CHAPTER 24

MAXIMOS THE CONFESSOR

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Maximos the Confessor has long divided opinion. A controversial and isolated intellectual within his own lifetime (580–662), when the Christological position that he supported was vindicated at the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680/1), he was not mentioned. Maximos' rehabilitation was a protracted process, gaining most momentum in the post-Iconoclastic period, when his actions in defense of doctrine were upheld as an example of the Church's autonomy from secular interference.[1] But even then some critics hesitated over his abilities. Thus the patriarch Photios, describing Maximos' *Questions to Thalassios*, admired his acumen for allegorical contemplation, but condemned his penchant for linguistic obscurantism.[2] Translators of Maximos' Greek will no doubt empathize.

Modern theologians are almost unanimous in recognizing Maximos' considerable learning and genius. But some historians demonstrate a distinct unease in their assessment. Thus one recent critic – as part of a wider argument which presents the Islamic caliphate as the heir proper to late antique intellectual culture – passes over Maximos as being of minor philosophical aptitude and interest;[3] another – arguing that the reign of Justinian had precipitated the triumph of a malign Christian "monodoxie" which suppressed all cultural pluralism – instead constructs him as the champion of an anti-ecclesial "platonisme ambiant," resistant to "l'aridité du dogme et la sclérose du rite," and preserving "le génie de l'hellénisme."[4] I will argue that neither assessment withstands examination. But these critics' arguments point to a clear problem: that is, Maximos' corpus cannot find a comfortable place in narratives which construct his lifetime as one of unambiguous intellectual regression, introversion, or decline, or which see contemporary Christian culture as incapable of innovation, pluralism, and dissent.

We cannot here survey the full range of Maximos' interests; readers can access several excellent introductions.[5] I will instead highlight the more prominent aspects of his thought, in particular his contributions to

[1] For Maximos' reception, see Price 2014: 105–108. [2] Photios, *Bibliotheke* cod. 192A.
[3] Fowden 2014: 149. [4] Athanassiadi 2010: 126–131. [5] Thunberg 1985; Louth 1996.

Christological doctrine and to political philosophy. At the same time, I will situate these aspects in the context of Maximos' life, a period of unprecedented disorder. Through his remarkable career – which took him to such diverse centres as Jerusalem, Alexandria, Carthage, Rome, and Constantinople – we can trace a world in which the political and cultural plates were realigning, in which Constantinopolitan and Persian emperors, Arabian caliphs, and Roman popes vied for position. By following the progression in Maximos' thought throughout his movements across this landscape, we can uncover the profile of a Christian intellectual born into a world of assumed Roman dominance in the eastern Mediterranean, but who died in a Christian Roman state on the verge of oblivion.

BEYOND THE FATHERS

Among the most important of Maximos' texts we can count the *Book on the Ascetic Life*, the *Centuries on Love*, the *Ambigua to John*, the *Questions to Thalassios*, the *Questions and Doubts*, the *Mystagogy*, and the pieces gathered as the *Letters* and *Opuscula*.[6] The corpus ranges across various themes (ascetical, liturgical, exegetical, doctrinal, philosophical, etc.) and genres (questions and answers, centuries, commentaries, letters, dialogues, etc.). In none of these, however, does Maximos present a comprehensive account of his theology. Each is instead occasional, addressed to individuals and focused on a particular topic, sometimes in response to a request.[7]

Within this diverse output, it is nevertheless possible to trace the operation of a systematic mind. Indeed, much recent scholarship has devoted itself to the disinterment of the basic structures of Maximos' thought, demonstrating in particular how the principles expressed in the Chalcedonian doctrine of the Incarnation further pervade and orient his entire theological vision.[8] Therein, Maximos avails himself of various patristic sources. His Christological impulses derive from the "Alexandrian" tradition of Athanasios, the Cappadocians, and Cyril, and from the Neo-Chalcedonism of the Leontioi; he is the spiritual heir to Evagrios, pseudo-Makarios, and Diadochos; and his cosmological vision owes much to pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite.[9] Maximos thus situates himself within a continuous theological tradition, and his achievement was in part the integration of its divergent strands.

His contribution to the thought of the Chalcedonian east is, however, far more significant than his systematization of its fundamental currents. It is increasingly apparent, for example, that Maximos enriches the

[6] See *CPG* 7688–7711. For the corpus in full, with dates, see Jankowiak and Booth 2015.
[7] Louth 1996: 20–22. [8] Kattan 2003; Cooper 2005; Töronen 2007; Tollefsen 2008.
[9] Louth 1996: 22–32.

tradition through independent if critical recourse to concepts derived from Aristotle and the Neoplatonists,[10] while his own elaboration of that tradition, though couched in conservative rhetoric, makes momentous intellectual advances, in particular in relation to the Christological and anthropological will. His theological system, therefore, is not static, but was enriched and elaborated over time, and in dialogue with others both allied and opposed.

EARLIEST EDUCATION

A basic problem for understanding Maximos' intellectual formation is the obscurity of his earliest career. There is a startling divergence between the later Greek hagiographic corpus, which presents Maximos as a Constantinopolitan aristocrat and administrator before his retreat into monasticism, and a contemporary invective, extant in a single Syriac manuscript, which places his birth in the Golan and his formative years in the monasteries of Palestine.[11] In recent literature the Greek narrative has been assailed from various directions. The tradition, which contains obvious anachronisms,[12] originated in the eighth or ninth century, and one suspects that Maximos' earliest hagiographers in Greek, confronted with a dearth of information for his earliest career, made it conform to the dominant expectations for middle Byzantine ascetics.[13] In contrast, the Syriac *Life* comes from a contemporary, George of Resh'aina, who demonstrates a striking awareness of biographical or historical details known to be accurate from other sources.[14] Can we then trust his account of Maximos' Palestinian career? The problem, of course, is that George is an implacable opponent of Maximos, so that when he reports on Maximos' ignoble parentage we suspect polemic. But it seems doubtful that George's picture of Maximos' Palestinian training is also polemical, or that it would have been possible, before an audience of contemporaries, to displace his entire career.[15]

If Maximos is (re-)placed within a Palestinian context, the temptation arises to trace Palestinian influences within his thought. Although the

[10] Mueller-Jourdan 2005; Benevitch 2011–2012; Lauritzen 2012; Bathrellos 2013. The extent and mechanisms of that borrowing remain unclear: Tollefsen 2008: 13–16.

[11] For the Greek hagiographic corpus – several *passiones* and a *Life* – see Roosen 2010. For the Syriac *Life* (= George of Resh'aina, *Syriac Life of Maximus*), see Brock 1973.

[12] Lackner 1971. [13] Allen 1985; Boudignon 2004; Roosen 2010; Booth 2013: 143–149.

[14] E.g. the knowledge of Maximos' movements between Africa, Sicily, and Rome; his association with the North African *hyparchos* George; and the settlement of his allies at *Cella Nova* in Rome at George of Resh'aina, *Syriac Life* 20–24.

[15] On the "internal evidence" for Maximos' Constantinopolitan career (in particular his association with persons in or around the capital), see the prosopographical section in Jankowiak and Booth 2015; contra Larchet 1996: 8–12.

cosmopolitan nature of late antique religious culture precludes definitive solutions, Palestinian intellectuals appear as a central influence. Specifically, his understanding of various Christological terms is much indebted to the Neo-Chalcedonism of Leontios of Byzantion and Leontios of Jerusalem,[16] while his evident interest in pseudo-Dionysios recapitulates and expands the activities of another Palestinian, John of Scythopolis.[17] At the same time, much within Maximos' earliest output is a selective critique of the Origenist tradition, refuting its more controversial protological and cosmological doctrines but nevertheless salvaging its rich exegetical and spiritual insight.[18] This too is perhaps suggestive of a Palestinian formation since here, during the reign of Justinian, Chalcedonian monastics had engaged in a high-profile dispute over "Origenist" doctrine. Recent literature orients that dispute around the same issue evident in some of the earliest Maximian texts, that is, the need to disentangle Origenist (in particular, Evagrian) ascetic insight from its original doctrinal matrix.[19] It is therefore notable that George of Resh'aina accuses Maximos of having trained under an "Origenist" at the Palaia Laura.[20] Maximos' interest in Origen and Evagrios made this an obvious accusation for enemies, and here George too omits the purpose of this training in Origenism.[21] The mention of Maximos' institution provides a crucial clue, however, for in the generation before him the Palaia Laura (also called "Souka") appears as a bastion in the battle *against* Origenism.[22]

While it is probable that Maximos was a product of Palestinian monasticism, the problem remains of his movements between 600 and 630, for which the Syriac *Life* is silent. That same period witnessed the Persians' invasion and subsequent occupation of Rome's eastern provinces, including the capture of Jerusalem in 614. In 632 we find Maximos at Carthage, a self-confessed refugee from "barbarian" pressure.[23] What was his route to the west? The evidence permits no more than speculation, but it is possible that he followed the same path as another Palestinian ascetic, Sophronios, whose disciple Maximos had become at some point before 632.[24] We know that in the reign of Phokas (602–610), and under threat of Persian invasion, Sophronios had abandoned Palestine and retreated to Antioch, and then traveled to Alexandria, where he remained for (at least some of) the first decade of the emperor Herakleios' rule (610–641),[25] before traveling to

[16] Bathrellos 2004: 39–54. [17] Suchla 1980.
[18] Sherwood 1955; Dalmais 1961; Cooper 2005: 65–95. [19] Hombergen 2001; Booth 2013: 15–33.
[20] *Syriac Life* 4. [21] The same accusation appears in the *Record of the Trial*.
[22] Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Kyriakos* 11–15 (pp. 229–235).
[23] Maximos, *Letter* 8 (*PG* 91:445A), with Devreesse 1937; Booth 2013: 164–165.
[24] Maximos, *Letter* 8 (*PG* 91:440D–445A), with Devreesse 1937: 35, calling himself "your servant and disciple." Cf. *Letter* 13 (*PG* 91:533A) (c. 633/4).
[25] *Prologue to the Spiritual Meadow*, 91–93, with Booth 2013: 49–53 for supporting evidence.

North Africa.[26] That Maximos trod a similar path – whether in the entourage of Sophronios, or as part of a wider Palestinian ascetic diaspora – must remain uncertain. But there is some reason to associate him also with Alexandria.

Critics of the notion of Maximos' Palestinian origins have sometimes said that a man of his considerable intelligence cannot have been trained in the Judean deserts, but must have received his education in Constantinople.[27] We need not assume, however, that Maximos' education occurred in a single period or place, or that Constantinople was the sole center for higher education. Indeed, recent research has pointed to the frequent association of Maximos' later correspondents not with Constantinople but with Alexandria, and suggested that Maximos might (like Sophronios) have been there in the 610s, mixing amidst its intellectuals.[28] It has long been recognized that he had studied and absorbed the philosophical classics: Porphyry's *Eisagoge* and Aristotle's *Categories*.[29] It now seems almost certain that he also authored a text *On the* Isagoge *of Porphyry and Aristotle's* Categories, lost but excerpted in two (perhaps three) other extant texts. The lost common source derives from the lecture notes of David the Invincible, one of the last representatives of the Alexandrian Neoplatonists, and reflects the Alexandrian philosophical curriculum as it existed, at least, in the earlier part of Maximos' lifetime.[30] Our lost source, therefore, provides a striking complement to recent speculation on Maximos' Alexandrian education and to the continuity between late antiquity and seventh-century thought.

THE MAKING OF A DISSIDENT

The gap in our knowledge of Maximos' life coincides with Herakleios' spectacular resurgence against and defeat of the Persian empire (by 628/9). Modern historians tend to laud the emperor's achievement, but Maximos was far less effusive. In order to comprehend this reaction, and indeed his persistent indifference to Constantinopolitan claims, we must bear in mind his status throughout the previous decades as a refugee, an exile from a homeland under foreign occupation. At the same time, we should also remember the paradigm of collective sin and divine punishment in which Maximos' contemporaries had come to interpret the Roman defeats.[31] From this perspective, we might then better appreciate Maximos' reaction to the Roman resurgence, which could not reverse

[26] Maximos, *Opusculum* 12 (*PG* 91:142A). [27] Larchet 1996: 8–12.
[28] Boudignon 2004: 15–22, with 37–41. For Sophronios' possible association with Alexandrian philosophers, see Wolska-Conus 1989.
[29] Lackner 1962. [30] Roosen 2001: 883–898. [31] Flusin 1992: v. 2, 129–149; Olster 1994.

the long periods of personal exile inflicted through imperial failure, nor indeed promise the moral renewal which alone could restore divine favor.

In 628 or 629 Maximos dispatched a letter to the imperial official Constantine Sakellarios in which he thanked him for communicating "news of a peace on earth" (*sc.* the end of the Persian war), but warned him that God's gift of peace did not entail affection for the world and its rule: it should instead prompt the renewal of the war against the passions, indulgence in which had fomented God's anger in the first place.[32] Perhaps around the same time, in a letter to another official, John the *cubicularius*, Maximos responded to a perhaps leading question: "How is it that God has judged it right that men be ruled by other men?" In his response he offers the standard Christian account: the Fall introduced disorder into man and the cosmos, so God has introduced the distinction of ruler and ruled in order to marshal those who are obedient to the laws of nature and punish those who ignore them. The emperor who maintains his rule in accordance with divine ordinances, Maximos insists, is God's lieutenant on earth. But, he then adds in an ominous conclusion, the emperor who ignores these ordinances will rebut good men, remove himself from all counsel, and appoint the impious to positions of power. This, Maximos warns, is "a final pit of destruction for both rulers and ruled."[33]

Although we cannot determine the precise chronological context for the letter to John, in 632 Maximos dispatched from North Africa a letter to Sophronios in which he reports a recent forced baptism of African Jews and Samaritans, carried out under imperial fiat.[34] The baptism appears to have been part of a wider ideological program emphasizing both the *renovatio* of the Roman empire and the eschatological dimensions of Herakleios' reign.[35] That program manifests itself in Heraclian court rhetoric after the departure of the Persians from former Roman territories, but is most obvious in a particular event: the emperor's personal restoration to Jerusalem of the True Cross, captured during the Persian assault of 614. The Heraclian court orchestrated and publicized the event for maximum ideological impact, proclaiming Herakleios as the restorer of the Constantinian empire and investing his exploits with eschatological overtones.[36] From this perspective, the forced baptism of Jews – which had both Constantinian and eschatological resonances – appears as a further act in a cosmic drama scripted at the court.[37] Maximos, nevertheless, again inverted imperial rhetoric. In his letter to Sophronios, he reported his consternation at the pollution of the sacrament of baptism through its extension to unbelievers, and at the subsequent consequences

[32] Maximos, *Letter* 24 (*PG* 91:608c–609a). [33] Maximos, *Letter* 10 (*PG* 91:449a–453a).
[34] Maximos, *Letter* 8, with Devreesse 1937. Forced baptism: Booth 2013: 170 n. 131.
[35] Stoyanov 2011. [36] Drijvers 2002. [37] For those resonances, see Booth 2013: 170 and n. 132.

of apostates mingling with the faithful. This, Maximos states, would be a "clear and unambiguous sign of the consummation of the universe."[38] Herakleios' action was not the mark of a new Constantine but the mark of the Antichrist.

It is worth reflecting on the intellectual position expressed in this letter, that is, the rejection of an imperial religious initiative on the basis of the perceived pollution of the sacraments and, thence, of the Orthodox Church. For this sense of the sacramental integrity of the church and its resistance to external pollutants underlies much of his subsequent perspective on imperial religious maneuvers. Indeed, in the same period the same notion was expressed in Maximos' liturgical masterpiece, the *Mystagogy*, an extensive interpretation of the Eucharistic rite. There Maximos propounds a profound new vision which saw symbolized in the progression of the liturgical drama the movement of man and cosmos toward their final consummation in God, and which relativized the realization of that movement according to the individual spiritual states of the gathered Christian faithful.[39] From an intellectual perspective, Maximos' commentary represents the unprecedented integration of two monolithic currents of Christian thought, the ascetical and the liturgical. But in its construction of the Eucharist as the gravitational center of Christian existence, and in its studied refusal to divide the congregation into separate social categories, it also makes a confident declaration of a diverse church united in, and oriented around, ascetic endeavor and liturgical devotion. From here, it was but a small leap to the position prefigured in the letter to Sophronios: the suspicion of the potential pollution accrued through the extension of the sacrament to apostates, and the concomitant rejection of political initiatives that threatened to introduce that same pollution.

REFINING A DEBATE

It is probable that Maximos, when he issued his dramatic admonitions over the eschatological consequences of misappropriating imperial power, was conscious of Herakleios' simultaneous doctrinal maneuvers. From 629, the emperor and his allies had launched a series of diplomatic initiatives which sought to restore communion between Constantinople and the anti-Chalcedonian churches in the eastern provinces that were then being reintegrated. Although each of those initiatives encountered mixed acceptance and resistance in anti-Chalcedonian communities, for a fleeting moment Herakleios achieved what had so often eluded his predecessors: the establishment of a doctrinal union which embraced communities from Rome to

[38] Devreesse 1937: 35.
[39] Riou 1973: 123–200; Thunberg 1985: 113–129; Larchet 1996: 399–436; Cooper 2005: 165–205.

Ctesiphon.[40] The realization of that union must in part reflect the considerable capital that Herakleios had accrued in his dramatic defeat of the Persian empire. But it perhaps also suggests that foreign occupation had led some Christians to share the imperial perspective, that is, the belief that Christian union was a greater good than an inflexible stance over doctrine.

A central component of some if not all these unionist agreements was monenergism, that is, the doctrine of the single Christological operation. Since Chalcedon, miaphysite enemies of the Council suspected that the Tome of Leo had in fact divided Christ through recognizing in him two active subjects and thus two Sons,[41] and in response to such concerns so-called Neo-Chalcedonian theologians had on occasion contemplated a single "theandric" (divine–human) operation, that is, a unified operation of the divine–human Christ performing both divine and human actions.[42] Imperial support for the doctrine under Herakleios, therefore, was not a doctrinal "innovation," a capitulation to anti-Chalcedonian doctrine in the name of political expedience. It was the sponsorship of a position which had roots in Neo-Chalcedonian attempts to propitiate and reconcile the council's enemies.

From the outset, it appears that Herakleios' efforts caused considerable disquiet amongst certain Chalcedonians, in particular amidst the monasteries of Palestine.[43] But it was not until 633, when the Chalcedonian patriarch-to-be of Alexandria entered into communion with elements in the Egyptian Severan Church, that public opposition began.[44] Now returned from North Africa to Alexandria, Maximos' master Sophronios protested at the terms of the union – in particular, it seems, the phrase "one theandric operation" – and appealed to Sergios, the patriarch of Constantinople, to intervene.[45] Sergios issued the *Psephos*, a document that banned discussion of Christological operations altogether, instead asserting that the actions which the single Christ performed were both divine and human at the same time.[46]

Maximos' first pronouncement on the operations is contained in his *Letter* 19, composed in the immediate aftermath of the *Psephos* and dispatched to Sergios' disciple – and future patriarch of Constantinople – Pyrrhos. Maximos there lavishes praise on Sergios and the *Psephos*, and sets forth a theological position which complements that document's emphasis on both the single acting subject in Christ and the status of all Christ's

[40] For the unions, see Jankowiak 2009: 49–96; Booth 2013: 200–208. [41] Hovorun 2008: 15–41.
[42] Uthemann 1997; Lange 2012.
[43] Disquiet: Euboulos of Lystra, *Against the* libellus *of Athanasios to the Emperor Herakleios*. In Palestine: Antiochos Monachos, *Pandects* 130 (*PG* 89:1843BC).
[44] See esp. the *Pact of Union*, with Jankowiak 2009: 84–96; Booth 2013: 205–208.
[45] See the account in Sergios of Constantinople, *First Letter to Honorius* 534–546.
[46] For the text of the *Psephos*, see Sergios, *First Letter to Honorius* 542–544.

actions as both divine and human. At the same time, however, he demonstrates disquiet over the monenergist doctrine earlier propounded in the Alexandrian union of 633 (which he calls an "innovation") and requests that his correspondent differentiate various words associated with "operation," since he cannot understand the reasons for supporting "one operation."[47] While their masters agreed to an accord, therefore, Maximos and Pyrrhos continued the discussion and looked to define its basic terms.

From a later perspective, it is striking that Maximos here does not commit to the outright proclamation of "two operations." Indeed, in his earliest pronouncements on the operations he continues to echo the position of the *Psephos*,[48] and one can thence trace a gradual shift toward a more assertive, anti-monenergist position,[49] in particular from around 640/1.[50] As Maximos developed his position, he was forced to confront those patristic passages that had spoken of "one operation," and over time his approach to such passages altered. In some texts of the earlier 640s, confronted with a citation from Cyril of Alexandria which pronounced "one *sungenes* operation," he could contemplate the qualified use of "one" as a guard against division;[51] but later – when Constantinople adopted the proclamation of "one and two" operations (and wills) as its official position – he refused the same approach altogether, and is said to have dismissed the said passage as a miaphysite forgery.[52] Indeed later in his life Maximos would come to regret some of his earlier statements on the topic of the operations, where he had not been as explicit or robust as he later would have liked.[53] But these developments point toward two conclusions: first, Maximos' position developed and was refined over time, in conversation with his opponents; and, second, he was making cautious inroads into uncharted territories.

Just as Constantinopolitan support for monenergism cannot be considered a simple political "innovation," nor can the protests of Maximos be considered a simple defense of "orthodox" tradition. Although he

[47] Maximos, *Letter* 19 (*PG* 91:593B–596B).

[48] *Ibid.* 14 (*PG* 91:537A) (c. 633); 15 (*PG* 91:573B) (c. 633).

[49] Maximos, *Ambigua to Thomas* 5, does not commit to "two operations" but makes repeated and explicit references to Christ's natural operations, and also contradicts "one operation" (5.249–250).

[50] See Maximos, *Opusculum* 6 (*PG* 91:65A–68D, with explicit reference to "two operations" at 68A); *Opusculum* 7 (*PG* 91:69B–89B). Both texts date to c. 640/1. The silence in the intervening period is perhaps explained by the silencing of Maximos at the Council of Cyprus in 636: see below.

[51] Maximos, *Opusculum* 7 (*PG* 91:88B–89D). Cf. *Opusculum* 8 (*PG* 91:105C–109B); *Opusculum* 9 (*PG* 91:124C–125C).

[52] For his shifting position, see Bathrellos 2004: 195–201. For the dismissal of the passage from Cyril, see *Dispute at Bizya* 299–301. I owe this point to Marek Jankowiak.

[53] Maximos apologizes for *Letter* 19 and also, it seems, *Opusculum* 7 (on the simultaneous recognition of "one" and "two" operations): at *Opusculum* 9 (*PG* 91:129A–132C); for the phrase "one operation of God and the saints" see *Ambigua to John* 3 at *Opusculum* 1 (*PG* 91:33A–B).

elaborated existing principles, and presented his position as the articulation of established patristic position, he was in fact engaged in something more significant: a pioneering analysis that confronted a protracted exegetical and Christological problem and served to problematize and sharpen the language of "operation" and its various cognates in Greek theological circles. The conservative rhetoric in which contemporaries engaged therefore disguises a substantial new discussion on the semantics of "operation" and its application to Christ.

Although protagonists in that discussion took nuanced stances – Sophronios' as patriarch of Jerusalem (634–c. 639), for example, was distinct from that of Maximos in the same period[54] – recent literature has emphasized the remarkable closeness of the protagonists: all were committed to the Chalcedonian doctrine of two natures; all believed in a single acting Christ; and all thought in terms of Christ's theandric acts.[55] Nevertheless, the fine distinctions are crucial, if not in substance then at least in principle. Confronted with the protests of Sophronios and then Maximos, the proponents of monenergism (and later monotheletism) argued that the doctrine should be accepted on the grounds of accommodation (*oikonomia*), that is, a degree of doctrinal latitude for the sake of establishing communion. Sophronios and Maximos, in contrast, presented themselves as the proponents of *akribeia*, that is, doctrinal precision, and regarded the unions – all of which involved shared communion – as the gratuitous pollution of both "proper" Chalcedonian doctrine and the Chalcedonian Church itself.[56] Contained within the Christological conflict, therefore, we also witness a deeper ecclesiological (and sacramental) conflict: between those who were willing to negotiate on doctrine and to tolerate difference for the sake of communion, and those for whom proper doctrine could not be compromised without the taint of pollution.

CONSTRUCTING A DEBATE

In order to appreciate fully Maximos' ever-deepening dissent from Constantinople, it is crucial not to lose sight of its geopolitical context. For at the precise moment that he and Sophronios launched their public opposition to monenergist doctrine, the Muslims had begun to infringe upon Roman territories.[57] Constantinopolitan claims to temporal and cosmological renewal – toward which Maximos had demonstrated an evident reticence – were unraveling; and therein too, for Maximos perhaps, were realized his portentous earlier warnings concerning the eschatological

[54] Sophronios, *Synodical Letter*, with Bathrellos 2004: 179–185. [55] Price 2010; 2014: 87–90.
[56] Ohme 2008. [57] Howard-Johnston 2010: 464–470.

consequences of submitting unbelievers to the sacraments and allowing them to mix with the faithful.

We should not underestimate the sense of shock which the expansion of the emergent caliphate engendered. In a letter composed soon after the commencement of the conquests, Maximos asked a correspondent (perhaps, again, an imperial official) what could be more terrible than the troubles of the *oikoumene*, in which "a barbarous, desert people" had overrun the civilized world. Maximos, once again, regarded the turbulent times as an indication of the Antichrist's imminent reign, and pointed to collective Christian sin as its cause.[58] Although he refrained here and elsewhere from making a direct (and impolitic) association between imperial doctrine and the crisis of empire, there can be little doubt of the association between heretical doctrine and temporal disaster in his mind.

Maximos may have experienced the Muslims at close quarters, for late in 634, as the Arab armies overran Palestine, Sophronios was elected patriarch of Jerusalem and Maximos appears then, if not before, to have been reunited with his master.[59] From an embattled Jerusalem, and despite Sergios' *Psephos*, Sophronios continued to oppose monenergism, and in 636 – on the eve of the effective collapse of Roman resistance in the Near East, and thence Jerusalem's capitulation – a council was convened on Cyprus with representatives of all four active Chalcedonian patriarchates. Here, according to the Syriac *Life* of Maximos, the assembled bishops disagreed over the doctrine of Sophronios and Maximos, and when a letter of the latter was submitted to Herakleios for arbitration, the emperor issued an "edict" which condemned it.[60] Recent literature has identified that "edict" as the (in) famous *Ekthesis*, a document which again banned discussion of Christological operations, and reasserted the doctrine of the *Psephos*.[61]

The publication of the *Ekthesis* in or soon after 636 seems to have effectively imposed a moratorium on the debate over operations. But within the same document were contained the seeds of a new controversy. The earlier *Psephos*, it seems, had included a statement to the effect that Christ could not have two opposed wills,[62] and in 635 pope Honorius had written to Sergios approving the sentiment, but inferred that Christ had "one will," a profession then included in the *Ekthesis*.[63] Later polemic has often led modern commentators to consider the *Ekthesis* a "monothelete" edict and to suppose that it too was designed to appeal to anti-

[58] Maximos, *Letter* 14 (*PG* 91:540A–541B, Antichrist at 540B). For the date (c. 633) and the correspondent (Peter the Illustrios), see Jankowiak and Booth 2015.

[59] This return, as presaged in the conclusion to *Letter* 8, is required by George of Resh'aina, *Syriac Life* 8–17.

[60] George of Resh'aina, *Syriac Life* 10–16. [61] Jankowiak 2009: 150–162.

[62] Sergios, *First Letter to Honorius* 542–544, with Booth 2013: 240 n. 58.

[63] Honorius, *First Letter to Sergios* 548–558; *Acts of the Lateran Council* 158–160.

Chalcedonian communities in the (now occupied) eastern provinces. This, however, is not the document's purpose or context: its actual aim was to suppress discussion on the operations, and its context was not a continued appeal to eastern dissenters from Chalcedon – for whom the abrogation of monenergism would have been unacceptable – but rather the reestablishment of Chalcedonian consensus in the aftermath of Sophronios' and Maximos' protests. It is far from clear, furthermore, that contemporaries would have considered the "one will" formula controversial.[64]

From around 640, however, Maximos began to agitate against the monothelete doctrine of the *Ekthesis*, and here made a significant departure from previous discussions of Christ's will (or wills).[65] Unlike the question of the Christological operation(s), earlier debate on the will(s) had been limited, as demonstrated in the desperate, and largely unsuccessful, seventh-century attempts to scour the tradition for patristic support.[66] Such debate had for the most part focused on the Agony at Gethsemane, where Christ seemed to demonstrate a contradiction of wills: first recoiling from death, but then proclaiming that the Father's will be done over his (cf. Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). Guarding against a subordinationist interpretation, the Cappadocians and others had treated Christ's initial reluctance as the natural refusal of the human will to welcome death, while the subsequent submission demonstrated the preeminence within him of the divine will, common to Father and Son. If that reluctance revealed a certain failing in Christ's manhood, this was because Christ had – as with other human experiences – appropriated it to himself.[67] Maximos, however, made a seminal departure from this tradition, interpreting the initial recoil as an impulse of the flesh, while the human will, being in perfect accord with the divine, freely accepted the passion. Elsewhere he explained this further in differentiating the gnomic and the natural human will, the former being the deliberation to which postlapsarian humans are subjected, and the latter that which Christ possesses and to which man must aspire: that is, the free but inevitable choice to follow the divine will.[68]

As in the earlier debate on operations, therefore, the conflict was not a simple defense of "orthodox" Chalcedonian doctrine in the face of an imperial attempt to corrupt it for political purposes. On the one side,

[64] Price 2014: 196–198.

[65] Maximos' earliest pronouncements on the wills are *Opusculum* 4 (*PG* 91:56D–61D; dated c. 636–640); *Opusculum* 6 (65A–68D; c. 640–641, as are the following texts); *Opusculum* 7 (69B–89B); *Opusculum* 8 (89C–112B); and *Opusculum* 20 (228B–245D). For the dates, see Jankowiak and Booth 2015; for analysis, see Jankowiak 2013.

[66] See esp. the lack of post-Chalcedonian citations on the will in the *Acts of the Lateran Council*. The monotheletes fared little better: Brock 1985.

[67] Price 2014: 92–94.

[68] See esp. *Opusculum* 16 (*PG* 91:184C–212A). For Maximos on the will, see Bausenhart 1992; Larchet 1996: 221–382; Bathrellos 2004: 99–174.

Maximos developed his commitment to "two wills" over time, drawing from existing principles but also correcting some earlier ambiguities;[69] while, on the other, the Constantinopolitans made repeated efforts to reestablish communion with Maximos and his allies, soon retreating from support of the *Ekthesis*,[70] then defending the "one will" formula as meaning that Christ's flesh (with its rational soul) "possessed the divine will,"[71] and finally abrogating discussion on the wills altogether.[72] These pacific maneuvers did nothing to convince Maximos of Constantinople's commitment to proper doctrine. But his anti-monothelete polemic should, once again, not obscure what was in fact occurring: a substantial new dialogue on the Christological wills in which both sides were making significant advances on the patristic and philosophical inheritance.[73]

POPES AND EMPERORS

Context was again important. Maximos' resistance to the *Ekthesis* – and, with it, his assertion of "two" operations and wills – was not immediate. From 640, however, two developments encouraged the renewal of the public doctrinal resistance: first, the Muslims commenced the conquest of Egypt, once again underlining Roman weakness and exposing North Africa to further expansion; and, second, after the death of Honorius the Roman popes performed a doctrinal *volte face*, throwing their weight behind the anti-monothelete resistance.[74] A combination of continued imperial reversals, tensions with the exarch at Ravenna, and diplomatic pressure applied through Maximos and his circle had no doubt convinced the Romans that a direct relation existed between Constantinopolitan doctrine and the temporal disasters of the *oikoumene*.[75]

Perhaps around the time of Sophronios' death in c. 639, Maximos had retreated again to North Africa and begun to develop his aforementioned commitment to "two" operations and wills in Christ. His output from this period, however, is also notable for another feature, that is, its defense and

[69] For the prefiguring of "two wills," see Maximos, *Exposition on the Lord's Prayer* 135–139, 148–153, 159–164; with Berthold 2011. But see the early application to Christ of *proairesis* and *gnome* at Maximos, *Exposition on the Lord's Prayer* 34; *Questions to Thalassios* 42, with the retraction in *Opuscula* 1 (*PG* 91:29D–31A).

[70] For this position of Constans II and the patriarch Paul (c. 641–642), see Booth 2013: 281–282.

[71] See Paul's *Letter to Pope Theodore* (645) at *Acts of the Lateran Council* 196–205, with Price 2014: 96.

[72] In the *Typos* (647/8). For the text: *Acts of the Lateran Council* 206–208. For context, see Booth 2013: 291–293.

[73] Cf. Sorabji 2003.

[74] See esp. pope John, *Letter in Defence of Honorius*; see Jankowiak 2009: 183–191; Booth 2013: 259–269.

[75] Tensions with the exarch: *Book of Pontiffs* 73 (pp. 328 ff.). Palestinian diplomatic pressure: Maximos, *Opuscula* 20 (*PG* 91:244C–D); *Acts of the Lateran Council* 40–42.

celebration of the Roman popes, now his allies. Thus in *Opusculum* 20 (c. 641) he mounted a (desperate) defense of the now deceased Honorius' orthodox credentials;[76] and, soon after, in his *Opusculum* 10 (c. 643), he defended against eastern detractors the synodical letter of pope Theodore, which had asserted both the *filioque* and the freedom of Christ from original sin.[77] At the same time, we discover in contemporaneous texts by Maximos effusive statements in support of Roman ecclesial and doctrinal preeminence, in particular the *Letter A (to Thalassios)* (c. 640) and *Opusculum* 12 (c. 645).[78] This rhetoric of course complements the long-standing claims of the popes. But it also reflects Maximos' evident realization that the maintenance of his doctrinal position depended on Roman support, and that he had much to gain in emphasizing Rome's continuous commitment to orthodoxy.[79]

Throughout the 640s the agenda of Maximos and his circle became ever more entwined with that of the popes. In 645 he had confronted and defeated the deposed Constantinopolitan patriarch and monothelete Pyrrhos in a doctrinal disputation at Carthage,[80] and soon after he had traveled to Rome.[81] There, the anti-monothelete resistance entered a more assertive phase. Around 647/8, pope Theodore appointed a former disciple of Sophronios, Stephen of Dora, as papal *vicarius* in the east, charged with the deposition of monothelete bishops;[82] and soon after Theodore began preparations for a pan-Italian council to condemn monothelete doctrine.[83] Although Theodore would not live to see his plans realized, the Lateran Council convened under his successor Martin, in October 649, and condemned the proponents of both monenergism and monotheletism. Soon after, Maximos – who was instrumental in preparing the council's *Acts* and florilegia[84] – was proclaiming it the Sixth Ecumenical Council.[85] It was a striking affront to imperial power.

The anti-monothelete resistance now risked spilling over into open political rebellion. Even before the Lateran Council – in the wake of two North African councils condemning monotheletism (645/6)[86] – the North African exarch Gregory, who had previously presided over Maximos'

[76] Maximos, *Opusculum* 20 (*PG* 91:237c–245a), with Larchet 1998: 128–133; Jankowiak 2013.

[77] Maximos, *Opusculum* 10 (*PG* 91:133a–137c).

[78] See *Letter A (to Thalassios)* (*PL* 129:585a, 586a); *Opusculum* 12 (*PG* 91:144b–c). For its authenticity, see Booth 2013: 272–274.

[79] See esp. Larchet 1998.

[80] See *Disputation with Pyrrhos*, of which Maximos is perhaps the author.

[81] Maximos in Rome: *Disputation with Pyrrhos* (*PG* 91:353a); also George of Resh'aina, *Syriac Life* 19; *Record of the Trial* 53–62.

[82] See esp. *Acts of the Lateran Council* 46, with Booth 2013: 295–297.

[83] The Lateran Council met in October 649 (*Acts of the Lateran Council* 2), and, even though Theodore had died in May (*Book of Pontiffs* 75), preparations must have begun under his pontificate.

[84] See the articles in Riedinger 1998, with Price 2014: 59–68.

[85] *Opusculum* 11 (*PG* 91:137c–140b).

[86] *Acts of the Lateran Council* 66–103, with Jankowiak 2009: 220–227.

disputation with Pyrrhos in Carthage, seceded from Constantinopolitan rule,[87] perhaps with the active encouragement of Maximos and pope Theodore.[88] But now the same pattern was repeated at Rome. Soon after the Lateran Council the Italian exarch dispatched to arrest the council's protagonists also rebelled, and reached an accord with pope Martin.[89] It seems that he, like Gregory before him, was soon defeated at the hands of Muslim invaders, but in Constantinople the implication must have been unambiguous – where Maximos went, doctrinal dissent and political rebellion soon followed.

In 653, when peace with the caliphate granted the emperor the political space to act against internal opponents, a new exarch arrested Martin and Maximos in Rome.[90] Martin was soon transported to the capital and there condemned to exile.[91] But Maximos' trial did not convene until 655.[92] In the context of that trial and of subsequent attempts to convert him to the imperial cause, Maximos and his circle produced several substantial texts (especially the dialogic *Record of the Trial* and *Dispute at Bizya*) which do much to elucidate the respective intellectual positions.[93] In addition to the disagreement over the use of "one will" – which the monotheletes now defended not as an exclusion of "two wills" but as a simultaneous guard against division in Christ[94] – Maximos therein denounces both his opponents' doctrine and their attempts to defend their position by appealing to the concepts of doctrinal accommodation (*oikonomia*) and of silence for the sake of peace.[95] Maximos and his circle, therefore, were not the tragic victims of an imperial attempt to enforce a malign Christian "monodoxie,"[96] but the precise inverse: implacable enemies of irenic imperial maneuvers which placed universal communion above absolute precision in doctrine (or *akribeia*).[97]

Although this position was rooted in Maximos' resistance to monenergism and monotheletism, within the trial literature it assumes a more overt political dimension. In the *Record of the Trial*, Maximos is accused of political crimes: discouraging the *strategos* of Numidia from coming to the aid of Herakleios' regime; encouraging the rebellion of the North African exarch; and ridiculing the emperor (some or all of which was perhaps true).[98] But then a further witness alleges that while in Rome Maximos' disciple Anastasios had denied the emperor's sacerdotal status, which prompts

[87] Jankowiak 2009: 228–231; Booth 2013: 288–289. [88] As alleged in the *Record of the Trial* 53–62.
[89] *Book of Pontiffs* 76. Cf. also Theodore Spoudaios, *Narrations concerning the Exile of the Holy Pope Martin* 6, 16–17.
[90] *Book of Pontiffs* 76. Cf. Theodore Spoudaios, *Narrations* 5–9, 12–13. For the context and Maximos' simultaneous arrest, see Booth 2013: 301, 306.
[91] Brandes 1998: 159–177; Booth 2013: 301–305. [92] For the date, see Allen and Neil 2002: 35.
[93] Brandes 1998; Allen and Neil 2002; Neil 2006. The dossier perhaps includes the *Disputation with Pyrrhos*; see Noret 1999.
[94] See esp. *Dispute at Bizya*. [95] *Record of the Trial* 141–179; *Dispute at Bizya* 167–192.
[96] Cf. above n. 4. [97] Cf. above n. 56. [98] *Record of the Trial* 23–106.

Maximos to pronounce that the emperor indeed cannot be a priest because he does not preside at the altar, make ordinations, or bear the vestments of priesthood; in the Eucharistic rite, the emperor is commemorated after the entire clerical order, and is therefore a layman, with no right to debate dogma.[99] Although it is doubtful that Herakleios or Constans II explicitly proclaimed himself "emperor and priest," since Constantine imperial power had nevertheless been constructed on the implicit model of the Christian emperor as "quasi-priest."[100] Although that model was fraught with ambiguities, Maximos in the *Record of the Trial* sought to expose its basic faults, thereby offering an unprecedented challenge to the political culture of the Constantinopolitan court. The earlier concern of Maximos to protect the Church and its sacraments from heretical pollution was extended here to include its freedom from secular interference.[101]

Within the monenergist and monothelete crises, therefore, we witness the gradual confrontation not only of two Christologies (even if, in truth, the positions were not that distinct), but also of two doctrinal and political ideologies: the one emphasizing *oikonomia* and obedience to imperial will, the other *akribeia* and the exclusion of the emperor from religious narratives. Both of these positions, we should note, were formed within the context of Persian and then Islamic expansion: for Constantinople, the most pressing imperative was the communion of all Christians and the maintenance of imperial prestige in the face of a fundamental challenge to the empire and its faith. But for Maximos and his circle it was the restoration of divine favour through the preservation of proper doctrine, irrespective of imperial will. Of course, if the emperor Constans had capitulated to Maximos' position, we might have expected a significant alteration in the latter's rhetoric. But as the crisis of the Roman empire deepened, and as the imperial commitment to monadic or equivocal doctrinal expressions became ever more entrenched – and, with it, the perceived relation of temporal disaster and improper doctrine – so too did opposition deepen, culminating in a fundamental challenge to imperial religious power, a challenge which established a powerful blueprint for Christian political dissent in subsequent centuries, when the emperor at Constantinople risked exclusion from religious narratives and could be cast not as the Church's protector, but rather as its persecutor.

It is perhaps surprising that the emperor did not at once execute Maximos, instead exiling him and then making repeated efforts to ensure his submission – including, from 657, the official recognition of "one and two" operations and

[99] *Ibid.* 112–206; cf. *Dispute at Bizya* 234–255. [100] Dagron 1996. [101] Booth 2013: 310–313.

wills.[102] But that reluctance reflects both the continued unwillingness of Constantinople to exacerbate religious tensions,[103] and the political capital which the court no doubt expected to gain from Maximos' capitulation.[104] From the Constantinopolitan perspective, Maximos represented a threat far greater than that of the ascetic champions of previous centuries. For besides his status as the figurehead of the doctrinal resistance, he had formed a doctrinal alliance with the popes, and in his reported differentiation of the "two powers," secular and sacred, and his subsequent denunciation of imperial interference in matters of the faith, had started to echo the rhetoric of Rome.[105] As Roman power faltered and as Constantinople's doctrinal position continued to shift in a desperate bid to realize communion, so too did some Chalcedonian intellectuals begin to invest in patterns of thought which predicted a post-Roman world, a world in which the Church was once again divested, unsullied, of an empire.

CONCLUSION

Maximos died in exile in Lazica on 13 August 662. Although he ended his life in isolation – even Rome had then abandoned him – he is perhaps the most important intellectual of seventh-century Byzantium.[106] Critics have sometimes thought of this period as witnessing the realization of a "totalizing discourse" that suppressed pluralism, drained the secular, and left little room for dissent.[107] But one will struggle to reconcile Maximos' output to such a vision. Although his intellectual achievement was in part to bring together the divergent strands of previous Chalcedonian thought, he is neither a sterile encyclopedist nor a meek servant of a singular and monolithic "orthodox culture." Besides his importance to subsequent Chalcedonian thought – his doctrines of "two operations" and "two wills" were recognized as orthodox at Constantinople within two decades of his death – Maximos represents both the sustained intellectual inventiveness of the period and the continued willingness of Christians to subvert and confront the religious culture of the Constantinopolitan court. The challenge is now to unveil further that same creativity, pluralism, and dissidence in subsequent centuries of Byzantine Christian thought.

[102] See the reported attempts documented in the *Dispute at Bizya*, with Booth 2013: 313–317. On the change of position to "one and two," see Maximos, *Letter to Anastasius the Disciple* and Anastasios the Disciple, *Letter to the Monks of Cagliari*.

[103] This is explicit at *Dispute at Bizya* 114.

[104] See the reported offer made to Maximos of receiving communion alongside the emperor in Hagia Sophia at *Dispute at Bizya* 108, with Jankowiak 2009: 324.

[105] Booth 2013: 340–341. [106] For the end of Maximos' life, see Jankowiak 2009: 318–361.

[107] Cameron 1994. Her position is now different but continues to inspire others, e.g. Bell 2013.