

Why Did God Become Man?

The Unconditionality of the Divine Incarnation



Deification as the End and Fulfillment of Salvation According to St. Maximos the Confessor¹

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IT CAN BE SAID that the word “deification” (θέωσις) expresses the sublimest meaning of the word “salvation.” It is the sublimest, because the word “salvation” signifies, in some sense, the entire path of man’s ascent to his “archetype,” God, and especially his deliverance from the bondage of Satan, sin, and death, while the word “deification” signals the end of this path, that is, man’s complete union with God, in which man becomes “by participation” what God is in essence.²

Deification, as union and communion with God, was established as the goal of man and of all creation even before they were created; more precisely, all things were created with the purpose that God should become “all in all”:

¹ Source: Hieromonk Artemije Radosavljević, *Τὸ Μυστήριον τῆς Σωτηρίας κατὰ τὸν Ἅγιον Μάξιμον τὸν Ὁμολογητὴν* [The mystery of salvation according to St. Maximos the Confessor] (Athens: 1975), pp. 180-196.

² See *Centuries on Love*, III.25, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. XC, col. 1024BC.

‘For to this end did He make us’ says St. Maximos, ‘that we should become partakers of the Divine nature [II St. Peter 1:4] and sharers of His Eternity; and that through deification, which proceeds from Grace, we might prove like unto Him. It is for the sake of deification that all existing things are constituted and abide, and all non-existing things are brought into being and come into being.’³

Ordained by the preëternal Divine counsel as the purpose of all creation, deification had as its sole precondition the Incarnation of God,⁴ through which all of human nature was deified in its “hypostatic” union with the Divine nature, in the Person of God the Word, Who revealed Himself to us as Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The deification of each man is accomplished on the basis of the human nature deified in Christ, but never by force, for it is made possible only in freedom and love.⁵ All of creation, from its very formation, has been directed towards this goal. Thus, deification was, and remains, the axis around which the entire history of the world revolves, from its creation until the close of the age, precisely because deification will assume its eschatological dimensions in the life to come, when all of creation will be changed,

receiving ever-moving rest, the unlimited enjoyment of Divine things, and stable motion, the insatiable ap-

³ “Epistle xxiv, ‘To Constantine, the Chancellor of the Exchequer,” *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xci, col. 609c. “The simultaneous creation by God of the entire cosmos becomes meaningful only when all of reality is viewed in relation to, and in unity with, the communion of the Trinity” (Nikolaos Matsoukas, *Ἐκκλησιολογία ἐξ ἐπόψεως τοῦ Τριαδικοῦ δόγματος* [Ecclesiology from the standpoint of the doctrine of the Trinity], in *Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρὶς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης* (Thessalonica: 1972), p. 129.

⁴ See *Responses to Thalassios*, LXIII, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 684A. (This work, traditionally referred to by its rather inaccurate Latin title *Questiones ad Thalassium*, actually consists of responses by St. Maximos to questions submitted to him by Thalassios, its full title being *To Thalassios, the Most Venerable Presbyter and Abbot, Concerning Various Difficulties in Divine Scripture—Trans.*)

⁵ Cf. [Protopresbyter] Georges Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, Vol. ix in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Vaduz: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), p. 245.

petite for such [i.e., the “decad,” which is a symbol of completeness].⁶

Furthermore, deification is the axis of all of God’s Providence and Economy in the world, the Providence of the Holy Trinity and the Economy of the Son of God, from His Incarnation until His Ascension into Heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit from thence into the world; for Christ

becomes man in very truth for this reason, that He might make us gods by Grace.⁷

In connection with this, Vladimir Lossky correctly observes that “Deification is the central idea of the spirituality of St. Maximus... the supreme end of the human will,” which “determines all the rest.”⁸

The Incarnation as the Foundation of Deification

FROM WHAT we have said above it becomes clear, therefore, that the mystery of the “divinization” of man is founded and built entirely upon the suprarational mystery of the Incarnation and enfleshment of God. In order to understand the interdependence of these two mysteries, to wit, the mystery of the Incarnation of God and the mystery of the deification of man, we must turn our attention to a very fundamental theme in St. Maximos’ theology: that of the relationship between the Fall of man and the Incarnation of God, or, in other words, of the unconditionality or conditionality of the Incar-

⁶ *Responses to Thalassios*, LXV, note 44, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 781c.

⁷ *Ibid.*, XL, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 401A.

⁸ Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God*, trans. Asheleigh Moorhouse, 2nd ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1983), p. 132.

• Concerning both the concept of deification in the history of Christian (and pre-Christian) thought and all of the aspects of deification (i.e., in Christ and in each man), see the work of Andreas Theodorou, *Ἡ περὶ θεώσεως διδασκαλία τῶν Ἑλλήνων Πατέρων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μέχρις Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ* [The teaching of the Greek Fathers of the Church down to John of Damascus concerning deification] (Athens: 1956), and also that of Elias D. Moutsoulas, *Ἡ σάρκωσις τοῦ Λόγου καὶ ἡ θέωσις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κατὰ τὴν διδασκαλίαν Γρηγορίου τοῦ Νύσσης* [The Incarnation of the Word and the deification of man according to the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa] (Athens: 1965).

nation of God the Word. This fundamental problem is resolved, according to St. Maximos, only in the light of the deification of man, understood as a “hypostatic” union of human nature with the Divine nature in the person of Christ, as we shall see below.

Although the Saint customarily speaks (as, moreover, do all of the other Fathers of the Church) about a conditional Incarnation of God, accepting, that is, that

the Incarnation came about for the salvation of nature,⁹

or, as he writes elsewhere:

God becomes man in order to save man, who is perishing,¹⁰

or, again, elsewhere:

We recall that the sole basis and purpose of His wondrous visitation to us in the flesh is our salvation,¹¹

and also in another passage:

For He had this as the sole cause of His birth in the flesh: the salvation of nature,¹² etc.,

there are nonetheless in his works not a few passages which clearly speak about an unconditional Incarnation of God the Word.

In other words, the Holy Father says that the Divine enfleshment and Incarnation of God the Word constitutes the primordial will of God for man and the world, and that it was conceived and decided upon by God before all creation as the final destiny and goal (“end”) of the whole creation.

The most important of these passages of St. Maximos is found in his work *Responses to Thalassios*.¹³ In this passage, St. Maximos identi-

⁹ *Responses to Thalassios*, LXIII, note 36, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 692B.

¹⁰ *Ambigua*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xci, col. 1308D.

¹¹ “Epistle xi, “To an Abbess,” *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xci, col. 456C.

¹² *Ambigua*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xci, col. 1040B.

¹³ *Responses to Thalassios*, LX, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, cols. 620B-625D.

fies in principle “the Mystery of Christ” with “Christ” Himself, Who is “the ineffable and incomprehensible hypostatic union of both Divinity and humanity.” Or, as he says a little further on, Christ is “a composite hypostasis of both (natures)” (without any diminution or change in the two natures).

In the next section of this text, the Holy Father says, in an exceedingly dense excerpt, that this mystery of the composite hypostasis of Christ, that is, of Christ *qua* God-Man, constitutes “the great and hidden mystery, which the mighty counsel of God conceived and decided upon before all the ages:

This is the blessed end for which all things were created. This is the foreordained Divine purpose of the origin of existing things, defining which we call it the foreordained end, for the sake of which all things exist, though it itself exists for the sake of nothing else. With this end in view, God created the essences of existing things; this, properly, is the consummation of Providence and of what is foreordained, whereby the things created by God are recapitulated in Him.

This mystery of the preëternal counsel of God, the Saint says further on, is now revealed by the Word of God “become man,” as an Angel,¹⁴ manifesting thereby the “innermost depth of the Father’s goodness” (that is, everything that God the Father was going to give to man) and disclosing

in Himself the end for which created things clearly received the beginning of their existence. For it was for the sake of Christ, or the Mystery of Christ, that all of the ages and the beings in those ages received the beginning and the end of their existence in Christ.

In developing his idea of the mystery of Christ, the Holy Father observes:

For the union of finitude and infinitude, of measure and immeasurability, of end and endlessness, of Creator and

¹⁴ Isaiah 9:6.

creation, of rest and motion, which has come to pass in Christ made manifest in the last times, was ordained [by God in His preëternal counsel] before the ages, in itself bringing to fulfillment the foreknowledge of God,

and constituting the fruition of the entire providence and the entire destiny established by the Holy Trinity for man, which destiny consists in preternatural deification.

This is precisely because the deification of man and creation, as union with God, is the primal and ultimate purpose and aim of the entire Creation, Providence, and Economy of God for the world. Hence, the Saint adds:

For it was in truth necessary that He Who is by nature the Creator of the essence of existing things should also become by Grace the Author of the deification of those whom He had created, in order that the Giver of being might show Himself also to be the Bestower of eternal well-being,

and that in this way “the consummation of the ages and the rest of those in motion” might be wrought in God the Word (Who, as Creator of all things from nothing set creatures in motion). Note 1 on this passage is apposite and complementary:

Creation is the actualization of things brought into being from non-being. The hypostatic union of these with Him from Whom they came into being was foreordained according to His Providence.¹⁵

Aside from this very important passage, there are also other passages in St. Maximos which speak equally about the unconditionality of the Incarnation of God the Word. In one of these (again, from the *Responses to Thalassios*¹⁶), the Saint says that God, after creating [or, more precisely, “establishing the beginning of”—Trans.] all of creation before all the ages

¹⁵ *Responses to Thalassios*, LX, note 1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 625c.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, xxii, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, cols. 317B-321CD.

had an inexpressibly and supremely good counsel for those [that He had created]. This plan was for Him [God the Word] to mingle with human nature, without change on His part, through true hypostatic union, to unite human nature with Himself while remaining immutable, in order that He might become man, as He Himself knows, and make man God by union with Himself.

Further on in this text the Holy Father adds that

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the beginning, middle, and end of all the ages, past, present, and future,

and concludes the passage in question with the doctrine of the deification of man in Christ.

Here, too, the ensuing notes 1 and 3 are very much to the point.¹⁷ They state that the “ineffable purpose” of the creative Divine counsel was “the hypostatic union of the Word with the flesh,” in order that the flesh (man) might become “hypostatically Divine,” which is precisely the ultimate meaning of deification.

For this reason, note 3 adds that

the Incarnation of God is a sure pledge for human nature of its hoped-for deification, for it makes man God to the same extent that He became man.

To these notes we should add note 18 of the fifty-fourth response to Thalassios, which says, on this subject:

The doctrine of the Divine Incarnation comprehends both the beginning of the ages and of things in any given age and the extension to infinity, by Grace, of the life of existing things beyond the ages.¹⁸

To the aforementioned passages we should add also certain others, such as the text of St. Maximos’ celebrated interpretation of the ora-

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, notes 1, 3, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 321CD.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, LIV, note 18, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 532AB.

tion by St. Gregory the Theologian “Concerning Love for the Poor,”¹⁹ and in particular of the following phrase in this oration: “We are a part of God.”

In his highly theological interpretation of this passage, St. Maximos likewise expounds the unconditionality of the “Mystery of Christ,” to wit, of His perfect Incarnation (“hypostatic”) and our recapitulation in Him as “members of His Body,” which mystery is “the preëternal purpose hidden in God the Father.” The mystery of the hypostatic union of human and Divine nature in Christ, the Saint goes on to say

shows that we were created for this [end] and reveals God’s all-good purpose for us before the ages, which, not admitting any innovation in its own inner principle [λόγος], came to fulfillment through the introduction of another, newer mode [τρόπος].

The Holy Father concludes with this striking phrase:

It is, indeed, quite evident to all that the mystery effected in Christ at the end of the age is indubitably the demonstration and fulfillment of that which was set forth in our forefather at the beginning of the age.²⁰

Yet other texts of St. Maximos could be adduced here, but we think that those heretofore cited clearly attest to the unconditionality of the Incarnation of God the Word. This theological idea of St. Maximos was addressed by Father Georges Florovsky, who expresses the view, with regard to the foregoing passages, that “‘the Logos became flesh’ not merely for redemption,” since the mystery of the Incarnation, according to St. Maximos, is “the mystery of the God-Man, the mystery of Divine love,” which is “wider and deeper than redemptive mercy.”²¹

¹⁹ St. Gregory the Theologian, “Oration xiv,” §7, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xxxv, col. 865B.

²⁰ *Ambigua*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xci, col. 1097AD.

²¹ Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, p. 227.

In one of his articles, Father Florovsky repeats and develops his opinion on the subject in question:

[St. Maximos] stated plainly that the Incarnation should be regarded as *an absolute and primary purpose of God in the act of Creation*. The nature of the Incarnation, of this union of the Divine majesty with human frailty, is indeed an unfathomable mystery, but we can at least grasp the reason and the purpose of this supreme mystery, its *logos* and *skopos*. And this original reason, or the ultimate purpose, was, in the opinion of St. Maximus, precisely the Incarnation itself and then our own incorporation into the Body of the Incarnate One. The phrasing of St. Maximus is straight and clear.²²

The same interpretation was proposed much earlier than Father Florovsky by S.L. Epifanovich, a remarkable student of St. Maximos.²³

This issue has not received special attention or scrutiny on the part of other, more recent students of the theology of St. Maximos. One of these students, Hans Urs von Balthasar, advocates the view that the Saint was in favor of the unconditional Incarnation of God. He says that in a discussion with the Scholastics on this issue, Maximos would have taken the side of Duns Scotus, but would not have accepted the presuppositions of the hypothetical theology of the

²² *Idem*, “*Cur Deus Homo? The Motive of the Incarnation*,” in *Creation and Redemption*, Vol. III in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976), p. 168; see also http://www.synodinresistance.org/Theology_en/E3c8002aGiatiEnst.pdf

• In this article, Father Florovsky mentions briefly those who, from the Middle Ages down to the present day, have dealt with the issue of the conditionality or otherwise of the Divine Incarnation. We refer those interested in the relevant bibliography to this article (and also to the article on the Incarnation in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, Vol. VII).

²³ S.L. Epifanovich, *Prepodobnii Maksim Ispovednik i vizantiiskoe bogoslovie* [St. Maximos the Confessor and Byzantine theology] (Kiev: 1915), p. 69.

Scholastics.²⁴ Among the other students, Polycarp Sherwood²⁵ and Irénée-Henri Dalmais,²⁶ although they deal only in passing with the aforementioned issue, put forward the same view. It is noteworthy that Nikos Nissiotis, too, although not concerned specifically with St. Maximos (or with the present topic), accepts “that the ultimate purpose of creation is the communion of love, in the flesh, of man with God,”²⁷ to wit, the unconditional Incarnation of God.

There are, however, students of the theology of St. Maximos who maintain the opposite view. Thus, for example, Vladimir Lossky, speaking about the goal of uniting the different spheres (the five divisions) of the cosmos in God, says:

If these unions or successive ‘syntheses’ that surmount the natural divisions are brought about by Christ, it is because Adam failed in his vocation. Christ achieves them successively by following the order which was assigned to the first Adam.²⁸

Prof. Andreas Theodorou, who has written recently about St. Maximos, is of the same opinion. In his detailed study of the issue at hand,²⁹ Prof. Theodorou cites a great many passages from the texts of the Holy Father, dividing them into those that support the unconditionality of the Incarnation and those that support the condition-

²⁴ Han Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian E. Daley, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), p. 272.

²⁵ “Introduction” to *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life, The Four Centuries on Charity*, trans. Polycarp Sherwood, O.S.B., Vol. XXI in *Ancient Christian Writers* (New York and Ramsey, NJ: Newman Press, 1955), esp. pp. 71-72.

²⁶ Irénée-Henri Dalmais, “Introduction” to *Saint Maxime le Confesseur* [St. Maximos the Confessor] (Namur: Les Éditions du Soleil Levant, 1964).

²⁷ Nikos Nissiotis, *Προλεγόμενα εις την θεολογικήν γνωσιολογίαν* [Prolegomena to Orthodox Gnoseology] [Athens: 1965], p. 65.

²⁸ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976), p. 136.

²⁹ Andreas Theodorou, *Cur Deus Homo? Ἀπροϋπόθετος ἢ ἐμπροϋπόθετος ἐνανθρώπησις τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου;* [*Cur Deus Homo? Was the Incarnation of God the Word Unconditional or Conditional?*], in *Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρὶς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν* (Athens: 1972), pp. 297-340.

ality thereof, and commenting at length on each of them. At the end of his study, Prof. Theodorou comes to the following conclusion:

In the passage cited from his response to Thalassios (Response LX, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, cols. 620-621), St. Maximos accepts the unconditionality of the Incarnation. It is characteristic that he does so in a reply to a question pertaining to that passage in Scripture (1 St. Peter 1:19-20; Colossians 1:26) which clearly attests to the Biblical background of his idea. Nowhere in Scripture, however, is there any evidence for the notion of an unconditional Incarnation. It is obvious that St. Maximos absolutizes Biblical ideas in this regard, using certain forms of theological discourse in a hyperbolic manner. This absolutization magnifies the uniqueness of the Divine Incarnation for the deification of man and creation.

Maximos expresses this idea only once, making no further reference to it—at least, not explicitly. The remaining examples of his thinking that we cited quite clearly point towards the conditionality of the Incarnation. It is impossible for one to dissociate, in the thought of Maximos, the idea of the Incarnation from the idea of redemption and salvation.... In our opinion, the unconditional Incarnation, even as a mere theological concept and theory, is absent from the theological thought of this Holy Father. We have nothing more to say on the matter.³⁰

It is evident that the disagreement on this subject among students of the theology of St. Maximos shows that there really is a problem here, and all the more so in that even according to those who do not accept the concept of an unconditional Incarnation in the œuvre of St. Maximos there exists at least one text in which his “teaching concerning an absolute and unconditional Incarnation is clearly taught.”³¹

At the same time, however, there are, as we have seen, many other passages which leave no doubt that the Incarnation of God the Word

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 339-340.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 301. This text is *Responses to Thalassios*, LX, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, cols. 620B-625D.

came about for the salvation of man and that, consequently, the Incarnation has as its precondition and motive the Fall of man and his resultant need of redemption and salvation. What are we to say about this disagreement in texts by the same Holy Father? Is there really an essential disagreement and conflict between them? Or does the problem perhaps reside in how we interpret this “disagreement” of texts within the broader context of the theological thought of this great Father of the Church?

To begin with, it must be said, and emphatically underscored, that St. Maximos is preëminently a soteriological theologian—as, moreover, are all of the other Fathers of the Orthodox Church. The salvation of man is, for him, the central message of the Gospel of the Church of Christ the Savior, and for this reason the Incarnate Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, is first and foremost the Savior. It has been said by many students of Patristic theology that St. Maximos is a Christological theologian *par excellence*, but it is a fact that for him, and also for all of the other Christological Fathers of the East, Christology itself is always conceived in soteriological terms.

This is the case very simply because the God-Man Jesus Christ was given to us and was manifested in the history of the fallen world and in the Church as Savior and Redeemer, as is demonstrated, furthermore, by His personal name “Jesus” (=“Savior”; see Acts 13:23). For this reason, it is inconceivable that St. Maximos would have put forward “hypotheses” like those of the mediæval Scholastics, for such would betoken an estrangement from the Biblical and Patristic theology of the Church, which is a “theology of facts,” that is, of the facts of the sacred history of the revelation of the Triune God to the world, for the salvation of fallen man. For this reason, von Balthasar is correct when he writes:

[O]f course the presupposition of that scholastic controversy, which begins with an order of being—a world free from sin—that is only possible, never historically real, is far from Maximus’ thought. For him, the ‘preexistent will’ of God is identical with the realm both of ‘ideas’ and of ‘possibili-

ties'; the order of essence and the order of fact, at this highest point, converge into one.³²

Consequently, special emphasis should be placed on the fact that in none of his texts does St. Maximos express any hypothetical thought or idea in connection with the unconditionality or conditionality of the Incarnation, but on the contrary, speaks equally positively both about the fact that the Word of God became incarnate for the redemption and salvation of fallen Adam and about the fact that the Divine Incarnation of the Word is “the blessed end for which all things were created” and the “foreordained end, for the sake of which all things exist, though it itself exists for the sake of nothing else.”³³

In our opinion, the theological “key” to the resolution of this problem in St. Maximos is precisely his central theological idea: deification. From his entire theological vision it becomes clear that all things are oriented towards, and explained by their “end.”

In seeking his end, therefore, man encounters his beginning, which exists essentially in his end.³⁴

Thus, the entire plan of God, which is contained in the preëternal Divine counsel for the creation of man and the world, and for the providence, salvation, and recapitulation of all things in Him (God), is fully disclosed and exclusively explained only in the ultimate deification of human nature and all creation.

But what does “deification” mean for St. Maximos? Does it mean simply a “moral deification” or even a deification only “according to Grace”?

It is evident from the entire theological witness of St. Maximos that the deification of man is inconceivable without the Incarnation of God the Word, for in the end, complete deification, according to him, is the hypostatic union of human nature with God. There are very many passages that attest to the identification by the Saint of the deification of human nature with its hypostatic union with God

³² Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, p. 273.

³³ *Responses to Thalassios*, LX, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 621A.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, LIX, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 613D.

the Word. And it is very striking that none of the students of the Divine Father who denies the unconditionality of the Incarnation deals with this basic point of Maximian theology, to wit, deification *qua* hypostatic union, whereas it is precisely the texts which speak about the unconditionality of the Incarnation that emphasize this concept. And not only does deification in St. Maximos coincide with hypostatic union—which, needless to say, is possible only in the Incarnate Word of God—but also recapitulation (or completion [ἀποπεράτωσις]), in his view, has the same meaning, as does the word “salvation,” at least in certain passages of his works (salvation=deification=hypostatic union).³⁵

On this point, the aforementioned response to Thalassios is plain: the “Mystery of Christ” is the “hypostatic union of Divinity and humanity,”³⁶ and this is “the preternatural deification”³⁷ that occurs through the Incarnation of God the Word, Who, being the Creator of “the essence of existing things” showed Himself to be also the “Author of the deification of those whom He had created.”³⁸

Likewise, the passage from St. Maximos on the *Ambigua* (difficult texts) of St. Gregory the Theologian³⁹ that we cited at the be-

³⁵ Cf. *Centuries on Theology*, I.67, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 1108B: “The salvation of the saved is by Grace, not by nature.”

³⁶ *Responses to Thalassios*, LX, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 620C.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 621D.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 624D.

• Such a total deification, therefore, *qua* hypostatic union, was decided upon beforehand in the preëternal counsel of the Holy Trinity, as is correctly stated in the first note on this passage (*Ibid.*, note I, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 625C), and also in the interpretation of the “Our Father” (*Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 837CD) and chapters 23 and 25 of the second “Century on Theology” (*Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 1136AC). This point is made even more clearly in the twenty-second response to Thalassios (*Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 317BC), which we cited at the beginning, and also in notes 1 and 3 thereon (*Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 321CD). Note 3 plainly states that deification is impossible without the Incarnation of God the Word, insofar as “the Incarnation of God is a sure pledge for human nature of its hoped-for deification” (*Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 321D).

• Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, Bk. I, ch. 12 (*Patrologia Græca*, Vol. VIII, cols. 368A-372A).

³⁹ *Ambigua*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xci, col. 1097AD.

ginning speaks with the same clarity about deification and recapitulation (or our “adaptation” and “incorporation” into the Body of Christ) as the “hypostatic” union of our nature in Christ “without division and without confusion.”⁴⁰

This text goes on to say that this was “God’s all-good purpose for us before the ages,” the realization of which, without any doubt, is ensured and brought to fulfillment only by the Incarnation of God the Word.⁴¹

However, at the end of the passage in question, a basic question is raised on this subject, for the Saint says that “the mystery effected in Christ at the end of the age is... a demonstration and fulfillment” of the “mystery” that was “set forth” in our forefather Adam at the beginning of the age.⁴²

What was the mystery “set forth” in Adam?

It was, of course, the deification of human nature and the union therein of all creation with God. For deification, as we have seen, was the ultimate purpose of man foreordained by God.

Yet, the question that arises here is as follows: Would the first-formed Adam have been able to attain to his purpose, that is, his deification?

Further on in the text, St. Maximos puts forth an extremely interesting interpretation, according to which the first man, Adam, had he lived rightly, in conformity with “the capacity for this given to him by nature from the beginning,” being moved towards God “according to nature,” he would have been able gradually to unite in himself and through himself the five divisions existing in the world and thereby attain to his own deification and that of creation, that is, to his union with the uncreated God.⁴³

What would this union have been?

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. xci, col. 1097B.

⁴¹ Cf. *Responses to Thalassios*, lxiii, note 35, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. xc, col. 692B: “[The] Providence [of God] is revealed in the hypostatic union of the Word with the flesh.”

⁴² *Ambigua*, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. xci, col. 1097D.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. xci, cols. 1304D-1308C.

According to this text of St. Maximos, it would have been the union through “love” of the created nature with the uncreated nature, which man would have achieved

by coinhering in his entirety wholly in the whole of God and becoming everything that God is, save for identity of essence, receiving the whole of God in place of himself, and gaining God Himself alone as the prize for his ascent to God.⁴⁴

This text of the Holy Father serves to explain that the deification of Adam, as his union with God, would have been attainable if Adam had not sinned.

However, in spite of this, we are justified in raising yet another question at this point on the basis of all of the theological ideas of St. Maximos: Is deification, as Grace beyond nature, attainable for any created nature whatsoever, even a nature assisted by Divine power?

For St. Maximos, deification beyond nature is a reality

to which absolutely no inner principle [λόγος] according to the nature of existing things will be able to attain.⁴⁵

Or, as he says elsewhere, man can achieve the virtues, but not his deification, since in the age to come (the age of deification)

we shall terminate our proper faculties together with those limited by nature, becoming that which can in no way be accomplished by our natural power [being deified], since nature is incapable of grasping that which transcends nature [such as deification]. For no created thing is capable of achieving deification by nature, since it cannot comprehend God.⁴⁶

Likewise, in note 5 on the same passage, he adds the following striking observations:

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xci, col. 1308B.

⁴⁵ *Responses to Thalassios*, LXIII, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 684A.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, xxii, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 321A.

We experience deification passively as something beyond nature according to Grace, but do not achieve it by ourselves. For we do not have any natural capacity to receive deification.⁴⁷

Deification, therefore, as complete “hypostatic” union with God, is unattainable for created human nature in and of itself (according to the “principle” of its nature), even for the prelapsarian nature of the first Adam. For this reason, the Holy Father will proclaim unequivocally that only the mystery of the Incarnation of God the Word is capable of bringing about preternatural deification:

Thus, the [olive tree] on the right is the mystery of the providential Incarnation of God the Word, which effects the preternatural deification of the saved that was foreordained by Grace before the ages.⁴⁸

St. Maximos will say the same thing when, in the *Ambigua* of St. Gregory the Theologian, he admits that

the whole man is deified, being divinized by the Grace of God Incarnate.⁴⁹

We can say, therefore, on the basis of the this last passage, that if Adam had not sinned, he would most certainly have been deified, though not simply by “Divine Grace,” but precisely in “being divinized by the Grace of God Incarnate,” since deification necessarily pre-

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, note 5, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 324A.

⁴⁸ See note 45.

• Imparting the right Faith to the catechumenate, with regard to the criterion of deification, St. Gregory the Theologian writes as follows: “Believe that the Son of God... [has become] man for your sake as much as you are to become God for His sake” (“Oration 40, ‘On Holy Baptism,’” §45, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xxxvi, col. 424B).

• Cf. the opinion of St. Maximos, who says that God the Word become incarnate in order to “deify us by Grace as much as He, in His Œconomy, has become man by nature” (*Responses to Thalassios*, LXIV, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 725C). Cf. *Responses to Thalassios*, xxii, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 320A; *Response to Theopemptos*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 1400D.

⁴⁹ *Ambigua*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xci, col. 1088c.

supposes the hypostatic union of human nature with that of God the Word Who divinizes. In other words, the deification (divinization) of man presupposes and requires the Incarnation of God.

Thus, in order for man to become God (deification), it is necessary, as a precondition, that God first become man (Incarnation).

That is, the precondition of our deification is the Incarnation of God the Word, which in and of itself has no precondition. To be sure, as we have seen, St. Maximos mentions, in one of the passages cited previously, that if the first Adam had progressed, he would have recapitulated creation in himself and would himself ultimately have been united

‘through love’ with the uncreated God, since love is the power ‘that elevates man to God on account of his love for God.’⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the power of true love, according to St. Maximos, does not consist only in this—let us say—unilateral movement from man to God, since love, as the Holy Father says, always carries with it also a “good inversion” (from God to man),

making man God through the divinization of man and God man through the hominization of God. For the Word of God and God wills always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of His embodiment.⁵¹

Consequently, we can now say with certainty that, according to the Saint, “the mystery set forth in our forefather at the beginning of the age,” of which the Mystery of Christ constitutes the “demonstration and fulfillment,” would not have been accomplished save through the Incarnation of God the Word, for the simple reason that deification cannot be attained by any created nature in and of itself, and that full and true deification entails the hypostatic union of human nature with God. This is effected and fulfilled only by the Incarnation of God as its firstfruits, continuation, and perfection. This is precisely why, in His preëternal counsel, the Triune God, Who

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. XCI, col. 1084C.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

loves mankind, appointed the deification in Christ of man and creation, that is, the hypostatic union of human nature with God the Word. It was precisely for this purpose or “end” that man and the world were created, for in this way “the innermost depth of the Father’s goodness”⁵² is revealed.

But how is this theological vision of St. Maximos to be harmonized with the Fall of man and also with the Incarnation of God the Word for the redemption and salvation of fallen Adam? Here, we return to the aforementioned soteriological character of the Saint’s entire theology.

Now, the question arises: Is this soteriological character not impaired and dislocated by the theological opinion of St. Maximos concerning the unconditionality of the Divine Incarnation?

We have already said that the Holy Father does not propound any “hypothesis” concerning what would have happened if Adam had not fallen, etc.

If, however, we were to seek to find in the works of St. Maximos a positive answer to this question that he did not pose, but which could be posed, then we would find the passages cited below, in which it is clearly evident that the enfleshment and Incarnation of the Word would have taken place independently of the Fall of man, and this because the primordial and ultimate “all-good purpose” of man and creation appointed by God was that of “the Incarnation of the Word and of our deification” (as St. John of Damascus would say).⁵³ This purpose would be realized, “not admitting any innovation in its own principle.”⁵⁴ Thus, the manifestation of sin, which was not unforeseen and which caused “alienation” from God, did not compel God to alter His original plan, in accordance with His inner “principle.”

⁵² *Responses to Thalassios*, LX, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 621B.

⁵³ St. John of Damascus, “Oration on the Nativity of the Theotokos,” in *Ἡ Θεοτόκος: Τέσσερεις Θεομητορικῆς Ὁμιλίης* [The Theotokos: Four homilies on the Mother of God] (Athens: Evages Hidryma “Hosios Ioannes ho Damaskenos,” 1970), p. 90 (see also p. 245, n. 51).

⁵⁴ *Ambigua*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xci, col. 1097C.

His foreseeing, through foreknowledge, of Adam's sin simply brought about the "introduction" of another ("newer") mode of realizing the Divine plan,⁵⁵ the œconomic "mode" of Christ's Incarnation and suffering on the Cross, initially for the redemption and salvation of fallen man, but subsequently—or, more precisely, simultaneously—also for his ultimate deification. This "new mode" of the preëternal design of the Divine counsel, irrevocable and immutable "according to its own principle," is clearly evident in the following passage of the Holy Father, in which he distinguishes between the providence and judgment of God. He applies providence (the broader concept) to the Incarnation, as the mystery that effects and constitutes preternatural deification, while he applies judgment thereto as the mystery of the suffering of the Lord for the redemption and salvation of Adam's fallen nature.

We read the following:

Thus, the [olive tree] on the right is the mystery of the providential Incarnation of God the Word, which effects the preternatural deification of the saved that was foreordained by Grace before the ages, to which absolutely no inner principle according to the nature of existing things will be able to attain. The [olive tree] on the left is clearly the mystery of the judgment displayed in the life-giving passion of God Who willed to suffer in the flesh. [The mystery of the Incarnation] effects the complete destruction of all the traits and movements introduced into nature contrary to nature as a result of disobedience; it causes the unflinching restoration of all the traits and movements that were previously in accordance with nature. In this restoration, no principle of existing things will be found that is in any way adulterated.⁵⁶

St. Maximos clarifies the foregoing passage in notes 35 and 36, in which he writes:

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Responses to Thalassios*, LXIII, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 684A.

Providence is revealed in the hypostatic union of the Word with the flesh; judgment is manifested in His acceptance of suffering in the flesh for our sake; through these, union and suffering, the salvation of all is established. The incarnation came about for the salvation of nature, the sufferings for the redemption of those held fast by death on account of sin.⁵⁷

In our opinion, this very important text of St. Maximos, together with the two notes thereon that we have cited, clearly presents the true dimensions of the theology of the Holy Father on the major topic of the Incarnation of God the Word as the foundation of our deification. Without putting forward “hypotheses,” the Saint reveals the unconditionality of the Mystery of the Incarnation of God the Word and of the deification and incorporation in Christ of man and creation.

Consequently, according to St. Maximos, Adam (understood either in his prelapsarian or postlapsarian state) is not the “hermeneutical key” to everything, but the God-Man, the Word, Christ, and He alone.⁵⁸ The Incarnation of the Word is not interpreted from Adam; rather, Adam and all things are interpreted from and in God the Word Incarnate. In Him, that is, Christ, the beginning (creation) and the end (deification) come together, as also does the Economy of salvation, which comes to pass in between them, with the result

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, notes 35-36, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 692B.

• Elsewhere, too, St. Maximos makes a clear distinction between the mystery of the redemption and restoration of human nature to its “ancient beauty,” which is accomplished through the voluntary sufferings of Jesus, and the mystery of deification through the very Incarnation of the Word. Thus, according to him, the Lord Jesus, “granting our nature dispassion through His Passion, remission through His sufferings, and eternal life through His death, restored it, renewing the habitudes of human nature by His own deprivations in the flesh and through His very Incarnation bestowing on our nature the preternatural Grace of deification” (*Ibid.*, LXI, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 632A; cf. *Centuries of Various Texts*, IV.43, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 1324BC).

⁵⁸ Cf. Archimandrite Justin Popović, “The Highest Value and Last Criterion in Orthodoxy,” in *Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ*, trans. [Father] Asterios Gerostergios *et al.* (Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1994), pp. 93-94.

that the ultimate Divine purpose of all things is disclosed and manifested in the Risen One:

The mystery of the embodiment of the Word contains the meaning of all the arcane symbols and figures in the Scriptures, and also gives us knowledge of visible and intelligible creatures. He who knows the mystery of the Cross and burial knows the inner principles of created things, while he who is initiated into the inexpressible power of the Resurrection knows the purpose for which God originally established all things.⁵⁹

Hence, we may conclude from the foregoing that, according to St. Maximos, the deification of man constitutes the second side of one and the same mystery, the first side of which is the Incarnation of the Word. Just as, therefore, the Divinity of the Incarnate Word does not undergo any alteration or change in its union with humanity, so also human nature, in its deification, is not transformed into the Divine nature in a pantheistic way, nor does it undergo any alteration in its essence:

For just as He came down for our sake without change and became man as we are, save without sin, undoing the laws of nature in manner transcending nature, so also shall we consequently ascend on high for His sake and become gods as He is by the mystery of Grace, not undergoing any change whatsoever in our nature.⁶⁰



⁵⁹ *Centuries on Theology*, 1.66, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 1108AB.

⁶⁰ *Ambigua*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xci, col. 1280D; cf. *ibid.*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xci, col. 1280BC.

• “The Fathers of the Church spoke openly about the divinization of man,” and in elucidating this, “taught that it is to be understood as coming about by adoption and according to Grace and participation, not as a transmutation into the Divine essence” (Basileios Ch. Ioannides, *Ὁ μυστικισμὸς τοῦ ἀποστόλου Παύλου* [The mysticism of the Apostle Paul] [Athens: 1957], p. 123).

• Likewise, according to Father Florovsky, “the limit and goal of creaturely striving” consists precisely in deification or divinization. “But even in this, the immutable, unchangeable gap between natures will remain: any ‘transubstantiation’ is excluded” (“Creation and Creaturehood,” in *Creation and Redemption*, p. 74).