CREATION IS INCARNATION: THE METAPHYSICAL PECULIARITY OF THE LOGOI IN MAXIMUS CONFESSOR

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Abstract

Maximian logoi or the “principles” of created being are often virtually identified with Platonic ideas or forms. This assumption obscures what is distinctive about Maximus’s concept of the logoi. I first note two metaphysical peculiarities of his doctrine, and then propose that these only make sense if we follow Maximus’s own directive to read the logoi through Christology proper – that is, as describing creation as the Word’s cosmic Incarnation. This suggests, in creative tension with a good deal of twentieth-century philosophical theology, that the God-world relation is not fully exhausted by the analogia entis: Maximus divines a still deeper hypostatic (not natural) identity between Word and world that actually generates natural difference – for perhaps the first and only time in the history of Christian thought. Here I assay a first step toward retrieving that relation.

Introduction

When Hans Urs von Balthasar scoured the Christian archive for clarity about the perennial and precarious question of God’s relation to the world, he found in Maximus Confessor an especially brilliant light. For Balthasar as for many in twentieth-century Catholic theology, the “original sin” committed by nearly every articulation of this relation is to make it, wittingly or not, a relation of identity. Erich

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Przywara labored to show that this is so whether you collapse divine transcendence into the world’s immanence (pantheism), or whether, ironically, you so press God’s transcendence beyond the world that the world itself is negated or absorbed into God, who alone is (theopanism). What's needed is a proper and peaceful analogy of being between God and world that lets both be precisely in their difference; indeed their difference is the very ground of whatever mysterious similarity they share. But it is never their identity. What takes Christian thought centuries to appreciate fully, even after the great achievement of discriminating created and uncreated at Nicaea, is exactly that these are in no sense the same, and that they need not be.

What Balthasar discovered in Maximus was the ultimate Christological justification for this *analogia entis*. It belonged uniquely to Maximus’s genius to see how the Christological formula hewn at the Council of Chalcedon might expand “into a fundamental law of metaphysics,” a law that disclosed the “formal structure of all created being, even the formal structure of the relationship between the absolute and the contingent.” Maximus perceived more clearly than any of his epoch that in Christ the law of analogy was enshrined in the affirmation that the divine and the created are unified in their difference, are finally inseparable but “without confusion” – the all-important term for Balthasar. And this, the Grundprinzip of a properly Christological metaphysics, extends to and governs Maximus’s very conception of the *logoi* or “principles” of created being: just where patristic thought wavered between the poles of an ultimate God-world identity (an Origenist “pantheism”) and an ostensibly infinite difference (a Dionysian-tinged “theopanism”), Maximus wed the two in the harmony of a Logos-Christology chastened by Chalcedon. These *logoi* are, Balthasar thinks, basically the divine ideas of various Platonisms, but now located precisely in God’s one Idea of the world, the Word, Christ. Of course other Christians had said the same. But Maximus announces the Chalcedonian promise that these ideas, however they ground the world in God, will not, in the Word, ever dissolve into the metaphysical sin of identity: in Christ created and uncreated are united “without confusion.”

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5 David Bentley Hart, “The Hidden and the Manifest,” in *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, edited by George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Press, 2008) faults the Neoplatonic tradition for never fully appreciating the (Heideggerian) “ontological difference” or “analogy of being” (202), unlike Christian theology after Nicaea whose God was nothing “like the paradoxical transcendence of the One of Plotinus, ‘revealed’ only as a kind of infinite contrariety” (206–7). Balthasar appears more sympathetic to Plotinus, “whose religiosity,” he claims, “in no way can be unambiguously called pantheistic” (“Retrieving the Tradition,” 373), a religious intuition of God-in and God-beyond all things that might even be indebted, he intimates, to Christianity itself (*Cosmic Liturgy*, 83).

6 So runs the influential tale told by Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982): the pagan mind gradually discriminated between the divine and the mundane, which culminates in a Neoplatonic failure of nerve: the emanation of the Many, granted that it fulfills no deficiency in the One itself, is “still not understood as the being there through a choice that might not have been made” (18). The Christian affirmation of *creatio ex nihilo* is therefore “the introduction of a new distinction” between God and world, an absolute distinction exactly because the distinction itself only came about by the deliberate will of God rather than from any necessity in God (33).

7 Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 70.

8 Ibid., 63. In this sense Balthasar sees Maximus as a genuine predecessor of later scholastics like Thomas Aquinas, who articulated the “real distinction” between *esse* and *essentia* (71), even if Maximus himself did not put it in precisely those terms (64–5).

9 Ibid., esp. 131–6, and passim.
And yet it is a curiously counterproductive thing to equate Maximus’s logoi with divine ideas, for Christians have always had a special problem just here. The problem is that positing a protological plurality in the Word threatens divine simplicity, since uniquely for Christians the Word too is the One God. This problem is itself twofold. There is the straightforward worry that giving too much ontological weight to a plurality in God makes the One Many – the ad intra aporia, if you will. Then there is the aporia ad extra: if the divine ideas are ideas of creatures, their formal and final reasons or causes, then to locate them in the divine being is to risk making created natures somehow inherently related to God’s own nature. This imperils what is supposed to be distinctive about Christian creatio ex nihilo – that there is no natural or necessary link between God and world. Creation is an act of sheer gratuity, an act which may well have never been at all. Many try to resolve the problem by distinguishing God’s simple act of knowing all ideas from his willing their actual existence. This certainly precludes any necessary God-world link, whatever its questionable utility for the problem’s first prong. But this is not Maximus’s way.

Maximus thinks creation was inevitable. His doctrine of the logoi or preexisting principles of all creatures means precisely to conflate the distinction between God’s thinking up potential beings and willing them to be. Dionysius had called the logoi both “paradigms” and “divine wills.” The logoi are at once thoughts and wills, for God knows what he wills and wills what he knows, and what he wills and knows he wills and knows to be. And they are he. The Logos is the logoi and the reverse. So it is obvious to Maximus that if God could have willed otherwise for creation –


11 See for instance W. Norris Clarke, “The Problem of the Reality and Multiplicity of Divine Ideas in Christian Neoplatonism,” in Neoplatonism and Christian Thought, edited by Dominic J. O’Meara (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982), 109–27, who finds the “resolution of almost 1,000 years of tension in Christian Neoplatonism” mainly in thirteenth-century scholastic theologians like Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure. These, trained as they were in the thorough rigor of Aristotelian logic and metaphysics, “could no longer be satisfied with inspiring but metaphysically fuzzy pantheistic-sounding formulas that at the same time repudiated pantheism” (121). Clarke’s solace is Aquinas’s adoption of the distinction between esse and essentia: since a thing’s essentia or form is not yet its real existence, it can preexist in God’s simple act of knowing while awaiting its actual being. So divine ideas are plural in God only as esse intentionale, God’s thoughts of them, but not as esse naturale or reale – itself a distinction Thomas learned from the Arabic philosophers (123). But this only trades one problem for another. No longer is there a necessary link between God’s thinking a being and its being, yes, but what now is the ontological status of these non-natural thoughts? An “intentional or volitional being” is still some sort of being, it would seem. So does this mode of being admit of plurality in God? Granted it is not the same plurality as that of esse reale, but then what sort of plurality preexists? And so on. The thesis of Andrew Louth, “St Maximos’ Doctrine of the logoi of Creation,” Studia Patristica 48 (2010): 82, that the logoi “are precisely God’s will and predetermination for each creature” similarly wobbles, since this only restates the problem.

12 Amb 7.24 (cf. DN 5.8). Unless noted otherwise, the translation, Greek, and precise paragraph enumeration of Ambigua come from On The Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua, 2 vols. edited and translated by Nicholas Constas, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). I wish also to thank Fr. Maximos Constas for the opportunity to view several drafts of his forthcoming complete English translation of Maximus’s Questiones ad Thalassium. When the Question is accompanied by a paragraph number, it is from this work. I also benefited immensely from the French translation of Maximus’s Epistles found in Saint Maxime le Confesseur: Lettres, introduction by Jean-Claude Larchet, translation and notes by Emmanuel Ponsonye (Paris: Cerf, 1998).
certainly if he could have willed nothing for it – then God could have simply been another God, which is absurd. There is no idea in God to which he might have never granted being. All this seems only to exacerbate the Christian problem with divine ideas. Were Maximus’s *logoi* merely equivalent to ideas then perhaps this would be so. But the burden of this essay is to deny as much, even though the alternative interpretation will seem to summon the very worst of Christian specters, Balthasar’s “original sin” – pantheism. I argue that for Maximus creation is not only inevitable but fundamentally identical to God, and yet because this identity is that of divine Incarnation, that is, hypostatic, creation is also utterly unnecessary by nature.

The argument, here only adumbrated, advances in two steps. I first indicate two peculiarities of Maximus’s doctrine of the *logoi*. I then propose that these only make sense if we follow Maximus’s own suggestion and read the *logoi* doctrine through Christology proper, that is, as describing creation as the Word’s cosmic Incarnation. I conclude that Maximus’s *logoi* are the One Logos’s hypostatic, kenotic procession into *becoming* the natural power of every individual creature to be, and that such a procession secures the metaphysical ground of an inevitable, identical, unnecessary creation. The God-world relation therefore includes the *analogia entis* between finite and infinite natures even while grounding it within the deeper and different logic of hypostatic identity. Only this sort of “both-and” – both similarity-dissimilarity and identity – can claim rights to a truly Christo-logical God-world relation.

Two Peculiarities

1. The *Logoi* are More than Ideas

John of Scythopolis (sedit 536-c.548) was the first commentator of the Dionysian corpus. Maximus would later add his own scholia to John’s, which led to a long

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13 We will see creation’s inevitability everywhere in the link between the historical Incarnation and the ground and goal of creation. It is an obviously Dionysian impulse (cf. DN 4.1, 4, passim). It leads Maximus to say, for instance, that if a creature is it must always be because its being comes from its *logos* and this *logos* is as eternally fixed as God himself. For Maximus there are only two options: either God intended a thing’s existence from eternity or that thing was not intended at all and so was no-thing in God’s mind. Otherwise it would be as if God later thought something up to create it, or perhaps – and this is the standard line – he thought it up and “decided” not to create it. Either way this violates what is for Maximus fundamental: “the purpose of God, who created all things, must be changeless concerning them” (*Amb* 42.15; PG 91, 1329C; cf. also 42.13–16). If he had an idea he may or may not have created, clearly this would imply that God could have had one of two purposes for that idea: to be or not to be. But then the God we know too could have been or not been.

14 Balthasar, Cosmic Liturgy, 120, already noted the inherent link between a creature’s *logos* and its existence, since this *logos* is first of all a “logos of being” (*Amb* 7.22; PG 91, 1084B: “τὸν ἐν τῷ Ὑψῷ προούντα τοῦ εἶναι ἔγγον”).* Pace Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 61: “In Ambiguum 7 St Maximus says that creatures are known in their *logoi*, but that this only represents a possibility for their being created in actual fact.” He later interprets Maximus’s *logoi* through Aquinas’s formal distinction between a divine idea as an exemplar (formal cause of creature) and *ratio* (objective knowledge of creature); the latter need not ever be made the former by God (89).


history of conflating the two under Maximus’s name.17 John is also the first to identify Dionysius’s \textit{logoi} and “paradigms” with the preexistent “forms” and “ideas” in the mind (or Logos) of God.18 For John a Dionysian \textit{logos} is “an idea, that is, a paradigm,” “an eternal production of the eternal God which is complete in itself.”19

This definition points up the precarious station divine ideas occupy: as productions (\textit{ποιημα τὸ τελεῖ ἄλοιπον}) they are not the divine essence, but as eternal with and internal to God they are not quite creatures either. They are “thoughts of God,” and though not worshipped as very God20 they are nothing other than him. They are the stuff of God who is “pure mind”:

Since God is also the creator of beings, he will think them in that which does not yet exist. But he is the archetype of this universe. And these things he thinks not by receiving types from another, but by himself being the paradigm of beings. Thus, he is neither in a place, nor are things in him, as if in a place. But he has them, in so far as he has himself and is one with them – since all things, on the one hand, exist together and exist in the indivisible in him; and since, on the other hand, they are distinguished indissolubly in the indivisible. Accordingly, his thoughts are beings, and these beings are forms.21

These forms or ideas are like the “incorporeal matter of the things which participate in those ideas.”22 So for John the \textit{logoi} are the preexistent ideas that result from God’s simple act of thinking himself, the forms participated variously by creatures.23

Maximus never calls the \textit{logoi} “ideas” or “forms.”24 Nor does he call them “paradigms,” even when he cites the passage where Dionysius does.25 Not that the

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18 Rorem and Lamoureux speak of “John’s obsessive linkage of the two words ‘idea’ and ‘paradigm’,” about 14 times in ten different scholia (88). Only once does John specify that these ideas are found in Logos (\textit{SchDN} 353.3), and this because the text at hand concerns why God is called “Logos” (\textit{DN} 7.4). Even here there is nothing special about it being the Word who contains these ideas.

19 \textit{SchDN} 329.1 (on \textit{DN} 5.8); Rorem and Lamoureux, 222 (PG 4, 329A).

20 \textit{SchDN} 329.1 and 332.1.

21 \textit{SchDN} 320.3 (on \textit{DN} 5.6); Rorem and Lamoureux, 220.

22 \textit{SchDN} 316.4; Rorem and Lamoureux, 219.

23 John even says that the \textit{logoi} are “a [single] nature” that together have one \textit{logos} and cause, though still in God (\textit{SchDN} 353.3; Rorem and Lamoureux, 230). They are like the most common nature of which particular creatures are but more determined and circumscribed instances. As we will see, this is strikingly similar to the Plotinian Intellect. It again confirms that John’s \textit{logoi} are overridden by the logic of formal causality.

24 Balthasar, “The Problem of the Scholia to Pseudo-Dionysius,” 376. This massive divergence is left out of the otherwise intriguing study of Nicholas Loudivikos, \textit{A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor’s Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity}, translated by Elizabeth Theokritoff (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010 [1992]), esp. 60–1, though most assume the \textit{logoi} are some version of Platonic ideas anyhow.

25 \textit{Amb} 7.24 (cp. \textit{DN} 5.8). Here as in \textit{QThal} 13 Maximus prefers the Dionysian identification of “divine wills.”

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logoi lack a paradigmatic function. A thing’s logos comprises and establishes the whole ontological continuum of its nature, power, and activity. So there is a logos of each participated nature (one of angels, one of human beings, and so on) and a logos of each individual’s way of participating its nature(s), and these together constitute an individual creature’s own prescribed logos. A logos indeed for every branch of Porphyry’s tree: the logos of a genus allows it to exist “as a whole indivisibly and really in the whole of those things subordinate to it,” while the logos of a particular is contained by the logoi of “what is universal and generic.” The preexistent logos of an individual creature necessarily includes its formal content, what sort of thing it is, up to the most generic level: its “logos of being” makes it the sort of thing that is.

Yet Maximus invokes the logoi more often to secure the integrity of creatively different. This certainly includes the difference of natural genera and species, and even the categorical distinctions embedding a creature in space and time – all of which contribute to the unique identity of that creature, something close to Porphyry’s “bundle of properties.” But Maximus is aware of a still deeper individuality, the difference of the differing thing itself. For “if we wish to have a complete knowledge of things,” he says, “it is not enough to enumerate the multitude of characteristics,” that is, “whatever is around the subject,” but it is “absolutely necessary that we also indicate what is the subject of these characteristics, which is the foundation, as it were, upon which they stand.” No creature simply “coincides in its essence with what is and is called the assemblage of characteristics that are recognized and predicated of it.” The inmost identity of the individual creature “is something different from these characteristics,” something “which holds them all together, but is in no way held together by them” and so “is not derived from” or “identical with them.” The logoi together carve out the individual difference of the differing thing – quite Platonic. But Maximus also attributes a logos to the difference of the individual as such, what he calls the “logos of hypostasis”: whereas a thing’s “nature” “comprehends the common logos of being,” its “hypostasis” “comprehends also the logos of being for that very individual.” A creature’s preexistent logos grounds its identity as that individual.

26 Amb 15.5; cf. CT 1.3. Hence Maximus can call the logoi “archetypes” (QThal 55; CCGS 7, 143). Again, my point here is not that a logos performs no exemplarist or paradigmatic function, only that this does not exhaust its most fundamental act – the act of grounding the very possibility of any participation between God and world at all.

27 Amb 7.16: through the Word God creates and continues to create “universals as well as particulars” (τὰ καθόλου τε καὶ τὰ καθ’ ἐκάστον). Maximus is clear that an individual’s logos establishes its simultaneous unified participation in many levels of being, from its species to its highest genera (“common being”): in the concrete individual are wrought “many and sundry unifications of things separated,” like many “angles” converging at a single point (QThal 48; CCGS 7, 341; SC 554, 84–5).

28 Amb 41.10–11.

29 Amb 7.22; Amb 41.10, passim. For “being” (οὐσία) as the most universal genus of creatures, as well as how this diverges from Aristotelian-Porphyrian conceptions, see Tollefsen, The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor, 97, and Melchisedec Törönen, Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 140.

30 Cp. Porphyry, Isag. (CAG 4.1.7) with Amb 17.5–6; cf. Amb 7.15,19 and Amb 22.2. The differentiating role of logos is especially clear in Christological discussions; cf. Amb 36.2, and below.

31 Amb 17.5: “... ἀλλὰ δέι πάντως καὶ τὸ ὑποκείμενον τούτους, θεμελίου τρόπον ἐφ’ ὑ’ τάκτα βέβηκε.”

32 Amb 17.6.

33 Ὺρεις. 26 (PG 91, 264A): “Ὅτι ἡ μέν φύσις τῶν τοῦ εἶσι λόγον κοινὸν ἐπέχει, ἢ δὲ ὑπόστασις, καὶ τὸν τοῦ καθ’ ἐκάστῳ εἶναι.”

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We can appreciate Maximus’s originality here if we contrast his *logoi* to Plotinus’s particular forms, especially since the two are often equated.34 Richard Sorabji has rightly observed that Plotinus’s concept of particular or individual forms “can provide no help with the differentiation of persons, since the individuals in question are souls.”35 A particular soul is a fixed nature, more precisely a preexistent form, which contains as *logoi* the potential for “all the individuals it animates in succession.” These *logoi* permit reincarnation. The same soul can now be Socrates and later Pythagoras.36 It is true that Plotinus cannot conceive the relation between an individual and its form in simply formal terms – “as portraits of Socrates are to their original.”37 The *logoi* of a soul (indeed the *logoi* of the whole world soul) shuffle down, as it were, into the material realm, and by their “unequal predominance” together with matter constitute an individual: the mother transmits now these *logoi*, now those, the father these, now those; certain *logoi* predominate during this particular time period, others at another, still others at this place, others elsewhere – a myriad of individual combinations *ad infinitum.*38 A circuitous route, to be sure, but where individuals are generated by *logoi* “the difference must [still] be linked with the form.”39 An individual preexists only as a potency of its particular form. Just to the extent it is an individual, it is not its form, and so, as Proclus insists, is not known by Intellect before the individual comes to be.40

Maximus agrees that an individual *quia* hypostasis is unknowable. A hypostasis certainly *has* a form, has a particular nature, but it is not itself form. No form, no intelligible content. Again, a “nature” has to do with “a *logos* of form,” and while a hypostasis as such is deprived of formal content, it has yet a *logos* of some kind.41 Of what kind? It can be of no kind, for a “*logos* of hypostasis,” by definition, can be no formal principle at all. This goes for every creature’s hypostasis. Since “every divine energy indicates through itself the whole God, indivisibly present in each individual thing, according to the *logos* through which that thing exists in its own way [ἐν ἐκάστῳ καθ’ ἄνερ τινά λόγον ἐστιν ὅλικος],” then no mind can fathom “precisely how God is, as it were, in all things common, and in each being in an irreducibly singular way [ἐν ἐκάστῳ τῶν διντῶν ὑδιαζόντως].” Intellects “are incapable of understanding even the lowermost creature in terms of the *logos* of its being and existence.”42 In each thing’s *logos* God is, as Scripture attests, truly “all things in all” (1 Cor. 12:6, 15:20; Eph. 1:23) – from its most common participation (Being itself) to what is most

36 En. V.7 [18] 1; Armstrong, 223.
37 En. V.7 [18] 1; Armstrong, 225.
40 *PT* 1.21, 98, 16–19, Saffrey-Westerink. Proclus adds two arguments against the preexistent potency of an individual *quia* individual: [1] if an individual’s own preexistent idea is also its cause, and if that idea is eternal, then this would imply the eternal fixity of the individual – a manifest absurdity (in Parm. 824, 12 f.); [2] if an individual’s own preexistent idea is precisely its *paradigm*, then this entails it to be always a paradigm of the individual. But then the individual must always be so that its idea is always paradigm. But the individual is obviously not eternal, *ergo* etc. (in Parm. 824, 23 f.).
41 *Opus* 26 (PG 91, 264B): “Ὅτι ἢ μὲν φύσις εἶδους λόγον μόνον ἐπέχει, ἢ δὲ ὑπόστασις καὶ τοῦ τινὸς ἐστὶ δηλωτική.”
42 *Amb* 22.3, modified.

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particular (hypostasis). Where some saw only intelligible dearth, Maximus glimpsed the surfeit of mystery: the logos of what is by definition unintelligible – the hypostasis, the concrete participant – God foreknows “as only he knows how,” and, in good Aristotelian fashion, God is what he knows. But that is to anticipate.

All this explains why Maximus never says creatures participate their logoi. A creature’s logos is the principle “by which” it participates divine perfections (Being, Goodness, Immortality, etc.). It is how not what a creature participates. Moreover, an individual’s logos of hypostasis not only facilitates participation, but, as we have seen, establishes the participant herself. Maximus can even say that we “receive participation.” My logos is the preexistent principle that determines not only what I participate but the I that participates. It is God who predetermines and pre-establishes the power to be me – my nature and my person.

They exceed formal content and are not participated, but are rather the very possibility of participation – surely Maximus’s logoi, preexistent though they be, are more than divine ideas.

2. The logoi pre-exist as a non-natural procession of One to Many

If the first exposed the peculiarity of the logoi-creatures relation, the second looks upward, as it were, at the relation between logoi and Logos.

For those familiar with Amb 7, that great treatise on the logoi, the relation between Logos and logoi may seem fairly straightforward. “Who,” after contemplating the latent unity undergirding the “infinite natural differences” in creation, would “fail to know the one Logos as many logoi, indivisibly distinguished amid the differences of created things,” and conversely, that “the many logoi are one Logos, seeing that all things are related to Him...”


44 Balthasar too noticed in Maximus this play of the “negative identity” and “positive identity” of the individual, but, as far as I can see, he did not expressly link these aspects to the causation of a created hypostasis as such: he says only that the “negativity” means every creature comes from nothing and is not God, and the “positivity” that every creature is yet held in being by God “through his relationship to them” (Cosmic Liturgy, 68). My point here is that the very negative positivity of a hypostasis evades every metaphysical relation, and that this relation, whatever it is, must “keep” a thing in being in an utterly unique and mysterious way. Maximus thinks that way – not just that fact – has indeed been revealed in Christ, in all its proper mystery.

45 QThul 2 (SC 529, 158); cf. Amb 7.19.

46 Amb 15.5. So too Perl, Methexis, 52–9; followed by Tollefsen, The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor, 174.


48 Pace Perl, Methexis, 153: “A logos is no more than the presence of the participated in the participant,” and 163: “Because the hierarchy is continuous from Being down to the logoi of particulars, there is no difference between a creature’s having a logos and its participating in the perfections.” The presence of the participated, if what’s participated is an energy or perfection (CT 1.48–50) or even a created universal (Amb 7.16), can only be present as that creature’s particular form (cf. Proclus’s “whole-in-part” at El. Th., propps. 72–4). A Maximian hypostasis and its logos cannot be present as form. However the logoi of hypostasis be immanent, it is not simply through the transcendence-immanence dialectic of participated and participating forms.

49 Amb 7.19: “in the wisdom of the Creator, individual things [ἐκσαρτσα] were created at the appropriate moment in time, in a manner consistent with their logoi, and thus they received in themselves actual existence as beings [τοῦ ἐνεργείας ἐλεήμονα]. For God is eternally an active creator, but creatures exist first in potential, and only later in actuality [Ἐπεξεργαζόμενος τὸ ὁμόφας καὶ ἐν ἐνεργείᾳ παρέχει Κυρίαμορφος, τὲ δὲ δυνάμει μὸν ἐστὶν, ἐνεργείᾳ δὲ σωφρόνει], since it is not possible for the infinite and the finite to exist simultaneously on the same level of being.”

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without being confused with Him? The one Logos “is manifested and multiplied [πιθηκωνόμενον]” in and as the logoi of all beings. 51 They preexist “in” and “with Him,” 52 ineffably pre-contained in Him from eternity. 53 Through the “creative and sustaining procession [πρόδοδον] of the One to individual beings,” “the One is many.” And through “the revertive, inductive, and providential return of the many to the One,” “the many are the One.” 54 So the Logos is the logoi and the logoi the Logos.

Plotinus said the same. The Intellect, the second of the three primary Hypostases, 55 “is like one great complete logos embracing them all,” embracing, that is, the logoi of the highest intelligible realities down to the logoi of particular “living beings” (i.e. particular souls). And these logoi are “what the Intellect wills and is [ὁ θέλει νοος καὶ ἔστι].” Intellect is therefore “one and many.” 56 One and many because Intellect’s activity is to receive the form of the object known and so become identical to that object in act. 57 When Intellect contemplates the logoi of all things – themselves the productive principles issuing from Intellect’s attempt to image the imageless One 58 – it becomes identical to them in actuality. The very nature of Intellect is “otherness” (ἐπερφύτης) and “sameness” (τυπότης), and here is the ground of all creaturely “difference” (διάφορας). 59 Intellect is the logos that generates difference by being identical to many logoi. Quite like Maximus, it seems. 60

50 “Amb 7.15: “όφις πολλοὶς ἐσται λόγοις τὸν ἕνα Λόγο, τῇ τῶν γεγονότων ἀδιάρρητος συναικρινόμενον ἀρμοδιώ, ὀν ἄνελλα τα καὶ έκστη ἀναγνώστην ἀνάγνωστος, Καὶ πάλιν ἐν τοῦ πολλοῖς, τῇ πρὸς πᾶσι τῶν πάντων ἀρμοδιώ, ὑπ’ ἐκάθεν ἀναγνώστης ὑπάρχοντα, ἐνοδόν τα καὶ ἐνυποδόται τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Πατρὸς θεοῦ Λόγου ὑπ’ ὄρθην καὶ διάκεισθαι τά πάντα,” The use of ἀδιάρρητος (“indivisibly”) and ἀναγνώστης (“unconfusedly”), both key terms in the Chalcedonian Definition in delimiting the relation of Christ’s two natures (Norman P. Tanner, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990], 85), ought to alert us that Maximus’s logic is already suggestive of the historical Incarnation. Pacé Törönen, Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor, 1–6, and Louth, “St Maximos’ Doctrine of the logoi of Creation,” 80, who think that the mere interest in union and distinction before Chalcedonian implies we need not take such terms as technically Christological. But Maximus himself will go on explicitly to invoke the Word’s Incarnation (Amb 7.22), and does so on several occasions (see below). So it would be odd, even misleading, if he did not want us to think in uniquely christological patterns.

51 Amb 7.16.
52 Amb 7.19; QThal 13.2.
53 Amb 7.16.
54 Amb 7.20.
55 The Three, One, Intellect, Soul, are fundamental and ubiquitous in Plotinus’s metaphysics, and are only marginally modified and ramified by later Neoplatonists like Proclus (cf. En. V.1).
56 En. VI.2 [43] 21. That the Intellect “wills” these logoi is enough to undermine any facile claim that Maximus’s (and Dionysius’s) logoi differ from Plotinus’s because the former are voluntarily elected principles. Plotinus actually has an entire treatise on the One’s free will in making all things, where he depicts the One (as did Plato himself at Tim 29e-30a) generating intellectual causes “as he himself willed” (En. VI.8 [39] 18). The hackneyed contrast between voluntary creation and necessary emanation, astonishingly widespread in its acceptance among contemporary Christian thinkers, needs a comprehensive reappraisal. Gregory of Nyssa, for instance, had no qualms identifying the two: see Harry Wolfson, “The Identification of Ex Nihilo with Emanation in Gregory of Nyssa,” Harvard Theological Review 63 (1970): 53–60.
59 En. VI.2 [43] 21. The διάφορα of magnitudes, figures, qualities, and material division are specified in this text.
60 This short review of Plotinus’s notion of the logoi as Intellect shows the limitations of Larchet’s narration of how Maximus’s logoi differ from Plato’s Ideas: “selon Maxime, le Verbe, qui a créé le monde, s’est référé aux logoi qui étaient contenus Lui [sic]; tandis que selon Platon, les Idées que le Démium a pris comme modèles pour produire le cosmos étaient extérieures à lui” (Larchet, “conception maximienne,” 282). Nearer the mark is his observation that “Une autre différence est que les Idées de Platon sont des réalités impersonnelles” (283).
Recall, however, that for Plotinus the divine Intellect is not the One. There can be no difference in the One, for to be different is to be other than one. The One somehow possesses all created beings beforehand, but “in such a way as not to be distinct [μὴ δισκεκριμένη]: they are distinguished on the second level, in the logos [ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ διεκκριτῷ τῷ λόγῳ].”61 Creatures gain their definitional difference only outside of the One in the Intellect’s logoi. Since Clement and Origen, who firmly planted the logoi of creatures in the Second Person of the Trinity, the Word and Wisdom,62 Christians were obliged to waver here. After Proclus’s proliferation of causal intermediaries (the henads),63 Dionysius again pressed the Christian point: “the whole good processions and the Names of God, celebrated by us, are of one God.”64 Insofar as the Christian Creator God is sole Cause of the many, He becomes, in the creative act, One and many.

Maximus’s identification of God the Logos with the creaturely logoi must mean that the Word is somehow both one and many, yet in such a way that it transcends the logic of Neoplatonic procession.65 He speaks of the Word’s “procession” (πρόοδος) into all beings, as we saw.66 But this cannot be taken to imply either [1] that this procession somehow diminishes the Word (making the Word-logos no longer the One), so that the identity of Logos and logoi comes only “by derivation,”67 or [2] that the very Word is not really identical to creaturely logoi after all (as Plotinus’s


62 Clement of Alexandria, Strom IV.25; Origen, Princ 1.2.2; Jo 1.22.


64 DN 5.2: “ἐνὸς θεοῦ τᾶς διὰς ἄγαθὰς πρόοδοςς καὶ τὰς παρ’ ἕμοιν ἐξημοιμένας θεομημάς” (Parker, 74, slightly modified; Suchla, 181).

65 Stephen Gersh, From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition (Leiden: Brill, 1978), argues that Maximus “is perhaps the first thinker in the Neoplatonic tradition to tackle the problem [of procession] head-on,” though he does not seem to think Maximus offers anything more than does Dionysius.

66 Amb 7.20.

67 The first instance in Amb 7 of the Logos-logoi copula appears along with a declaration of the consubstantiality of Logos and Father (Amb 7.15). Cp. Proclus, El. Th., prop. 18: “Thus the character as it pre-exists in the original giver has a higher reality than the character bestowed: it is what the bestowed character is, but is not identical with it, since it exists primitively and the other only by derivation [αἱ ὑπὸ τοῦ εἰκόνος ἐκείνου πρῶτας γὰρ ἐστι, τὸ δὲ δευτέρους]. For it must be that either the two are identical and have a common definition [ἐν ὑπὸ λόγου ἀμφοτέρων]; or there is nothing common or identical in both; or the one exists primitively and the other by derivation... It remains, then, that where one thing receives bestowal from another in virtue of that other’s mere existence, the giver possesses primitively the character which it gives, while the recipient is by derivation what the giver is [τὸ μὲν εἶναι πρῶτος δὲ δίδωσι, τὸ δὲ δευτέρους δὲ τὸ διὸν ἔστιν]” (Proclus, The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary by E. R. Dodds [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963], 20–1). Only an identity by derivation is possible where participation among stratified levels of nature – a metaphysics of “more or less” like in kind (e.g. prop. 9) – is the only conceivable relation. Maximus too knows that in this way we are “not the same” (Ep. 6; ταὐτόν). And yet the original vocation of the human person was to become “one and the same” (ἐν καὶ ταὐτόν), by grace interpenetrating the whole of God, save identity in essence (Amb 41.5). This suggests a far deeper relation, indeed identity, between God and world, which has little to do with the natural or essential relations normally conceived.
One is not Intellect’s logos.\textsuperscript{68} No, this “procession” of One Word to manifold world is at once a vertical and a horizontal one. It is a vertical descent and yet remains the same hypostasis.\textsuperscript{69} It is a horizontal multiplication and yet no inner perfection of any hypostasis.\textsuperscript{70}

So the logoi name the procession of the Word from One to many as the very difference, definition, unity, potency, and existence of the many. This is not straightforward Neoplatonic procession. The logoi are not related to the Logos as exempla to Exemplar, nor are they themselves simply exemplars for lower, more qualified participants (though they are that too). The Word’s protological procession as many logoi is the very condition for the possibility of participation itself, the very condition for exemplarity to get underway. They are that “by which” creatures participate perfections, or, to use Maximian conceit, participate divine energies.\textsuperscript{71} Indeed they establish both the participated (divine activities) and the participants (each thing’s logoi), and therefore establish the very dynamism and entire continuum of participatory metaphysics. What then to say about this Procession that grounds and sustains the procession of the many from and return to the One? Dare we say anything at all?

\textsuperscript{68} Pace Törönen, \textit{Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor}, 132, who perceives in the “creation song” of C. S. Lewis’s Aslan an apt analogy for Maximus’s logoi: “The connection between the creatures and the creator is presented in this figure as different musical notes. With the notes everything seems to proceed, as the young observer puts it, ‘out of the Lion’s head’. Yet, it is clear that this is not a process of emanation but an act of creation. It is \textit{not} the Lion, as it were, unfolding into creatures.” But for Maximus it is \textit{precisely} the Lion-Logos who unfolds in the “creative and sustaining procession of the One to individual beings” as their logoi (\textit{Amb} 7.20), who, as he says elsewhere, “expanded himself” into all multiplicity (\textit{Amb} 33.2, PG 91, 1288A: “ἐκανόν... διαστέλει”; cf. \textit{Amb} 22.3).

\textsuperscript{69} Not only does Maximus specify this at \textit{Amb} 7.15 (“ἐνθεσίων καὶ ἐνυπόστασιν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Πατρὸς Θεόν Λόγον”), but he later adds that this procession is emphatically \textit{not} that of the ineffable divine nature (\textit{Amb} 7.20: “ἐν ὑπεροποσίᾳ, οὐδὲ υπὸ τινος οὐδέχόμενος καθ’ οἷον μετετέχεται”).

\textsuperscript{70} I therefore cannot agree with Tollefsen, \textit{The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor}, 88 who sees little substantive difference between Plotinian and Maximian logos: “The Plotinian Intellect contemplates the Forms as its thoughts, and there is unity because what contemplates (subject) and what is contemplated (object) are the same. Of course, this is the case with God and His divine wisdom expressed in the [Maximian] logoi as well.” That for Maximus the logoi in no way complete or actualize the one nature of the Logos distinguishes his doctrine quite clearly from Neoplatonic logoi. Again, contrast Syrianus, \textit{in Metaph.} 106, 26 – 107,1 (cited at Sorabji, 146): “And, being complete, [Intellect] thinks everything. So nothing that has real being is left out of the essence of the Intellect, but it always situates the Forms \textit{(eide)} in itself. They are not different in it and in its essence, but complete its being and bring to everything productive \textit{(poietike)}, paradigmatic and final cause. For it creates as Intellect, and the paradigms exist as Forms and are productive through themselves and their own goodness.”

\textsuperscript{71} CT 1.48–50.
Creation is the Mystery of Incarnation

We have come upon two peculiarities about Maximus’s “principles” (logoi) of being. Both are peculiar because they seem to evince features unlike any other metaphysical “principles.” It is as if these logoi bear witness to new possibilities, like a higher logic previously unknown and unthought – features that had to be disclosed from their very Author. And that is as it should be, since behind and in and as these logoi is the Logos through which all things were made. It is unsurprising, then, that Maximus looks to the Incarnate Logos, Christ, where alone the unseen contours of being first take leave of their primordial gloam. Just here Maximus walks the ancient path first tread by Irenaeus: Christ reveals the truth of creation.72 The truth he sees in the historical Incarnation is that everything, all of creation, the entire world, is that Word’s Incarnation.

Maximus never qualifies his conviction that the Logos’s self-distribution as the logoi is an Incarnation of this Word. We might expect such qualification since he seems intent upon nestling them into the same category.73 In his famous and curt explanation of Gregory Nazianzen’s remark that “The Logos becomes thick,” Maximus proffers three instances where this is so: the Word’s historical Incarnation as Jesus Christ, his ineffable self-encryption as the logoi of all creatures, and his consent to be “embodied and expressed” in language.74 This ambiguum culminates in the fundamental axiom underwriting each instance, what Maximus calls “the principle of condescension” (συγκτεβάσεως λόγω): “Just to the extent that he contracted us for himself into union with himself, to that same extent he himself expanded his very self for us through the logos of condescension.”75 In creation and in language, as in the historical Incarnation, the Word graciously stoops to become the identity of extremes: divinity and humanity, Creator and creation, ineffable and speakable.

QThal 60 begins as Amb 33, with a brief resumé of the historical Incarnation. Another, now familiar principle, “the principle of hypostasis” (τοῦ τῆς ὑποστάσεως λόγω): “it was seemly for the Maker of the universe – for him who according to the economy became by nature what he was not – to preserve unchanged both what he himself was by nature and what he became by nature according to the economy.”76 The Word’s economy is the Word’s becoming identical to a nature not his own and thereby preserving the integrity of two incommensurable natures, uncreated divinity and created humanity. Again, without qualification, Maximus moves straightaway to consider how the historical Incarnation reveals the very structure of creation.

72 Paul M. Blowers, Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) aptly speaks of “Maximus’ neo-Irenaean perspective” (102–9), whose guiding principle is this: “Cosmology, as cumulative reflection on the origins, structure, and destiny of the world, revolves around Christology” (104).
73 Even Eriugena, glossing Amb 33 (Comm in Jn I.29, 154–6), refers to the two “modes” of the Word’s Incarnation in words and world as one quasi incarnatum.
74 Amb 33.2.
75 Amb 33.2, my translation: “τοσοῦτον ἡμᾶς δι’ ἐκποντόν πρὸς ἐνοικιάζων ἐκποντοῦ συστάλισε, διὸν τῶν δι’ ἡμᾶς ἐκτὸς συγκτεβάσεως λόγῳ διαστατέτων.”
76 QThal 60 (CCSG 22, p.73); cf. also Ep 13 (PG 91, 521D).
77 QThal 60 (CCSG 22, pp.73–5), my translation. So too Ep 15 (PG 91, 556A): “καὶ ἀνθρωπός ἀληθῶς φύει καὶ ἀνθρωπόμοι ἐνοικιάζεις;”
Scripture provokes him to do so: 1 Pet. 1:20 speaks of “Christ, the pure and spotless lamb” as “foreknown” from “before the foundation of the world,” yet “manifested at the end time” for us. Maximus interprets what was foreknown by the Trinity as “the whole mystery of Christ” (τὸ κατὰ Χριστὸν μισθήματος), that is, the very ground and goal of all creation as revealed by the historical Christ: “all the ages as well as the things in these very same ages have received in Christ their ground and goal of being.” But that Christ unveils creation’s ἀρχή – what exactly does this come to?

Consider two of Maximus’s more original Christological emphases. First, that Christ’s hypostasis is the identical term of two infinitely incommensurable natures. Of course this was held long before Maximus, but with him it becomes a sort of signature. Maximus, with other “Neo-Chalcedonian” thinkers, upheld the total “difference” (διάφοροι) of the two natures, and so affirm that Christ existed “out of” two natures. Divine and human natures ontologically precede their fully actualized union in the man Jesus. He becomes a “composite hypostasis” made from the two. Nestorius would have agreed. So different were the two natures indeed that their only real “union” was a “relational union” between the wills of two discrete subjects, human and divine. But a mere “relation union,” Maximus remonstrates, only “signifies the exact likeness of things subsisting separately in themselves, in their own personal unities, identical in movement of will and intentional sameness.” Nestorian Christology saw no other way of preserving true difference. For Maximus, though, the presence of natural difference in Christ tells nothing whatsoever of any natural relation. Their primary relation is hypostatic identity. We can say that their perichoretic union on the level of modes and activities – so important to Maximus – certainly proves both are “enhypostatic,” that is, mutually inhering in the same hypostasis. Against Nestorius, we have nothing to do with two separate hypostases sharing a tight but extrinsic relational identity; the identity itself is one hypostasis, one subsistence, and so a most intrinsic relation beyond every natural relation.

Nor does Maximus fail to oppose miaphysitist Christology. Whether that of Apollinarius, whose divine Christ absorbs or mangles human nature, or the more tempered view of Severus, Maximus affirms with Chalcedon the enduring preservation of the whole of each nature after the union, and with the same formula: Christ

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78 QThal 60 (CCSG 22, p.75), my translation: “ἐν Χριστῷ τὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ εἶναι τὸ τέλος ειλήφασιν”; cf. Amb 41.9.
79 Amb 7.22, 10.9, etc.
80 See too Perl, Methexis, ch. 6.
81 For instance, Ep 12 (PG 91, 472D): “πᾶσιν διαφοράν.”
82 Ep 15 (PG 91, 556CD).
83 Ep 12 (PG 91, 484A), cf. Ponsonye, Saint Maxime le Confesseur: Lettres, 134. My interest in both Nestorius and Severus extends only as far as Maximus’s understanding of them. Note, however, that Maximus had conversed directly with Severan bishops on at least one occasion (Opusc 3; cf. Larchet’s introduction in Lettres, 11, n. 3).
84 Ep 12 (PG 91, 477A): difference “introduces no relation” (οὐ τῆς σχέσεως ἐστὶν εἰσχρογικός).
85 Amb 5.14.
86 Ep 15 (PG 91, 558D): the “communication of attributes” between natures “shows enhypostatisation, but not [the] hypostasis, since the hypostasis was never divided [διέκμενος ἐνοπόστατος, ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὕπόστασιν ὅτι μὴ καθ’ ἄνδρος διορισμένος ὕπόστασις].”

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existed “in” two natures. Severus granted that there perdured a human “element” after the hypostatic union, and that Christ’s duality was therefore of one “composite nature.” For Maximus not even this modified miaphysitism escaped the absurdities inherent in restricting the identical term to the level of nature. A composite nature cannot be what it is apart from whatever natural relation pertains between its parts. Christ’s one “composite nature” after the union must then be something inherently other than either human or divine nature: both existed quite separately before their synthesis in the Incarnation; and if separately, then without natural relation; and if without natural relation, then as something other than what Christ became. Severus succumbs to the perennial problem of every “synthetic Christology”: a natural union of two natures can preserve the integrity of neither.

Both Nestorian and Apollinarian Christologies are “diametrically opposed in their impiety.” Neither can consistently confess the simultaneous unity and duality of the Incarnate Word. Maximus’s special emphasis on the hypostatic identity points up the reason: every synthetic Christology depends on an unwillingness to consider that Christ’s own “singular hypostasis” became a relation unthinkable on the level of natures – and is for this very reason generator of natural difference. The historical Incarnation was not the outcome of two otherwise disparate and separately subsisting entities somehow coming together (contra Nestorius); nor was it unable to accommodate the fullness of natural difference after union (contra Severus). Since the being of both natures is the Word’s own hypostasis – his very own subsistence – they exist, and they are different, only because they are identified in him. When Maximus adds his own innovation to the typical Neo-chalcedonian formula that Christ existed “out of” and “in” two natures, it is precisely the ineffable character of hypostatic identity that is at issue: Christ “is the two natures.”

This then is the second of Maximus’s signature claims: the historical Incarnation shows us another mode of coming to be, for Christ’s (created) human nature only is insofar as it is him. Hypostatic identity is the “generation of opposites,” the very act

87 Chalcedonian Definition: “one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures [ἐν δύο φύσεσιν] which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being” (Tanner, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 85–6); cf. Ep 12 (PG 91, 468C): “[He is] the same [as us] indeed, not according to the same [Person], but because of the things out of which and in which He is the very being [διὰ τὰ ἄν καὶ ἐν οἷς ἔσχε τὸ εὐρύχορον].” See too Ep 12 (PG 91, 500C) for a fuller discussion of the significance of “out of” and “in” two natures.

88 For Maximus’s characterization and refutation of this notion, see Ep 13 (PG 91, 516D-524B).

89 As with human nature itself, a composite of body and soul; cf. Amb 7:40–3.


91 Ep 12 (PG 91, 493C): “ὁσπέρ νῦν ἐκ διαμέτρου πρὸς ἀλλήλους μερισμένου τὴν ἅσβεσιν, Ἀπολλινάριος ὁμ Εὐσεβεῖ, καὶ Νεστώριος ποιήσαντες”; also at Ep 14 (PG 91, 537A). For a helpfully concise description of these two Maximian foils, see Larchet’s introduction in Lettres, esp. 19–20.

92 Ep 12 (PG 91, 468C); Amb 5.12. For a concise discussion and several more references in Maximus’s corpus, see Pierre Piret, S. J. “Christologie et théologie trinitaire chez Maxime le Confesseur, d’après sa formule des natures «desquelles, en lesquelle et lesquelles est le Christ,” in Maximus Confessor (cf. n. 79), 215–22. That this emphasis on identity was dear to Maximus is clear from the fact that Leontius of Byzantium, a fellow Neo-chalcedonian from whom Maximus drew liberally, never went so far. See Brian Daley, “The Origenism of Leontius of Byzantium,” The Journal of Theological Studies 27, no. 2 (1976): 360.
whereby God creates the creature and the creaturely difference itself.93 Put another way, Christ’s particular human nature came to be only as identical to Christ, and was identical to Christ to the extent that it came to be.94 Think here of the Virgin Birth: the Word was born (γεννηθηκεί) and took from Mary his human nature “not by seed, but rather by the seed of His own will,”95 so that his will to be human was coterminous with the generation (γένεθαι) of his humanity. Indeed, because he was born, took on the possibility (without sin) consequent upon our Fall, died, and was raised from death, and because he remained all the while the very same impassible God the Son, second person of the holy Trinity – then we are led back, in light of his birth (γέννησις), to grasp a still deeper generation (γένεσις) apart from natural procreation.96 And this generation – attributed precisely to the Word’s “condescension” (συμχατάσβασιν)97 – is none other than Christ’s self-identification with his human nature. That human nature is “enhypostasized” in the Word’s hypostasis, and so not “pre-hypostasized” in anything at all.98 Christ’s “composite hypostasis” (not Severus’s “composite nature”) becomes composite only because Christ makes the created part identical with his own person. He himself is the two parts and therefore compositeness as such. The metaphysical import: in the historical Incarnation of the Word, it is the Word’s self-identification with that particular human nature which is the sole and sufficient condition of its creaturehood. Now the Cause of creaturely causes becomes the principle of condescension:

one and the same [hypostasis] of the Word exists [ὑπάρχουσαν] both now and before: before without a cause [ἀναχιτίως], simple and uncomposite; and later, on account of a cause [δι’ ἄξιν] by the assumption of an animate and noetic flesh, becoming, unchangeably, truly composite [ἀτρέπτως γενομένην κατ’ ἀληθείαν σύνθετον].99

Since Christ is both, both are. This is the inexorable issue of Maximus’s defense of the Chalcedonian Definition against its detractors. The historical Incarnation discloses that the Word not only preserves both natures in his own person, as Chalcedon

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93 Amb 5.14: “τῇ τῶν ἐναχιτίων γένεσις γενομένῃ.”
94 “Particular nature” refers to the individual existent’s specific manner of participating the more universal nature participated. For instance, Plotinus says that “in respect of the soul and what we most are. We participate in substance and are a particular kind of substance, that is a particular kind of composite of substance and difference [μετέχομεν οὐσίας καὶ ἐκμέν τις οὐσία, τόσο δὲ κατὰ ὅνων σύνθεσιν τι ἐκ διάφορας καὶ ὁμοίας]” (En. VI.8 [39] 12; cf. too 14); see Proclus’s “whole-in-the-part” (El. Th., prop. 67).
95 Ep 15 (PG 91, 553D), my translation.
96 Amb 42.3. I am therefore sympathetic to Blowers’s broader point that the historical Incarnation bears cosmic significance, but go beyond his analysis in seeing the hypostatic identity as the primal and necessary condition of γένεσις; see Paul M. Blowers, Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 250–1.
97 Amb 42.3: in His “gracious condescension” (συμχατάσβασιν) He takes on generation, in his “self-emptying” (κένοντι) He is born.
98 Ep 12 (PG 91, 468AB; cf. Ponsonye, Saint Maxime le Confesseur: Lettres, 124): “From Mary he united to himself according to hypostasis our very substance, brought to life with a rational and noetic soul, not, though, as if pre-hypostasized [προὑποστασύς] for even the twinkling of an eye; but this soul receives both being [τὸ ζύγιον] and hypostasis [τὸ ὑποστήγαρ] only in God the Word himself”; see too Ep 12 (PG 91, 504A).
proclaimed, but that it is precisely his being both that generates and so preserves the creaturely difference. He “made the union and distinction of the extremes [ὅς τὴν πρὸς τὰ ἄκρα ἐποίησε ἐνωσιν καὶ διάκρισιν]” and in this way “He Himself possessed difference and identity.” That is to say, “He himself was one and two.”

Now recall those two peculiarities. The first was that the logoi are more than divine ideas, more, even, than Plotinus’s particular forms. Since a logos institutes not just a creature’s form (or nature) but its very hypostasis, the logoi precede and indeed establish the very dynamic polarity of participatory metaphysics (where higher forms of preexistence relate to lower existing beings as less qualified natures to more). Here One-to-many is certainly a vertical descent. Yet the many preexist not just in form but also in hypostasis, so this must be a procession unlike any other on the scala naturae. The second precluded another natural understanding of the procession. The Logos’s procession is not the more horizontal inner-perfection of its nature, as with Plotinus’s Intellect. The Logos-logoi identity is not natural but hypostatic.

Now consider how Maximus’s two christological signatures account for the two metaphysical peculiarities. Take them in reverse order. [2] In the historical Incarnation the only identical term between created and uncreated natures was the Word’s own hypostasis, and yet for that reason these two natures remained infinitely incommensurable – they shared no natural relation. Apply this to the second metaphysical peculiarity. When the Logos becomes the logoi, this betrays no natural relation between One and many, not even the inner-perfection of an infinite nature. This protological plurality therefore preserves divine simplicity: what becomes many is the divine hypostasis, not the divine nature as such. [1] Again, in the historical Incarnation the hypostatic identity of natures was precisely what generated the created human nature. Here the metaphysical priority falls squarely on the divine hypostasis, since, as Tollefsen has noted, the Incarnation of the divine person is what establishes whatever participation his human nature enjoys in deification. This corresponds to the first peculiarity. The Word’s protological condescension to become, in his hypostasis, the power of every creaturely participant to be and so to participate betrays the same metaphysics of the historical Incarnation: the Logos identifies his very hypostasis with created nature and so generates that nature, which only then participates higher formal perfections. Historical and cosmic Incarnation follow the same logic. In history the Logos became two logoi, each with their proper tropoi (“modes” or “ways” of being). In creation the Logos becomes all creaturely logoi and every individual tropos. In history the Logos became two what’s and two how’s. In creation the Logos becomes every what and every how. Maximus’s logoi are peculiar because just here he is staying true to his

100 Ep 14 (PG 91, 536B): “Nor did He alter what He became by remaining what He was; for He loves humanity. But He is naturally both, a whole according to hypostasis. As one out of both, and through His own oneness He preserves both, without change or diminution – He is truly both according to the union of hypostasis.”


102 Tollefsen, The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor, 216: “In His historical Incarnation as Jesus Christ, the Logos becomes immanent, but He does not become participated by His human nature, nor does He, as God, participate His own humanity. On the other hand, the Incarnation makes participation possible. Therefore, the human nature of Christ is deified by participation in the divine activity.”

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unqualified affirmation that creation is indeed “the mystery according to Christ.”\textsuperscript{103} The cosmos is not only Christo-centric. It is Christo-form.

**Final Remarks**

The major claim here is this: Maximus’s logoi are more than John’s “ideas,” more than Neoplatonic “particular forms.” They exceed Platonic ideas even while performing the latter’s metaphysical task, since “more” is no simple negation. Avoiding this conflation not only grants sight of Maximus’s own peculiarities, but the chance to take him at his word that creation is Incarnation.\textsuperscript{104}

The historical Incarnation reveals that creation by divine will means the divine will is itself the seed of a creative, hypostatic God-world identity. The cosmos is at once Christ, who generates it by self-identifying with it, and Mary, since this generation is the first movement from protological potency to an act whose final perfection is the very birth of Christ in and as the world.\textsuperscript{105} This form of creation ex nihilo by

\textsuperscript{103} QThal 60 (CCSG 22, 75). A major objection lingers: how can divine hypostasis become a created hypostasis without annihilation of one or both? Put differently, how does this protological account of the logoi understand deification? Maximus himself says that two hypostases of the same nature cannot be united “according to one and the same hypostasis” (Ep 15; PG 91, 549B). This is even true of the Trinity (549D). Just here Eric Perl’s account of Maximian creation needs refinement, though I find much of it compelling. He rightly characterizes deification as “enhypostatization” of creature in the Word, as when “the creature receives God the Word as its hypostasis” (260). Deification for Perl is also, though, “perfect participation in God” (260). Since participation is the natural relation between effect and cause, here creature and Creator, then we would seem to be precisely where Maximus sees an annihilation of hypostasis: two beings with the same nature, say, by “perfect participation,” could never become identical in hypostasis and remain two. Perl does not elaborate, but there are grounds for suspecting this is the inevitable outcome of his position. When he attempts to defend Maximus against pantheism, he can only say that the “one hypostasis” of creation, which is only Christ’s, still retains its created nature (261). I here only note three features of Maximian deification absent in Perl, but that suggest the need to reevaluate deification in terms other than participation: [1] deification, which is also divine Incarnation, exceeds the logic of participation: the deified creature does not rest “a mere simulacrum [or likeness],” but becomes “the Lord Himself” (Amb 21.15). To exceed likeness is to exceed participation, lest “participation” become an empty cypher signifying the faint memory of what once was a created hypostasis; [2] deification as perichoresis (Amb 7.12) is more than one hypostasis by definition, just as it does in the Trinity (CT 2.1); if all there is to say is “one” and not “one and two ineffably unified,” then there is no true deification of created persons; [3] deification is the simultaneous actualization of both creature and Word ὑμνῳ creaturely, a feature explicable only if the initial act of creation itself was already nascent ἐκ φωτός τις ταυτότητος between the hypostasis of the Word and every creaturely hypostasis. See Eric D. Perl, “Metaphysics and Christology in Maximus Confessor and Eriugena,” in Eriugena: East and West – Papers of the Eighth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugena Studies, edited by Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 253–79.

\textsuperscript{104} Balthasar, “The Problem of the Scholia to Pseudo-Dionysius,” 360, long ago advised: ‘From their contrast with the notions contained in [John’s] scholia, Maximus’ own ideas and his interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius’ view of the world would certainly stand out more clearly.” This has been an exercise in that method.

\textsuperscript{105} Amb 6.3: “For it is true – though it may be a jarring and unusual thing to say – that both man and the Word of God, the Creator and Master of the universe, exist in a kind of womb, owing to the present condition of our life. In this sense-perceptible world, just as if He were enclosed in a womb, the Word of God appears only obscurely, and only to those who have the spirit of John the Baptist. Human beings, on the other hand, gazing through the womb of the material world, catch but a glimpse of the Word who is concealed within beings (ἐν τοῖς οὖσιν ἐγκρυπτόμενοι)... For when compared to the ineffable glory and splendor of the age to come, and to the kind of life that awaits us there, this present life differs in no way from a womb swathed in darkness, in which, for the sake of us who were infantile in mind, the infinitely perfect Word of God, who loves mankind, became an infant.”

That the world is both Christ in its potency and Mary in its actuality begins to meet another lingering objection: If created nature is generated through the Word’s kenotic and hypostatic union with it – if it is true Incarnation – then would not created nature be perfect from the outset, as was Christ’s human nature?
If yes, then why does Maximus also say that Adam sinned and so stultified his nature “at the instant he was created [ἠῶς τῶι γίγνεσθαι]” (QThal 61; CCSG 22, 85; Blowers and Wilken, 131; cf. Amb 42.7)? An important question in itself, but it also points up the inherent limitations of this article, which is but a first step toward the broader horizon. A comprehensive presentation of creation as Incarnation would have to explicate the fullness of Maximus’s claim that “our Lord Jesus Christ is the beginning (ἀρχή), middle (μέσον), and end (τέλος) of all the ages” (QThal 22; Blowers and Wilken, 117). Here I have focused on the first two terms, how the logic of protology (beginning) follows that of Christology (middle). Now this objection seeks an account of how creation as Incarnation relates to the very nature of temporality itself – that a finite hypostasis must progress through self-motion, which progression necessarily contains the potential for failure. I can only provide a brief rejoinder: it is no obstacle to the Word’s unforthcoming power of condensation that He voluntarily assume not only nature, but what is unnatural: Christ assumed the very corruptibility and mortality that is itself unnatural, that is “a kind of punitive faculty” natural to sin but not to human nature itself, as Maximus also teaches in the same Question; see QThal 61; Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 132. If in the middle of history the Word can assume something actually opposed to perfect human nature, like death, I see no reason why at the dawn of history itself He could not also assume the very condition for the possibility – not even the actuality – of imperfect human nature – a dazzling condensation indeed! Blowers and Wilken note that what Maximus means when he says Adam fell “at the instant he was created” is that “Adam’s perfection, historically, was more a potency than an actuality” (97, n. 3). All I suggest here is that the Word became and so generated that very potency, which is, it is true, the potency of a created and rationally free hypostasis.

107 Of the historical Incarnation, Amb 5.5: “His own Incarnation, which was granted a birth beyond being, was more incomprehensible than every mystery. As much as He became comprehensible through the fact of His birth, by so much more do we now know Him to be incomprehensible precisely because of that birth [κοσμόν καταλαμβάνων δι’αυτήν γενόσθαι δι’ αὐτῆς ἄλλης ἀληθεύσεως]… what could be a more compelling demonstration of the Divinity’s transcendence of being? For it discloses its concealment by means of a manifestation, its ineffability through speech, and its transcendent unknowability through the mind, and, to say what is greatest of all, it shows itself beyond being by entering essentially into being.”

108 QThal 35.2.
The mystery of the Incarnation of the Logos holds the power of all the enigmas and types of Scripture, and it also holds the exact science of all creatures visible and intelligible. The one who knows the mystery of the cross and burial knows the *logoi* of these creatures. And the one who has been initiated into the ineffable power of the resurrection knows the goal for which God gave hypostasis to all things.\(^{109}\)

Maximus elsewhere discloses this goal, just at the crucial moment of his great *logoi* treatise:

And by this beautiful exchange, it renders God man by reason of the divinization of man, and man God by reason of the Incarnation of God. For the Logos of God (and God) wills always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of His embodiment.\(^{110}\)

I do not mean to cavil about exegetical details as if historical exactitude itself is always useful or interesting. My guiding question has been a classically systematic one, though it opens upon a horizon far greater than whatever small distance a single essay traverses. And so my method chimes with the likes of Balthasar even while my conclusions prove dissonant with his.

Balthasar was right to see in Maximus the definitive rejection of any natural God-world identity.\(^{111}\) He was right too that Maximus finds in Christ the final metaphysical warrant for the infinite difference between created and uncreated natures – which secures the permanence of their respective integrities – as well as their analogical peace. But if the whole relation between God and world be truly Christological, if, that is to say, we glimpse in the Incarnate Word the whole “structure” of this relation (rather than the mere epistemic justification for it), then we must with Maximus also insist on the simultaneous identity that obtains on the level of hypostasis. Balthasar refuses this fullness. This blinds him (and many others) to the metaphysical peculiarities of Maximian *logoi* and leads to their equation with divine ideas. But what is more pressing is that it invites confusion with regard to the God-world relation itself.

It comes to this: is the God-world relation really Christological or not? Balthasar allows that it is only in the sense that it ratifies the analogy of being\(^{112}\) rather than because created being itself is fully Christological. Christ makes analogy “concrete” and so certain, but the way Christ does this at history’s climax is decidedly not the way He does it for history itself. Concrete though it be, the historical Incarnation does not tell us how anything is concrete at all.\(^{113}\) While it is true, therefore, that

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\(^{109}\) CT 1.66 (PG 90, 1108AB), my translation: “Τὸ τῆς ἐνσωματώσεως τοῦ Λόγου μοστήριον, πάντων ἔχει τῶν τε κατὰ τὴν Γραφὴν συνεργῶν καὶ τίποτον τῆς σύμμαχων, καὶ τῶν φαναριῶν καὶ οὐκομένων κυριάρχων τῆς ἐπιστήμης. Καὶ ὃ μὲν γιον τετεθεὶ καὶ ταῦτα τὸ μοστήριον, ἐγγονος τῶν προεομένων τούτων λόγως ὅ ὅτι τῆς ἀναστάσεως ροής τῆς ἀπόρρητης σφαίρας, ἐγγονος τῶν ἐν ὑμῖν πάντων προηγουμένων ὁ Θεὸς ἑσπερήτω ἀκοπόν.”

\(^{110}\) Amb 7.22, slightly modified.

\(^{111}\) This is especially clear in Ep. 6; CC 3.27–8, 4.1–6. In the latter Maximus even attributes the failure to discern a fundamental difference between created and uncreated “substance” to “the Greeks.”


\(^{113}\) Balthasar is crystal clear about this, and again tries to recruit Maximus for the point: “Quite simply, this means that the person of the Logos in whom the hypostatic union takes place cannot function, in any way, as the (‘higher’) unity between God and man; this person, as such, is God. Since the person of the Logos is the ultimate union of divine and created being, it must constitute the final proportion [Mass]
Christology (as sketched in its outlines by Chalcedon) gives an account of an event that cannot be made subject to any universal law but that subjects all other laws (regulating the relationship between God and the creature, that is) to its own uniqueness.\footnote{Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, 311.}

- it is just as true that “Christology is not concerned with the general relationship between God and the creature distinguished by their immeasurable distance from each other.”\footnote{Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, 312.} It is hard to imagine a statement more alien to Maximus’s vision.

For Balthasar the God-world relation is comprehensively ana-logical rather than Christo-logical: the world is not grounded in the kenotic, hypostatic identity of Word with world.\footnote{Even Eriugena, who closely follows Maximus in attributing the world’s generation to the Word’s condensation or “self-making” (*Periphyseon* II, 18 and III, 4), denies that the God-world relation is fully Christo-logical after the manner of the historical Incarnation; cf. III, 7–9, and esp. III, 17. This is indeed a decisive difference between Eriugena and Maximus, as Perl, “Metaphysics and Christology in Maximus Confessor and Eriugena,” 253–79, rightly argues. Balthasar chides Malmberg and Rahner for indulging the thesis that “the ordinary act of creation is a partial or inchoate Christology and that Christology is the superabundant expression of anthropology” (*Theo-Drama* III, 224), and parts with Bulgakov and Rahner when they depict creation as a “first realization” of “that self-emptying that will attain fullness through the incarnation” (*Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Volume IV: The Action*, translated by Graham Harrison [San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994 (1980)], 277–8).

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And if the relation is not fully Christological; if created being is not generated according to the same logic that Christ’s human nature was generated; and if the world yet has its sole source in God – then what is the precise ground of the ontological difference? It is mysterious. True, but how does this mystery present itself in Christian metaphysics? As the inscrutable divine will? It is very hard, at least by my lights, not to suspect a species of divine voluntarism lurking beneath it all:\footnote{So John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Renewed Split in Modern Catholic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 13: “von Balthasar’s dogmatics seems to float free of ontological conceptualizations into a ‘mythical’ realm that is highly voluntarist and personalist, and in the end at times only tendentiously orthodox.” Whether or not Balthasar’s dogmatics is tendentiously orthodox, it is certainly too “voluntarist and personalist.”} the brute will of a God whose gracious act of creation admits absolutely no identity between Word and world – not even the identity once effected by that divine Word in the midst of that world, an identity supposedly subject to no law, except, it seems, to the general law that it must not be the general law of creation. Difference grounds union because creation is essentially the act of distending this very difference between created and uncreated natures, whose only claim to integrity is the pure will that there be two.\footnote{So scrupulous to discriminate and extirpate every trace of any natural God-world link (understandably so), Balthasar sometimes risks plunging any primordial God-world relation into an abyss of divine volition. He faults Thomas Aquinas himself, for instance, for not being enough of a two-tiered Thomist:}

None of this is finally Christo-logical, for in Christ
hypostatic identity grounds both poles of the *analogia entis* – similarity and greater dissimilarity.

Maximus, who permits a view of creation at once inevitable, identical, and in no way natural, might again justify one of Balthasar’s deep intuitions: that we let Maximus be our light in these matters, for he more than any knew that only in the Word Incarnate, finite, dead, and resurrected, can we know “the right model for the world.”119 This essay is but a first attempt to take both these luminaries at their word.

“However strange this might sound, the actual dangers of Scholasticism do not come from Aristotelianism…but from the residue of Platonism that had still not yet been overcome. That is why, to name the most important and controversial point, the material separation of nature and supernature (despite their *de facto* interpenetration) was never fully realized, even in Thomas. For Thomas still knew nothing of a natural final goal of man that pertains to the nature of the creature as such…So he had to come to the conception of a ‘natural longing’ of the creature for the supernatural vision of God. But this then entails, of course, the danger of interpreting the *potentia oboedientialis* as a *potentia naturalis*, which corresponds to the patristic danger of looking on the *pneuma* as an essential component of man” (“Retrieving the Tradition,” 383–4).