

THE TRINITY INSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIANITY & CULTURE

T.I.C.C.

“CHRISTIANITY & CULTURE : MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF DIVERSITY”

FIRST TICC INTERNATIONAL CONSULTANTS CONFERENCE

LONDON - ENGLAND

SEPTEMBER 20TH – 24TH 2004

**The Christian Vision of Unity
In a Multicultural World
- Exegesis of Saint Maximus the Confessor -**

LECTURER

METROPOLITAN DR *PAUL YAZIGI*

ADDRESS

GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF ALEPPO, ALEXANDRETTA & DEPENDENCIES

(PATRIARCHATE OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST)

PO. BOX : 6976 ALEPPO – SYRIA

PHONE : + 963 21 4660670 – FAX : + 963 21 3631420

EMAIL : SECRETARY@ALEPPORTHODOX.ORG

WEBSITE : WWW.ALEPPORTHODOX.ORG

LONDON - ENGLAND

2004

The Christian Vision of Unity In a Multicultural World

- Exegesis of Saint Maximus the Confessor -

Content

Introduction

1. St Maximus and his theology
2. The universal unity project – the five unions:
 - a. Union between the man & the woman
 - b. Union between paradise & ‘oikoumene’
 - c. Union between heaven & earth
 - d. Union between the visible & the invisible
 - e. Union between the created & the uncreated
3. The Church’s unity

Epilogue

Introduction

It is remarkable that during the past years, and at the beginning of the third millennium, the theological thought has been deeply interested in ‘Globalization’. Views differed between scholars varying in acceptance, hesitation and refusal. In reality, theology, in order to realize its identity, has the responsibility to provide answers to issues emerging in time, whose answers should be a reflection of God’s will, by which the world will preserve itself. I am very much pleased by the theme of the conference, something that denotes a firm understanding of today’s world issues. Globalization is not, in fact, our real issue. Instead, christening the world and the unity of the world are our Christian goals, in which globalization can be a mere tool when using it or a handicap when forgetting it, in such a process.

Our view of christening the world is based upon its unity, but a unity that is in the Lord. This is not a view specific to one religion or civilization. It is important, in this regard, that we clarify our Christian understanding of man, his unity with himself, with the world and with God, in a language that does not abide exclusively in its religious context and addressed to a specific community, since it is an inheritance of our Christian tradition that deserves to be made known to every man. Truth and its expression are quite two different things: truth is universal and cosmic; its expression belongs to civilizations and religions. The first is one, whereas the second is manifold.

The greatest outrage against our Christian truths is that we keep them constrained within the confines of our religious language that can be understood by only some of us, if not only by the most learned. If expressions like ‘salvation’, ‘deification’, etc, are specific to God, man and the universe, they are indeed, by the same token, relative to every man and not to any given religion. We have the conviction that our Christian view regarding this matter is the more accurate and profound, despite the multiplicity of its expression.

Therefore, we have chosen St Maximus the Confessor to speak about the “Christian vision of unity in a multicultural world” because his theology about the church and about man stems not from an exclusive ‘religious’ connotation, but from the relationship among God, man and the world. Realizing the plenitude of the relationship between God and man has a place which is the world, and a tool or a way which is the Church. We might need some time to explain the meaning of church within our pure tradition, since religious theories have alienated it to a mere system, or an organization, or a dogma, or even a mission. Church, in the Orthodox tradition, is realized in the “liturgy” (λειτουργία=έργο του λαού), i.e. people’s work, man’s work. This work is the liturgy not confined to prayers and worship. The church’s mission in the world is that it becomes the ‘world’ of the world, or that the world is transformed into the church. In other words, it means that the Kingdom of God comes, so that “God may be all in all”¹, i.e. everything will be united in Him and by Him.

Jesus Christ is not a person that belongs to Christians only, even though they are the ones who clearly speak of Him. Our holy and long tradition is not exclusively our own heritage, although it is preserved in our church. Christianity is a cosmic message between God and man, of which we are simple servants and witnesses performing Christ’s work in the church He established. Our saints did not have the conviction that they were members of an exclusive nation, confession, ethnicity or religion, but considered themselves to be “God’s sons”. They did not speak about religiosity but about ‘life’. Therefore, their teachings were not addressed to some people, but to man. Their expression might be peculiar, but their purpose is the ‘life of man’ that Jesus came to provide. This is what we will encounter in St Maximus’ vision of unity of mankind with itself, with the world and with God.

St Maximus is one of the Eastern Church Fathers who lived in the 7th century AD. He left a lot of writings in various disciplines such as Scriptural exegesis and dogma, something that reflects his utmost concern for an accurate expression of our faith, refusing what might harm life itself. He is a neptic (νηπτικός) father who reads the Scriptures and the tradition in “truth and spirit”. He is indeed an ‘ecumenical’ figure because of the relevance of his teaching to man and not to a category of religions. Being free from the limitations of languages and civilizations and their historical and literary

restrictions, he touches on the human-divine experience that can be common to anyone who is “in the image and likeness of God”.

We believe that theology and dogma are not mere philosophical issues. On the contrary, theology is the science that relates man to God. It is the art of arts and the science of sciences. We also have the conviction that St Maximus’ approach of the ‘cosmic unity’ between man and himself, with the world and with God, will provide valuable advice to the future of mankind in its entirety and an important guideline for the orientation of the church’s work in the world, and will guaranty the truthfulness of the church’s message/mission, the one that we sometime harm because of our limit knowledge of the church’s mystery, delaying or even damaging the church’s message/mission.

We will commence our approach by a summary of St Maximus the Confessor’s life and his theology, in as much as it may concern our subject. Then we shall analyze in St Maximus’ writings his approach to unity, the approach that we find in *Mystagogy*, chapters 23-24; and in this work *On different questions*, PG 91, 1305-1308.

Does diversity hinder unity? Does unity exclude diversity, or fuse everything with each other? Is man’s relationship to himself and to the world before God, possible to everyone? Is such a possibility accessible even in different and various ways, without excluding the diversity of civilization and losing the truth of the spirit? And last, if the church’s openness towards diversity is a must, how can we preserve the ‘salt’ that flavors it from the danger of secularization?

To all these questions, St Maximus provides answers, in one way another, with his universal unity project of the five human-divine unions.

1. St Maximus and his theology

St Maximus became famous because he boldly faced the heresy of monothelism (μονοθελητισμός), something that made him appear to be the theologian of the 7th century. He was born of noble parents in Constantinople in 580 AD and received an excellent education. He became, for a few years, the first secretary of the Emperor Heraclius (610-641) and his adviser. He left the royal court and entered the Chrysopolis monastery, where he accepted monastic tonsure.

After many travels between Kiziko (Κύζικο) and Africa, and affronting the heresy of monothelism whilst in Africa, he went to Rome because of the Persian and Arab conquests. He was sentenced by Emperor Kostas (who published the ‘Credo’ (τύπος) in 647) to exile in Preveza (Πρέβεζα) in 656. Later on, he had both hands and his tongue cut off, and was exiled to a prison in the Caucasus, in Lazov, where he died

in great sufferings on August 13th, 662. His memory is celebrated on August 13th and January 21st.

He wrote many theological works covering numerous disciplines such as biblical exegesis, patrology, dogmatics, ascetic mysticism, liturgics, and many letters. Most of them can be found in the *Patrologia Graeca*, tomes 90 and 91.

The theological teaching of St Maximus about God, man and the world is summarized in his use of the image of the church. The church, in fact, is the “image of God”, because it is performing the same work as He does, and God works through it. God is drawing creation to Himself, and the church is the net with which He is doing so².

The Church is the spiritual image of the World, of Man and of the Soul. It is like a huge construction that is able to embrace all these elements as parts of it. The final purpose of the world and of man is that they both become a church. Divine Liturgy is, in this process, the ideal form of such a cosmic phenomenon, even in ritual symbolism, where man and the world, both as a church, are lifted up to God.

The church embraces the image of the visible and the invisible (τα ορατά και τα άορατα), of the sensible world (the paradise and the ‘oikoumene’-οικουμένη), of man and angels, and of man in both genders, male and female³.

The church embraces man with his different cultures, countries, men and women, young and old, without any discrimination. It is sufficient that they are believers. But the true and complete faith that leads to unity and union with God can not comply with the superficial degree of faith found everywhere, because reaching these sublime experiences and truths requires a more profound faith⁴.

Man, according to St Maximus, tends naturally towards goodness, whereas what we observe of his inclination to evil resulted from the current unnatural state (παρά φύσιν κατάσταση, παράσιτον)⁵. Therefore, the first human profound impulse is to return to the natural state (κατά φύσιν) and to be freed from the present state.

Moreover, what happens in the church (God and man’s work in the world) is the lifting up of man to the hyper natural state (υπέρ φύσιν), which means cultivating the spiritual man who appears as the “hyper human man” (υπέρ άνθρωπον άνθρωπος)⁶. It is a state that requires from man less involvement in the world’s matters and more deepening in his truth/reality, something that makes him act as a ‘theologian’, in the image of his relationship with God, which results in upholding the universe moved by the responsibility of a pastor⁷.

Consequently, man is called to be by grace what God is by nature, a transfusion of life, from a life of flesh and blood to a life in spirit⁸. In this regard, the plenitude of such a process for the spiritual man becomes factual when he is in the likeness of Christ, “theanthropos” (θεάνθρωπος). As God came out from His dwelling place towards man and incarnated, in the same way, man precipitates towards God, in answer to His love,

in order that he, at the end, reaches deification. Such a movement or process is the real ‘liturgy’, the very work of the church, and the finality to which everyone is called. It is achieved through a spiritual move towards God, where the church, as life, teaching and presence, is the real place and the ideal way to realize it. The church is therefore, according to St Maximus, neither an organization nor an institution, but communion with God to realize this unity.

Realizing this unity, and the process of reaching it, is aborted because of sin, since Adam’s fall. Man beholds God’s image, but seeking God (in the likeness of Whom he should be) was delayed and ceased for a while. Since then, division reigns over humanity and the universe, at all levels: with God, with the universe, with the angels, with his fellow man, and within himself. It is evident, then, that the process of reaching unity with God should begin by gathering what is scattered. Unity is achieved only when what is broken and divided is restored.

2. The universal unity project – The five unions

On the way of achieving unity, St Maximus presents his universal project of unity⁹ that he treats speaking of the five-fold unions:

- a. union between the created (κτιστό) and the Uncreated (άκτιστο), i.e. between God and man;
- b. union between the rational (νοητά) and the material (αισθητά) worlds, i.e. on the level of creation;
- c. union between heaven (ουρανός) and earth (γη), i.e. on the sensible level;
- d. union between paradise (παράδεισος) and “oikoumene” (οικουμένη), i.e. on the level of the earth;
- e. union between man (άρσεν) and woman (θήλυον), i.e. on man’s level.

St Maximus looks to the world from its origins, as God’s creation. The work of creation was diversified. There are the material and spiritual worlds, the visible and invisible worlds, etc. God has created all these in order that they will come to unity and become a unique world without abolishing their diversities.

- i. Since the time of creation, diversity of creatures appeared. There is God, the Uncreated Being that brought every thing from nothingness into being. He willed this variety of creation. Otherwise, He would have made it a unique kind. Nothing forced Him to behave as He did.
- ii. Afterwards, He created the visible and invisible worlds, (the sensible-αισθητά and logical-νοητά beings).
- iii. On the level of the sensible worlds, He created heaven (ουρανός) and earth (γη).

- iv. And on earth, He created paradise (παράδεισος) and the ‘oikoumene’ (οικουμένη).
- v. And when man was created, He brought him as male (ἄρσεν) and female (θήλυ).

God created man at the end of his work of creation, in order that man, having spiritual potentials, would unify the creation in his person, so all the worlds would come into the one and same unity, harmonious and comprehensive. But sin by itself alone showed that man is so weak that he is unable to realize such a project. Unfortunately, man, this free being, misused his potentials leading these worlds into a bigger differentiation instead of narrowing the difference and bringing them into unity. Sin increasingly separated the different levels of creation and led them to wage war (πόλεμος) between one another. Human nature with its spiritual potentials is able to bring out this unity, a work that is the divine goal of creating the world and man. When Adam failed first to achieve this goal, Jesus Christ succeeded, not only as an event, but also as a way that man can follow and realize as much as he can.

The realization of these five projects of unions runs in an order contrary to the one in which they appeared at creation. Chronologically, the first differentiation was between the created and the uncreated, where the final phase of unity will be achieved. Union starts with creating harmony between the simple differentiations until reaching the more complicated ones, the one that distinguishes God from man¹⁰.

Man’s role in the work of creation is to bring the differentiations into unity. This is the role of the gifts he has been given. This could be realized only through God, when he lifts them all to God, in Whom and with Whom they shall meet¹¹. God created man in order that the life of the latter should dwell around the former. God also created the world for man to become a matter of the work of his life. Unfortunately, man behaved in an unnatural and ignorant way in¹² that his life became centered not on its Creator, but on the creation made for him. He began therefore to lose his life’s source until God intervened in men’s life and became incarnated in Christ, and saved the work of His hands. By centering his life on the world, man loosed his ability to lift it up to the Creator, the world that was donated to man by God. Therefore, man faced the tragic consequence that he will never achieve the binding together of the world’s differentiations that came out of its varieties.

In conclusion, this union cannot be achieved between worlds different by nature, but man’s spiritual gifts are his potentials with which he may overcome these differentiations in order that, through man’s spiritual life, the encounter of these worlds may be possible.

a. Union between man & woman

Man's role commences (and this is his role in universe) by overcoming the differentiations first on a human level, i.e. through the union between man and woman. St Maximus refers to the verses of Apostle Paul: "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Jesus Christ"¹³. This unity embraces not only union between man and woman, whose differentiations originated from Creation, but also union among men and a lifting up of all the barriers introduced later on by sin, such as racial differences (between Jew and Greek), or class differences (between slave and free).

It is clear from the exegesis encountered in patristic literature, mainly in reference to creation, that the natural differentiations (male and female) were planned by God as a means to procreate and build up human communion. But sin, after man's fall, made Adam accuse his wife, and address God about her not as a fellow companion, but in these terms: "the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree and I ate"¹⁴. The deterioration of harmony in paradise because of sin imposed new laws on natural regulations, such as submission (the obedience of woman to man). Therefore, returning to the paradisiacal state is not a matter of gender but rather of virtue. When sin fades away, the split between genders is abolished, and distinctions in honor and dignity will occur no more. When both genders are of equal virtue, unity between them is fulfilled.

The union between man and woman will not abolish the natural distinctions between both, but will make them work in a harmonious and complementary way, in order that both will meet spiritually as beings equal in honor, work, and responsibility before God. Only before God may this encounter take place and union in worthiness and finality is reached. On the contrary, these natural distinctions are reverted into differentiations before the world, leading one gender to be superior to the other, or furthermore, to be in conflict with the other. A life of virtue may override such handicaps between both genders. The patristic tradition speaks about this life and names it 'virility' (ανδρεία), an image of the strong spiritual man, irrespective of the gender to which the person belongs. This spiritual attribute is that of virtue and morality, required from both genders who meet in dignity, until this virtue of 'virility' (ανδρεία) is equal between both. When common things between both genders are given priorities in life, they may then live together overcoming their natural distinctions, which were originally given to serve their common life and unity, when their life's spiritual orientation is right.

The equality between man and woman, their unity, either in marriage and family life, or generally in social life, is a matter that has tormented humanity and still. The difference between man and woman in dignity, whether in family or in society, is an image of the world that God willed to abolish, through his divine economy with man. The union of man and woman in spiritual 'virility' is a life's goal. Feminist movements in the world have gone to the extreme. Although they were correctly motivated, they did not reach Christian solutions. They have addressed the issue on the level of social

relationship and equality in work. The patristic approach, in that regard, stipulates that the encounter of both genders can not be achieved unless it is in God, i.e. on the level of the spiritual man.

On the level of the spiritual person, differences will remain as diversity, not as a matter of conflict or superiority. Diversity reinforces life and promotes unity. The common and equal responsibility of both genders before God makes them, in return, equal in dignity. This dignity is not subdued to criteria such as the gender, i.e. being male or female, but to spiritual virility, equally available to both.

The main concern does not reside in putting an end to a social conflict, but to lift up both man and woman to spiritual virility, and to lead both of them to God, where there is “no man or woman, (...), but all are one in Christ Jesus”¹⁵.

The Western world is much influenced by Plato, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, and therefore, differs from Orthodoxy in its approach to this issue. Catholics and Protestants had contradictory views regarding feminist movements, especially regarding equality of both genders (religiously) in priesthood. Both parties have adopted the same base to reach two distinct and even contradictory results. The main issue resides in the delimitation of virility and femininity in human nature. If the Catholics have rejected the idea of woman’s accessibility to priesthood, on the basis that the priesthood comes from Christ who is male, many Protestants have considered that Christ died as male and female on the Cross, because he came to save our human nature. We consider that these two contradictory results stem from the one common wrong principal. For unity and equality in Christ, according to St Maximus, will not be achieved, when we have equality between genders in dignity, but when we lift them up to the same spiritual level. The paradisiacal image of the beginnings will give us the pledge of the endings (έσχατα). It is the image of the one who lives by the Holy Spirit, whether male or female. Diversity does not annihilate unity. Differentiations between man and woman resulted from ‘sin’ and not from ‘creation’. Therefore, differentiations will be removed, when sin exists no more. Our Orthodox Church does not approach this issue from a dogmatic standpoint, but from a spiritual view, i.e. ethical and social.

b. Union between paradise & oikoumene (on earth’s level)

We should explain the meaning of terms such as “paradise” and “oikoumene” (η οικουμένη) according to St Maximus. “Oikoumene” is the inhabited world, i.e. human societies. “Paradise” is “where Jesus is”, interpreting Christ’s word on the cross to the thief on His right: “today you will be with Me in paradise”¹⁶. St Maximus’ view means that the world should become a church and, similarly, the church should embrace the whole world. Indeed, paradise is the awaited state of the “oikoumene”, when the whole of humanity becomes the fellowship of God’s kingdom. St Maximus’ terminology refers more to a universal vision of God and man rather than to a specific religious language,

due to his vision of God, man and creation as a reality beyond differentiations that came into existence long afterwards (such as ethnical and social). In this regard, union may be achieved by man through a saintly life (αγιασμός), or what we call purity of life (κάθαρση)¹⁷.

In such an approach, earth will no longer be a battle place, but paradise where man dwells in the presence of the living God. Unity between all parties, ethnicities, religions and all manner of social agglomerations is possible, but only in a saint life. When every man's life is sanctified, including every society and ethnicity, these ties will then become unnecessary, and if some remain, they will embellish the diversity without putting them into conflict.

Difference between 'oikoumene' and paradise is not geographical, for paradise is the place where man stands and dwells in God's presence. The 'oikoumene' without God's presence is a place of enmities, as the history of mankind proves to be. The 'oikoumene' gathered around God, the one who brought the scattered into unity, is God's kingdom, i.e. the place where man's life flow in love, harmony, cooperation and progress.

St Maximus knew a multitude of ethnicities and religions, and he, therefore, spoke about the 'oikoumene' and not about churches or some specific ethnicities parented to his faith. St Maximus' thought, as mentioned earlier, is based on this profound truth that the church is the common life between the one God and men, every man. He speaks of the 'principles (causes) of the beings' (οι λόγοι των όντων), a terminology of cosmic amplitude. God and man, in St Maximus' thought, are realities present to every being.

c. Union between heaven & earth (on the level of visible & sensible things)

When the human mind seeks and loves virtue (κατ'αρετήν), then man's earthly life is restored to its unity, and those terrible contradictions will be removed. This way, the chasm between what is material and what is spiritual in life will vanish and will be brought together. Unfortunately, many people have a platonic and not a Christian view of life matters. For them, Flesh is opposite to the spirit; wealth contrary to love and charity; science on the antipode of faith; sacrifice opposite to being; eating against fasting or pleasure against religion, etc. There is a huge gap between what is 'above' and what is 'below', what is 'here', and what is 'there'. But the Christian vision is quite different from that approach: because heaven is the earth in its true image, or as it should be; wealth is the tool of love and charity; real pleasure is in the spirit; money is a great spiritual tool; through fasting is the dignity of food. Spirituality is not thought to be the absence of materiality, but the presence of God in it. Materiality is not identified with the matters of the world, but is the absence of God when using the world. One must look at the earth as heaven, and place a goal for history, and a spiritual vision for the world, which can be summarized as sanctification of time and place. Sanctity is not

exterior to materiality or superior to it, rather it is the way of using matter and the goal towards which we use it. Matter will lose its value outside sanctity. If the earth does not become heaven, then it will be stolen from man and it will be lost because of him. This virtue is called “mindful understanding” (νόηση).

d. Union between the visible & invisible world

Man’s mind (νοῦς) is the common element between himself and the invisible world. The union between the visible and the invisible world does not necessarily mean either that we should undress man from his earthly dimension, or simultaneously give chancel existence to the invisible creatures. It is a union based on the common life of the spirit, as much as man can acquire such a similarity. The virtue that can be common to men and angels, in reference to human rational possibilities, is the virtue of ‘knowledge’, i.e. the knowledge of God (θεογνωσία), whose real image is Wisdom (Σοφία).

The reality of personhood makes man capable of realizing these ‘unions’ using his spiritual potentials, because these unions are not fusion of different natures, but an ethic likeness that realizes the union of two into one being and one life. It is harmony (σύμβασις) and sameness of nature (ομοφυΐα) that overcomes barriers and differentiations. Man is a creature that holds characteristics and common powers with the invisible world, something that makes the affinity between both worlds possible and leads through it to the union of the differentiated.

Orthodox iconography depicts many saints with angelic wings, like John the Baptist, as a symbol of his angelic life and the nature of his mission. In the Orthodox hymnography, the prophet Elijah is known to be “an angel in the flesh”¹⁸. Furthermore, Orthodox iconography places together the angelic hosts and the multitude of saints in frescoes and icons in the church. It also depicts the heavenly Divine Liturgy, which takes place invisibly, along with the one celebrated on earth in a visible way. Moreover, ascetic literature often speaks of monastic life in terms of angelic life. The Apostle Paul proclaimed that the saints will judge angels¹⁹. If we are waging war not against flesh and blood, but against the evil spirits in the air, then it can be said that this war is simultaneously a union with the good spirits in the air. In our worship too, we address prayers and supplications to the angels, especially to our guardian angel. Needless to say, the Holy Spirit gathers the angels and men in the church.

e. Union between the created & uncreated world

Even though the difference between created and uncreated natures is greater than of the previous levels, union is still possible here. It is achieved not by man’s virtue, such as Wisdom, Understanding, and Purity, but by God’s Love, because such a

union is achieved by grace and not by man²⁰. The union between the created man and the Uncreated God means that man will become by grace (χάριτι) what God is by nature (φύσει), though not in the identity of natures²¹.

What man failed to achieve, i.e. the realization of his creation's purpose, has been achieved by Jesus Christ, hypostatically. That is why Jesus is considered to have 'restored' (ανακεφαλαίωσε) every thing that came into being through Him²².

The Word incarnated, and God became man, a perfect man, in our likeness, exempt of sin. His birth from the Virgin was the beginning of the restoration of creation. His birth occurred as it would have happened before the fall, i.e. without marriage. For this reason, Jesus could realize these five projects of union, the purposes of creation, in an ideal way.

By His incarnation, Christ united the **created** and the **Uncreated**. He unified the **visible** and the **invisible** world; He unified the world, sanctifying **earth** and **heaven**; He unified 'oikoumene' and **paradise** bringing the scattered together; after His resurrection and His ascension, He became the prototype of **man** and **woman** alike boring the imperishable body that will be given to all humanity, and He, this way, unified both genders embracing them equally.

Christ is God's Wisdom and 'Understanding'. In Him is accomplished the union of all worlds: the visible is united to the invisible world by wisdom; heaven is united to earth by 'understanding' (νόηση); the 'oikoumene' is united to paradise by purity of life; man is united to woman in the image of his resurrected body; and God is united to man. In His person, Jesus brings all worlds into unity²³.

3. The Church's unity

In both writings referred to, St Maximus does not literally mention the church's unity between Christians. Nevertheless, he was one of the champions defending the truth on behalf of the one catholic (καθολική) church and its unity.

As we are gathered in a Christian meeting, I would like to mention, shortly but clearly, St Maximus' idea about unity. The world cannot be real and united unless in God. If unity between scattered parts means that they come to union with God in order to unite between themselves, then unity between Christians is achieved in 'Orthodoxy', understood here as truthfulness of faith rather than having any congregational connotation. The 'catholicity' of the church can not be accomplished without 'orthodoxy': the church is one and unique, and is catholic meaning that she bears the fullness and plenitude of truth, without any lack in the truthfulness of faith. It is well known that St Maximus, when he was informed of the new confession of faith (ομολογία) that all the bishops had signed (τόμος) thereby accepting false statements,

responded boldly: “I am the catholic apostolic church”. For the church is Christ and cannot be determined by quantity. The power of the church is Truth and not some worldly criteria varying between different confessions and communities. Truth in the Orthodox tradition is not ideology, but the way of life. Orthodoxy is the Way, the Truth and Life in its fullness in spirit with God. St Maximus’ position is not far from the example that St Dorotheos provides: men are like points of a circle. Whenever these points go far away from the center, they are more separate between themselves, but whenever each point draws closer to the center of the circle, it gets closer to the other points. Communion with God is the ground on which people gather. Unity in Christ brings out our unity. The Church’s unity is neither a confederation where each member conserves what he has, nor a Christian ‘cooperative’.

In this context, St Maximus’ position regarding the heresy of monotheletism (μονοθελητισμός) was neither a dogmatic nor a rational or philosophical matter, as it is often referred to today. Rather, St Maximus expressed his understanding of whether our will is able or not able to acquire what Christ had. If Christ had only one divine will that swallowed his human will, our will would therefore not be in the likeness of His will, something that would have resulted in our incapacity to reach the purpose of life, i.e. being in His likeness and reaching deification. But human and divine will can unite and become one without the one excluding the other, in full accord. Whatever happened to Christ can occur with us, i.e. our will come to concordance to the divine will, whenever we want it and fight for it.

Seeking the unity of the churches outside of the Truth implies a loss of the church, according to St Maximus. The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is all of the churches when they meet in Christ, the “Truth”. All the churches have developed cooperation between each other and with other religions and might have common projects and pastoral work. However, even though this collaboration is blessed, this fact does not imply ‘Unity’.

Unity, according to St Maximus, is built upon the “one spirit’ between man and woman, the slave and the free, man and angels, man and his brethren, and also between one church and another.

Epilogue

The Church is the continuation of Christ’s work on earth. It is the yeast that should leaven the entire batch. It is the salt that will flavor the world, in the spiritual unity of humanity around God.

“**Spiritual virility**” will unite man to woman and will make unimportant all natural differentiations, and will speak of them as gifts and not differentiations in responsibility. This is true on all levels of ethnic and social differentiations. Did not Paul proclaim: “have you believed in Christ, you are set free”?²⁴ Did he not address the woman: “you will teach your unfaithful husband and thereby save him”?²⁵ All these differentiations are human “illusions” nourished in the world as a result of sin. They will not be removed unless by true worship and life “in spirit and truth”.

“**Sanctity of life**” makes the universe a paradise, and the world a land of peace in the center of which God stands and reigns, a peace that will not accept wars and human conflicts which are guided not by the paradise’s ideal but by the law of the jungle. The spiritual rule of paradise should constitute the spirit of human laws and sciences, because the true human values are common to all men. On the other hand, distinctions, such as racial, ethnic, and even religious ones, are assets for dialogue and interrelation, and not causes of separation from the unique paradise. Every bond is sacred, but it will lose its sanctity when people look to the part and not to the whole, or when they look to the whole excluding God’s presence, substituting it by their own thoughts and regulations. People are thereby under the yoke of human laws instead of living in the liberty of Spirit as sons of God.

“**Mindful Understanding**” (νόηση) is the church’s mission to spread in all human sciences, in order to provide answers and solutions that correspond to reality and the needs of humanity, taking into consideration man’s vision in Christian anthropology. This “understanding” should be the spirit of sciences and the thought of all thoughts. This thought is man’s salvation, happiness, life with God. Man is the goal of sciences which should set man’s life free, as much as possible, from materiality, pain, and illness, something that philosophies tried in vain to realize, up to the point that the philosopher’s death became his salvation! The human mind, with its faculty of understanding, has to work on the basis of two conditions: the first, amelioration, and the second, which explains the first, deification. Otherwise, creativity comes against progress and science conflicts with religion. Changes will defy customs, even the better ones. This way, the human mind will create societies, almost heavenly ones, and a mankind, almost angelic; substance will become spiritualized and the spirit will overtake substance.

Wisdom begins with the fear of God²⁶. Human life can not be perceived by human understanding, but by divine wisdom. The world is meaningless by itself, even if it forms an ideal community – and this is secularism, i.e. the world globalization with only worldly criteria. The secularization of Christianity occurs when ‘wisdom’ is only explained rationally, whereas ‘mindful understanding’ in Christ should lead to Wisdom (Σοφία). Science, knowledge, cultural progress should be orientated towards the

civilization of the spirit that sanctifies place and time, and makes earth a heavenly kingdom, and prepares man for the outpouring of the Spirit, and leads time to the “end of times”, as Joel the prophet spoke about the outpouring of God’s spirit and of youth and maidens beginning prophesy. Then, all flesh becomes spiritualized, and bones will bear flesh and shall live²⁷.

Divine Love will pour its divinity upon human wisdom. When pain and human conflicts are banished by spiritual virility, when humanity becomes a one human family in holiness, when the human mind leads humanity with ‘intelligence’ to Wisdom and knowledge of God, then life becomes ‘love’. God’s love embraces one’s love for one another. Love is happiness, and happiness is life. Jesus came to build this one world with this unique love, which is not generated by worldly desires but by God’s grace that transforms man into a humble, praying, working creature, opening his heart to the breath of the Holy Spirit, looking at the world in its universality and unity, trampling down sin that divides the world from within. Man becomes the free “son of God” who perceives the church as a companionship of God and man, and not the narrowness of confessions. The church is not a confessional community, a religion or an organization. It is a ‘cosmic liturgy’, within which God works by his Holy Spirit and deals with the free man, whoever he is, and calls him to divine love. The human being is lifted up to such a sphere, bleeding from divine eros, and his life dwells around its divine and true origin. This is the spiritual man in whose likeness the Scriptures call every man to be. In such a man, all divisions come to unity, even the created with the uncreated, but only by grace.

Abbreviations

- PG Patrologia Graeca, Editions J.P. Migne, Paris 1857-1912.
 EPE Ellines Pateres tis Ekklisias, Thessaloniki (in Greek).

Endnotes

- ¹ *I Cor.* 15, 28.
² Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, 1-7.
³ Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, PG 91, 668-673.
⁴ *Ibid*, PG 91, 665.
⁵ Maximus the Confessor, *To Thalassius*, PG 90, 324.
⁶ Maximus the Confessor, *On different questions*, PG 91, 1125.
⁷ Maximus the Confessor, *Answers*, 73, PG 90, 845.
⁸ Maximus the Confessor, *On different questions*, PG 91, 1125.
⁹ Cf. Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, 23-24; Maximus the Confessor, *On different questions*, PG 91, 1305-1308; Maximus the Confessor, EPE, Philocaly Tome 14D, 93, 424.
¹⁰ «εναρμονίως από των προσευχών επί τα πόρρων, και των ηττονών επί τα κρείττονα».
¹¹ «ίνα της προς Θεόν, ως αίτιον, τα πάντα συναγούσης ενώσεως...».
¹² «παρά φύσιν εκών ανοήτως κεκίνητα».
¹³ *Galatians* 3, 28.
¹⁴ *Genesis* 3, 12.
¹⁵ *Galatians* 3, 28.
¹⁶ *Luke* 23, 43.
¹⁷ «διά της οικίας αγιοπρεπούς αγωγής».
¹⁸ *Troparion of the prophet Elijah*, July 20th.
¹⁹ *I Cor.* 6, 3.
²⁰ «και κτιστήν φύσιν τη ακτίστω δι'αγάπης ενώσας (φιλανθρωπία)».
²¹ «και γενόμενος παν ει τι περ εστίν ο Θεός, χωρίς της κατ'ουσίαν ταυτότητος».
²² *John* 1, 10.
²³ «καταλύων πόλεμον, και προς ειρηνικήν φιλίαν τα πάντα και αδιαίρετον συνδέων ομόνοια».
²⁴ Cf. *I Cor.* 7, 21.
²⁵ Cf. *I Cor.* 7, 16.
²⁶ Cf. *Proverbs*, 9, 10.
²⁷ Cf. *Ezekiel* 37, 6.