gives the Church her most intimate human face! The vision is profound but also complex and therefore we shall consider it.

The soul, says St. Maximus, generally speaking comprises the intellectual power (νοερά δύναμις) and the vital power (ζωτική δύναμις). The intellectual power is moved authoritatively by a will, whereas the vital power remains constant (i.e. as it is) in its own nature without the power of choice (ἀπροαιρέτως). The intellectual power contains two further powers, the theoretical (θεωρητική δύναμις) and the practical power (πρακτική δύναμις). The former is called «mind» (νοῦς) and the latter «reason» (ὁ λόγος). It is the «mind» that actually moves the intellectual power, whereas «reason» exercises providence over the vital power. The mind is called «wisdom» (σοφία) when it keeps its movement constantly directed towards God. Similarly reason is called «prudence» (φρόνησις), when through acts it unites prudently the vital power, which is providentially directed by it, with the «mind», and makes the one agree with the other, since this vital power has the same seal of God as the mind, acquired with virtue. This vital power is naturally distributed to the «mind» and to «reason», so that the soul may appear right from the start as consisting of «mind» and «reason», because she is both mindful and reasonable. The vital power is the power equally of the «mind» and of «reason», because neither of these two is deprived of life.

The «mind», having life which we called «wisdom», moves into simplicity by means of «a contemplative «theoretical activity» directed towards the ineffable silence and knowledge, and thus is led to «the truth» by means of the «unforgettable and unceasing knowledge». On the other hand, «reason», having the life which we called «prudence», moves to the good by means of a «practical activity» of the body which is consonant with virtue by faith. These two goals, the truth and the good, says St. Maximus, constitute the true science of the divine and the human realities, the truly inerrant knowledge, the ultimate end of all divine philosophy of the Christian, namely, God Himself.

We may, then, summarize the doctrine of St. Maximus on the structure of the soul in the following way:

## GOD

|                        |          |
|------------------------|----------|
| (Being)                | (Act)    |
| Truth                  | Good     |
| Constant Knowledge     | Faith    |
| Knowledge              | Virtue   |
| Theory (Contemplation) | Act      |
| Wisdom                 | Prudence |

## MIND

## LOGOS

## INTELLECTUAL POWER OF THE SOUL

## VITAL POWER OF THE SOUL

## SOUL

## BODY

## Θεός

|                   |                  |
|-------------------|------------------|
| (οὐσία)           | (ἐνέργεια)       |
| ἀλήθεια           | ἀγαθόν           |
| ἄληστος γνῶσις    | πίστις           |
| γνῶσις            | ἀρετή            |
| θεωρία            | πρᾶξις           |
| σοφία             | φρόνησις         |
| (νοῦς)            | (λόγος)          |
| θεωρητικὴ δύναμις | πρακτικὴ δύναμις |
| νοερά δύναμις     |                  |
| ζωτικὴ δύναμις    |                  |
| ψυχὴ              |                  |
| σῶμα              |                  |

The Truth denotes God with respect to His Being (His existence—the fact that He is) because the truth is a reality which is simple, only one, the same, incomposite, immutable, incapable of suffering, infallible and without distinction. The Good denotes God with respect to His Act, because the good is such that it provides for all that derive from Him and follows them like a guardian. Here St. Maximus points out that, according to the grammarians, the word good (ἀγαθόν) comes from a combination of two words ἄγαν + εἶναι or ἄγαν + τεθεῖσθαι, or ἄγαν + θέειν, and as such it denotes that which grants existence to all things, or preservation and movement.

There are then, five syzygies in the soul which evolve around the one syzygy which reveals God, i.e. the syzygy of Truth and Goodness.

By means of these syzygies the human soul imitates the immutability and beneficence of the being and act of God through the habit of her constant and immovable will.

St. Maximus clarifies further the notion of the five syzygies of the soul by resembling them to the ten chords of the spiritual Psalter. They are the chords which, by their word, supply the tune of God's praise at the biting of the Spirit. This takes place through the other ten blessed chords of the commandments whereby the decad of the psychological chords produces the perfect and harmonious sounds with a sort of mental or intellectual melody with which God is truly praised. So there are two groups of ten chords: one that sings and another which is sung. When the one is mystically united with the other and is harmonized with it then the following events take place: on the one hand the divine Saviour Jesus is brought back to man and on the other hand man is perfected in Him — though Jesus is always in perfect fulness and never exists outside himself; and on the other hand, man is reconstituted as a man through Jesus in a wonderful way, as he is once again united with Him from Whom he received existence and towards Whom he hastens to go longing for true being. This coordination of the two sets of chords reveals man's special office as it is known actively in life. It reveals that what is made after the Image is given back to the Image; or that the archetype is honoured by the type; or that the power of the mystery of salvation is in him for whom Christ died; or that men can abide in Him and He in us, as He said: the Logos of God is straight and all His works in faithfulness.

Exploring yet further the five psychological syzygies, St. Maximus says that «wisdom» is the power of the «mind», and that the «mind» itself is «wisdom» in power; «contemplation» is a «habit» (ἔξις), and «knowledge» is energy; «unforgettable knowledge» is a «habitual and perpetual movement» (ἀεικίνησις) around that which is to be known and which is incomprehensible and beyond knowledge; finally, that the end of the perpetual movement is that which is to be known as infallible, namely, «the truth» of God, which is worthy to be wondered at; and that which is inforgettable (τὸ ἀληστον) comes to an end, when it is described, or when it reaches the end of its movement in the truth of God. God is in fact the Truth around Whom the mind moves unceasingly and unforgettably, without being ever able to come to a point of rest, since it does not find a limit (πέρας) where there is no distance (διάστημα). Indeed, says St. Maximus, such is the amazing magnitude of the divine limitlessness (ἀπειρία), deprived of all quantity, parts

and all kind of dimensions, that when man reaches out to God, he cannot know what His being could be. Whatever has no dimensions and does not admit of comprehension, no one can conquer.

The movement of reason is parallel to the movement of the mind. Reason passes through prudence to act or energy; and from act to virtue; and from virtue to faith; i.e. to the truly assured and unshakable awareness of divine things. Reason possesses faith first as a possibility and then through prudence, activity and virtue as an actuality, i.e. as work. Without work faith is something dead, as it is written; and as such it could never be numbered among the goods. Rather it is through faith that man arrives at the good, as reason finds the proper end to its inherent power and energies. So then, prudence is the power of reason and reason is provisionally power. Act is habit and virtue is energy. Faith is an inherent and immutable solidity (ἐνδιάθετος πῆξις καὶ ἀναλλοίωτος) of prudence and act and virtue, i.e. of power, habit and energy. The ultimate limit of all this is the good, where reason puts an end to its movement and retires, because God is the Good in Whom every power of whatever reason is naturally ended.

St. Maximus does not explain how precisely the inner movement of ascent to God is achieved by the soul and what powers are coordinated with or opposed to it and for what length of time. But he does make a number of important points which clarify the whole subject. Firstly, he says that every soul can achieve union with the good and true God, when with the grace of the Holy Spirit and her own effort and diligence she unites «reason» with «mind», «prudence» with «wisdom», «act» with «contemplation», «virtue» with «knowledge» and «faith» with the «unforgettable knowledge», without minimizing or exaggerating any one vis à vis the others. Secondly, he says that the soul which is united with God having transformed the decad into a monad, becomes like God by acquiring the four general virtues. The tetrad is potentially a decad, because it is constituted on the basis of the monad by means of a successive line. Again the decad is the monad, because it contains the good in a comprehensive unity and shows in itself the simple and incomposite divine energy as being partitioned without being divided! With these four virtues, which are the fulfillment of the ten powers of the soul, the soul keeps whatever is her own in a firm and inviolable state, and at the same time is rid of all that is evil or alien to it in a manly fashion. Because she has a mind endowed with good reason, and a mindful wisdom coordinated with practical contemplation, and a knowledge imbued with virtue, and also an unforgettable knowledge which follows

on and which is both secure and unailing, she is able to bring to God the energies united together with the powers as causes with effects, and thus she is rewarded with deification and simplicity.

The energy is also a manifestation. Reason is the manifestation of the mind as the effect manifests its cause. Similarly, St. Maximus links prudence with wisdom, act with contemplation, faith with unforgettable knowledge. From these, again, the innate relation with the truth and the good (i.e. God) is achieved. This relation is called divine science, unailing knowledge, love and peace. Deification is found in them all and is accomplished with them all. It is science (*ἐπιστήμη*), because it constitutes the completion of the knowledge of God and the divine realities, which man can achieve and secure as he guards the virtues. It is knowledge (*γνώσις*), because it has genuinely arrived at the truth, and gives an unceasing experience of the Divine. It is love (*ἀγάπη*) because it partakes with entire disposition into the entire pleasure which comes from God. Finally it is peace (*εἰρήνη*), because it suffers the same as God, and prepares those who become worthy to attain to it, to suffer the same. In other words, if the Divine is totally immovable, since there is nothing from anywhere which can disturb it — for what is there which could reach its lofty position? — and the peace is also immovable and unshakable firmness and also undisturbed gladness, is it not true that every soul which became worthy to taste the Divine peace should suffer the same condition at the Divine? For she has not only surpassed evil as ignorance, lie and deceit, which are opposed to virtue itself, and of knowledge, and truth and goodness, and has come to rest in an ineffable and unknowable way in the 'restful place' of God (as it were), which is something beyond truth and goodness according to His reliable promise! Because nothing of the things whose nature is to disturb can reach its hidden resort in God. It is on this most-blessed and all-holy 'bed' that the awesome mystery of unity, which is above mind and reason, takes place. This is the mystery of the union of God with the Church or soul and the soul with God into one spirit. At this point Saint Maximus exclaims: «how shall I wonder for your goodness, O Christ! for I do not dare to praise this, because I do not even have the power to wonder at it worthily. 'The two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great, i.e. that of Christ and the Church' (Ephes. 5-31-32) as the divine Apostle says elsewhere. 'He who is united with the Lord becomes one spirit'» (I Cor. 6:17).

So when the soul becomes unified and gathered together in itself and in God, the logos (reason) which divides it into many parts with

conceptions, will no longer exist, because she will be crowned on her head with the first and one and only Logos and God. She will be crowned, that is, with the Logos in Whom are and subsist in an incomprehensible simplicity all the reasons of beings unifiedly, since He is the Creator and Maker of all beings. Gazing at Him Who is not outside her, but the entire in the entire, she will also come to know by a simple projection (κατὰ ἀπλήν προβολήν) the «logoi» and causes of all beings, on account of which she was subjected to devisive methods before she was married to God the Logos, and by means of which (methods) she was led in a saving manner and without contradictions near Him Who contains and creates every logos and cause.

These things then occur to the soul: potentially she has wisdom in the mind and contemplation in wisdom and knowledge in contemplation and unforgettable knowledge in knowledge (νοῦς-σοφία-θεωρία-γνώσις-ἀληστος γνώσις-ἀλήθεια); through these she is led to the truth which is the limit and end of all the goods which are connected with the mind. Again on account of her reason she has prudence, and from prudence, act, and from act, virtue, and from virtue, faith, and by the faith's help she finally arrives at the good as the blessed end of all the rational energies (λόγος-φρόνησις-πρᾶξις-ἀρετή-πίστις-τὸ ἀγαθόν); it is through these energies that the science of the divine things is summed up in accordance with their union with each other, which is achieved when they come together.

It is clearly appropriate, therefore, from the theoretical point of view to liken the Church of God to the soul; by the things which belong to her mind and which have been shown to exist and of the mind by progression (κατὰ πρόοδον εἶναι), she denotes the holy of holies (τὸ ἱερατεῖον). And again the things which belong to her reason and which have been shown to exist by expansion (κατὰ διαστολήν εἶναι), she makes plain through the Temple (ναός). She sums them all up by means of the Mystery (Sacrament), which is celebrated upon the divine Altar. Whoever managed to enter into this Mystery, says St. Maximus, with prudence and wisdom, through the Church's liturgical act, he alone was able to make his soul divine and truly a church of God. It was most probably for the sake of the soul that the hand-made Church was given. It was instituted that it might lead man by the hand, as it were, to his highest calling. This hand-made Church constitutes, especially through her divine acolouthies, a real symbol and example of the Christian soul.

*The Bible as the Eikon of Man and the Church*<sup>11</sup>

Previously, St. Maximus showed how man, composed of body, soul and mind, is an eikon of the Church understood as a liturgical community in a specific place, i.e. consisting of laity (Temple), clergy (The Holy Place) and the divine grace (The Altar). Here he draws two similar eikonic parallels between man and the Bible by saying that the body-soul composition of the former corresponds to the OT-NT canon, or to the historical letter — mind (or purpose of the letter) of the latter's composition. This means that as the body is mortal and the soul immortal, so the letter of the Bible is corruptible, but the spirit incorruptible. Also, as man through philosophy masters the flesh, so the Bible, understood spiritually, can be seen as a circumcision of her letter. What Paul says about the outer man (who is corruptible) and the inner (who is incorruptible) could also be said of the Bible. The more the letter of the Bible withdraws, the more its truth shines. The more the shadows of the temporary worship pass away, the more the luminous effluent and shadowless truth of the faith enters in. As man is man because of his rational and noetic soul, whereby he is called image and likeness of God, likewise the mind of the biblical grace is in fact what makes the Bible to be the Bible.

*The World, Man, and the Church*<sup>12</sup>

The world as visible and invisible, or sensible and intelligible is also an eikon of man as body and soul. This eikonic relationship between the world and man does not only pertain to their constitutive parts, but also to their unity. In other words, the soul is in the body as the intelligible world is in the sensible; and as the first pair is one man, so the second pair is one world. In both cases the natural distinction (ἡ φυσικὴ ἑτερότης) does not embarrass the hypostatic union (ἡ καθ' ὑπόστασιν ἐπὶ τῇ ἐνώσει ταυτότης). Their particularity (or peculiarity, ἰδιότης) does not prevail against the mystical union, which results in their inherent and friendly congeniality. Here the catholic and unique manner of operation of the invisible and incomprehensible presence of the cause which hold together all in all, keeps everything at once distinct and united by means of a different form in each case, and thus demonstrates that they all belong more to each other than to themselves

11. cf. *Mystagogy* ch. 6.

12. cf. *Mystagogy* ch. 7.

according to the bond which unifies them. This pattern of the unified existence will prevail till the final moment, when He who tied them up will loosen them on account of a hidden economy. Then the world phenomena will die a death like man's and a new world will arise adapted to the resurrection which man awaits for. Man, as we know him, will be resurrected as part of the whole world, or as a small world bound up with a greater one. and thus he will receive the power to escape corruption. The body will approach the soul, the sensible realities will approach the intelligible ones, both in beauty and brightness, and one Divine power will shine upon each in an appropriate way like an active and sleepless presence, which will preserve by itself the bond of unity indissolubly in the unending ages of ages.

### EPILOGUE

Maximus' teaching represents a magnificent synthesis of all reality, Divine and creaturely. God, the world and man are analysed and synthesized in such a way as to bring out one truth and meaning through many truths and meanings. It is the truth of the Holy Church which is one but appears in a multitude of eikons. The one in the many and vice versa of the ecclesiastical perception of St. Maximus imbues all reality, Divine, cosmic and human, with an ecclesiastical quality which functions as a principle of reconciliation and cohesion. Perhaps the most significant of all the eikons of the Holy Church is that connected with the human soul, because it allows the individual human existence to be the expression of the same truth which is also expressed in the macrocosmic existence of the entire universe. A soul that has actually discovered and embraced the mystery of the Church in herself does not find the need to contradict, or enter into conflict with any other expressions of the same mystery. Such a soul has in fact overcome in herself all divisions and partialities, so that her particularity enshrines the same catholicity that is eshrined by the many souls united together in the Church as community, as liturgical community, as human and angelic community, as cosmic reality. Such a soul is at rest in herself and atuned with the whole. We might say that it reveals the mystery of the whole reality, Divine, cosmic and human, in the wholeness of her particularity. It is this mystical consciousness, which unites the macrocosm of the world with the microcosm of the human nature on the basis of God's divine activity in creation and redemption, that constitutes the distinctive legacy of Patristic theology and ecclesiology which our modern fragmented world needs urgently to recover.