

“IF ALL THINGS WERE EQUAL, NOTHING WOULD EXIST”¹
FROM COSMOS TO HIERARCHY
IN DIONYSIOS THE AREOPAGITE (SIXTH CENTURY) & MAXIMOS THE CONFESSOR (580-662)

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Contemporary man will have trouble seeing the logic of Saint Augustine's (354-430) deduction: “If all things were equal, nothing would exist”. What is likely to be obscure is the un-stated relation the bishop of Hippo presumes between the equality of modernity, a sort of imposed similitude, and totality. In ancient Greek the term “hierarchy” which describes the construction of wholes, was invented a century after Saint Augustine's death by a Syrian monk, who called himself Dionysios, in order to describe the sacred order of relations of creatures to their Creator. Despite the articulation of the one God through the relations of three Trinitarian hypostases, the Christian God is always considered as united in the distinction of three persons². The spectrum from *totus*, a whole, to nothing(ness)

1. “*Quia non essent omnia, si essent aequalia...*” Saint Augustine, *De diuersis questionibus octoginta tribus*, question 41, linea 3.
2. What makes the Christian “Son of God” theism distinctive? A rapid juxtaposition of earlier theologies will bring out its specific character. Most primary religious expression is “cosmo-theistic”, structuring the world internally by installing a multitude of spirits and divinities (Assmann 2001). Monotheism is always a counter-religion, juxtaposed to these earlier cosmo-theisms, creating social space in the “inner self” of man. For man to admit that the multitude of his idols is false gods is a painful experience, only accomplished by the admission that their recognition is sinful. “The cosmic process loses its synergic character if it is conceived of as the work of a single God.” (Assmann 2002: 230) The gods founded societies and kingdoms, often only of a single city, but nonetheless exercised power on an earth that was inseparable from nature and myth. Beginning in the fourteenth century before Christ, Mosaic monotheism used an entirely different starting point, namely that man was created in the image of his Creator. This was contemporaneous to the very different intra-cosmic solar monotheism of Aménophis IV- Akhénoton. While Akhénoton was trying to engender a correct understanding of the world, Moses was insisting upon fidelity to a new alliance established with a transcendent God through a reformulation of the nature of individuality and subjectivity (Assmann 2002: 233).

(*nihilum*) in Saint Augustine's maxim is today no longer commonly used and therefore neither Dionysios' understanding of a hierarchy inherent in creation nor Augustine's belief in a real personal, omnipotent Creator is present in "modern" minds to justify Augustine's observation. The virtue of difference, nowadays everywhere affirmed, has over the centuries become a division favouring fragmentation and not convergence; in the sixth-seventh century mindset, difference (διαφορά) was what created space for communion between persons. Such theology is no longer taken seriously by social science for which man has no "society" with God.

Yet these concerns have not completely volatilised in Western Europe. At the heart of the nascent sociology of the late nineteenth century were the issues of community and individual, i.e. locally expressed holisms versus individuations (Milbank 1990, Chapter 3-4). Daniel de Coppet was seriously committed to understanding these issues in a historical perspective as one could hear during many of his weekly seminars at the EHESS in Paris. That these concepts (difference, hierarchy and totality) had long held an important place in Western European thought is reflected in their reappearance as soon as sociology went searching for its methodological foundations. Although nowadays partially determined by eighteenth century political categories of the state, interdependence and hierarchy have more ancient historical roots. To attribute the nascent modern concept of person to Christianity as did Louis Dumont (1983, Chapters 1-2) opened a vast field of inquiry. Once beyond the level of generalities, Bernard Meunier (2006) has recently shown how complex the anthropological roots of *prosôpon*/persona (person) and *ὑπόστασις* (hypostasis or person) are. Here I will sharpen the focus by limiting myself to two figures from the eastern Mediterranean Christian world (Syrian and Greek) who, in the sixth and seventh centuries, still belonged to the period of late antiquity. We will see that the way in which the individual

Monotheism is normative; its God is jealous of the fidelity of the creatures he creates. In this counter-society man is liberated from the political pride of Pharaoh; by distinguishing religion from politics, a political theology of liberation from the servitude of Egypt is revealed in an alliance with God. Here the strict prohibition of images underscores a fundamental alliance, the accompaniment of the invisible God, that "God is with us". Any symbiotic relationships of the micro-, macro- kind formerly proposed by a cosmotheism is forbidden. Monotheism resists polytheism and idolatry by proceeding "as if God was not given" (*etiamsi daremus non esse Deus*). The God of the Israelites, *YHWH ehad*, has his own images, creatures, populating the earth in the form of men adhering to his alliance. Morning and night, they proclaim their status in the great *shema* ("Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is One...") (Deuteronomy 6: 4-9; 11: 13-21; Numbers 15: 37-41).

is subsumed into the “hierarchic” faith stepping off from their experience of the humanity of Christ. The similarity of Christ’s humanity to ours is expressed differently in Western and Eastern Christianity. The Eastern Church hardly ever envisages Christ’s humanity apart from his divinity. Their approach requires a brief overview provided by this introduction.

The moderns, in order to understand human society, set aside cosmology and started afresh from the individual or from society as a whole. In Marx, Toennies, Durkheim and Weber, one feels that an intellectual revolution is taking place. Especially in Toennies and Weber, the whole to which one once belonged in Western Europe had become the nation state of which they are individual citizens, furnishing them with rights and certain obligations. After the seventeenth century, once the nation had been presented as the true whole and God ushered off centre stage, the state governed, with a new set of values, a “genuine” totality, called society, introduced as the backdrop against which all human action takes place. We ought not to forget that the word “society” at that time was a neologism. From the seventeenth century onwards, the experience of belonging to that earlier, vaster whole, God, as a *member* of a body of which Christ was the head, was vanishing. Church came to be considered by agnostics as just another institution establishing meaning in the social landscape. In most European societies agnosticism and individualism certainly go hand in hand. In this sense they are treated as pseudo wholes for the Christian God had more fully encompassed them. Without an account of the rise and eclipse of Christianity, any description of these realities is incomplete. Clearly something is left out, where neither the kingdom, nor the nation state nor even society possess the encompassing qualities that Christendom had exemplified.

Both society and the state, with their polities of varying scales, and aided by the practice of evaluative indifference towards religions, derive nation from a notion of totality initially present in Western Europe, due to the Christian revelation (Milbank 1990: Chapter 1). Hence the need for a true separation from this theology, achieved by abandoning the very concept of an undivided whole. Biology, crowned with a *naturalness*, and later driven by genetics, eventually replaced the earlier theology but they could not explain the basic issue of social bonds, hence the need for a science of sociability. Where no uncreated divine energies penetrated from God down through the cosmos to man, cosmology would henceforth have to become a different, more natural and neutral face than in the one that included God. As the Creator was absent so also was any structuring transcendence.

For the first time in Western Europe since the sixth century, Christianity during the twentieth century lost the credibility needed to bridge the gap from the personal self to the whole, the totality who is God. That monotheistic link had fissured and needed restoration; this was not the first time such a reconstruction loomed urgent. In the example from the sixth and seventh centuries sketched out below, we will show how an immensely influential cosmic holism of the sixth century was revamped by a theologian (possibly a Syrian monk) who called himself Dionysios “the Areopagite” after he had studied the terminology of cosmology from Proclus (c. 410-485; head of the Neoplatonic school in Athens, finally closed by Justinian in 529). Dionysios had set out to Christianise the “a-theistic cosmology” of the later Stoics.³ If Dionysios turned to the Neoplatonism of Proclus, retaining their terminology, he nevertheless placed the Christian God in an impenetrable realm well beyond the emanations of Stoic cosmology. A century later through the commentaries of Maximos the Confessor (580-662), Dionysios was then introduced into mainstream Christian theology by this disciple, in a revised form.

This final period of late antiquity experienced a full-fledged spiritual revolution which took the form of the doctrine of the incarnation of the Word of God. What relationship to totality did Christianity propose? If Christ incarnated a *new* relationship with mankind it was because

3. For the Stoics God is simply one of the different forms of the real and hence cannot be considered a *Théos* in the Christian sense of God. Both Hinduism and Islam produced variants of radical monism / pantheism, where the being of God and man are fundamentally of one essence. But such “unity in diversity” ontology can be taken to describe totally distinct theological outlooks. Thus while al-Hallāj speaks of the transposition of roles (*shath*) wherein Allah enters into union with man, talking with a human tongue, Ibn ‘Arabī adopts a Neo-Platonic quasi-pantheism. For the Hindu monists like Sankara and Rāmānuja, from the outset there is only one being. In this sense their monism is acosmic, for the universe has neither macro nor micro dimensions. Later Western European medieval Christian scholastic theology is built on the concept of the “analogy of being” that exists between the Creator and the created. Being by itself is not being by another; being is an analogical concept because it refers both to the finite and the infinite modes of existence, that of the creature and Creator. This has a more ancient Semitic expression which we have just seen. As Saint Paul put it on the Areopagus in Athens, “...In Him, we live, we move and we are...” (Acts 17: 28). Thus from the beginning, the expression of being in Christian cosmology was highly personalised. Being was considered to be derived from the inter-personal communion of God and man. Being is communion; this is the distinctive characteristic of Christian theism. If an abyss separates the Creator from the creature, he nonetheless lives from communion with his maker “through whom all things were made”. Earthquakes, tidal waves and human evil notwithstanding, cosmology by definition expresses the benevolence of its Creator.

he encompassed humanity into his own relationship to his Father. Yet the relationship of mankind and God in no way resembles an intra-Trinitarian one since humanity is separated from the Word of God by the abyss of creation. Christians are only sons of God by adoption. A Christian becomes part of a whole through the relation of a creature with the Creator. This *whole* implies, *inter alia*, a cosmology where the word “transcendence”⁴ also came to be used to indicate the bridge between the created and uncreated, established by the incarnation of Jesus.

The central religious experience of Christians is one of being saved from a universe riddled with mortality (and hence corruptibility, sin) by being incorporated into Christ’s resurrection from death. Salvation is a performative in the sense that Christ accomplishes it. Thus Christ says that he is the way, the truth and the life (John 14: 6). Creation is revealed as a cosmology embodying this divine economy, a providential plan which offers Christians a new mode of being (*τρόπος ὕπαρξις*). In this article I am combining approaches to cosmology taken both from the sociologist Louis Dumont and from patrology. As an anthropologist, I do not need to deconstruct the revealed truths of Christianity (see Cannell 2006). I am interested in the comparative sociology that a study of early Christian cosmology permits. Even where I rely on patrologists for their understanding of our two authors, by reading these fathers of the Church I am seeking to understand their religious *anthropology*. In fact one cannot separate their theology from their anthropology.

After this general introduction to our subject, the topic of this article can now be clearly set out. I will try to explain how the word “hierarchy” was used to describe the dynamics of the Christian relationship to God and how this use later opened the floodgates to a certain individualism. By this sixth century neologism, “hierarchy”, Dionysios meant the outpouring of God’s love for his creation, considered as a “sacred order” (*ἀρχή*) of grace made adequate to each person. God’s coming “towards” man is the precondition of any ascent towards He “through whom all things were made”. Studying the meaning of the Dionysian neologism “hierarchy” enables us to perceive that it is *totality*, the Christian holism, as the structure of personhood.

Like other words, for instance, cosmology (that “beautiful, good” order), or more recently, the notion of society, the word “hierarchy” has different meanings depending on the century of its use and the author employing it.

4. Today a new meaning for the word “transcendence” has been added to its semantic field, one that is pejorative, an imagined bridge leading towards an unknowable abyss.

While later Fathers of the Church also referred to the term “hierarchy” in the same sense as Dionysios, here we will refer exclusively to the Areopagite’s writings and their reconsideration in Saint Maximos’s writings around the turn of the seventh century, approximately a century after Dionysios⁶. Contemporary usage starts with philosophical visions as opposed as Kant’s epistemology and Hegel’s phenomenology and, after them, hierarchy is then transposed into social science jargon before being hijacked by political science where it has become a synonym for the systemic domination of social stratification. For instance, when Donald E. Brown subtitles his 1988 book *Hierarchy, History and Human Nature, The Social Origin of Historical Consciousness*, he is transposing the *phenomena* of social stratification onto the *idea* of hierarchy (Brown 1988: 314-5). The justification for this very modern usage of hierarchy is modern historiography, which, if nothing else, confirms Louis Dumont’s point that there is an intrinsic connection between individualism and historical consciousness. As we will see below (p. 5 and note 17) theologians such as John Meyendorff and John Zizioulas will introduce into the thought of Maximos the Confessor dimensions of inter-subjective consciousness that are likewise distinctly modern.

Hierarchy: order as an adequation of Divine compassion

In the eastern Mediterranean, the notion of the world as an immense cosmic play was at the centre of much Stoic and Neo-Platonic religious experience and thought. For sixth century Christians, the most recent and most influential intellectual exposition of the isomorphism between society and the cosmos was that of Proclus. From this late Greek notion of the well-ordered cosmos, Dionysios retained the vision of a harmonious and indeed beautiful (in the sense of well-ordered) precision. On the other hand, for this monk Christianity had revealed that the cosmos did not emanate from God in ever-weaker circles of lesser being. Instead the Lord of All creates the world out of *nothing*. Proclus had proposed a cos-

5. Translations: Ponsoye: *Ambigua* 1994, *Questions à Thalassios* 1992, *Lettres*; 1998; Sotiropoulos: *Mystagogie*; Touraille (*Philokalia* vol. I, 1995): *Centuries sur l’amour; Centuries sur... l’incarnation*.
6. Many excellent studies of their individual writings and aspects of their theology exist. We have extensively borrowed from these: especially, René Rocques (1983 [1954]) for Dionysios and on the writings of Maximos, the works of Hans Urs von Balthasar (1947) and Jean-Claude Larchet (1996).

mology where in a logical dialectical process from the monad proceeded three *momenta*: persistence (or identity); differentiating procession and return (or union). Thus at each stage in the hierarchical descent, lower hypostases⁷ proceed from higher ones, whereas for Dionysios, at each distinct level there is a direct, unmediated and immediate relation to what is beyond, the whole, that is God concerned by his creation and creatures.

After the council of Chalcedon (451), Dionysios was for both the Western and Eastern Church an important vector of a new vision of existence and personhood. After the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon (451), “being” previously classified by the Aristotelian tree of Porphyry (c. 232–c. 303): essence, class, species, genus and individuals, was in the process of being replaced by personhood (ὕπόστασις). The grace of hierarchy is seen as the path of deification (θέοσις), through which man comes to know God⁸. Dionysios was adapted by Maximos, whose teaching on Christ shows how this dynamic hierarchy or ascent takes place *through and in* Christ’s personhood (hypostasis). Mankind’s adoption into Christ’s *mode of being* is the foundation of hierarchy, characterized.

The Christian Trinity brought creation and all mankind out of nothing, endowing it with the will to know God expressed in its ascent towards Him through this hierarchy. When Dionysios in the sixth century coined the term hierarchy for the first time, it was to illustrate this “sacred order”⁹. He presents his vision in his four famous brief treatises:

7. Here the ancient Greek term *hypostasis* meant underlying reality, whereas in Christian theology the term came to mean person(-hood).
8. For the neo-Platonists procession and return (*existus et reditus*) were timeless and unhistorical. As Paul Rorem points out (1996: 135–5), “...The uplifting is not accomplished by the symbols [of the hierarchy] themselves, as if they possess any magical efficacy; it occurs in the process of interpreting them...” Rorem calls this epistemology one of *unknowing*. *Divine Names* 13: “The preference is for the way up through negations, since this stands the soul outside everything which is correlative with its own finite nature...beyond the outmost boundaries of the world, the soul is brought into union with God Himself...” While God’s ecstasy takes the form of an overflowing of His Goodness in a procession towards humanity, mankind’s ecstasy takes the form of a return to God. Commenting on the *Divine Names*, Section 7, Maximos the Confessor will write: “The unknowing of God ... is a knowledge which knows, in silence, that God is unknown.”
9. It is important to note that from the beginning, i.e. already in Dionysios’ writing, the meaning of the word “hierarchy” moves towards the notions of order (τάξις) and subordination with the accent on status and purity / power. Normative classifications however need not have any sacred principle at their inception. Nor in Dionysios was the opposite of “hierarchy”, “anarchy”.

*The Divine Names, The Mystical Theology, The Celestial Hierarchy and The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy.*¹⁰

How then did Dionysios himself define hierarchy? In the third section of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Dionysios provides six complementary explanations which provide some clarification of what he means by his neologism. The first definition merely claims that hierarchy is essentially of divine and celestial origin.

(1) ...What I must now do is explain what I mean by hierarchy and say what advantage such hierarchy offers to those who are members of it. So, I hope that my discourse will be guided by Christ...the inspiration of what has been known about hierarchy. ...Keep these holy truths a secret in your hidden mind. Guard their unity safe from the multiplicity of what is profane. (*Sources Chrétiennes* [SC], 58: 86; *Patrologica Graeca* [PG] 145 b; trans. by Luibheid and Rorem 1987: 152)

(2) In my opinion a hierarchy is a sacred order, a state of understanding and an activity approximating as closely as possible to the divine. And it is uplifted to the imitation of God in proportion to the enlightenments divinely given to it....The goal (σκοπός) of hierarchy, then, is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be one with him. A hierarchy has God as its leader of all understanding and action ...Hierarchy causes its members to be images of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of primordial light and indeed of God himself. It ensures that when its members have received this full and divine splendour they can then pass on this light generously and in accordance with God's will to beings further down the scale. (SC 59: 87-88; PG 164 d; trans. ibid:153-4)

(3) If one talks then about hierarchy, what is meant is a certain perfect arrangement, an image of the beauty of God which sacredly works out the mysteries of its own enlightenment in the orders and levels of understanding of the hierarchy...(perfection) becomes what scripture calls a "fellow workman of God"(I Cor. 3: 9; III John 8)...Therefore when the hierarchic order lays it on some to be purified and on others to do the purifying, cause illumination, on some to receive illumination and on others to cause illumination...each will actually imitate God in the way suitable to whatever role it has. ... The beatitude of God is something uncontaminated by dissimilarity...It is also the cause of every hierarchy and yet it surpasses by far every sacred thing. (SC 59: 90; PG 165 b-c; trans. Luibheid and Rorem 1987.)

Elsewhere Dionysios says that hierarchy is:

(4) ...The common goal of every hierarchy consists of the continuous love of God and of things divine... It consists of seeing things as they really are... It consists of an inspired participation in the one-like perfection and in the one itself, as far as is possible... (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1,3; PG 376 a; trans. by Luibheid and Rorem 1987: 198)

10. Dionysios is known to have written others, but none survive.

(5) When we talk of yearning, whether this be in God or in an angel, whether in the mind or in the spirit or in nature we should think of a unifying and comingling power which moves the superior to provide for the subordinate, to be in communion with peer and subordinate to return to the superior and the out-standing. (*Divine Names* 1V, 15; PG 713 a-b; trans. *ibid.* 1987: 83)

(6) I have set out in due order the many yearnings springing from the One and I have explained the nature and the knowledge and power appropriate to the yearnings within the world and beyond. (*Divine Names* 1V, 16; PG 713 b-c; trans. *ibid.* 1987: 83)

If we bring together these six explanations, we understand that: (1) a member of this hierarchy, of this order, is one of a living aggregate. Christ has articulated this hierarchy as a church, *ecclesia*, i.e. (2) this teleology is God's 'beauty' (θεοπρεπες); it makes each man participate in a holy order (τάξις) by imitating God according to the light and image which is in each one of us. (3) To be part of the hierarchy is to cooperate with God (see I Cor. 3: 9¹¹) and this implies each person being purified as he/she needs be. This is both a personal and a collective process where (4) the unifying love of God, his Providence, being higher, helps the lower purify itself. This capacity expresses both a received and given light at each level. So in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* the meaning and the finality of this hierarchy are explained as that of the 'sacramental', 'global' activity of purification, illumination and perfectioning (Rocques 1983 [1954]: 279-280).

Deification can only take place if man by grace partakes of the uncreated energies of the Trinity. Seraphima Konstantinovsky (2002: 22) provides a clarification of what Dionysios the Areopagite meant by hierarchy. She writes that

...(W)hat hierarchies pass on to the lower levels is not being, but union with the divine created energies and, in effect, deification. Now, since all levels of being have been directly created by God and there is therefore no emanation of being, only *direct* communion with the creator can deify. Thus in Dionysian cosmology, the "higher" beings do not uplift the "lower" ones to a union with themselves, but rather to a direct union with *their Creator*.

The concept of hierarchy is a critical one for conceptualising transcendence, worlds beyond our contemporary mind frame of secularisation and individualism. Hierarchy here does not imply domination, but in Christianity

11. The reference to Saint Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians (3: 9) involves a different metaphor for an organic whole, that of the building or temple to which each Christian is incorporated as a living stone; what the third epistle of John (Verse 8) calls "fellow workers for the truth".

Aucun
accent ???
Je trouve

θεοπρεπής

has the positive connotation of divine guidance, a sacred order infused into all creation. Riou notes that the doctrine of these divine energies,

... abolit les schémas verticaux de participation et de causalité pour leur substituer le symbole d'une union synergique, sans émanation du supérieur dans l'inférieur ni assumption de l'inférieur dans le supérieur, mais compénétration collaborante, sans qu'il y ait fusion. (1977: 62.)¹²

On the other hand, John Meyendorff has claimed (1969: 139, 147) that the Dionysian concept of hierarchy is not without a certain individualistic and anti-ecclesial bias. For Meyendorff, the Christian Eucharist has the tendency to become for Dionysios a symbolic drama where only certain well-initiated individuals actually penetrate the mystery. If for Dionysios' hierarchy was meant '...to express the simple idea that all beings are created for union with God', this would explain Dionysios' reluctance to resort to the Chalcedonian concept of personhood or hypostasis (Christ has two natures, human and divine in one person) due to "sensible-intelligible" dualism that his doctrine of hierarchy entails (Meyendorff 1969: 137, 139, 141, 143). Dionysios says that "Jesus", the Incarnate Lord, is the head of every hierarchy (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1.1 (372A)). Later when Maximos the Confessor incorporates Dionysios into mainstream Christian theology, he will emphasise the collective dimension of salvation through Christ's incarnation by envisaging all hierarchy in terms of the relationship of the human and divine accomplished in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Here ontology, the science of being, is replaced by a theology of existence based on a vision of distinction in union.

Hierarchy as distinction (διάκρισις) uniting Man to God¹³

Dionysios differs from Plato's understanding of union with God (the mind's rising above the concerns of the body, *Theaetetus* 176 a-b) and Plotinus' (201-270) formulation of a fully divine man (led to the One by knowing himself, *Enneads* V, 9, 1). Dionysios insists that it is not through the articulation of hierarchies involving the macro- and micro-cosmos, but a double mediation through the angelic and ecclesiastical hierarchies

12. Following M. von Ivanka; see Sources chrétiennes, 59: 89, note 3.

13. According to Andrew Louth (1996: 130), "hierarchy" is a word coined by Dionysios himself.

that permit man to become fully deified in the one and only God (*Divine Names* II. 11; trans. by Luibheid 1987: 66-67).

In his treatise *On Divines Names* (II. 2), Dionysios writes that, although “the Word of God operates sometimes without, sometimes with distinctions” (trans. by Luibheid 1987: 60), God is not a whole made from the sum of his attributes. Dionysios began by claiming:

...All the Names appropriate to God are praised regarding the whole, entire, full, complete divinity, rather than any part of it, and that they all refer indivisibly, absolutely, unreservedly, and totally to God in his entirety. (*On Divines Names* II. 1; trans. *ibid.* 1987: 58.)

This affirmation derives from the initial revelation of the name of God to Moses (Exodus 3: 14) “I am that I am (*Ehyé ascher Ehyé*)”, from the apophatic vision that Dionysios holds of the unity of the Trinity as that of a Godhead beyond Deity whose subsistence is beyond being. In this chapter Dionysios explains the relation of the three persons of the Trinity who are not confused (II. 5; 641D), and yet linked by a sacred dance (*χορεία*) of movement “beyond movement” joining the three persons of the Trinity in the unity of the Godhead. Later in this same chapter of the *Divine Names*, Dionysios writes about the difference between indifference (the Godhead beyond Deity) and benign processions or differentiation (*διακρίσεις*):

...Our theological tradition asserts that the unities {i.e. divine unity} are the hidden and permanent, supreme foundations of a steadfastness which is more than ineffable and more than unknowable. They say that the differentiations within the Godhead have to do with the benign processions and revelation of God... (II. 4; P.G. 640 D; trans. *ibid.* 1987: 61).

...The term “divine differentiations” is given to the benevolent processions of the supreme Godhead...And it becomes differentiated in a unified way. It is multiplied and yet remains singular. It is dispensed to all without ceasing to be a unity. (II. 10; P.G. 649 B; trans. *ibid.* 1987: 66.)

Dionysios is notorious for avoiding any explanation of the union of Christ’s human and divine natures. However it is clear that these are not Neo-Platonic emanations; the incarnation is related to that process by which the One, the Good, is generously diffused, constituting a hierarchy of beings categorised by their own capacity to reflect his light. The Word of God comes out of the One and enters the world of man, that of diversity and division. It is in this sense that for Dionysios hierarchy is created out of distinctions. That the space of distinctions (*διάστημα*) is good, creating the possibility of communion, arises from Dionysios’s positive evaluation of difference (*διαφορά*) in the cosmos. Even if division (*διαίρεσις*) leads to distance (*διάστασις*) and finally to decomposition (*διασπάσις*) into fragments,

this vision (already clearly expressed by Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-c. 395) of distinction in the sense of expansion (*διαστολή*) in Dionysios, and even more so in Maximos, is the expression of the movement of God's compassionate condescension towards His creation. As priest Christ initiates our human intelligence into understanding this providence (*πρόνοια*).

It is easy, when reading Dionysios, to agree with Rocques (1983 [1954]: 284) that Dionysios has sacrificed direct personal contact between Christ and mankind to this vision of hierarchical mediation, but does Dionysios really attempt to incorporate the Neo-platonic cosmology and its hierarchic laws? The implications of the creation of the world and mankind *ex nihilo* had of course been the subject of much thought on the part of the fourth century Church fathers, John Chrysostom (347-407), Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390) and Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-c. 395). In particular, Gregory of Nyssa had developed an understanding of man as an "extension" in time having the "dimension" of a temporal "interval" (*διάστημα*), a specific kind of difference, a "spacing" comprising movement. This "distance" (*διάστασις*) was opened by the category of "when", of duration. In this cosmology, time and space become those limitations on the world, yet the categories of how a person is. Thus becoming is movement (*κίνησις*), either limited or circular movement. When can one measure the cosmos in which mankind exists? The answer of Dionysios and Maximos will be, during deification. One comes to know God's creation by discerning in all matter the *logoi* of He who created it. Clearly this "wordly" knowledge is the result of a process of sanctification very different from our own world view. The *λόγοι* of differentiated creation reflect together the purpose of the Creator and these *λόγοι*, because they pre-existed in God, are held together by His Logos. It will remain for Maximos the Confessor to insist that these persons are participating members in the ensemble of *λόγοι* which drive the economy of salvation coordinated by Christ's incarnation in the flesh (Thunberg 1995 [1965]: 73-80).

Individualism in Dionysios

The sixth century world of the Greek fathers of the church is not that inherited by the medieval West from Saint Augustine. As mentioned in passing above, the veneration of the humanity of Christ, Vladimir Lossky (1967: 60) is almost foreign to Eastern Christianity. This follows on from the formulations of the first council in Nicea (convoked in 325 by the Emperor Constantine) and the Fourth Ecumenical Council held in

Chalcedon (451) culminating in the “ineffable” distinctions between the single nature of the Godhead and three persons in the Trinity. For, being theological clarifications, these dogmas were also of the utmost importance sociologically. They attempted to distinguish the Christian Oecumene from the non-Christian one, initially the Persian, and later the Arab.

For Dionysios, knowing God apophatically (theological description of God in terms of what he is not) can never occur by knowing Christ apart from the other two persons of the Trinity. The Ecumenical Councils made it clear that, if God is one, the three persons of the one God cannot be treated separately one from another. Dionysios in *On the Divine Names* proposes that the only way to come to know the Triune God is through grace and light, which he also calls natural energies (δύναμις). God’s essence remains unknowable, but, as Vladimir Lossky explains (1963: 100-1) his energies descend towards man “...out of his nature...” to make this Creator known. These processions or manifestations reveal God as darkness (σκότος). As the cause of all being, God does not exist, since as the cause of all existence, he is above existence, just as God is not unity but the cause of all unity.

If God brings everything together into a unity without confusion, if “Perfect peace ranges totally through all things with the simple undiluted presence of its unifying power” (*Divine Names* XI. 2; Luibheid 1987: 122), what of those who do not want such a peace? Dionysios replies:

“There are many things which take pleasure in being other, different, and distinct, and they would never freely choose to be at rest” This is true, assuming that what is meant here is that being other and being different refer to the individuality of each thing and to the fact that nothing tries to lose its individuality. Yet, as I will try to show, this situation is itself due to the desire for peace (ἡσυχία). For everything loves to be at peace with itself, to be at one, and never to move or fall away from its own existence and from what it has. And perfect Peace is there as a gift, guarding without confusion the individuality of each,... Yet there is nothing which has totally fallen away from unity. That which is completely unstable, unbounded, un-established, undefined, has neither being nor place *among the* things that have being. (*Divine Names* XI, 3 and 5, Loubheid 1987:123)

Did Dionysios develop a theology of private personal holiness reserved for an elite, where only the totally purified could be said to stand before God? Unlike modern Orthodox commentators, however, Maximos the Confessor, while correcting certain aspects of Dionysios’ thought, never criticized Dionysios for depicting Christ’s presence in the world only through hierarchical intermediaries, which would have compromised any ecclesiological holism. Modern critics, who are not monks like Dionysios

and Maximos, and who have probably themselves been influenced by modern European individualism, have found Dionysios lacking in a sense of congregation. An Anglican Bishop, Westcott wrote in 1891:

(Dionysios) fails indeed by neglecting to take in the whole breadth of the Gospel... The whole view of life which he offers is essentially individual and personal and subjective; the one man is the supreme object in whose progress his interest is engaged. Though he gives a magnificent view of the mutual coherence of all the parts of the moral and physical worlds, yet he turns with the deepest satisfaction to the solitary monk, isolated and self-absorbed, as the highest type of Christian energy... And so it is that he is unable to see in their full beauty and strength those instincts and faculties of man, by which he is impelled towards social combination... (cited by Andrew Louth 1989: Chapter 8)

Amongst modern theologians and church historians, John Meyendorff and Alexander Schmemmann shared Westcott's criticism of Dionysios. As Orthodox churchmen they had to deal with the damage to liturgical theology and ecclesiology caused by Dionysios' re-interpretation of the Christian liturgy as mystagogy. They were alarmed about the individualistic aspect of Dionysios' spirituality. Does Dionysios present liturgy as spectacle in the costume of symbolism? Here Andrew Louth comes to Dionysios' defence, saying that, although it is partially true that the sacraments become spectacle, an "ecclesial ballet", his vision of hierarchy, mutual inter-dependence and dramatic movement in terms of the path of monastic purification is a very organic part of his understanding of liturgy. Louth feels that to attack Dionysios' mystagogy misunderstands what Dionysios meant by hierarchy¹⁴. Indeed Serphima Konstantinovsky (2002: 16-17) goes on to say that they have substituted the modern understanding of hierarchy (see note 2) for Dionysios' own comprehension of it. To attribute to the term "hierarchy" not what Dionysios meant, but what we now mean by the term "hierarchy", something independent of us in which we are forced to participate, is to read the present into the past¹⁵. In fact says Louth (1989:132), the cosmos and its hierarchies reveal God to us only because we are a part of these hierarchies. Louth

14. Törönen (2007: 66-67), who studied under Louth, also disputes this. He claims that, for the Cappadocians, the subjectivity of the mind is not a category of ontology, and the inter-subjectivity of the person is only a recent philosophical preoccupation. He cites as proof de Halleux's well-known 1986 article which concludes "...what they [the Cappadocians] denoted by the intra-divine *κοινωνία* was the common nature and not the "dialogical" interpersonal relations." (1990 reprint: 265). Obviously to discuss Zizioulas' rebuttal of this attack as it appears in his 2006 *Communion and Otherness* would require another whole article.

15. This is also Sister Seraphima's point (2002: 16-17).

counters that it is the modern idea of community and community worship that are really individualistic because the individuals that make up the community “should” all do everything together. All this reduces to asking whether one goes to church to save the church or to be saved by the communion which the church already constitutes.

Louth (1989: 133) writes “the idea of a hierarchical society – even though the word *hierarchy* is Deny’s – is a more natural presupposition in late antique society than any other: certainly more natural than our own notions of “social contract” which only go back to the Enlightenment (and which has hardly stood the test of even that short time)” (1989: 133). Here Louth invokes the analyses of Mary Douglas (1973: Chapter 4); for this anthropologist societies with a strong grid of shared values and a powerful system of group control carry with them a clear socio-cosmic isomorphism. As Daniel de Coppet and André Iteanu stated at the outset of a series of essays on the theme of the claims of the cosmos to wholeness: “no higher values than those which characterise it may exist” (1995: 1). This leads them on to claim (1995: 3) that, “In Europe, the assumption of successive cosmologies, which all claimed universality, appears as directly responsible for the degradation of the idea of society.” If the cosmopolitan quality of the world of late Mediterranean antiquity is analysed seriously, one must ask how were these diverse worlds interrelated? The answer to this question would require a history of the appearance of the very notion of society in modern northern European languages, which is quite beyond the scope of this article.

Concretely, are these societies in the Eastern Mediterranean in the sixth and seventh centuries seeing, living and experiencing themselves through that whole who is God?¹⁶ Garth Fowden (1993) has shown that for late antiquity the federating value of the new empires, the first and second Byzantium and the first two caliphates in Damascus and Baghdad, was monotheism. They were commonwealths whose cultures, languages and social networks were distinct, but who shared a common monotheistic deity, Allah or the Trinity. As proof, he proposes that we notice that the armies of the first caliphate in Damascus were composed of a majority of non-Arab soldiers. Religion, not ethnicity, was the binding factor.

Returning to Dionysios, Andrew Louth remarks (1989: 134) that “Denys’ vision is remarkable because, on the one hand, his understanding

16. Peter Brown in an essay on the holy Man (1971; reproduced in *La société et le sacré dans l'Antiquité tardive*, 1985: 61) states that most of what we know of the daily lives of the peasantry of the eastern end of the Mediterranean comes from the sayings and lives of the ascetical fathers.

of hierarchy makes possible a rich symbolic system in terms of which we can understand God and the cosmos and our place within it, and, on the other, he finds room within this strictly hierarchical society for an escape from it, beyond it, by transcending symbols and realising directly one's relationship with God as his creature, the creature of his love." Here Louth refers to Dionysios' negative or apophatic theology. One wants to ask here whether this sixth century Syrian monk's attraction to the vocabulary of neo-Platonism was due to his conscious admiration for Proclus' and the Platonic tradition (in Louth's words in 1989: 11 – "...the truths that Plato grasped belong to Christ..."), or due to an understanding that the incarnation of the Word of God, what is "beyond being", must be mediated (Proclus' principal preoccupation). Certainly the graded levels of reality, the hierarchies as Dionysios called them, were articulated ritually, theurgically. Finally for Dionysios, liturgy is more valuable than philosophical wisdom, if one understands it as revealed mystery, i.e. the manifestation of God's love for mankind revealed in Christ (Louth 1989: 28).

The nexus of this debate over the meditating capacities of hierarchy, although it is a theological one hanging on the thread of faith, does concern the relation of the cosmos to transcendence. In the treatise *Mystical Theology*, Sections Three and Four define the transcendent as the cause of all material and intelligible reality which itself is immaterial and unintelligible. Maximos the Confessor will transfer the centre of the drama of salvation in Christ from that of the interrelations of the different levels of the cosmos to that of the relation of the transcendent to the human person conceived as a microcosm. Mediation, grace, the outpouring of Divine Love, will retain their central value in the relation of Christ, the Mediator, to the micro-cosmic man.

Maximos the Confessor's (580-662) non-cosmological hierarchy

Milbank (1990: 62-65) has insisted that if Durkheim understands social structure as following on from religion, it is because society only exists through a symbolic self-representation. Shortly before Durkheim, Auguste Comte wondered whether social change was not reflected in alternative conceptions of the "natural" order. In recent theories of the secularisation of religion, social reality¹⁷ is not even located as the backdrop on which

17. Lewis and Short's Latin Dictionary (1879: 1715) indicates that until Augustine, (c. 430 AD) in prose the adjective for social, as its root indicates (*sec-*; *sequor*), indicates a "sharing,

a religious revelation is written. For totally different reasons, this is also true of Maximos the Confessor where change, described in terms of a progressive rapprochement with God, is the contribution of monotheism to preserve the health of the body social. Society's internal coherence is rooted in that value provided by the wholeness of God. In the late Roman (Byzantine) empire where monotheism was the empire's religion, the way people speak and reason about the One belies their notion of person, hierarchy, and transcendence. In this section we will look at how Maximos reinterprets Dionysios' holism as a non-cosmological hierarchy during the seventh century struggle with the heresy of monotheletism¹⁸.

Initially, in the *Ambigua*, Maximos' book explaining the ambiguous passages in Dionysios the Areopagite and Gregory of Nyssa, Maximos explicitly agrees with Dionysios' definition of oneness and cites (*Ambigua* 41: 1313A) his predecessor with approval:

For nothing of what is universal and containing (others) and generic can be divided into what is partial and contained and particular... For everything generic, according to its own *logos*, is wholly present, indivisibly by mode of unity, to those subordinate wholes, and the particular as a whole is considered as within a genus.

This capacity for encompassment often demonstrates features of inversion. In the theistic revelation which Maximos contemplates (see *Ambigua* 41; translated in Ponsoye 1994: 292-299), the role of God's providence in each person's destiny precludes any individualism. Man's role as mediator involves his using his God-given "rational" (λογικός) nature to reunite to God the five divisions that characterise the universe. Maximos envisages this in five stages of reunion, which overlap and so are not quite as distinct as in the five stages represented below:

a fellow", while the more common noun *societas* was a fellowship, a union for a common purpose. Benveniste (vol. I, 1969: 363-73) indicates that the western variants of Indo-European designated the people by **teutâ*; while at the eastern end of this linguistic area the Indo-Iranian *arya* (people) derived from *ari*, meaning a person of my people. The Greek and Latin *polis* / *civitas*, were initially very different, but both came to indicate the institution of the ensemble of citizens. Clearly society is a rather late notion, and had difficulty separating itself out from a reflexive, of "my" body social. See *Secular Theories on Religion: Current Perspectives*, edited by T. Jensen and M. Rothstein, 2000.

18. The belief in one and only one will/energy in Christ who has both a human and a divine nature was propagated by the Emperor Heraclius who, in 624, was beginning to reconcile the Monophysites in the eastern end of the Mediterranean. In 634 Heraclius prohibited further discussion of the issue but finally in 681 thanks, largely, to Maximos' opposition (confession which cost him his life), the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople proclaimed that two wills in Christ, divine and human, was the orthodox faith.

- The reuniting of the created and the uncreated.
- The establishment of a passionless relation between men and women; through the purity of man's behaviour, earth is to be made one with paradise.
- Imitating the complete God-ward direction of the angels, the difference between knowing and non-knowing is to be abolished.
- Men then reconciling the sensible and intelligible worlds.
- Finally, a life by grace through communion with God abolishing the difference between God and man, yet still this deification involves no ontological identity between the two.

How should we characterize this seventh century Christian hierarchy presented here? It is basically "social". The structure of man's relation to God, that model of the whole (person) which pre-exists all creation, is articulated by a divine relationship which founds man's intrinsic value¹⁹. This value is grounded in the belief that man is created in God's image such that he can indeed resemble his Creator through the praxis of the truth revealed in himself. In terms of public behaviour, the hierarchical threshold of the fundamental ritual of Christianity, the Eucharist, is a form of commensality where the creature communes with his Creator. This is explained in detail in Maximos' commentary on the "divine" liturgy, entitled *Mystagogy* (trans. by Sotiropoulos, 2001).

In that commentary, Maximos the Confessor states (*Mystagogy* § 7; see Thunberg 1995 [1965]: 142-3) that mankind, reborn in Christ, possesses a new mode of existence, shepherding himself and the cosmos towards a transformation and recapitulation in Christ. There is a sense in which Maximos' cosmology is a double inversion of the Neo-Platonic Greek notion that the cosmos was a macrocosm vis-à-vis society. If man is understood to be the microcosm, then there are three poles in this hierar-

19. There is a very large corpus of commentary on the verse in Genesis 1: 26 "Let us make man in our own image and likeness." This passage is extraordinary because throughout the Old Testament the accent is unceasingly on the fact that "man is dust and ashes before God, ...that he cannot stand before his holiness." (G. Kittel II: 390). Made from dust from the earth (*'afar min ha'adamah*) and a breath of life (*rishmat haim*) from God, man's Elohim nature indicates that he is by nature from above, hence the image (*tselem*) and resemblance (*demut*) to his Creator. In the New Testament this is taken up again, especially in the epistles of St. Paul (I Cor. 15: 45; Col. 3: 10) where the restoration of the divine likeness of creation with God is identical with being incorporated into fellowship with Christ. See G. Kittel II: 381-397.

chical transformation. This can be portrayed as taking place in three progressive oppositions. Here ($\supset$ = is encompassed by; $\subset$ = encompasses):

Micro-cosm $\supset$ *macro-cosm (the Greek "pagan" conception)*

Micro-cosm $\subset$ *macro-cosm (the cosmology of Dionysios)*

Mankind $\supset$ *Trinity (for Maximos mankind orchestrates a cosmic liturgy)*

For Maximos, the microcosm, man, is the centre of the cosmos and in that sense encompasses it. And if man is at the centre, this is because the deification of man is a pre-condition for the transfiguration of the (rest of the) world. Maximos' understanding of what is presented by Dionysios the Areopagite (*Divine Names* 13. 2) is presented in terms of logical oppositions²⁰:

The name "One" means that God is uniquely all things through the transcendence of the one unity and that he is the cause of all without ever departing from that oneness... For multiplicity is not without participation in the One, but that which is many in its parts is one as a whole.

The forty-first *Ambigua* of Maximos explains how man has to be born twice over so that the destructive aspects of the division of being found in him may be erased, so that the positive aspects of the dichotomy of body and soul may play their role. Andrew Louth paraphrases this as follows:

...The human being has been created to hold together these divisions of being, which are all reflected in the human constitution. The human person is therefore to be regarded as a microcosm and bond of creation, mediating between all the divisions. But because of the Fall, the human person can no longer fulfil this function. Therefore, in the incarnation, God has recapitulated the cosmic role of human beings and restored to them their primordial function. (Louth 1996: 155-6)

The key to this "new" mediation is God's creation, man. The locus of theology is not to be located in the processes of the intellect, but in the inner structure of the mystery of creation, of an anthropology. To restore man in his own image, this "second God" (ὁ δεύτερος θεός), the "Son of man", reveals himself as both God and man. The hypostasis is not only the place of resemblance to one's Creator, but also the proper place of responsibility, sin and merit, in short what colours the relationship to God (Meunier 2006: 300). This vision of Christ comes to Maximos directly from the declarations of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451). There he finds the terminology, the adjectives, to describe the relation of the two natures of Christ, God and

20. In the same text Dionysios has more poetic expressions of the same reality as in §4:13 "This divine yearning brings ecstasy so that the lover belongs not to self but to the beloved."

man: two natures free from all separation as well as mixture in one person. This encompassing is later called “theandric”. The four privative adjectival terms (underlined in the citation below), at the end of the Chalcedonian credo, are famous for creating the conceptual foundation for an apophatic presentation of this paradox, the mystery of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God. Here is this extract of the credo confirmed by the council of Chalcedon (Camelot 1961: 140):

... Engendré du Père avant les siècles en sa divinité mais aux derniers jours, pour nous et pour notre salut, (engendrer) de Marie la Vierge, la Theotokos, en son humanité, en deux natures, *sans confusion, ni changement, sans division, ni séparation*.

In the incarnate Christ, *ἄσυνγνῦτος* (without mixture, or confusion), was one of the adjectives qualifying this reciprocal compenetration (*περιχώρησις*) of human and divine nature in one person. This union in the single person of Christ of two natures was not defined dogmatically by the council in terms of essences, but in terms of modes (*τρόποι*) of existence (*ὑπαρξίς*) and personhood (*ὑπόστασις*).²¹ For Maximos (see Meunier 2006: 302) a person is he who sets into motion the capacities of natures by orienting them for better or for worse. Only by using one’s liberty given in nature does one have any real existence as a person for it manifests his/her singularity. Thus Maximos’ reflection on personal interiority, while allowing for a psychological dimension, is metaphysical by definition. In his fifteenth letter Maximos writes:

C’est ce que le discours de vérité nous représente à propos de l’économie (c’est-à-dire) de l’incarnation) divine: les propriétés par lesquelles la chair diffère et se sépare de nous sont celles par lesquelles elle possède l’identité avec le Logos selon l’hypostase; et les propriétés par lesquelles le Logos diffère du Père et de l’Esprit et est défini (séparé, ἀφορίζομενος) en tant que Fils sont celles par lesquelles il garde, sauve, l’unicité avec la chair selon l’hypostase, en n’en étant séparé par aucune loi (*logos*). (trans. by Meunier 2006: 302-303)

Meunier (2006: 303) states that, applied to the two wills (divine and human) of Christ, this comprehension of the incarnation shows that Maximos’ understanding of person (hypostasis) integrates both the psychological and anthropological dimensions in a richer, more “modern”, understanding of person than was known beforehand.

21. Balthasar (1947: 21) admits that the subsequent Western European scholastic differentiation of essence and existence is not present in Maximos who often uses the words “being” (*εἶναι*); “essence” (*οὐσία*); “personal existence” (*ὑπαρξίς*) and “personhood” (*ὑπόστασις*) almost interchangeably.

In his thirteenth letter (PG 91, 521c) Maximos takes over the so-called universal law of conjunction²² (couple, συζυγία), or synthesis. In this letter he applies this understanding of synthesis to the Incarnation and demonstrates its generality:

Each totality, and particularly which results in the synthesis of different elements, while keeping a perfect identity of its ὑπόστασις, involves a differentiation without confusion of the parts integrated. Thus it maintains without falsification the particular and essential reason of each of its members. Inversely the parts, while keeping in their synthesis their natural reason without mixture or diminution, maintain without any possible division the singular identity of their totality. (Letter 13; PG 91, 521c.)

This mysterious presence of the Whole in its parts is a synthesis that leads directly to God, writes Balthasar (1947: 24; trans. by Stephen C. Headley):

If the members communicate only by the presence in them of the totality that surpasses them, creatures also are only united by their transcendent identity in God: a negative identity in that they all communicate in the nought of their origin and in that property of not being God; positive identity due to the fact that the Creator sustains them all by his presence in them.

Dionysios' integration into Eastern Christian theology via Maximos' reworking of his vision is said to mark the final victory of Christianity over Hellenism (Balthasar 1947: 15-18). On the other hand, V. Lossky (1963: 105) claims that for certain theologians in the Catholic West²³, Dionysios was sometimes interpreted in ways that made him a vehicle for further penetration of Greek Neo-Platonism into Western theology. Ignoring that question, we will also confine our remarks to Maximos' reinterpretation of Dionysios' Christian cosmology, leaving aside Maximos' so-called role as a precursor of the Western Scholastic distinction between being and existence. This seventh century confessor of the faith derives his vision of the created world from the sacramental one

22. The role of synthesis as developed by the Gnostics in their cosmological theology made this notion widely known in the third century and, by reaction, sharpened the Christian focus on a vision of creation *ex nihilo*.
23. I.e. John Scot Erigena, whose translation of Dionysios dates from 862; certain Victorines (eg. Hugues' commentary (†1141) on the *Celestial Hierarchy* and Richard's commentary (†1173) as well as certain Cistercians authors (Isaac of Stella †1169), etc. See *Dictionnaire de la Spiritualité*, fasc. 18-19, Paris, 1954, cols. 318+). Dionysios' main influence begins in the twelfth century with Robert Grosseteste's translation and commentary, and that of Albert the Great, and continues in the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Bonaventure (Jean Leclercq 1987: 27-31).

he found in Saint Paul's epistles. Writing to the Ephesians (I: 14-5, 10), Saint Paul opens his letter with a famous description of humanity's adoption by Christ before the world was created:

According as he (God) hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestined us to adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself ... That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are one earth; even in him: (Ephesians I: 14-5, 10).

This implies that the Logos is present in all created things, by binding their *logoi* (their reasons for being, "toward God"²⁴) together. This leaves the cosmos pregnant with an orientation towards the Trinity. Here hierarchy is always a dimension of man's experience of his *created* life. God is not an infinity, the ultimate "beyond" of human intelligence, but the Creator. Alain Riou (1973: 55) remarks that this is not an ontology applied to the domain of cosmology, for both in Saint Paul and Saint Maximos, through the structure of the created world, one is led to the mystery of the God's good will. Due to the presence of the image of the creator and Logos in man, the latter's knowledge of the world through his *logikoi*, his own rationality, is already a feature of that communion which life embodies. This is a God of life who is both the One through whom all things were made and the Lord of the insights of our mind (Thunberg 1985 [1965]: 129).

The hierarchy Dionysios described concerned a cosmos defined by a circumscribed place. This means that time in this cosmos is only circumscribed movement (Balthasar 1947: 91). Maximos replaces the emanations of Dionysios by a natural form of being "conform to the whole" (the original meaning of the Greek word "catholic", *κατὰ ὅλον*), i.e. the Logos. Maximos envisages the attributes of material existence with an "Aristotelian optimism" (Balthasar 1947: 17). Its hierarchy is preserved in a "two-dimensional" relation that is both simpler, yet more encompassing, not a great chain of being, but a cosmic liturgy where the image of God in man makes of him the mediator between earth and heaven. Maximos actually uses his vision of the divine dignity of the created world as an essential part of his argumentation against diastole and systole of the grace found in Dionysios. The path to the contemplation of

24. As Maximos paraphrases Ephesians Chapter 1 in his work *Ambigua* 7: (trans. by Riou 1977: 56) "Chaque être intelligible et rationnel, ange et homme, par le logos – même selon lequel il a été créé (logos qui est en Dieu et qui est en vue – *πρός* – de Dieu), est dit et est parcelle de Dieu à cause de son logos qui préexiste en Dieu... s'il se meut selon ce logos, il parviendra en Dieu, en qui préexiste son logos d'être comme principe et cause." (PG 90: 1080b-c.)

the God passes through “natural” contemplation (*θεωρία φυσική*) of the created world. If for Dionysios God’s transcendence is a distance mediated by what Chenu has jokingly called “all that bureaucracy of light”, Maximos sees God’s goodness everywhere at work in re-creating in the resemblance to the image in which he was created. Finally this is a reformulation of what Saint Paul wrote to the Romans (8: 28-29):

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestine to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

“By whom all things were made”: creation *ex nihilo*

Riou has called this vision of Maximos a “transcosmism”, neither the “economic”, soteriological “cosmism” of Origen nor the ontological “cosmism” of Dionysios. Maximos the Confessor revises Origen’s (c. 185-251) concept that all rational beings (*λογικοί*) were created equal and that themselves determine their place in the human hierarchy. This ranking, for Origen, was not one based however on “accomplishment”, rather on their respective de-, re-generation as human beings. Maximos’ vision, on the other hand, is based on God as a personal finality (*τέλος*), involving a vision (*θεωρία*) of movement towards Him. For Origen all ranking was based on the Greek dichotomy of mind above matter, a nostalgia of lost origins where the final end at best only reproduced the point of departure. In Maximos, the transfiguration of human nature in Christ produces an impatience to attain the future, as experienced in God. There is no development from pantheism here. Eschatology is produced by a vision of the future deriving from the divine council, i.e. providence, preparing the advent of paradise.

As Saint Paul puts it, “conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” Preserving the meaning of creation out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), for Maximos means grasping the finality of all creation. A person yearns to configure him or herself to the image in which it was created (see Riou 1977: 59, 67, 97). What is this “nothing” out of which God’s creation comes? Nothing is that which is incomprehensible! Juan Miguel Garrigues insists that for Maximos what is mysterious to the point of incomprehensibility, is the relation of man to God, the mediation by the *imago Dei* of the created to his Creator.

L'abîme hypostatique du Fils qui unit Dieu et l'homme est irréductible à toute hiérarchie des natures; il est l'ex nihilo de la création, le mystère de la philanthropie trinitaire dans lequel s'extériorise l'indicible amour des personnes : "Je les ai aimés comme tu m'as aimé." (John 17: 23, cited by Riou p.97, note 23.)

This understanding of nothingness as "nothing that is comprehensible to man"²⁵ is already found in Saint Gregory of Nyssa who identifies it as the "mystery of God's will: '... to gather in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him'" (Ephesians 1: 9-10). For Saint Gregory of Nyssa (Riou: 97 note 23, following Wolfson 1970), the mystery of God's will is the only aspect of the incomprehensibility of God which really concerns mankind (Ep. 1: 9.)

Il transforme donc par là un thème métaphysique – "le non-être" – pour signifier le cœur même du mystère trinitaire: l'ex nihilo, le néant, c'est l'abîme de l'unité hypostatique du Christ pour l'économie de son incarnation pré-con nue dans la gratuité du conseil trinitaire. En effet, Dieu ne peut être dit néant dans son essence, mais en tant qu'il intervient comme "contingence" dans la non-nécessité absolue de son libre arbitre créateur.

Above we have sketched out in what way for Maximos the recapitulation of Christ's two modes of being in one person is both the foundation of the economy of salvation and the eschatological movement of the *logoi* towards Christ. But what is hidden in Christ is also hidden in the Holy Spirit. What in Maximos is called the *kenosis*, or self-emptying of the Holy Spirit, parallels the *kenosis* of Christ when the Word of God becomes incarnate. Filiation, being the son of God, lost by the first Adam, is rediscovered when the second and final (δεύτερος and ἔσχατος) Adam, Jesus, becomes incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary. In the *Ambigua* (42) Maximos explains this work of the Spirit.

À l'origine l'homme est venu à l'être (γενεῆσθαι) à l'image de Dieu ; et sur ce, il est né à l'Esprit (γεννηθῆναι) selon le libre choix et reçu en outre de parvenir par lui-même à la ressemblance par la garde du commandement divin, en sorte que le même homme soit imitation de Dieu par nature et fils de Dieu et Dieu par grâce par l'Esprit. Car il n'était pas possible autrement que l'homme créé puisse être fils de Dieu et Dieu selon la divinisation par grâce, s'il n'était d'abord né à l'Esprit selon le libre choix par la puissance qui est en lui, qui se meut d'elle-même et qui ne contraint pas.

25. Riou (1973: 108) "En elles-mêmes l'hypostase et la périchorèse ne *sont* rien. Elles manifestent dans la Trinité le non-dépassement des Hypostases par une essence antérieure – ne serait-ce que logiquement – qui les engloberait."

Maximos presents the paradox of an incarnate God signifying his divinity by metamorphosing his human body on Mount Thabor. This appears in the tenth *Ambigua* (10. 31; see trans. by Ponsoye 1994: 196). Christ “becomes” the very model of man’s salvation.

Le Seigneur est devenu type de lui-même selon son économie dans la chair: En effet, identique à nous par l’aspect (par un incommensurable amour des homes – φιλανθρωπία – il a accepté d’être créé, sans changement cependant), il est devenu type et symbole de lui-même. Il s’est montré en symbole lui-même à partir de lui-même: il a conduit par la main la création tout entière à travers lui-même manifesté en vue de lui-même totalement cache comme ne se montrant pas. Et comme indication de l’Infini qui ne se montre pas, ... par amour des hommes il procure aux hommes les oeuvres divines se manifestant à travers la chair.

These self-emptyings (κενώσις) of both Christ and the Spirit are parallel dimensions of the incarnation. It is at that “moment” when Christ’s hypostatic union becomes the internal principle of both the cosmic liturgy and man’s place in the world. In his *Mystagogy* (§1; Sotiropoulos 2001: 123-135), Maximos shows how the church is nothing other than a figure and an image of God to the extent that it is the unifying τρόπος of God in the world, inside the world, in man’s heart. The grace of being “of” Christ, to bear his name (christian),

... D’avoir une seule même relation, simple, non divisée en parties, indivisible, dans la foi, qui ne permet plus de reconnaître même l’existence des nombreuses et inexprimable différences qui existent en chacun, par le fait de la référence universelle de tous à elle et de leur rencontre en elle (= église). Par cette rencontre personne n’est absolument séparé de la communauté, pas plus qu’il n’appartient à soi-même, parce que tous sont en affinité les uns avec les autres, et rattachés les uns aux autres dans la seule et même grâce et puissance simple et indivisible de la foi. (Actes 4 : 32) “Car ils n’avaient tous, est-il dit, qu’un cœur et qu’une âme.”

We began this second section by saying that while venerating Dionysios the Areopagite, Maximos, writing approximately one century after him, reworks his cosmology in major ways. As Riou (1973: 139-140) points out,

Nous sommes donc loin d’une perspective dionysienne dans laquelle cette structure de rapport (ἀναφορά) de l’effet à la cause devenait la dépendance automatique de l’inférieur au supérieur, et la catégorie qui sous-tendait non seulement toute la cosmologie, mais aussi la sotériologie elle-même jusqu’à conduire au monoénergisme christologique ... Ainsi, seule la kénose divine dans le mystère de l’union hypostatique donne son principe interne à la liturgie cosmique et au jeu du monde. Elle fait ressusciter l’homme à son tropos filial de la glorieuse liberté des enfants de Dieu, dont toute la création attend, dans les gémissements, la révélation (Romains 8: 19), l’Apocalypse. Et cette résurrection ne saurait être celle de l’homme

en tant qu'individu; elle est celle de l'homme comme vocation hypostatique (personnelle et catholique), celle de l'Église qui enhypostasie toute la création.

What typifies Maximos' cosmology is that the categories of kind (γένος) that differentiate God's creation also unites it by their sharing in the quality of *createdness*. For Maximos only such a creation *ex nihilo* endows men with an indelible personhood, guaranteed by the activity and purposefulness (σκοπός) of its Creator (Thunberg 1995 [1965]: 63-64). Where Dionysios foregrounds the dynamic emanation of God's grace, Maximos resituates that creative systole in the very act of the embodiment (ἐνσωμάτωση) of the Word of God.

Thus foundation of the unity of the cosmos is the Logos (the "Verb" of God) which has been kept "...free from the division founded on difference..." (Thunberg 1985: 83). When Maximos says (*Ambigua* 7; 1994: 127 ff.) that "... always and in all His words, God wills to effect the mystery of his embodiment...", he is putting centre stage a theandric vision of reality. First of all, this concerns mankind: "...the flesh of the Logos is also the perfect return and restoration of human nature to itself..." (*Ambigua* 10; 1994: 153 ff.). Still it also concerns the cosmos, seen as a *makranthropos*. In this Christian revelation of cosmology, God's task is to unify the world and this is done through the Logos as mediator. Man participates in Christ's incarnation, becoming this microcosm; indeed he was created for this task. A cosmic liturgy unifies through a new theandric energy the entire universe whose image is reflected in Christ as microcosm. By theandric, Maximos designates that "ineffable mode of mutual adhesion" between Christ's divine and human natures. (*Ambigua* 5; 1994: 117; Thunberg 1985: 72). The mystery of this identity "in mutual preservation" is defined by Maximos as identity in internal "invariability (ἀπαρλλαξίς)".

Conclusion

To make a résumé of the major turning point in *Christian understanding of the cosmos* where for the first time the role of the person took on the form later developed in the Middle Ages into a Christian personalism, three positions appear paramount:

- That the relation of the macrocosm to the microcosm found in Greek religions in late antiquity is gradually replaced by the reciprocity of Christ's divine and human natures. Instead of a series of correspondences between the earthly as the celestial, this new hierarchy between the visible and the invisible, the created and the uncreated, in Christianity has a

single mediation, that made possible by the incarnation of the pre-eternal *logos*. The only symbol (“a bringing together”) that bridged the finite and the infinite for this Christianity was Jesus of Nazareth.

– That the relation of man to God is not individualised (one creature seeking salvation from his Creator), but the type of Christ’s human and divine nature united in one person becomes the occasion for the restoration of the image in which man was created, renewing his stewarding of the *logoi* of all creation.

– That the Christian experience of this hierarchical threshold is located in the Eucharist where commensality permits a communion (*κοινωνία*, a society) of the creature with the creator. All the icons of this worship refer to historical acts in the life of Christ, yet the passion of Christ has occurred before this liturgy starts, its linear movement is one beginning with the Resurrection and ending in the second coming, that is to say the kingdom of God where all that Christ has assumed on earth is returned to paradise.

These conclusions can be qualified by the wider perspective of the development of Eastern Christianity. Any in-depth study of the appearance of individualism in Western Europe, and its much later appearance in seventeenth century Russia and the Balkans of the eighteenth century, would have to deal with the issues referred to below, but which are not addressed here:

– To what extent did the theology of Saint Maximos the Confessor remain the perspective of the Eastern Church or its monastic elite?²⁶ As a mystagogy of the liturgical practice of the entire Eastern Church it might have had greater influence had it not been gradually replaced by liturgical exegesis from bishops like Symeon of Thessalonika (died 1429; *Patrologica Graeca* vol. 155). The ascetical view of such mysteriological piety was almost anti-liturgical according to Alexander Schmemmann (1966: 155). In such authors we have the Dionysios of the Neo-Platonic speculative tradition reintroduced into an Eastern Christian understanding of liturgical life.

– Can the christo-centric personalism of Maximos be qualified as a social holism and, if so, what replaced it after the Ottoman conquest in the Byzantine Commonwealth? This was not as radical a change in the Greek-speaking areas of the Eastern Church as one imagines (Runciman 1968: 165-185). Since the eleventh century certain parts of Asia Minor

26. See Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, “Symbolism and Realism in Orthodox Worship” p. 3-17 in *Sourozh* (79, February 2000).

(the future Turkey), occupied by Muslims and the Latins (Genovese and Venitians) had been taking over Greek islands which they controlled even after the Turkish conquest of Constantinople on 29 May 1453. The Arab / Turkic system of *dhimmitude* did make of the churches bishops into ethnarchs. The clandestine Christian schools saved Christian theology among the disappearing the parishes, but a new social space was being created, mixing Greek and Turkish culture (Balivet 1994). To analyse its social morphology dominated by the Muslim notion of *dhimmitude* implies that the Christian recumbence has become, at least in sociological terms, only a partial whole. Before outright nationalism, the former Byzantine commonwealth might have shared common values, but the liberation of the different “ethnic” Orthodox lands in the Balkans later exacerbated ecclesiological problems in the nineteenth and twentieth centurys. Only a Neo-Patristic synthesis could begin to resolve these. Maximos much more than Dionysios is at the centre of any renewed commonwealth.

Appendix

MAXIMOS' LIFE AND WORKS	EVENTS AND PERSONALITIES
454 – Council of Chalcedon	Empereur Justinian (482-565)
C. 590-605 – Maximos studies philosophy and rhetoric in the Byzantine capital (Aristotle, Dionysios, Evagrius, Origen).	
610 – Maximos works as the personal “Secretary of State to Emperor Heraclios”; in 614 he leaves the court for the monastery of Philippicus at Chrysopolis, across the Bosphoros	
<i>Ambigua</i> II (commentary on Gregory of Nazianze)	
<i>Mystagogy</i>	
<i>Commentary on the “Our Father”</i>	
<i>The Ascetic Life, The Four Centuries on Charity</i> (prior to 632)	630 – Maximos enters monastery of Euchratas under its abbot Sophronios

<i>Questiones ad Thalassios</i>	634 – Synodal letter of Sophronios, Patriarch of Jérusalem
<i>Ambigua</i> I (before 638)	638 – Statement (<i>Ecthesis</i>) of Emperor Heraclius on the single will of Christ
	641 – Pyrrus, Patriarch of Constantinople
645 – Maximos debates the exiled Patriarch at Carthage	
646-649 – Maximos in Rome	Council of Latran convened to oppose Emperor Constans' and Patriarch Paul II's doctrine of the "single will" (monothelism)
	653 – Arrested, Maximos is returned to Byzance; 654 – Pope Matrin I arrested by the Emperor; Pyrrhus returns as patriarch
655 – First interrogation of Maximos	
667 – Second interrogation and martyrdom	
	680-681 – The Third Council of Constantinople confirms the Christology of Maximos

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