

Synergy in Christ According to Saint Maximus the Confessor

I. Introduction

No doctrine of free choice, according to Saint Maximus the Confessor, can be understood apart from the theology of the Incarnation. It is this “mystery of Christ” in the words of Polycarp Sherwood that forms the centre and “stands at the very heart of the Maximian synthesis.”¹ It is important to note that Maximus stands within the Neo-Chalcedonian position, or as Fr. John Meyendorff correctly calls it ‘Cyrillian Chalcedonian.’ This position is distinguished by three main features: 1) the acceptance of the Theopaschite Formula of St. Cyril, 2) that there was no contradiction whatsoever between St. Cyril and the Council of Chalcedon, and 3) the use of a consistent terminology between Triadology and Christology that is applicable to both.² As we will see later on in this paper, the Chalcedonian theme of “unconfused” and “undivided,” with respect to Christ’s natures, plays a similar (if not the same) role in Maximus’ understanding of the divine *logoi* or energies with respect to each other and the divine essence. It is within this paradigm that Maximus “was capable of establishing the orthodox solution of the Monothelite question.”³

In this paper I will sketch the underlining metaphysic of Monenergism,⁴ its three fold dialectic, Maximus’s break-up of this dialectic, and conclude with Maximus’s over-all grid for a coherent doctrine of predestination *subsumed under* Christology and Eschatology.

II. The ‘Origenist Problem’

To understand the ‘investigative’ theology of Origen’s *On First Principles*, we need to outline two basic concepts of Plotinus’s ‘The One.’ For Plotinus, ‘The One’ is utter transcendence, beyond all predications, and is “absolute unity itself.”⁵

It [the One] is not a thing or quality or quantity or intellect or soul: It is not in motion or at rest...It is not thought for there is no otherness in It. It is not movement, but prior to movement and thought. For what would It think about? Itself? But then It would be ignorant before Its thought, and would need thought to know Itself...It is none of them, It can only be said to be beyond them. Now these things are beings, and being: so It [the One] is ‘beyond being’... ‘Beyond being’ is not Its name; all that it implies is that It is ‘not this.’⁶

This very apophatic approach to ‘the One’ harkens back to Plato in book VI of *The Republic* that all human cognition of the good can never pick out the good because the good in essence is

¹ Sherwood, ACW vol. 21, p. 29

² Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 34-35

³ Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, p. 9

⁴ I will be using Monenergism and Monotheletism interchangeably throughout this paper.

⁵ Farrell, *Free Choice in Saint Maximus the Confessor*, p. 40

⁶ *Enneads* VI:8:13; 9:3; V:5:6, c.f. cited in Farrell pp. 40-42

altogether on the other side of *esse*.⁷ However, there is another side to this coin for Plotinus's conception of 'the One': within the One all predications are wholly indistinguishable. Being, activity, and will are all identical:

He is his own act, and is what He is not by chance but according to His own activity...So He is not 'as He happened to be,' but as he Himself wills...His essential being is his self-directed activity, and this is one with Himself.⁸

This concept of simplicity—all predications being identical and indistinguishable in the One—is definitional to the One's utter perfection. This leads to some interesting consequences. If the One is to *be* the One, multiplicity must stand over against the One, and the One could not be the One if it did not produce this multiplicity. Plotinus remarks that "everything which is multiple and not one is defective, since it is composed of many parts"⁹ which in turn means that "distinction is opposition."¹⁰

We see in both of these accounts that there is a certain tension in Plotinus' view of 'the One.' However, it is this latter concept of God being identical to all predications of Him, that one might employ, is inherent in Origen's *On First Principles*¹¹ to which I now turn.

For Origen, the problem of free-choice is centered on two anomalies. The first one is a divine problem. As we have stated with Plotinus, God's essence has no multiplicity or distinctions. Existence, Will, and Activity are wholly indistinguishable and identical.¹² Any distinction of these attributes is only in the cognition of the human subject. Since God's activity is wholly indistinguishable from his Being, we can say that he is an 'ever-productive' agent. To be ever-productive, the divine essence must create, since it has no distinction of being, essence, will and activity. The essence has but one object of willing to choose—it has but one good thing to do.¹³ We can therefore say, for God's essence, true freedom is actually a freedom *from* free choice. Thus, for Origen God was by definition Creator and Almighty:

Accordingly, to prove that God is almighty we must assume the existence of the universe. For if anyone would have it that certain ages, or periods of time, or whatever he cares to call them, elapsed during which the present creation did not exist, he would undoubtedly prove that in those ages or periods God was not almighty, but that he afterwards became almighty from the time when he began to have creatures over whom he could exercise power. Thus God will apparently

⁷ Plato, *Republic*, VI.509B: "You will agree that the Sun not only makes the things we see visible, but also brings them into existence and gives them growth and nourishment; yet he is not the same thing as existence. And so with the objects of knowledge: these derive from the Good not only their power of being known, but their very being and reality; and Goodness is not the same thing as being, but even beyond being, surpassing it in dignity and power."

⁸ *Ibid.*, VI:8:17; c.f. Farrell, p. 44

⁹ *Ibid.*, VI:9:6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, III:2:16; Farrell, p. 45. This is a very important principle for Monotheism.

¹¹ It is only my concern in this essay to show the similarity and comparison of this concept in Origen's doctrine. Farrell, p. 52: "Origen was not familiar with the works of Plotinus, and derives his platonizing tendencies largely from the Middle Platonists."

¹² Origen, *On First Principles*, Bk 1, c. 1

¹³ Farrell, p. 44

have experienced a kind of progress, for there can be no doubt that it is better for him to be almighty than not to be so. Now how is it anything but absurd that God should at first not possess something that is appropriate to him and then should come to possess it? But if there was not time when he was not almighty, there must always have existed the things in virtue of which he is almighty; and there must always have existed things under his sway, which own him as their ruler.¹⁴

A couple of things that are worthy of noting from this passage: first, we see that the will as the 'faculty of will' that is proper to nature is not distinguished from the will as the 'object of the will' which is hypostatic. Thus, the natural faculty of will, which is identical to the essence, is the same as its object. This highlights confusion between nature and person, which has ramifications as well for Origen's doctrine of the apokatastasis.¹⁵ For a restoration of one's nature inevitably results in the restoration of one's person as well. Secondly, since these two are not distinct, what is natural to an agent is absolutely necessary. This 'definitional simplicity' leads free-will to be defined as between objects dialectically opposed.¹⁶ Like Plotinus's conception of 'the One', creation stands over and against God, for the very purpose that God can be Creator. In other words, "he [Origen] imagined an endless flow of ages which had to be filled...Any sequence in the divine predicates appeared to him under the form of real temporal change; and therefore, having excluded change, he was inclined to deny any sequence at all to, or interdependence among, those predicates taken as a whole; he asserted more than the mere "co-eternity" of the world with God; he asserted the necessity of the divine self-disclosure ad extra, the necessity of the eternal realization of the fullness and of all the potentialities of Divine power."¹⁷ Likewise, "the world was impossible without God, and God was impossible without the world."¹⁸ Therefore, for Origen, God cannot choose not to create, since such a choice is entangled with a dialectic, which would involve multiplicity in Him, and given God's utter perfection, such would by definition be evil and impossible.¹⁹

The second problem in Origen's doctrine of free-choice is the Saints in the Eschaton and this is a creaturely problem. Since we have just shown that for Origen God's freedom is really a freedom from free choice, creation on the other hand, being composite, must therefore involve choice. This choice, however, must precisely be between objects of differing moral value. The creature in its diversity must always have free volition, mutability, and motion:

¹⁴ Origen, *On First Principles*, II, 2, 10

¹⁵ We will see that Maximus holds to a notion of the apokatastasis but comes to a different conclusion because of the real distinction between person and nature. This is likely what Gregory of Nyssa, as interpreted by Maximus had in mind as well, although it is much debated in modern scholarship.

¹⁶ Farrell, p. 55

¹⁷ Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption*, Vol. III, The Collected Works of George Florovsky, p. 53

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56

¹⁹ Farrell, p. 55

the will's freedom always moves in the direction either of good or evil, nor can the rational sense, that is the mind or soul, ever exist without some movement either good or evil.²⁰

We see in this passage that Origen logically ties personhood to free-choice and motion, but because he cannot disentangle motion and plurality from his definition of free-will as objects dialectically conditioned, this has some interesting consequences for the redeemed in the Eschaton. With God being absolutely simple, how many willing objects can there be? There can be only one metaphysical object in this logic,²¹ and Origen has ruled out all diversity or motion in the Eschaton for creatures—absorption into the One. However, Origen is not one to give up on the problem. We saw that motion, free-will, and personhood are tied together in his doctrine of free-choice. The redeemed have but one single good object to will, the other option by definition must be evil, which brings us to the culmination of this human problem as an eternal cycle of falls and redemptions:

the soul is immortal and eternal, it is possible that in the many and endless periods throughout diverse and immeasurable ages it may either descend from the Highest Good to the lowest evil or to be restored from the lowest evil to the Highest Good.²²

This is how Origen logically believes in the pre-existence of souls. The cycle was the only conceptual way he could stave off absorption into the divine essence since sin was a clear individuating principle between God and creatures. Sin then becomes the distinguishing mark of creatures and their free will is thought of in terms of between options of differing moral worth, as we have already stated. Since God is perfect nothing sinful could become God thereby staving off divine absorption. The pre-existent souls in God are in stasis. Kinesis results in a fall from this unity resulting in Genesis of the corporeal world with a reversal of this process in a journey back to the One (Kinesis, Stasis).

Before we turn to Maximus and the Monothelite controversy, I wish to note the continuity with history that Maximus has of breaking up the 'Origenist problem.' This job seems to first fall to St. Athanasius in the controversy with the Arians over the deity of Christ and his consubstantiality with the Father. Arius was the one who first picked up on Origen's dialectic that gives two opposed options: Either the eternity of the world or to deny the eternity of the Son.²³ In Saint Athanasius, the distinction between essence and will appears to be a real, metaphysical one:

A man by counsel builds a house, but by nature he begets a son; and what is in building began to come into being at will, and is external to the maker; but the son is proper offspring of the Father's essence, and is not external to him; wherefore neither does he counsel concerning him,

²⁰ Origen, *On First Principles*, III, 3, 5

²¹ Although there would be multiple creatures in the Eschaton, man's natural desire is for God and He being the object of beatitude.

²² *Ibid.*, III, 1, 23

²³ Florovsky, *Aspects*, p. 46

lest he appear to counsel about himself. As far then as the Son transcends the creature, by so much does what is by nature transcend the will. And they, on hearing of Him, ought not to measure by will what is by nature.²⁴

Thus, St. Athanasius's defense of the deity of Christ and His necessity from the Father, along with the free contingency of the world depends on a real distinction between essence and will.²⁵

A continuing break up of the 'Origenist problem' occurs in the Cappadocians's view of the proper knowledge of God through the process of conception (ἐπίνοια) against the Semi-Arian Eunomians.²⁶

According to Eunomius, the οὐσία of the Father can be known through the precision of the terminology applied to it. It was this idea of having knowledge of the divine essence that the Cappadocians attacked:²⁷

He makes Himself known that He is "by the greatness and beauty of His creatures proportionately" to the things that are known, vouchsafing to us the gift of faith by the *operations of His hands*, but not the comprehension of what He is.²⁸

We are now able to outline 2 distinct principles that characterize definitional simplicity:

1) The principle of non-contradiction²⁹ or that plurality cannot be disentangled from moral opposition, and 2) What is natural is compelled. With this hermeneutic in place, we can now proceed on with an investigation of Monothelism.

III. The Three Dialectical Principles of Monenergism

In this essay concerning monothelism, we will not be concerned with historical or political developments or its relationship with monophysitism but solely with the theology of Pyrrhus of Constantinople as its representative in Maximus's disputation with the Patriarch. As I have pointed out two underlying principles in the previous section, it is important to show how these two motivate a third. This third principle is that the will is hypostatic:

If Christ be one person, then He willed as one person. And if He willed as one person, then doubtless He hath one will and not two.³⁰

And,

It is impossible to imply some "willer" along with the will itself.³¹

The first quote is an explicit confession of one will in Christ, but the second quote is more interesting. Not only does it signify one will, but it confuses properties of a nature with the

²⁴ Athanasius, *Third Discourse Against the Arians* III, 62, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers II, 4, pp.427-428

²⁵ Florovsky, *Aspects*, p. 53

²⁶ The Eunomians also held to a 'definitional' simplicity of God.

²⁷ See M. C. Steenberg's excellent essay: *The Cappadocian Fathers on Essence and Energy and the Knowledge of God: The Process of Epinoia*. http://www.monachos.net/patristics/epinoia_ennoa.shtml

²⁸ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Answer to Eunomius's Second Book*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers II, 5, p. 251

²⁹ Although both the Monothelites and Saint Maximus were committed to eliminating contradiction in Christ, the two groups have opposite approaches. For Pyrrhus, to eliminate distinction was the only way to uphold to non-contradiction.

³⁰ Maximus, *Disputation with Pyrrhus* 10, p. 4

³¹ *Ibid.* 14, p. 5

hypostatic employment of that faculty, a real confusion between the will as the ‘faculty of nature’ and the will as the ‘mode of willing’ that is employed towards the ‘object of the will.’ The key text that focused the debate was Christ’s agony and Passion in Gethsemane: “My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will but as thou will be done.”³² The idea here by all parties was to eliminate the seemingly apparent contradiction between the human and the divine.³³ However because of the principle of “distinction is opposition,” this leads Pyrrhus to confess:

It is impossible for two wills to exist in one person without opposition.³⁴

In the Patriarch’s thinking, not only did rooting the will in the hypostasis seemed to be the only way to uphold the principle of non-contradiction and maintain the integrity of Christ’s hypostasis, but subsequently, to safeguard from any overture of opposing wills in him.³⁵ This concept even appears in none greater a Father than St. Gregory [Nazianzus] the Theologian that was appealed to by the Monenergists:

Seventhly must be mentioned: the Son’s “coming down from heaven not to do his own will, but the will of him who sent him.” Certainly had these words not been spoken by the very one who “came down” we should have said the language bore the stamp of a *mere man like us*, not that of the Savior we know. His will is not in the least degree opposed to God, is totally dependent upon God. Our merely human will does not always follow the divine; it often resists and struggles against it. *This is the way we interpret*: “Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me, but not what I will—let your will prevail.” The alternative suppositions—either he was ignorant of the thing’s possibility, or, he was opposing the Father’s will—are both implausible. No, given that the words come from what was assumed, we must meet this problem in the same way as the previous ones. The words there mean not that the Son has, but that he has not, a will over against the Father’s. This would give the sense: “Not to do my own will,’ for what is mine is not distinct from what is yours but belongs to both you and me, who have one will as we have one Godhead.”^{36 37}

This first principle of non-contradiction that presupposed ‘distinction is opposition’ is what gives traction to root the will in the hypostasis, but there is also a second principle that is related to the will being hypostatic:

If thou sayest that the will is natural, and if *what is natural is compelled*, and if thou sayest that the wills in Christ are natural, thou dost in fact take away all his voluntary motion.³⁸

It is important to emphasize at this point that rooting the will in the hypostasis is built on the back of these two principles: 1) distinction is opposition as understood within the principle of

³² Mt 26:39

³³ See Note 28.

³⁴ Ibid. 16, p. 7

³⁵ Farrell, p. 81

³⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Fourth Theological Oration* (Oration 30, 12), pp. 102-103

³⁷ Maximus is quite critical of Saint Gregory in this passage. In Sixth *Opusculum* Maximus says that “if it is a matter of perfect harmony and concurrence, whom do you understand as the subject? The man who is just like us, or the man we consider in the role of Savior? If it is from the man who is just like us, then our teacher Gregory errs...” PG 91:65BC. *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, p. 174

³⁸ *Disputation* 24, p. 11

non-contradiction and 2) what is natural is compelled. This leads Maximus back to confronting the problem that recollects the Origenist Problem that is not only “a Monothelite problem, but a problem of theology as well.”³⁹

There is still some force to affirm a human operation in Christ for Pyrrhus that isolates him from the rest of the proponents of Monenergism. The contradiction at the Passion is a true human will; however, it is not one that is *in* Christ but *in* us:

There are still some in Byzantium who place the natural wills in opposition [to each other] and who thus maintain that the Fathers said the Lord had a human will by appropriation [only]...It is plain that the relative appropriation is meant...Why did not the Fathers say that Christ formed *our* will *in* Himself?...They [the Fathers] referred, not to that which appertaineth to Him by mere nature, but to that which He took upon Himself by appropriation.⁴⁰

The predestinarian character of Pyrrhus doctrine should be obvious in this passage. If salvation is to be accomplished, it must be wholly moved by an irresistible movement of the divine will since the human operation is in opposition to it by the mere fact that it is a creature. Christ is moved solely in his humanity by the divine Logos. This is so significant because it raises the problem of predestination and free-will in a *Christological context* and not an anthropological one.⁴¹ With a sketch of Monothelism, along with its Origenistic presuppositions, we will now turn to St. Maximus’s doctrine of free-choice in Christ and his refutation.

IV. Synergy in Christ

As we shall see in the rich thought of the Confessor’s doctrine on free-choice, his refutation of Monenergism is dependent on a real distinction between person and nature and between nature and energy. Maximus’s doctrine of free-choice, unlike most, starts “from above” rather than “from below.”⁴² In other words, Maximus looks at what properties are essential to free-will and not the accidental relations that are consequences of the Fall to erect his doctrine. It is one that is centered on Christ and the Saints in the Eschaton. It is a doctrine of free-choice that is non-dialectical.⁴³ The choices between objects, in Maximus’s thinking for Christ and the Saints, are not construed between objects of differing moral worth as they are for Origen and Monenergism.

As for Origen, Maximus is insistent that kinesis and motion are proper to what it is to be a creature and have personhood:

³⁹ Farrell, p. 82

⁴⁰ *Diputation* 56, 66, 68, pp. 23-27

⁴¹ See Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio* WA 754: “Thus it is through us he preaches, shows mercy to the poor, [and] comforts the afflicted. But what is attributed to free choice in all this? Or rather, what is there left for it but nothing? And really nothing!”

⁴² Farrell. P.178

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 90

Since, therefore, rational beings are created, they are doubtless subject to movement because they proceed from a source by virtue of the being proper to nature, and because they move themselves towards an end by virtue of that well-being proper to *gnomie*.⁴⁴

Although Maximus is equally insistent that kinesis does not produce the Fall, it is the movement towards deification:

For the divine is immovable, as filling all, and everything that passes from non-being into being is movable indeed, as impelled surely to some cause, then nothing moved has yet to come to a stop, as not yet reposing its power of movement from desire in the ultimate object of its appetite; for nothing else is apt to stop what is impelled except the appearance of that object of appetite...No created being, ever, in any manner, stands fast while being moved by [its] natural power towards the End proper to that power; *neither does it cease* from the energy proper to that End, [even] after it is fixed up on it.⁴⁵

There seems to be a slight problem with the Confessor's thinking at first glance. If Adam was created "up-right," how is he able to sin in the first place and what is his idea of *gnomie*?

Following Chalcedon that Christ is "fully man," Maximus deduces that Christ must have a natural faculty of will in both natures—a divine and a human energy:

If he hath two natures, then He surely must have two natural wills, the wills and essential operations being equal in number to the natures. For just as the number of natures of the one and the same Christ, correctly understood and explained, doth not divide Christ but rather preserveth the distinction of natures in the union, so likewise the number of essential attributes, wills, and operations attached to those two natures doth not divide Christ either.⁴⁶

Pyrrhus took this passage as a denial of all of Christ's voluntary motion, because "what is natural is compelled." For Maximus, Pyrrhus's presupposition was too suggestive of the Origenist problem and its dialectical opposition. The will as the 'faculty of will' which is the rational principle of the nature (*logos*) is distinguished from the 'mode of willing' or hypostatic use of that faculty (*tropos*):

The will and the mode of willing, just as the power of sight and the mode of perception are not the same...For the rational nature hath the natural ability and rational appetite [proper to it]. This is called the "faculty of will" of the rational soul. It is according to this [faculty] that we consider when willing, and in considering, we choose the things which we would...and these are not subject to compulsion.⁴⁷

This answer leads us back to our original question: What is Christ's mode of willing, and how does it differ from ours that gives him the inability to sin (*non posse peccare*)?

The natural faculty of will is always directed towards the good. We could even say it is irresistibly moved towards some real or apparent good. This is why even in sinful agents they take their wrong doings as goods for them, i.e. apparent goods. The problem with a thief,⁴⁸ however, is not his *nature* per se but his *hypostatic* use (*tropos*) of the natural faculties (*logos*),

⁴⁴ *Ambigua* 7, PG 91:1073BC; c.f. Farrell, p. 136

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1069B, 1073B; c.f. Farrell pp. 134-135

⁴⁶ *Disputation* 13, p. 4

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 23, 25; pp. 10-12

⁴⁸ I'd like to thank my good friend Perry Robinson for pointing this argument out to me.

which is why sin is personal and not natural. Since the personal employment and the natural faculty are not integrated in virtue, the thief deliberates about proposed courses of actions. He is hesitant and uncertain about the good. This hesitancy and uncertainty about the good is **not** because he is composite and contingent being (and thus able to sin). So *plurality* per se is not the problem with the thief. This anxiety about courses of action and uncertainty of the ends of those acts is eliminated in the Saints in the Eschaton so it is not *essential* to being human. The anxiety and uncertainty about the good is due to the fact that for contingent beings virtue must be exercised through *habit*. Virtues for Maximus are the rational principles and agencies of the Person of the Logos,⁴⁹ i.e. the uncreated *logoi* of God,⁵⁰ and they are not in human nature accidentally and subsequently to creation:

Pyrrhus: Virtues, then, are natural things?

Maximus: Yes, natural things.

Pyrrhus: If they be natural things, why do they not exist in all men equally, since all men have an identical nature?

Maximus: But they do exist equally in all men because of the identical nature!

Pyrrhus: Then why is there such a great disparity [of virtues] in us?

Maximus: Because we do not all practice what is natural to us to an equal degree; indeed, if we [all] practiced equally [those virtues] natural to us as we were created to do, then one would be able to perceive one virtue in us all, just as there is one nature [in us all], and “one virtue” would not admit of a “more” or “less.”

Pyrrhus: If virtue be something natural [to us], and if what is natural to us existeth not through asceticism but by reason of our creation, then why is it that we acquire the virtues, which are natural, with asceticism and labours?

Maximus: Asceticism, and the toils that go with it, was devised simply in order to ward off deception, which established itself through sensory perception. *It is not [as if] the virtues have been newly introduced from outside, for they inhere in us from creation, as hath already been said. Therefore, when deception is completely expelled, the soul immediately exhibits the splendor of its natural virtue.*⁵¹

⁴⁹ *Ambigua* 7, PG 91:1081D: “There can be no doubt that the one Word of God is the substance of virtue in each person...It is evident that every person who participates in virtue as a matter of habit unquestionably participates in God, the substance of the virtues,” and *Gnostic Centuries* 1.50; 58 in Berthold pp.137-138: “But some [virtues] began to be in time, for there was a time when they were not, and others did not begin to be in time...The one who with his body is diligent for his soul in the well-ordered diversity of the virtues.” C.f. Thunberg, *Microcosm*, p. 323-327 for Maximus’s understanding of virtue.

⁵⁰ Thunberg, *Microcosm*, p. 74: “The differentiated logoi pre-exist in God, who keeps them together. This pre-existence of the logoi in God implies, first of all, that they are fixed in Him.”

⁵¹ *Disputation* 91-95, pp. 32-33. This passage refutes the Nestorian character of Pyrrhus’s conception of the mode of the Incarnation of appropriating attributes, and the appropriation of grace being introduced into man from the outside.

On the other hand, Adam did not start out “exercised” in virtue, although his faculty of willing is “naturally” directed towards virtue (either real or apparent according to *tropos*). This was the purpose in giving man such a simple command to obey in the garden. The idea was to fuse Adam's faculty of willing (*logos*), naturally directed towards the good, with his personal employment of the will. Once virtue is practiced with one's hypostatic employment through habit (possibly through more commands and obedience), then Adam would become a morally impeccable agent and be like God unable to sin. But before created agents have exercised the natural virtues, their hypostatic mode of willing (*tropos*) has a discrete status which Maximus calls the *gnomic* will:

Gnomie is nothing else than an act of willing in a particular way, in relation to some real or assumed good.⁵²

The gnomie will can be defined as the personal employment of the will (*tropos*) that is not integrated with virtue, that is, integrated with the natural faculty of the will directed towards the good (*logos*). This is why it was possible for Adam created in innocence to sin. Theosis was open to him, but he was not created in theosis: but a state of potential deification. The devil and our first parents sinned by the *gnomic* will. Since the *gnomic* will ceases when a created hypostasis is integrated in the natural virtue, we can say that it [gnomie] is accidental to human nature and not essential. Christ lacks this personal 'mode of willing' since he is the divine uncreated Logos. Christ's faculties of will are integrated with his hypostatic use of the will by his super-essential mode of existence being the Word:

These natural things of the will are present in Him, but not exactly in the same manner as they are in us. He verily did hunger and thirst, not in a mode similar to ours, but in a mode which surpasseth us, in other words, voluntarily. Thus, He was truly afraid [in Gethsemane], not as we are, but in a mode surpassing us. To put it concisely: all things that are natural in Christ have both the rational principle proper to human nature, but a super-natural mode of existence, in order that both the [human] nature, by means of its rational principle, and the Economy, by means of its super-natural mode of existence, might be believed.⁵³

Since the gnomie will is accidental to human nature and not essential, Christ does not need to assume this mode of willing, nor could He, since He is the Logos. Christ has an integrity of his nature and person with respect to his humanity that we lack (except in the Eschaton), and we have a "distance" between our personal employment of our faculties and the Good that our natural faculties are directed to (gnomie) that Christ lacks. Maximus sums it up as follows:

Thus, those who say that there is a gnomie in Christ, as this inquiry is demonstrating, are maintaining that he is a mere man, deliberating in a manner like unto us, having ignorance, doubt and opposition, since one only deliberates about something which is doubtful, not concerning what is free of doubt. By nature we have an appetite simply for what by nature is good, but we gain experience of the goal in a particular way, through inquiry and counsel. Because of this, then,

⁵² *Disputation* 85, p. 30

⁵³ *Ibid.* 35, pp. 17-18

the gnostic will is fitly ascribed to us, being a mode of the employment [of the will], and not a principle of nature, otherwise nature [itself] would change innumerable times. But the humanity of Christ does not simply subsist [in a manner] similar to us, but divinely, for He Who appeared in the flesh for our sakes was God. It is thus not possible to say that Christ had a gnostic will.⁵⁴

Christ's statement, "Not my will, but thine will be done," in the Gethsemane text expresses that Christ initially wills two good objects. Since he has two natural faculties, each one of them directed towards the good, the 'objects of willing' are self-preservation of his life and the Salvation of humanity. Since the faculty of the will is rooted in the nature as we have stated, and nothing natural is in opposition to God, then it is not possible on the mere basis of Christ having a natural human will for him to sin in opposition to God for self-preservation of his own life which is a good to will:

For the things that exist came to be out of nothing, and have therefore a power that impels than to hold fast to existence, and not to non-existence, which [power] is simultaneously an inclination towards that which naturally maintaineth them in existence, and a drawing back from things destructive [to their existence]. Consequently, the super-essential Word, by virtue of His humanity, had of His humanity this self-preserving power which clingeth to existence. And [in fact], He exhibited both [aspects of this power], willing the inclination and the drawing back on account of His [human] energy.⁵⁵

Christ then freely wills the salvation of the world without any determinism, since the choice is between two good courses of action. We see so far in this analysis of St. Maximus that natures can only circumscribe possible courses of action, but do not determine the hypostatic use of one's faculties. If Christ in Gethsemane and the Saints in the Eschaton are going to have true free-choice, then there must be alternate courses of action that are all equally good, all the while excluding the possibility of sinning. It is to the Confessor's view of the divine simplicity and the objects of choice that we now turn.

The Confessor's refutation of the Origenist idea of 'definitional simplicity' is dependent on the correct understanding of his doctrine of the *logoi*. Unlike Origen's idea of the pre-existing *logikoi*, rational creatures in the Henad, Maximus's *logoi* are rational 'principles' that pre-exist in God. The *logoi* are agencies, "blue-prints"⁵⁶ in which God created the world, but are also the One Logos, which as Farrell notes places it in an important Christological context:⁵⁷

Who then cannot see that the one Rational Principle is in fact many rational principles, and that created things were determined simultaneously by the agency of this distinction which is undivided, because their attributes are distinct from each other and without confusion? And again the many [rational principles] are in fact one [Rational Principle] existing without confusion by

⁵⁴ Ibid. 87, pp. 31-32

⁵⁵ Ibid. 33, pp. 16-17

⁵⁶ Maximus also calls them "divine predeterminations and wills." *Ambigua* 7, PG 91: 1085A: "With examples from Scripture St. Dionysius the Areopagite teaches us to call these *logoi* "predeterminations" and "the divine wills." *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, p. 61

⁵⁷ Farrell, p. 136

virtue of all things being offered up to Him through Him Who is their enessentialization and enhypostasization.⁵⁸

This passage grounds the idea of recapitulation of the plurality of the *logoi* being offered up through the One Logos. The *logoi* are uncreated, real, and distinct; they are not to be identified with the divine essence of God or with any essence of created objects as indicated by Hans Urs von Balthasar from the Confessor's *Ambigua*.⁵⁹ Another interesting point we see in this passage is the Chalcedonian locus of "without division" and "without confusion" being applied to the many *logoi* to each other and to the One Logos. The *logoi* of God define the type of movement we are to have in Heaven which refutes the type of 'stasis' that Origen imagined:

We are speechless before the sublime teaching about the Logos, for He cannot be expressed in words or conceived in thought. Although he is *beyond being* and nothing can participate in him in any way, nor is he any of the totality of things that can be known in relation to other things, nevertheless we affirm that the one Logos is many *logoi* and the many *logoi* are One. The many rational principles are one by being providentially attached, led, and offered up, to the One Rational Principle of the many, as to a source which possesses universal sovereignty, or as to a point which predetermines and unites all the radii [emanating] straight out of it and that gather them altogether...One zealously traverses one's course toward the beginning and source without deviation by means of one's good will and choice. And through this course one becomes God, being made God by God. To the inherent goodness of the image is added the likeness acquired by the practice of virtue and the exercise of the will...He moves in God according to the *logos* of his well-being that pre-existed in God when he lives virtuously. [Finally, one] lives in God in accordance with the rational principle of [one's] Ever-Being, [which also pre-exists] in God. In the future age when graced with divinization, he will affectionately love and cleave to the *logoi* already mentioned that pre-exist in God, or rather, he will love God himself, in whom the *logoi* of beautiful things are securely grounded.⁶⁰

The language of the radii of a circle, in this passage, is close to the spatial imagery of the things moving "around" God in Plotinus's *Enneads*.⁶¹ The movement of the Saints in the Eschaton according to the rational principles is defined by Maximus as an "ever-moving rest."⁶² This rest is a divine *logoi* of God's nature⁶³ and one of the *logoi* of man's motion in Ever-Being:⁶⁴

He [God] rests when each being, having obtained the divine energy in due measure, will determine its own natural energy with respect to [or around] God.⁶⁵

This being the goal of the creature's motion,⁶⁶ Maximus goes on to state that the energies are

⁵⁸ *Ambigua* 7, PG 91:1073BC; c.f. Farrell, p. 136

⁵⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, p. 117-118; Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, p. 77

⁶⁰ *Ambigua* 7, PG 91: 1081A,C, 1084B; Farrell pp. 137-138; *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, for an English translation of the entire *Ambigua* 7, see p. 57-60

⁶¹ Farrell, p. 138,143; *Enneads* II:2:3: "This is how intellect is moved; it is both at rest and in motion; for it moves around Him (the Good). So, then, the universe, too both moves in its circle and is at rest. "

⁶² *Gnostic Centuries* PG 90:1100C, English trans. by George C. Berthold in the *Classics of Western Spirituality Series*: Maximus the Confessor Selected Writings, p. 136. The phrase "ever-moving rest" implies that "rest" is impeccability and obtaining the goal while the phrase "ever-moving" implies that man does not cease from choice, as Origen likewise held, and electing things to will in God.

⁶³ The idea of rest in Maximus is closely connected with impeccability: "God never ceases from good things, because he never began them." *Gnostic Centuries* PG 90:1096D, Berthold, p. 135.

⁶⁴ Farrell, p. 148

⁶⁵ *Gnostic Centuries* PG 90:1100C, Berthold, p. 136.

The works of God which did not happen to begin to be in time are participated beings, in which participated beings [creatures] *share according to grace*, for example, goodness and all that the term goodness implies, that is, all life, immortality, simplicity, immutability, and infinity and such things which are essentially contemplated in regard to [or around] Him; they are also God's works, and yet they did not begin in time.⁶⁷

At this point in the essay it is important to note the relationship the *logoi* have with the energies of God. As we have identified the *logoi* as blue-prints, predeterminations, agencies, and rational principles, they are also identified with the energies of God which will denote the kind of divine simplicity Saint Maximus has in mind:

The *logoi* which are in beings, in the infinity of which it contemplates the energies of God, then, to speak truly, it reproduces the numerous and infinite differences in the divine energies which it perceives. Then, as regards the employment of scientific inquiry (ἐπιστημονικῆς ἐρευνῆς) into that which is really true, for reasons that one may readily appreciate (εἰκότως), it (the intellect) will find the power of any such inquiry [to be] ineffective and its method useless, for it has no means of understanding how God Who is truly none of the things that exist, and Who in the strict sense is all things, and yet beyond them all, [exists] in each *logos* of all particular things and in all the *logoi* together whereby all things exist. If, therefore, in a proper sense, every divine energy properly signifies God indivisibly, wholly and entirely through itself, in each thing according to the *logos*—whatever it may be—whereby it exists, who is capable of conceiving and of saying exactly how, being wholly and entirely and altogether common to all and yet altogether particularly present in each of these realities, God is without part and division, without [thereby] being diversely distributed in the infinite differences of these realities in which He exists as Being, and without thereby being contracted according to the particular existence of each individual [logos], and also without fusing the differences of these realities into the sole and unique totality of them all, but on the contrary that He is truly all in all, He Who never abandoned His own simplicity [which is] without parts?⁶⁸

This passage is crucial for a couple of reasons. First, it signifies that Maximus maintains that God is simple, but it is to be distinguished from the 'definitional' type of simplicity that we mentioned in Plotinus and Origen in the beginning of this essay, the type of divine simplicity where all predications are indistinguishable and identical in God. Secondly, it shows that the

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 150

⁶⁷ *Gnostic Centuries* PG 90:1100D, p. 136 in Berthold

⁶⁸ *Ambigua* 22, PG 91:1257A-B; c.f. Farrell, pp. 139-140. Compare this statement of Maximus with St. Gregory Palamas *Triads* III:2:7-8: "Thus, neither the uncreated goodness, nor the eternal glory, nor the divine life nor things akin to these *are* simply the superessential essence of God, for God transcends them all as Cause. But we say He is life, goodness and so forth, and give Him these names, because of the revelatory energies and powers of the Superessential. As Basil the Great says, "The guarantee of the existence of every essence is its natural energy which leads the mind to the nature." (*Ep.* 139, 6-7) And according to St. Gregory of Nyssa and all the other Fathers, the natural energy is the power which manifests every essence, and only nonbeing is deprived of this power; for the being which participates in an essence will also surely participate in the power which naturally manifests that essence...But since God is entirely present in each of the divine energies, we name Him from each of them, although it is clear that He transcends all of them. For, given the multitude of divine energies, how could God subsist entirely in each without any division at all; and how could each provide Him with a name and manifest Him entirely, thanks to indivisible and supernatural simplicity, if He did not transcend all these energies?...The superessential essence of God is thus not to be identified with the energies, even with those without beginning [Palamas was previously discussing the difference between energies that have a beginning and an end in time and those that do not]; from which it follows that it is not only transcendent to any energy whatsoever, but that it transcends them "to an infinite degree and an infinite number of times" (*Cent. gnost.* I.7), as the divine Maximus says."

energies are in no way separate from each other—being wholly connected to God’s essence—but neither are they to be confused with each other either. Simplicity operates for Maximus as a way to safeguard God’s utter transcendence on one hand (‘Beyond Being’⁶⁹), and that God is fully manifested in each of His operations on the other.⁷⁰ These divine energies are the ‘objects of willing’ for Christ and His Saints, and they are all of equally moral value which constitutes a genuine free choice for agents without the possibility of sinning.

V. Conclusion

What are the implications of viewing free-choice and predestination in a Christological context? I will conclude this essay with investigating one further implication of the Confessor’s doctrine: the apokatastasis. The Patriarch of Constantinople rooting the will in the hypostasis not only was a *reductio ad absurdum* to two different Triadological heresies,⁷¹ but it also implied an apokatastasis reminiscent of Origenism with respect to one’s hypostatic state. A denial of a natural will in Christ was a denial of His full humanity, and Christ’s humanity being consubstantial with all men was moved fully by the divine will:

Pyrrhus: Was not the flesh moved by the decision of the Word Who is united with it? But doesn’t Maximus’s view of the *logoi* being naturally in all men at creation⁷² and being recapitulated in the One divine Logos also imply a kind of determinism and inevitability⁷³ that is every bit as strong as Origen? Indeed it does. The difference between Origen and Maximus goes back to the robust distinction of *nature* and *person/logos* and *tropos* that the Confessor holds in his doctrine of free-choice. The apokatastasis for Maximus—which is what his doctrine of

⁶⁹ von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, pp. 88-89; 217: “God’s immanent name, then, is the name Being; his transcendent name is the name Not-Being, in that he is not any of those things we can speak of as being. The second of these names is *more proper to him*, since such negation means a reference to God as he is in himself, while an affirmation only refers to him in his activity outside of himself. This is not contradicted by the fact that Maximus, along with the tradition reaching from Philo to Gregory of Nyssa, says we can only know God’s existence—know that he is—not his *essence*, or *what* he is. . . He lies far beyond both modes [affirmative and negative] of knowing,” and later von Balthasar says, “[W]hile Leontius includes God within the category of *ousia*, Maximus—true to his teachers Origen and Pseudo-Dionysius—places him beyond it: God is not *ousia* but stands above *ousia*.”

⁷⁰ Simplicity also operates as a means to safeguard that there is only One True God.

⁷¹ *Disputation* 15, pp. 5-6: “For if one suggests that a “willer” is implied in the notion of the will, then by the exact inversion of this principle of reasoning, a will is implied in the notion of a “willer.” Thus, wilt thou say that because of the one will of the superessential Godhead there is only one hypostasis, as did Sabellius, or that because there are three hypostases there are three hypostases there are also three wills, and because of this, three natures as well, since the canons and definitions of the Fathers say that the distinction of wills implieth a distinction of natures? So said Arius!”

⁷² Maximus is not a semi-Pelagian, for the uncreated *logoi* being uncreated have no similarity whatsoever with created essences. This is a strong metaphysical distinction between nature and grace. In regards to man’s abilities after the Fall, man’s ignorance of whether or not acts end in good or an evil act becomes much worse, and his ability to actualize the divine energy is only under girded by the Incarnation itself. Maximus calls the *logoi* and virtues natural only insofar as the type of participation that man has in them, and not the notion of grace AS nature as the Pelagians held.

⁷³ I make this statement only if we take the Resurrection of Christ as a reference point.

predestination is—is to all created nature and man having “ever-being.” This is God’s purpose or predestination for his creation to have eternal existence.⁷⁴ The Incarnation, Life, Death, and Resurrection of our Lord are a process that reversed the effects of Adam’s sin that would’ve introduced annihilation or a going back into non-being in God’s creation. It is a life of our Lord “that healed and restored with a certain compulsion, by the mighty power of God’s omnipotence and invincible grace.”⁷⁵ However, one’s hypostatic state, either to “ever-ill being” or “ever-well being,” is up to the personal use of that natural faculty and is not determined by God, but is utterly free:

The Church knoweth three apokatastases. One is the [apokatastasis] of everything according to the principle (logos) of virtue; in this apokatastasis one is restored who fulfills the principle of virtue in himself. The second is that of the whole [human nature] in the Resurrection. This is the *apokatastasis to incorruption and immortality*. The third, in the oft-cited words of Gregory of Nyssa, is the apokatastasis of the powers of the soul which, having lapsed into sin, are again restored to that condition in which they were created. For it is necessary that just as the entire nature of the flesh hopeth in time to be taken up again into incorruption in the apokatastasis, so also the powers of the soul, having become distorted during the course of the ages had instilled in it a memory of evil, so that at the end of ages, not finding any rest, will come unto God Who hath no limit. And thus the distorted powers of the soul will be taken up into the primeval apokatastasis, into a merely discursive knowledge of, *but not into the participation in, the good things* [of God], where the Creator is known yet without being the cause of [their] sin.⁷⁶

God’s glory is for all and will be communicated to all in “ever-being.” Those that have their hypostasis united with the *logoi* by constantly recapitulating these virtues in this life (by prayer, asceticism, and sacramentally in the Church), God’s glories are “ever-well being.” Likewise, those that choose not to practice these virtues, God’s glories are “ever-ill being.” Because the damned have not integrated their hypostasis with their natural virtue, it is God’s *presence* [as opposed to his absence] that is their misery.

I conclude this paper by noting that in all the debates that have plagued the West in the confrontations between predestination and free-will, the great gem of Saint Maximus the Confessor who wrote the most definitive explications on the will has been absent amongst all the great contenders. One must wonder with Jaroslav Pelikan if Western theologians have been able to successfully implement the results of this Eastern Christian controversy.^{77 78}

⁷⁴ Thunberg, *Mircosm*, p. 430

⁷⁵ Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption*, p. 147

⁷⁶ *Thalassium*, PG 90:796BC. Cited in the Disputations with Pyrrhus, Introduction, p. xxxii

⁷⁷ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology*, p. 116. Pelikan quotes St. Anselm in *Cur Deus Homo* I:9: “Christ came to do not his own will but that of the Father, because the righteous will that he had did not come from [his] humanity but from [his] divinity.”

⁷⁸ I would like to make a special note. While Lateran IV and Vatican I both speak of God being absolutely simple, the councils do not define this simplicity with respect to Latin Scholasticism as the attributes being identical with each other and identical to the essence of God. It appears to this writer that it could be read in the same manner as it does with St. Maximus in safeguarding monotheism or that God is not partitioned out in his operations. For Maximus this simplicity is to ensure that the fullness of the divinity is present in each person and in each operation.

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