

# SEVENTH CENTURY CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTROVERSIES

The Christological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor

## BACKGROUND

- 613 Capture of Antioch, Damascus, and Jerusalem by Chosroes II of Persia
- 622 Emperor Heraclitus waged war against the Persians and retook Jerusalem in 628
- 626 Avars and Slavs besieged Constantinople
- 632 After the death of Mohammed, Arab forces began taking other lands
- 634 Damascus captured by Arabs
- 635 Fall of Alexandria
- 638 Fall of Jerusalem

## LIFE OF MAXIMUS

- Question of the Syriac life
- Born in 580 (Maximus says he is 75 at his first trial in 655)
  - Education for preparation for imperial service: quadrivium (arithmetic, music, geometry, astronomy) and philosophy based in Plato and Aristotle with neoplatonic commentaries (Sherwood 1955a, 6). This is drawn from the testimony of the Life, as well as the evidence of his erudition.
- Became first secretary to Heraclius from 610-613/4 (Sherwood, 1955a, 7)
- Entered the monastery of Chrysopolis (now Scutari) in 613/4 (Sherwood, 1955a, 7)
  - Had a disciple, Anastasius, by 618 (Sherwood, 1955a, 7)
- In 624/5 he moved from Chrysopolis to St. George at Cyzicus (Sherwood, 1955a, 7)
  - This was the time of his first writings (Sherwood, 1955a, 7)
    - *Liber Ascetius*
    - *Centuries on Charity*
    - It is here that the *Ambigua* were thought out but not written down; one can see here a consistent correction of Origenism (Sherwood, 1955a, 8)
- He was forced to leave Cyzicus in 626 as the Persians advanced on Constantinople (Sherwood, 1955a, 10)
  - Sherwood locates his stay in Crete to 626/7 (Sherwood, 1955a, 216 n 26)
  - He then stopped in Cyprus (Sherwood, 1955a, 10)
- He was in Carthage by Pentecost of 632
  - *The Questions to Thalassius* and the *Earlier Ambigua* were written at this time (Sherwood, 1955a, 11) as well as the *Mystagogy* and Epistle 29 to Patriarch Pyrrhus of Constantinople
  - While a monk in Africa, Maximus corresponded with the political authorities: Peter the Illustrious and George (Sherwood, 1955a, 12)
  - The *Later Ambigua* are written after 634

## CHRISTOLOGY IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY

- 618c Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople, together with Emperor Heraclitus sought reconciliation between Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians
- 619 Sergius contacted Theodore of Pharan and George Arsas of Egypt on a proposal to use the one energy and one will of Christ as a formula for union
- 622 Encouraged by Theodore, Sergius unsuccessfully approached the Severan party in the person of Paul the One-Eyed
- 626 Sergius sent a monoenergistic treatise to Cyrus of Phasis

- 631 Cyrus was named patriarch of Alexandria by Heraclitus and proceeded to enact a Pact of Union between Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonian Theodosians in Alexandria on the basis of the assertion of one will in Christ "one theandric energy"
- 631 The monk Sophronius opposed the monoenergetic approach; Sophronius and Maximus shared the same monastery in Africa (Eucrates)
- 633 Sergius withdrew from the Pact of Union and issued a judgment Psephos forbidding discussion of energies
- 633 Sergius wrote to Pope Honorius I for his opinion; Honorius enthusiastically agreed with Sergius's monoenergism and used the expression "one will" in regard to Christ
- 634 Sophronius was elected patriarch of Jerusalem and sent out a synodical letter to the other patriarchs using language which supported two activities and two wills without using the prohibited terminology
- 638 After the death of Sophronius, Sergius sent out an imperial decree (Ekthesis) which incorporated the Psephos and the letter to Honorius
- 638 Two synods ratified the Ekthesis, one under Sergius, and the other under his successor Pyrrhus, which was then approved by Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem
- 640 Ekthesis was brought to Rome; Maximus learned of it at about the same time
- 641 Pope John IV condemned the Ekthesis
- 641 Paul became patriarch of Constantinople
- 642 Theodore was consecrated pope
- 645 Maximus engaged now ex-patriarch Pyrrhus in dialogue and showed the error of monoenergism; this spurs African councils to condemn the position
- Maximus left Africa for Rome after July 645; Maximus arrived in Rome in 646/7
  - In Rome, Maximus was engaged in refuting monotheletism (Sherwood, 1955a, 24)
- Defied the Emperor Constans at the Lateran Council of 649 called by Martin I
- 648 Constans II issued a Typos, a decree (perhaps drafted by Patriarch Paul) forbidding reference to wills and energies
- 649 Pope Martin I called a council at the Lateran, at which Maximus participated actively
  - "Canon 10. If anyone does not properly and truly confess according to the holy Fathers two wills of one and the same Christ our God, united uninterruptedly, divine and human, and on this account that throughout each of his natures the same one of his own free will is the operator of our salvation, let him be condemned.
  - Canon 11. If anyone does not properly and truly confess according to the holy Fathers two operations of one and the same Christ our God uninterruptedly united, divine and human, from this that through each of his natures He naturally is the same operator of our salvation, let him be condemned." (cited in Siecienski diss 18)
  - The canons 10-11 of the Lateran Council of 649 were composed by Maximus or a close associate (Sherwood, 1955a, 25)
  - Maximus was nearly 70 at the Council (Sherwood, 1955a, 26)
- 653 Martin I and Maximus were arrested and brought to Constantinople
- 655 Trial of Martin I and Maximus
  - After failing to accuse Maximus of political crimes, the trial accused him of not communicating with Constantinople while it accepted the Typos of Constans (Sherwood, 1955a, 26)
  - Maximus was exiled to Bizya (Sherwood, 1955a, 26)
- 656 Bishop Theodosius came to interrogate Maximus; Constans was insistent that he accept the Typos (Sherwood, 1955a, 27)
  - Maximus was then sent to Perberis for six years (Sherwood, 1955a, 27)
- 662 Martin I died
- 662 Maximus and his two disciples were recalled to Constantinople
  - They were then anathematized, along with Martin I and Sophronius (posthumously)
  - The three had their tongues and right hands amputated and are sent to Lazica; they arrived on June 8, 662 and were then separated
  - Maximus died on August 13, 662

- 680-81 The Sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople III) vindicated Maximus's position and declared him a Confessor of the faith
  - Maximus's feast day is Jan 21 in the East and Aug 13 in the West

## MONOENERGISTIC AND MONOTHELITE CHRISTOLOGIES

See *Bathrellos*, 69-89

Theodore of Pharan

- The one energy of the Logos acts humanly in all Christ's actions, yet his humanity is completely taken up into divinity such that it is freed from its natural qualities
- Christ's humanity is the instrument of his divine activity
- There is no active power in Christ's humanity
- There is some hint of a passive human energy but not a human will

Sergius of Constantinople

- The one energy comes from the one incarnate nature of the Logos and may seem divine or human
- One energy, though, is confusing, suggesting a denial of two natures; two energies is not traditional
  - Two energies implies two wills, and there cannot be division or opposition in Christ
  - The divinity acts on the humanity as the soul acts on the body
  - The humanity is utterly passive

Honorius I

- The question of energies is pedantic and trouble-making
- Christ performs divine and human acts
- The assumption of perfect humanity by the Logos means that only the divine will exists in Christ
- Not one energy but one Christ

Pyrrhus

- Two wills cannot both exist in one subject, since this would imply division or opposition
- Christ has one will and one energy because he is one subject
- A will does not spring from nature but from person; if it were natural, then changes in will would mean changes in nature. Or, if will can be said to reside in nature, then in Christ there can be said to be only one composite will
- Christ's humanity was passive in regard to his divinity; human energy would only be distinguished from divine energy in Christ if the human were to oppose the divine, which never happens in Christ

Paul of Constantinople

- Christ can be said to have only one will because two wills would open the possibility of internal division
- In the Incarnation, the humanity of Christ is taken up into the divine will

## MAXIMUS'S WRITINGS

- The complete Greek corpus can be found in a text established by François Combefis (17th century), collected in J.-P. Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* 90 and 91 (Paris, 1850, 1863).
- *The Church's Mystagogy*
  - *He Mystagogia tou Agiou Maximou tou omologetu*, ed. C. Stoteropoulos (Athens, 1978).
  - *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George Berthold (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 181-225.
- Earlier and Later Ambigua (*Ambigua ad Iohannem*, *Ambigua ad Thomam*)
  - Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, ed. Nicholas Constas, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).
  - Difficulty 10, 41, 71 of the Earlier Ambigua and Difficulty 1, 5 of the Later Ambigua in Louth, Andrew, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 94-179.
  - Sherwood, Polycarp, *The Earlier Ambigua of St. Maximus the Confessor* (SA 36) (Rome, 1955).
  - *Ambigua*, trans. Emmanuel Ponsoy (Paris: Les Editions de l'Ancre, 1994).
- *Opuscula Theologica et Polemica* (*Opuscula exegetica duo*)
  - *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca*, 23 ed. Peter van Deun (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991)

- Opuscula 7 and 3 in Louth, Andrew, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 180-198.
  - *Opuscules théologiques et polémiques*, trans. Emmanuel Ponsoye (Paris: Cerf, 1988).
- Chapters on Theology and the Economy (*Capita theologica et oeconomica*)
  - PG 90.1084-1173
- Letters
  - Letter 2 in Louth, Andrew, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 84-93.
  - *Maxime le Confesseur: Lettres*, trans. Emmanuel Ponsoye (Paris: Cerf, 1988).
- The Four Hundred Chapters on Love (*Capitoli sulla Carità*)
  - *Verba Seniorum*, n. s. 3, ed. A. Ceresa-Gastaldo (Roma: Editrice Studium, 1963)
  - *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George Berthold (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 33-98.
  - Sherwood, Polycarp, *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life; The Four Centuries on Charity* (ACW 21) (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1955), 136-267.
- Chapters on Knowledge
  - *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George Berthold (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 127-180.
- Questions and Doubts (Quaestiones et dubia)
  - *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca*, 10, ed. José H. Declerck (Turhout: Brepols, 1982)
  - Prassas, Despina Denise, *St. Maximus the Confessor's Questions and Doubts: Translation and Commentary* (Ph.D.diss.: The Catholic University of America, 2003), 95-270.
- The Ascetic Life (Liber Asceticus)
  - *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca*, 40, ed. Peter van Deun (Turhout: Brepols, 2000)
  - Sherwood, Polycarp, *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life; The Four Centuries on Charity* (ACW 21) (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1955), 103-135.
- Commentary on the Our Father
  - *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George Berthold (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 99-125.
- Questions to Thalassius (Quaestiones ad Thalassium)
  - *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca*, 7 (Qq. 1-55), 22 (Qq. 56-65), ed. Carl Laga and Carlos Steel (Turhout: Brepols, 1980, 1990)
  - *Questions à Thalassios*, trans. Emmanuel Ponsoye (Paris: Les Editions de l'Ancre, 1992).
- Disputation with Pyrrhus
  - *The Disputation with Pyrrhus of Our Father among the Saints, Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Joseph P. Farrell (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon, 1990).
- Life of Maximus
  - *Vitam Maximi Confessoris Illustrantia una cum latina interpretation Anastasii Bibliothecarii iuxta posita*, ed. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca*, 39 (Turhout: Brepols, 1999).
  - "The Trial of Maximus," in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George Berthold (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 15-31.

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