

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTIONS I

The Christological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor

Ambigua 1-5 to Thomas

PROLOGUE

- Lover of wisdom and her beauty
- Knowledge embodied in practice
- God incarnate by means of virtue
- Dionysius and Gregory attained the heights of sanctity such that their minds communed with the Logos himself “by which one is persuaded that the passages cited hereinafter were authored, not by them, but by Christ, who by grace has exchanged places with them.”

AMBIGUUM 1

“For this reason the Monad from the beginning moved toward a dyad and at the Trinity came to a halt.”

“The Monad moved on account of its abundance, the dyad was surpassed—for it is beyond matter and form, out of which bodies are made—the Trinity was defined, on account of its perfection.”

ISSUES

- How is God said to be moved?
- Does monadality precede Trinity?

God is simultaneously Monad and Trinity.

Trinity is not the sum of three beings but the way the Monad subsists.

The movement is our movement moving into God via our knowledge of him.

AMBIGUUM 2

“In sum: you must attribute the more sublime expressions to the Godhead, to the nature that transcends the sufferings of the body, and you must attribute the lowlier ones to the compound, to Him who because of you was emptied, became incarnate, and (to use equally valid language), was made man.”

ISSUES

- How can God be compound?

The compoundedness adheres to the Son in his birth. He becomes the hypostasis of the two natures. He accepted all that it means to be human. He thus truly is said to have suffered: a “suffering God”.

The difference between essence and hypostasis.

He became man with the energy proper to humans “for the principle of natural energy is what defines the essence of a thing, and as a rule characterizes the nature of every being in which it essentially inheres.”

AMBIGUUM 3

“He whom you now treat with contempt, was once transcendent even over you. He who is now human was incomposite. He remained what He was; what He was not, He assumed. In the beginning, He was

without cause (for what is the cause of God?), but later He came into being for a cause, namely, for your salvation, of you who insult Him and despise His Godhead for that very reason, because He deigned to take on your think corporality, consorting with the flesh through the medium of the intellect—and God on earth became man, for it (i.e., the flesh) was blended with God, and He became one, because the stronger predominated, so I might be made God to the same extent he was made man.”

ISSUES

- In what sense is the intellect a medium for the incarnation?
- How can flesh be said to be blended with God?
- How can I become God?

While remaining what he was, he became what he was not.

He took on intellect and flesh.

He became a visible God and manifested himself through the flesh.

The assumption of flesh by the Word is what is meant by blending.

He is one in his concrete reality (hypostasis) while remaining two at the level of nature.

Being complete renewed in grace one becomes filled with God and identified with God.

AMBIGUUM 4

“As the Word He was neither obedient nor disobedient—for these terms apply to those under the authority of others and those inferior in rank, the former (i.e., obedience) pertaining to the willingly compliant, and the latter (i.e., disobedience) to those deserving of punishment. But as the form of a slave He comes down to the same level as His fellow slaves and servants. And He receives an alien form, bearing the whole of me in Himself, along with all that is mine, so that He may consume within Himself the meaner element, as fire consumes wax or the sun earthly mist, and so that I may share in what is His through the intermingling. For this reason He honors obedience by his actions, and experiences it by suffering. Just as in our case, the mere disposition is an unsatisfactory thing unless we give it practical effect—for deeds are the proof of dispositions. We may perhaps also make the not invalid assumption that He tests our obedience by the art of His philanthropy, and measures all our sufferings against his own, so that He is able to understand our condition in light of His, taking frailty into account along with suffering, knowing how much can be demanded of us by the one, and how much we are to be excused by the other.”

The Son is not obedient in his divinity, but in his humanity he is perfectly obedient.

His humanity is not passible, like ours affected by sin.

His philanthropy is revealed in the act of incarnation.

He bears all of human nature in its perfection “including its natural, blameless passions”.

He “absolved our penalty in Himself” so that we can have immutability in soul and body.

The will is identified with the naturally good.

We become cleansed of passion by grace.

Because he perfected obedience, he accomplished our salvation.

He does human things as God, lifting humanity thereby.

Everything he is and does is the simultaneity of both natures, acting as God in a human manner.

He is perfectly unified.

His obedience cleanses us.

AMBIGUUM 5

“‘How,’ you ask, ‘is Jesus, who is beyond all things, ranked together with all men at the same level of essential being?’ But here He is not called ‘man’ insofar as He is the cause of men, but as being that which in the entirety of its essence is truly man.”

ISSUES

- How can Jesus be said to be entirely man?

God can be designated by names deriving from that which is caused.

God is not called man merely in this way, but in essence.

God is the entirety of man’s essence, which includes a natural energy that makes him truly man.

In becoming man he is properly the incarnate one, and thus Jesus is his proper name.

He is beyond being and a human being.

He is above humanity and shares in humanity’s becoming.

He transcends being and overflows with this transcendent being. In becoming man, he elevates human nature to himself. Nature then becomes mysterious in the transcendence of his divinity: “He elevated nature to Himself, making nature itself another mystery, while He Himself remained entirely beyond comprehension, showing that His own Incarnation, which was granted a birth beyond being, was more incomprehensible than every mystery.”

He remains hidden in his self-revelation: “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 to be beyond being by entering essentially into being.”

His incarnation renewed human existence and nature itself.

The natural power of the flesh is joined to his divinity and receives its power from it, imbuing our flesh with this same possibility of divine participation.

Finite being becomes the operation of infinite being: “in a manner beyond man, He works the things of a man.”

The human nature is self-moved; its activity is not taken away because it is the activity of the Godhead. The principle of being and the mode of its existence are distinct.

“since the human nature, united without confusion to the divine nature, is completely penetrated by it, with absolutely no part of it remaining separate from the divinity to which it was united, having been assumed according to hypostasis.”

That which is human is divinely negated in its being brought into a transcendent mode of existence.

He suffered in a divine way and performed miracles in a human way.

“Instead, as God having become man, He lived His life among us according to a certain new theandric energy.”

His divine energy was humanized and his human energy was divinized, yet these cohere in one identity. The distinction remains in their union.

A single energy that partakes of both natures would be impossible.

A single energy would introduce humanity into the Godhead.