

6.0 Jesus Christ

1. Before Creation

– in the theologia, God the Son, Eternal Word, Second Person of the Trinity – the only ‘Begotten’ of the Father in the theologia as ‘God in Himself’ with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

2. At Creation

A. Creator of the immaterial angels before the physical creation

B. Creator of all that is material

C. Creator of Man and who’s image man bears

Regarding the Trinity: the Father ordains, the Son creates (and is the image man is created in), the Holy Spirit animates. (Where we again apply the formula of creation/movement: **Εκ, δια, εν**, (**from** the Father, **through** the Son, **in** the Holy Spirit).

3. In Scripture

A. As the hermeneutic of the Fathers

The Old Testament is interpreted and understood in the light of Christ. St. Athanasius the Great taught Christ as the singular hermeneutic of the Old Testament. Through their teaching we understand the bible to be literally the book of Jesus Christ.

4. In Humanity:

A. The *why* of the Incarnation

John 1, ‘*The Word became flesh.*’ **Why?** As St. Athanasius also taught and the Church has always affirmed: “God became man that man may become God.” From the Theological articles of Fr. Georges Florovsky *On the Incarnation and Redemption*. Using primarily St. Maximus the confessor. He notes regarding the “why” of the incarnation.

In the course of this age-long discussion (about Christ) a constant appeal has been made to the testimony of the Fathers. Strangely enough, the most important item has been overlooked in this anthology of quotations. Since the question of the motive of the Incarnation was never formally raised in the Patristic age, most of the texts used in the later discussions could not provide any direct guidance.¹⁵ St. Maximus the Confessor (580-662) seems to be the only Father who was directly concerned with the problem, although not in the same setting as the later theologians in the West.

He 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. The 60th *questio ad Thalassium*, is a commentary on I Peter, 1:19-20: "[Christ was] like a blameless and spotless lamb, who was foreordained from the foundation of the world." St. Maximus first briefly summarizes the true teaching about the Person of Christ, and then proceeds:

"This is the blessed end, on account of which everything was created. This is the Divine purpose, which was thought of before the beginning of Creation, and which we call an intended fulfillment. All creation exists on account of this fulfillment and yet the fulfillment itself exists because of nothing that was created. Since God had this end in full view, he produced the natures of things. This is truly the fulfillment of Providence and of planning. Through this there is a recapitulation to God of those created by Him. This is the mystery circumscribing all ages, the awesome plan of God, super-infinite and infinitely pre-existing the ages. The Messenger, who is in essence Himself the Word of God, became man on account of this fulfillment. And it may be said that it was He Himself Who restored the manifest innermost depths of the goodness handed down by the Father; and He revealed the fulfillment in Himself, by which creation has won the beginning of true existence. For on account of Christ, that is to say the mystery concerning Christ, all time and that which is in time have found the beginning and the end of their existence in Christ. For before time there was secretly purposed a union of the ages, of the determined and the Indeterminate, of the measurable and the Immeasurable, of the finite and Infinity, of the creation and the Creator, of motion and rest — a union which was made manifest in Christ during these last times." (M., P.G., XC, 621, A-B.)

One has to distinguish most carefully between the eternal being of the Logos, in the bosom of the Holy Trinity, and the 'economy' of His Incarnation. 'Prevision' is related precisely to the Incarnation: *"Therefore Christ was foreknown, not as He was according to His own nature, but as he later appeared incarnate for our sake in accordance with the final economy."* (M., P.G., XC, 624D).

The 'absolute predestination' of Christ is alluded to with full clarity. This conviction was in full agreement with the general tenor of the theological system of St. Maximus, and he returns to the problem on many occasions, both in his answers to Thalassium and in his *Ambigua*. For instance, in connection with Ephesians 1:9: ***"having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,"*** St. Maximus says: *"[By the Incarnation] he has shown us for what purpose we were made and the greatest good will*

be of God towards us before the ages." (M., P.G., 1097C). By his very constitution man anticipates in himself *"the great mystery of the Divine purpose,"* the ultimate consummation of all things in God.

The whole history of Divine Providence is for St. Maximus divided into two great periods: the first culminates in the Incarnation of the *Logos* and is the story of Divine condescension ("through the Incarnation"); the second is the story of human ascension into the glory of deification, an extension, as it were, of the Incarnation to the whole creation.

*"Therefore we may divide time into two parts according to its design, and we may distinguish both the ages pertaining to the mystery of the Incarnation of the Divine, and the ages concerning the deification of the human by grace... and to say it concisely: **both those ages which concern the descent of God to men, and those which have begun the ascent of men to God... Or, to say it even better, the beginning, the middle, and the end of all the ages, those which have gone by, those of the present time, and those which are yet to come, is our Lord Jesus Christ.**"* (M., P.G., XC, 320, B-C).

The ultimate consummation is linked in the vision of St. Maximus with the primordial creative will and purpose of God, and therefore his whole conception is strictly 'theocentric', and at the same time 'Christocentric'. In no sense, however, does this obscure the sad reality of sin, of the utter misery of sinful existence. **The great stress is always laid by St. Maximus on the conversion and cleansing of the human will, on the struggle with passions and with evil. But he views the tragedy of the Fall and the apostasy of the created in the wider perspective of the original plan of Creation.**

B. The *Who* of the Incarnation:

The greatest question the Church struggled to answer for hundreds of years (and was the reason for six of the seven Ecumenical councils) Christ Himself poses to the people he originally came to and to us: *"Who do men say that I am?"*¹

And in trying to more accurately answer that question many who were not spiritually up for the task fell into one error – one heresy after another. The councils are nothing more than the refutation of one Christological heresy after another. For believers it was enough to know that He is one of the Trinity that became man and lived among us and died for our sins so that we could fulfil our high calling as man. As St. Athanasius said in the fourth century regarding the divine and human Christ, *"He did not seem to alter His transcendent status in any way, for in taking flesh He does not become different, but remains the same."*²

¹ Mark 8:27

² J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pg.284

But attempts for those not content with the mystery of *God taking flesh* led to one conflict after another in the Church. By it also forced the Fathers to answer, as much as it can be answered Who He is.

a. The Gnostics

As early as the NT we see the Apostle John warning us saying in 2 John 1:7, *For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.* Being Platonists they simply could not accept that the perfect, sublime and awesome creator would inhabit coarse, base flesh.

b. Arians

'There was a time when he was not' was their maxim. They could accept that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God, but they could not accept that the Word of God was co-co-eternal, (and therefore co-equal) with the Father. St. Athanasius of Alexandria was the Father that principally struggled against this devastating heresy but it was a heresy of the Trinity, whereas those that would follow would focus exclusively on Christ.

c. Apollinarians

Taught that Christ lacked a human soul or mind (nous) – being instead divine. As Kelly notes:

*"The Word was the sole life of the God-man, infusing vital energy and movement into Him even at the purely physical and biological levels. If it is objected that this makes Him different from ordinary men, Apollinarius had no hesitation in agreeing."*³

He used the Scripture references such as *"found in appearance as a man"*⁴ to support his claims. Apollinarianism could not accept was Christ being, not just in the form of man, but true man – body *and* soul (including the nous). Apollinarianism was called *"the first great Christological heresy"* and would be fought by the Fathers St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Gregory of Nyssa as they formulated the two natures in one hypostasis, which resulted in it being anathematized at the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 381. There it was proclaimed: *"the heresy of Apollinarianism: the oiconomia of the flesh of Christ is neither soulless or mindless nor imperfect...and the divine Logos was perfect before the ages and became perfect man in the last*

³ *ibid.* pg 292

⁴ Philippians 2:8

days for our salvation."⁵

Apollinarianism is in the deepest sense a false Anthropology...is the negation of human reason, the fear of thought."⁶ This forces the question: what then makes man, man? The Fathers were consistent in this answer – man is corporeal body, and incorporeal soul. This is why it has often been said Christology and Anthropology are really two sides of the same coin – you cannot speak of the "**Communicatio Idiomatum**,"⁷ without understanding either the impassibility of God or the body/soul anthropology of man. As such this body/soul dichotomy of man will be the main analogy St. Cyril will ultimately use to explain his Christology.

It is important at this point to review a bit from our study of God and man and the importance of these terms impassibility and passibility. We have to remember the term God had been understood since the earliest Biblical times to mean the personal source of all life that is totally "other" from his creation. As we noted in class, we are inseparably, immeasurably distant from Him – not by space but by nature. The term they use (and that we still use today) in the Christological struggle of this era to define God's complete untouchable, unknowable otherness is "**impassible**."⁸ God's ousia – essence/nature is utterly inaccessible to anything and anyone not of His nature – in other words – anything created.

This being understood by all, the very concept of mixing the impassible creator God with **passible** created man, "Communicatio Idiomatum," stretches our logical capacity past the breaking point – and we enter mystery. Unfortunately, it is a mystery that, while not explainable in every aspect of "how" must nonetheless be very clearly understood in its "what" and "why." Much as the Cappadocians and Athanasius had to explain God as one nature and yet three persons, it will be for St. Cyril to clarify the Communicatio Idiomatum of Christ. And it will be for the Fathers of Chalcedon and the three Ecumenical Councils that will follow Ephesus (for the next 250 years) **to keep this seal of knowledge that protects the Eucharist and leads to deification from being broken.**

Because we have to remember, whatever we say about the substance of Christ, is true of the Eucharist as His mystical body and blood. This is not lofty theology. The reason the average believer was deeply engaged in this is because they experience of Christ was most viscerally contained in their receiving him into themselves in the Eucharist. This was super relevant.

⁵ *ibid* pg. 142

⁶ Florovsky, G. *Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century*, pg 123

⁷ "Exchange of Properties" also referred to as "Communion of Idioms."

⁸ επαθεν