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Whole God and whole man: Deification as incarnation in Maximus the Confessor

Samuel Korb

University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN, USA
Email: skorb@nd.edu

Abstract

Maximus the Confessor says that the Word of God wills to be embodied always and in all things. Against many who wish to render this 'universal incarnation' metaphorical, I attempt a literal reading. When Maximus speaks of the Word's universal incarnation, he refers to the deification of human beings, which constitutes a single reality with the Word's incarnation. For Maximus, deification perfectly realises and completes the very logic of the Word's incarnational descent: just as God became whole man while remaining whole God, human beings will become whole God while remaining wholly human. Herein all things become enhypostasised into the Word – rendered one by grace with Christ himself, through his humanity – and so the Word becomes embodied in all things.

Keywords: christology; deification; grace; incarnation; Maximus the Confessor

In one of his most distinctive sayings, St Maximus the Confessor writes: 'The Logos of God, also God, wills always and in all things to actualise the mystery of his embodiment.'[1] For Maximus, this 'universal incarnation'[2] is accomplished by the deification of human beings. As the description of this reality as 'incarnation' or 'embodiment' (ἐνσωμάτωσις) shows, for Maximus this deification belongs to the realm of christology proper: it is not just what Christ does, but who he is as the incarnate Word. As Paul Blowers aptly puts it, incarnation for Maximus means something 'larger, but not qualitatively greater, than [the Word's] enfleshment in Jesus of Nazareth'.[3] Ultimately, that 'larger, but not qualitatively greater' sense of incarnation is given by the deification of human beings, and through them the deification of all creation.

However robust Maximus' conception of deification is, it seems at first glance inappropriate to describe it as incarnation proper: in his incarnation the Word becomes

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[1]Βούλεται γὰρ ἀεὶ καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν ὁ τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγος καὶ Θεὸς τῆς αὐτοῦ ἐνσωματώσεως ἐνεργεῖσθαι τὸ μυστήριον. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* [hereafter *Amb.*] 7.22, in *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, 2 vols, trans. Nicholas Constas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), vol. 1, p. 107; trans. altered.

[2]To be clear, the term 'universal incarnation' is my own. So 'universal' corresponds to ἀεὶ καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν and 'incarnation' to ἐνσωματώσεως.

[3]Paul Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), p. 139.

man by nature, while in their deification the saints become God by grace. 'The union according to hypostasis of humanity and divinity' – these words Maximus will apply only to the incarnation of the Word as formed from Mary's flesh. Yet Maximus does give deification a truly hypostatic and therefore properly incarnational character in another sense. Deification is hypostatic insofar as it occurs within a personal identity between Christ and his disciple, the latter becoming enhypostasised in the former. In the incarnation the Word enhypostasises his own human nature in himself; in deification he enhypostasises human beings within himself by identifying them (by grace) with the same humanity with which he is hypostatically one, as members of his own body. Seen in these terms, deification can be nothing but incarnation – the Word's gracious incorporation of humanity into his own hypostasis.

Incarnation or 'incarnation'?

That Maximus gives to incarnation an unusually wide meaning is an unmistakable feature of his thought, and indeed a unique one. Here many interpreters hesitate to interpret Maximus literally, adding qualifications to Maximus' language that he himself does not add.[4] This is perfectly understandable. The terms in which I have already described Maximus' understanding of deification as incarnation are, at least at first blush, rather shocking, and many of them original to him. So, in reference to the quotation with which we began, many commentators suppose Maximus to have creation in mind as that in which the Word universally accomplishes his incarnation.[5] Take Torstein Tollefsen as an example. Tollefsen thinks that this universal incarnation refers to 'the creation and ordering of the world' – through the *logoi*, which Maximus identifies with the Logos[6] – yet insists also that this talk of incarnation is metaphorical and improper – far more 'incarnation' than incarnation. But as we will see in the texts adduced below, when Maximus describes deification as incarnation, in an elaboration of this line from *Ambiguum* 7, he does so without any kind of 'metaphorical' qualifications, instead applying properly christological logic to the saints. Not only does he not qualify this language as Tollefsen assumes, but he even repeats the exact same language elsewhere – 'actualizing the mystery of his incarnation/embodiment' – to refer unambiguously to incarnation proper.[7] That Maximus – a careful writer, to be sure – can repeat the exact same language for both incarnation and deification indicates that he sees them as one and the same.

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[4]On this tendency in Maximus scholarship, see Jordan Daniel Wood, *The Whole Mystery of Christ: Creation as Incarnation in Maximus Confessor* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming 2022), 'Introduction'. Wood's whole monograph is an exploration of what might happen if we take Maximus literally at all turns.

[5]A common interpretation: notwithstanding crucial differences, see Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), esp. pp. 2, 80, 135; Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 124; Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 2nd edn (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), pp. 77–83; most extensively, Jordan Daniel Wood, 'Creation Is Incarnation: The Metaphysical Peculiarity of the *Logoi* in Maximus Confessor', *Modern Theology* 34/1 (Jan. 2018), pp. 82–102; Wood, *Whole Mystery of Christ*. Wood alone chooses to interpret Maximus literally, which produces a seismic difference between his and the preceding texts.

[6]See e.g. Maximus, *Amb.* 7.20 (Constas, vol. 1, p. 101): 'The one Logos is many logoi and the many are One.'

[7]See *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* [hereafter *Q.Thal*] 22.3; in *On Difficulties in Sacred Scripture: The Responses to Thalassios*, trans. Maximos Constas (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), p. 151.

Beyond describing deification as incarnation, Maximus uses further language which gives his readers pause. A word that will frequently arise in the ensuing exposition is ταὐτότης, which rather unambiguously means *identity*. Yet here once again certain readers waver. Hans Urs von Balthasar – so enwrapped by the shadow of German idealism, which rendered 'identity' only a term of opprobrium for its later detractors – cautions against translating ταὐτότης as *Identität* in his seminal text on Maximus.[8] But Maximus will indeed make *identity* a key term in both his christology and his understanding of deification – an indication, yet again, that the two are one and the same for Maximus. Yes, deification does lead to an identity between God and the world, at least in Maximus' view. We need not follow him there, but we also need not hedge the bets that Maximus himself cared not to hedge.

Consider a final instance, from Anna Williams' work on deification in Aquinas and Palamas: 'Although … in an extravagant moment Maximus does seem to claim that deification causes such a fundamental change of status [viz. "that what was once created can somehow become uncreated"], the logical and theological problems entailed in such a claim are enormous.'[9] Williams is certainly right that 'logical and theological problems' might emerge from taking Maximus at his word. But that is just what we will do, and follow where he leads. If the subsequent analysis persuades, we will see the great coherence of Maximus' thought on this matter: at stake is the very integrity of the incarnation, which demands that the logic defining the person of Christ – what Jordan Daniel Wood calls 'Christo-logic'[10] – be applied to his disciples. But that is a task yet to be accomplished.

Deification as universal incarnation

Maximus introduces the idea of universal incarnation in *Ambiguum* 7 within a discourse on the virtues and on deification:[11]

> In honoring these logoi and acting in accordance with them, he places himself wholly in God alone, forming and configuring God alone throughout his entire being, so that he himself by grace is and is called God, just as God by his condescension is and is called man for the sake of man, and also so that the power of this reciprocal disposition might be shown forth herein, a power that deifies man through his love for God, and humanizes God through his love for man. And by this beautiful exchange, it renders God man by reason of the deification of man, and man God by reason of the incarnation of God. For the Logos of God, also God, wills always and in all things to actualize the mystery of his incarnation.[12]

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[8]See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian Daley (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2003), pp. 234–5; cf. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, p. 36. These references are adduced by Wood: see *Whole Mystery of Christ*, ch. 1, n. 92. Constas, in his translations of *Amb.* and *Q.Thal* does not so hesitate to give a literal translation.

[9]Anna Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p. 89; cited in Wood, *Whole Mystery of Christ*, 'Introduction'. The text where Maximus speaks about a deified individual as uncreated is *Amb.* 10.48, where he refers to Melchizedek: 'and thus he becomes without beginning or end, no longer bearing within himself the movement of life subject to time, which has a beginning and an end, and which is agitated by many passions, but possesses only the divine and eternal life of the Word dwelling within him'. Gregory Palamas says the same thing (see *Triads* 3, 1, 31).

[10]See *Whole Mystery of Christ*, *passim*, but esp. ch. 1, 'The Middle: Christo-logic'.

[11]Maximus, *Amb.* 7.21–3 (Constas, vol. 1, pp. 103–7).

[12]Maximus, *Amb.* 7. 22 (Constas, vol. 1, pp. 105, 107; trans. altered).

Note that it is in *acting* in accordance with the *logos* of his being that man becomes God, and it is in this context that the idea of universal incarnation is introduced. Maximus then uses properly incarnational language to describe deification, speaking of God being rendered man by the deification of man – 'being rendered man' simply is another way of saying *incarnated*.[13] An explicit *hypostatic* link between deification and incarnation is not established, but it is nonetheless clear that what Maximus principally has in mind is the deification of human beings.

This is confirmed later in the same text. Maximus says that the aim of deification is that 'the creator of all things might be received as one, coming to reside through humanity in all beings proportionally, and that all things, separated from each other according to nature, might come to unity by converging around the one nature of man'.[14] This clearly secures the universality that is an essential aspect of our mystery of universal incarnation, but does not explicitly relate deification to incarnation, instead speaking generally about God 'coming to reside' (ἐπιβατεύων) in all things. Yet this is immediately followed by properly incarnational language: 'that God himself be all in all [1 Cor 15:28], encompassing all things, and *enhypostasizing* them in himself (ἐνυποστήσας ἑαυτῷ)'.[15] Maximus is comfortable to speak here of humanity being *enhypostasised in God*, enwrapped into the subsistence of the Word just as his own human nature is. This language clearly identifies deification and incarnation, even if they are not identical in every way.

Last, it must be noted that Maximus also speaks explicitly of the enactment of the virtues as incarnation, as in the prologue to the *Ambigua ad Thomam*: 'In yourself you show God incarnated (σωματούμενον) by the virtues.'[16] And to Thalassius: 'The modes of the virtues and the inner principles of what can be known by nature have been established as figures and foreshadowings, through which God always willingly becomes man in those who are worthy.'[17] In a scholion in the same text Maximus clarifies the relation between deification and the virtues, saying that 'while we are in our present state we can actively accomplish the virtues, since we have a natural capacity for accomplishing them. But in the age to come we experience deification passively (πάσχομεν), receiving as a gift the grace to experience it.'[18] Here the virtues are presented as the active, intra-historical 'foreshadowing' of the deification to be passively experienced in the age to come. Virtue therefore anticipates incarnation insofar as it prefigures the deification in which man finds 'identity [with God] grounded in stability'.[19]

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[13]'[It] renders God man' corresponds to the Greek, ποιοῦσαν … τὸν μὲν Θεὸν ἄνθρωπον.

[14]Maximus, *Amb.* 7.31 (Constas, vol. 1, p. 121; trans. altered).

[15]Ibid.: 'encompassing all things and enhypostasizing them in himself' renders πάντα περιλαβὼν καὶ ἐνυποστήσας ἑαυτῷ.

[16]Maximus, *Amb. ad Thomam*, Prol., 2 (Constas, vol. 1, p. 3). For an elaboration of this feature of Maximus' thought, see Joshua Salés, 'Divine Incarnation through the Virtues: The Central Role of Maximos the Confessor's Aretology', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 58/2 (2014), pp. 159–76. Salés' article is very valuable, but never considers the necessary question of how incarnation-by-virtue can be related to the incarnation qua hypostatic union. The same goes for Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, pp. 323–30.

[17]Maximus, *Q.Thal* 22.8 (Constas, p. 154). ὧν τύποι καὶ προχαράγματα καθεστήκασιν οἱ τρόποι τῶν ἀρετῶν καὶ τῶν γνωσθῆναι φύσει δυναμένων οἱ λόγοι, δι' ὧν ὁ θεὸς ἀεὶ θέλων ἐν τοῖς ἀξίοις ἄνθρωπος γίνεται. Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium I*, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca* [hereafter *CCSG*], ed. C. Laga and C. Steel (Turnhout: Brepols, 1980), 7.143.

[18]Maximus, *Q.Thal* 22, sch. 5 (Constas, p. 155).

[19]Maximus, *Q.Thal* 22, sch. 7 (Constas, p. 156). Note the emphasis on stability. Maximus does not share the epektatic view of salvation/deification which one finds in Gregory of Nyssa, and is so popular nowadays

Although the eschatological reality of deification is our main focus, the ascetical aspects of this idea must not be overlooked. However abstruse it might seem, this idea, like every other aspect of the Confessor's thought, arises from his practice of the ascetic life and his understanding of that practice.

Now, having seen that it is deification by which the Word accomplishes his universal incarnation, we must consider respectively its universal and its incarnational character.

As universal

Maximus presents the human being as the one who contains all of creation in himself. Man is the 'most capacious workshop of the whole of things, naturally mediating through himself all divided extremes'.[20] As the one who contains all the elements of creation, man was meant, through his 'becoming everything that God is', to unite 'created nature with the uncreated through love'[21] – not just his own created human nature, but created nature *as such*. Yet he failed, and so God became man in order to unite all things in himself, 'recapitulating into himself all things, both in heaven and on earth, in whom they also were created' (Col 1:16).[22]

For Maximus, the human being's task of containing and mediating all things is inextricable from his own call to deification, through which he not only unites himself entirely to God, but, through himself, unites all of created nature to God. This is why Maximus can speak of the Logos 'enhypostasizing *all things* (πάντα) in himself' by deifying human beings, and why he says that grace deifies not just human beings, but all things *tout court*.[23] Yet because this task is now only accomplished by Christ, humanity's purpose of uniting all things to God is only accomplished by becoming united to Christ. So says Jean-Claude Larchet, 'It is this mediation wrought by the incarnate Word that renders possible for man, by union to him, his own deification and by his own deification that of all creatures.'[24] Insofar, then, as the deification of all things is included in the deification of man, Maximus can truly say that the deification of man actualises God's incarnation 'in all things'.

As incarnation

We now come to the difficult task of construing how deification can rightly be called incarnation. The question, I propose, cannot be adequately answered apart from prior consideration of Maximus' general concept of divine perfection as *ecstatic*. This conception is in many ways indebted to the Areopagite, whom Maximus crucially cites within *Ambiguum* 71:

> We must dare to say even this, on behalf of the truth, that the very cause of all things, by a beautiful and good yearning (ἔρωτι) for all things, on account of

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(although it's commonly asserted that he does). See Alexis Torrance, *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology: Attaining the Fullness of Christ* (Oxford: OUP, 2020), pp. 40–81.

[20]Maximus, *Amb.* 41.2 (Constas, vol. 2, p. 105).

[21]Maximus, *Amb.* 41.5 (Constas, vol. 2, p. 109).

[22]Cited in Maximus, *Amb.* 41.6 (Constas, vol. 2, p. 111; trans. altered).

[23]See Maximus, *Q.Thal* 2.2 (Constas, p. 98); see Jean-Claude Larchet, *La divinisation de l'homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Cerf, 1996), pp. 105–12, and p. 105, nn. 78–9, for further relevant references.

[24]Larchet, *La divinisation*, p. 112.

the overflow of his erotic goodness, comes to be outside himself in his providences for all things, and, as it were, is beguiled by goodness, love, and yearning, and is led down from his position above all and beyond all, to be in all things according to an ecstatic and superessential power that is inseparable from himself.[25]

Such language is indeed daring, but Maximus, following Dionysius, does not hesitate to use it. In another *Ambiguum*, Maximus considers God's 'infinite longing (ἀπείρῳ πόθῳ) for human beings' the cause of his becoming the very thing for which he longed.[26] The danger of such erotic language – words like ἔρως and πόθος – is the connotation of deficiency which they import.[27] But Maximus insists, paradoxically, that the 'deficiency' suggested by these terms is actually a consequence of the utter fullness of God's perfection. So in *Ambiguum* 23, Maximus speaks of God 'yearning to be yearned for'[28] only after first insisting that the divine is 'completely unmoved, insofar as it is boundless, unconditioned, and infinite'.[29] And immediately after using this erotic language, Maximus turns to the 'divine and unspeakable fecundity' by which the Good is never 'infertile of the Word and Wisdom or the sanctifying power, consubstantial and hypostatic'.[30] In other words, the eros that ineluctably connotes lack is mysteriously consequent upon the utter fullness and infinity of the trinitarian life. The same point is made in the passage from Dionysius cited above, where God's eros comes from the *overflow* of his goodness; that is, its complete fullness, complete even unto excess. This linking of erotic overflow and trinitarian fecundity illuminates Dionysius' description of this ecstatic and superessential power as 'inseparable from himself', precisely because it follows from that which God eternally is, an infinite spring of triune perfection.

   Where Maximus builds on Dionysius is his connection of this basic ecstasis not just with God's 'providences', but principally with the incarnation. So, as already mentioned, God's infinite longing brings him to *become* the very object of his longing. This, for Maximus, is the mystery that 'surpasses all the divine mysteries',[31] that God, 'having deemed it fitting to become man by nature', does so without essentially altering either humanity or divinity: 'For being God did not hinder him from becoming man.'[32] For Maximus, true infinity is inherently self-surpassing, following Gregory of Nyssa: 'Everything that goes beyond the limits of its nature becomes especially an object of wonder for all.'[33] Being God does not hinder God from becoming man, just as

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[25]Maximus, *Amb.* 71.6 (Constas, vol. 2, p. 323; trans. altered), citing Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 4.13.

[26]Maximus, *Amb.* 5.4 (Constas, vol. 1, p. 35).

[27]The Platonic heritage of Eros as the offspring of poverty always ringing in the background (see e.g. Plato, *Symposium* 203b).

[28]Maximus, *Amb.* 23.3 (Constas, vol. 2, p. 7; trans. altered). ἐρῶν τὸ ἐρᾶσθαι.

[29]Maximus, *Amb.* 23.3 (Constas, vol. 2, p. 5).

[30]Maximus, *Amb.* 23.4 (Constas, vol. 2, p. 7). The term 'fecundity' (γονιμότης) is Dionysian: see *De divinis nominibus* 1.4, where the term is similarly used in a trinitarian context. For more background, see Samuel J. Korb, 'On the Triumphs and Limits of Platonism: A Trinitarian Account', *Pro Ecclesia* 30/4 (Fall 2021), pp. 529–32.

[31]Maximus, *Amb.* 42.17 (Constas, vol. 2, p. 155).

[32]Maximus, *Amb.* 42.6 (Constas, vol. 2, p. 131).

[33]Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 3.3.34–5, cited in Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), p. 178. Gregory is referring to the incarnation.

transcendence does not hinder immanence, or infinity finitude. This peculiar relation between infinite and finite is indicated by Maximus in *Ambiguum* 4, where he says that Christ 'honors obedience' and 'experiences it by suffering' – these phrases being taken from Gregory the Theologian – 'so that he who by nature contains all knowledge might also "test our own obedience", and learn that which concerns us by experiencing what is our own'.[34] This is deeply paradoxical, that the one naturally possessing an infinity of knowledge can *learn* something new. And although this passage is principally about the character of salvation, wherein Christ appropriates the human condition fully to himself, it should not be forgotten that Maximus does not make God's will to become flesh conditional on human sin, but insists that incarnation is an eternal fixture of the divine will, independent of whether that incarnation would provide salvation from sin.[35] And so, although he does not say it in as many words, we can still consider this paradoxical framework in which the infinite knower 'adds' to his knowledge a key aspect of the character of divine love and divine being. This digression may seem unnecessary. But it crucially shows how constitutive of the divine reality Maximus considers this 'ecstatic power'. When we see how this will to totally embrace the finite is so fixed within the divine being, we can begin to appreciate the depth of the connection between deification and incarnation as mutually conditioned, and the great coherence, despite its initially shocking character, of describing God and man as paradigms of each other.

So Maximus says: '[The saints] say that God and man are paradigms (παραδείγματα) of each other – so that as much as man, enabled by love, has deified himself for God, to that same extent God is humanized for man by his love for mankind.'[36] There is a reciprocal relation between incarnation and deification: man is deified to the extent that God is humanised – as Maximus puts it elsewhere, the incarnation 'makes man God to the same degree that God himself became man'[37] – while God is humanised to the extent that man is deified. The prior element of this relation – the famous *tantum-quantum* principle[38] – is unmistakable in Maximus' work, and is consistently observed by his commentators. So Norman Russell, for example, speaks of 'the reciprocal relationship between the incarnation of the Word and the deification of man'[39] – that incarnation exists *for* deification, that man becomes God in the same measure as God is become man. This much is true, and the heart of the Athanasian-Nicene principle that 'the Logos became man that we might become God'.[40] Yet Maximus here goes beyond Athanasius in a way that is easily overlooked: the full import of Maximus' conception is not just that incarnation exists for deification, but that deification exists for incarnation.[41] To the extent that man 'deifies himself for God', to that extent is God humanised, i.e. incarnated. If incarnation only contributed

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[34]Maximus, *Amb.* 4.9 (Constas, vol. 1, p. 29).

[35]See Maximus, *Q.Thal* 22.2 (Constas, p. 150).

[36]Maximus, *Amb.* 10.9 (Constas, vol. 1, p. 165; trans. altered).

[37]Maximus, *Q.Thal* 22, sch. 3 (Constas, p. 155).

[38]See Larchet, *La divinisation*, pp. 376–82. Maximus' use of this formula has precedents in Gregory the Theologian (see Larchet, *La divinisation*, p. 377).

[39]Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), p. 267, and *passim* in the chapter on Maximus, pp. 262–95. Thunberg similarly describes deification as 'simply the other side of incarnation' in *Microcosm and Mediator*, p. 432.

[40]Athanasius, *De incarnatione* 54.

[41]So Larchet, *La divinisation*, pp. 381–2: 'But one can consider still more profoundly that for Maximus … [deification and incarnation] become even reciprocally dependent and are mutually conditioned, since not only does man become god relative to the humanization of God, but further that God,

to deification, and not deification to incarnation, then God and man would not be paradigms *of each other* – rather only God would be a paradigm of man, only God's incarnation a paradigm and measure of man's deification. So Fr Constas – and rightly, it seems – translates this τῷ Θεῷ in *Ambiguum* 10 as a dative of advantage, 'for God', rather than 'to God', which one finds elsewhere.[42] By deifying himself – always (passively) 'enabled by love', lest Maximus' frequent use of the active voice give us pause – the human being does something *for* God. He renders God's incarnation whole. How is that which is already perfect *completed*? Because the incarnation is God's perfection, indeed the highest of divine mysteries, which means that its 'going out of itself', its communication and infusion of itself into another, is inseparable from itself. If God is not incarnate in all things, then he is not incarnate at all. Deification is not strictly speaking the hypostatic union – not a union of two natures in a single hypostasis. But it is an integral, inseparable moment of that union, and it is therefore proper to the incarnation.

To see this more clearly let us consider a passage from the *Mystagogy* in which Maximus describes Jesus as 'my God and savior, who is co-perfected by me who am being saved, ever most full and never able to be depleted of himself'.[43] This is again dangerous language which might at first glance seem vaguely impious.[44] Yet Maximus immediately qualifies this suggestion of deficiency by highlighting the fullness of Christ's perfection, who is 'ever most full'. Although coming sequentially later in the sentence, the abundant fullness indicated here logically precedes the deficiency implied by the phrase, 'perfected by me'. As a perfection that is maximally full, it seeks receptacles to flow *into* and to embrace within itself – and this is the saint, who receives the abundance of Christ's deifying grace. Here we see again the mutuality of Christ's and humanity's perfection, so that Maximus describes Christ not just as 'perfected' by those who are saved but 'co-perfected' (συμπληρωθέντα), signifying that the perfection of each is bound to the other. Maximus speaks similarly in a later text, specifically in reference to the virtues as 'figures and foreshadowings through which God always willingly becomes man in those who are worthy: Blessed therefore is the one who has actively made God man in himself, who has brought to fullness the inception of this mystery.'[45] What mystery's 'inception' is 'brought to fullness' by the virtues and thus by deification? The mystery of God becoming man. Most poignantly and radically this idea is presented in the *Centuries on Theology*: 'Insofar as I am imperfect and refractory, neither obeying God by enacting the commandments nor becoming perfect in spiritual knowledge, Christ also, from my perspective (κατ' ἐμὲ), is thought to be imperfect and refractory because of me; for I diminish and mutilate him (μειῶ γὰρ αὐτὸν καὶ κολοβῶ) by not growing in spirit to him, since I am the body of Christ and one of its members.'[46] Here incorporation into Christ's body is not

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by a supreme manifestation of his love, becomes man relative to the deification of man, so far as he is mystically incarnated in each deified person, and even before that in each person who practices the virtues.'

[42] See e.g. Andrew Louth's translation, in *Maximus the Confessor* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 101.

[43] Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia* [hereafter *Myst.*] 5 (*CCSG* 69:23–4).

[44] Although it should not be forgotten that St Paul himself uses similar language: 'In my flesh I fill up what is *lacking* in Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, that is, the Church' (Col 1:24). Maximus likely has this text in mind here. One could draw out this whole theology of deification and incarnation from the Apostle's understanding of the church as Christ's body. In fact, that is exactly what Maximus is doing.

[45] Maximus, *Q.Thal* 22.8 (Constas, p. 154).

[46] Maximus the Confessor, *Capita theologica et oecumenica* 2.30, in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca* [hereafter *PG*], ed. Jacques-Paul Migne. 162 vols (Paris, 1857–86), 90:1137D–1140A.

just presented as the completion of the incarnation's genesis; rather, Maximus dares to say that, insofar as he, a member of Christ's body, fails to become perfect, Christ fails to become perfect, Christ is diminished and mutilated.[47] This is what it means to say, as Larchet does, that deification and incarnation are 'mutually dependent'.[48]

So the latter side of the *tantum-quantum* formula, that God becomes man to the extent that man becomes God. But what of the former side, that the incarnation 'makes man God to the same degree that God himself became man'?[49] To what degree is this? To a degree of *identity*. So when God becomes man, the 'union according to hypostasis of humanity and divinity brings humanity [i.e. Christ's human nature] into identity, in every way, with divinity [i.e. his divine nature], by principle of the hypostasis'.[50] Here it is worth noting, with Eric Perl, that Maximus does not rest content to speak of hypostatic *union*, but adds *identity*.[51] In this vein, one finds him frequently adding to conventional descriptions of Christ existing 'out of' two natures (Cyril) and 'in' two natures (Chalcedon) that he 'is' his two natures: 'For Christ is not only out of but also in these parts [i.e. natures], and what is still more proper to say: Christ *is* these parts.'[52] It is worth briefly dwelling on this aspect of Maximus' christology, since it is both striking and critical to the matter at hand. Consider another passage from the just-quoted *Epistle* 15: 'The properties that distinguish each [reality] in its own essential novelty become, according to their simultaneous conjunction in being, the very characteristics of the one hypostasis which is itself constituted out of those realities. *In this hypostasis* we contemplate the identity of these realities with one another; they do not differ in any way whatsoever.'[53] The key phrase here is 'in this hypostasis'. In this person Jesus Christ we contemplate the identity of humanity and divinity, which are identical not because they become the same *nature*, but because they mutually constitute the singular person of God the Word: 'although Christ's parts differ naturally from one another, they do not differ *qua* the hypostatic whole of those parts out of which he is composed'.[54] This person Jesus Christ *is* two, so that the two from which he is constituted can be considered one.

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[47]The question of universal salvation clearly enters the scene here. The topic cannot be treated *in extenso*, but can at least be indicated from two directions within this perspective. First, it seems that, if not all are saved, then the incarnation would remain eternally imperfect, if Christ is indeed diminished and mutilated by the failure of human beings to grow in spirit to him. From another perspective though, the thesis defended here would lean away from universalism, insofar as the incarnation accomplished by deification goes hand-in-hand with the active performance of virtue. This requires much further elaboration, without even mentioning the variance of opinions, on sheer exegetical grounds, of Maximus' position on universal salvation.

[48]Larchet, *La divinisation*, p. 381.

[49]Maximus, *Q.Thal* 22, sch. 3 (Constas, p. 155).

[50]Maximus, *Q.Thal* 60.2 (Constas, p. 427; trans. altered). Τοῦτο [τὸ κατὰ Χριστὸν μυστήριον] προδήλως ἐστὶν ἄρρητός τε καὶ ἀπερινόητος θεότητός τε καὶ ἀνθρωπότητος καθ᾽ὑπόστασιν ἕνωσις, εἰς ταὐτὸν ἄγουσα τῇ θεότητι κατὰ πάντα τρόπον τῷ τῆς ὑποστάσεως λόγῳ τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα. CCSG 22:73.

[51]See Eric Perl, 'Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, and Deification in Saint Maximus Confessor' (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale, 1991), pp. 190–1.

[52]Maximus the Confessor, *Epistle* [hereafter *Ep.*] 15 (*PG* 91:573A). Many thanks to Jordan Daniel Wood for letting me view his draft of a translation of *Ep.* 15, being prepared for publication in the Catholic University of America Press' Fathers of the Church series.

[53]Maximus, *Ep.* 15 (*PG* 91:552A).

[54]Maximus, *Ep.* 15 (*PG* 91:572A).

So just as Maximus insists on speaking of identity with reference to Christ's natures – an identity by principle of hypostasis – he similarly speaks of an identity between humanity and God in deification. We can already begin to appreciate why. If the Word's descent into the world is constituted by an identity between divinity and humanity, and our deification occurs *to the same degree* as the Word's incarnation, then deification too must terminate in an identity between humanity and divinity – a different identity (to use a somewhat bizarre phrase), because no human being becomes God by nature (as God became human by nature), but an identity nonetheless. So Maximus describes deification as 'an identity according to activity of the participants with the participable received through likeness'.[55] Finally is Adam's task of showing God and man to be 'one and the same [ταὐτόν = identical] by the state of grace'[56] complete. Just as God became whole man while remaining whole God, so 'man will remain whole man in soul and body, owing to his nature, but will become whole God in soul and body owing to the grace and the splendor of the blessed glory of God'.[57] Further, in a move original to him, Maximus describes the deified state in perichoretic terms, the same terms he uses to describe the relation of Christ's divine and human activities:[58] 'the whole man pervading (περιχωρήσας) the whole God'.[59] This is what it means to become enhypostasised in the Word: for one's whole activity to be pervaded by God's, just as Christ's human nature was wholly pervaded by his divine, according to their hypostatic union-identity.

Since Maximus constantly asserts that this deification involves no identity with God according to nature, how does it come about? Identity with God comes about through identity with Christ – it is, to repeat the phrase just employed, a hypostatic identity: 'We pass from the grace that is by faith to the grace according to sight, when our God and savior Jesus Christ transforms us into himself.'[60] Even more forcefully: 'those who choose the pure and undefiled life of the Gospel … become living images of Christ, or rather become identical to him through grace (rather than being a mere simulacrum), or even, perhaps, become the Lord himself, if such an idea is not too onerous for some to bear'.[61] Here Maximus speaks – admittedly in a way that might be too onerous for some – of becoming identical with Christ and becoming the Lord, the incarnate Word. What could this possibly mean – to become identical to Christ? Such language of 'identity' might seem pitilessly unbiblical and 'philosophical' (maybe pantheistic) to some. But no. For Maximus this is simply what the Pauline body of Christ means. This, it should not be forgotten, is another interpretation – indeed the highest interpretation – of Gregory's nebulous 'portions of God' which occupies *Ambiguum* 7. So we learn from the Apostle 'that we are the members and the body of Christ, and that we constitute the fullness of Christ God, who "fills all things in all ways" [Eph 1:23]'.[62] That we constitute – that we *are* (ἐσμεν) – the fullness of Christ God: perhaps nothing more aptly summarises the theology we have been developing here, a theology which is unqualifiedly scriptural. Maximus then continues: 'In and through his holy flesh …

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[55]Maximus, *Q.Thal* 59.8 (Constas, p. 417; trans. altered).

[56]Maximus, *Amb.* 41.5 (Constas, vol. 2, p. 109).

[57]Maximus, *Amb.* 7.26 (Constas, vol. 1, p. 113).

[58]On Maximus' christological understanding of perichoresis, see Wood, *Whole Mystery of Christ*, vol. 1, p. 4. The key text for Maximus' understanding of the perichoresis of Christ's activities is *Amb.* 5.

[59]Maximus, *Amb.* 41.5 (Constas, vol. 2, p. 109).

[60]Maximus, *Myst.* 24 (*CCSG* 69:59).

[61]Maximus, *Amb.* 21.15 (Constas, vol. 1, p. 445; trans. altered).

[62]Maximus, *Amb.* 7.37 (Constas, vol. 1, p. 131).

he has conjoined us to himself, as a kind of first fruits, making us worthy to be one and the same with him, according to his humanity.'[63] We have already seen the christological logic which allows Maximus to move from 'member of his body' to 'one and the same with him'. To say that the church is the body of Christ is to say that the church belongs to the very constitution of Christ's flesh, that is, of the human nature with which he is hypostatically one. If the Word 'is identical with his own flesh',[64] and that flesh is so one with the church that he can say to Paul, 'Why do you persecute *me*?' (Acts 9:4), then we must say also that Christ is identical with those persons who are his members. They belong to the human nature that he enhypostasises in himself – that he *incarnates into*. This is to say that he enhypostasises *them* in himself, that he incarnates himself *in* his members, is incarnated *out of* his members and most properly *is* his members.

To sum up, there are three senses in which 'hypostatic' (and therefore properly incarnational) can be used in relation to deification. The first is the sense in which deification is not hypostatic. So the Word's descent into the world united human and divine natures in his single hypostasis, becoming human by nature, while deification unites humanity to God by grace. This is a qualitative abyss that cannot be traversed. Yet there are two further, and very real, senses in which deification actually is hypostatic. First, deification is hypostatic insofar as it is intrinsic to the very perfection of Christ's hypostasis (i.e. of Christ himself), so that Maximus can speak without hesitation of Christ being 'diminished and mutilated' when his members become lifeless, and as 'co-perfected' by those who are saved. Second, and more deeply, deification is hypostatic since the term of the union is the hypostasis of Christ, to whose body, and thus to whose self, the saints are joined as members, becoming not just parts of him, but *him*, receiving the entirety of divine activity and life through his humanity which has been wholly pervaded by his divinity – becoming, to repeat the language of *Ambiguum* 7, 'enhypostasized' in him. In this deification of human beings, all reality becomes joined to Christ through his humanity, becomes God's very body, and so all reality constitutes his incarnation.[65]

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[63]Ibid.

[64]Maximus, *Ep.* 15 (*PG* 91:565A).

[65]Sincerest thanks to Fr Alexis Torrance and Jordan Daniel Wood for reading previous versions of this manuscript and offering comments, critiques and questions which greatly sharpened its own cogency.