



St Maximus the Confessor



You are a guide of Orthodoxy, a teacher of piety and modesty, a luminary of the world, the God-inspired pride of monastics. O wise Maximus, you have enlightened everyone by your teachings. You are the harp of the Spirit. Intercede to Christ our God for the salvation of our souls.

Apolytikion for Feast of St Maximus (January 21)

Who was St Maximus?



- born 580, Constantinople
- died 13 August 662, Lazica
- the greatest of Byzantine theologians:
 - “Maximus the Confessor stands out as the most productive and significant theological figure in either eastern or western Christendom during the seventh century.”
(Neil & Allen)
 - Maximus “in many respects, may be regarded as the real Father of Byzantine theology.” (Meyendorff)
- a bridging figure between the churches of East and West
- title of “Confessor”

Background to Maximus' life and work



- Transitional period between early and medieval Christianity
- Age of Justinian: emperor 527–565
 - Sought to restore the Roman Empire to its former glory
 - *Building program*: Hagia Sophia
 - War with Persia: 50 years' truce
 - Church – State relations:
battle with Monophysitism





Justinian I:
mosaic in the Church of
San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy



Byzantine Empire
at the death of Justinian: 565 AD



Byzantine Empire 668 AD

Monophysites



- Christ has only **one nature** (*physis*, φύσις)
 - a divine nature
- Christ's humanity is engulfed by his divine nature
- rejected the Council of Chalcedon

Council of Chalcedon (451)



- Fourth Ecumenical Council
- rejected the Monophysite view of Christ
- *Definition of Chalcedon:*

Christ is to be “recognised in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation [εν δύο φύσεσιν, ασυγχύτως, ατρέπτως, αδιαιρέτως, αχωρίστως]; the distinction in natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence [υπόστασις], not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ.”

Origenists



Origen (c. 185 – c. 254)

- the most important theologian and biblical scholar of the early church
- controversial figure, charged with many heresies
- *On First Principles*: a systematic statement of Christian doctrine on an ambitious scale

Origenists: e.g. Evagrius Ponticus, Leontius of Byzantium

- the pre-existence of souls as pure intellectual beings that assumed flesh and became sinful
- *apokatastasis*: the reconstitution of fleshly beings in angelic shape and unified with God
- asceticism as the main path to salvation

Cyrrillian Chalcedonians



Cyril of Alexandria (378 - 444)

- patriarch of Alexandria
- μία φύσις του Θεού Λόγου σεσαρκωμένη
 - “one nature [or hypostasis?] of the Divine Word incarnate”
- the Logos and the flesh in Christ are a *hypostatic unity*

Cyrrillian Chalcedonians

- were the majority at the Council of Chalcedon
- dominated Byzantine theology in the 6th century and won the support of Justinian
- no contradiction between Cyril and Chalcedon

Maximus' early years



- Was born of noble and pious parents in Constantinople.
- Received a good education.
- Syriac biography gives a different account of Maximus' early years.
- In his early 30s, joined the imperial service of emperor Heraclius.

Emperor Heraclius



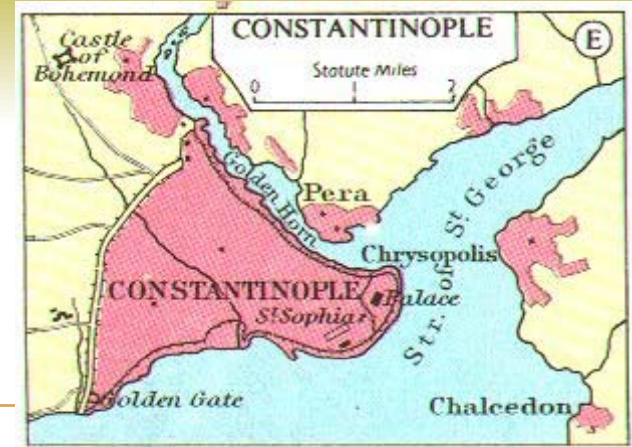
- Eastern Roman emperor: 610–641
- Empire: external threats, internal tensions
- successful campaign against the Persians:
 - 627: returned to Constantinople in triumph, and was hailed as a Moses, an Alexander, a Scipio
 - Byzantines reclaimed all the territory they had lost since 613, including the cities of Caesarea, Antioch, Damascus, Jerusalem, and much of Egypt
- 630: personally restored the Cross to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem
- replaced Latin with Greek as the official language
- married his niece (Martina): caused offence

Maximus' imperial service



- worked as *protasecretis* (πρωτασηκρήτις)
- head of the college of *asekretis*
- Chief Secretary
- enormous influence
- role: to supervise imperial notaries and manage court archives
- about 613-14, he withdraws to a monastery

Monastic life



- became a monk at a monastery near Chrysolis in Bithynia
 - *Chrysolis*: modern Scutari, just over the Bosphorus from the capital.
- Motivation: love for the life of quiet prayer and solitude
- Later he acquires a disciple, Anastasius, who was to be his constant companion for 37 years.
- 6 or 7 years later, leaves the monastery at Chrysolis and goes to the monastery of St George at Cyzicus.
 - His earliest writings date to this Cyzicus period.

Flight to North Africa



- crisis of 626: Persian invasion, also Avars and Slavs converging on Constantinople
- flees to Carthage, north Africa
- stopovers on his way to Africa: Cyprus, Crete
- arrives in Carthage (by 630)
- reputation grows, writes major works
- relationship with **Sophronius**
(future Patriarch of Jerusalem)



Monothelitism



- from **μόνος** and **θέλημα**
- Christ has only one will
- emperor Heraclius saw Monothelitism as a compromise between Chalcedonians and Monophysites

Developed from *Monoenergism*:

- from **μόνος** and **ενέργεια**
- Christ has one energy or activity attributed to his individual hypostasis

Question: Do Monoenergism and Monothelitism entail Monophysitism?

Plan of Reunion



- devised by Heraclius (emperor) and Sergius (Patriarch of Constantinople)
- aim was to unite Christian groups of the East: esp. the Chalcedonians and the Monophysites
- 630s: various reunions achieved, most famous case being Egypt
 - **Cyrus** (Κύριος, Patriarch of Alexandria, 631-42)
 - Cyrus “Pact of Union” (633): brought many non-Chalcedonians of Alexandria back into union with the church of Constantinople

The “Psephos” and the “Ekthesis”



The “Psephos” (634)

- the judgment (*psephos*) of Sergius about the Pact of Union devised by Cyrus
- forbade mention either of one or two operations of Christ
- aim was to avoid controversy

The “Ekthesis” (638)

- issued by Heraclius
- in substance the same as the Psephos, but this time with the emperor’s signature
- led to intense controversy
- a couple of months later, Sergius died (December 638)
- chief defender of the *Ekthesis* became Pyrrhus (new patriarch of Constantinople)

Great debate of 645



- Maximus engages in debate with Pyrrhus
 - Pyrrhus: no longer patriarch of Constantinople, now abbot of the monastery of Chrysopolis
- this is Maximus' first public defence of the dyothelite (or "two will") position
- held at Carthage
- *result*: Pyrrhus accepts orthodoxy, and is persuaded to declare his abandonment of Monothelite doctrine at the papal court

The “Typos” of Constans



- Constans II: emperor 641-68
- 648: issued an edict (“Typos”) requiring adherence to Orthodoxy and forbidding all discussion of the question over Monothelitism
- Endorsed also by patriarch Paul of Constantinople
- The decree was posted up in the exo-narthex of Hagia Sophia for public view.

Rome's reaction



Pope Martin



Lateran Synod (649)

- convened by Pope Martin
 - Maximus present, together with 105 bishops (Maximus was in Rome since 646)
 - denounced Typos of Constans
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- Maximus also rejected Typos:
 - The truth should never be silenced.
 - A union achieved on the basis of such a strategy can only be a false union.
 - Constans considered rejection of the Typos as treason
 - 653: Pope Martin and Maximus arrested and taken to Constantinople

Maximus' first trial (655)



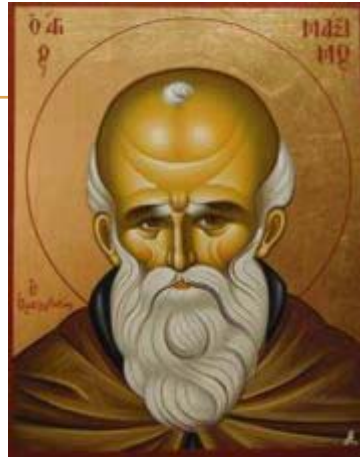
- “show trials”
- Maximus was 75 years old.
- *Charges made against him:*
 - treason against the emperor
 - violation of (civil and ecclesiastical) law
 - theological accusations
- Exiled to Bizya in Thrace.
- Resistance to Monothelitism was now virtually reduced to one man – the monk Maximus.

Maximus in exile



- continued his anti-monothelite activities in Bizya
- *Dispute at Bizya* (August 656): held a dispute with Theodosius, bishop of Caesarea Bithynia, on the subject of the number of wills and energies in Christ.
- *Outcome*: Maximus' wins over Theodosius, and then suggests that the bishop persuade the emperor and the patriarch of Constantinople to renounce their heretical views.
- But Theodosius was to change his position a month or so later.

Maximus' second trial (656)



- Interrogated by imperial emissaries.
- Threatened Maximus with anathema and death if he failed to rejoin communion with the church of Constantinople.
- Maximus refused, and so he was exiled to Perberis, in Thrace.
- Spent 6 years there.

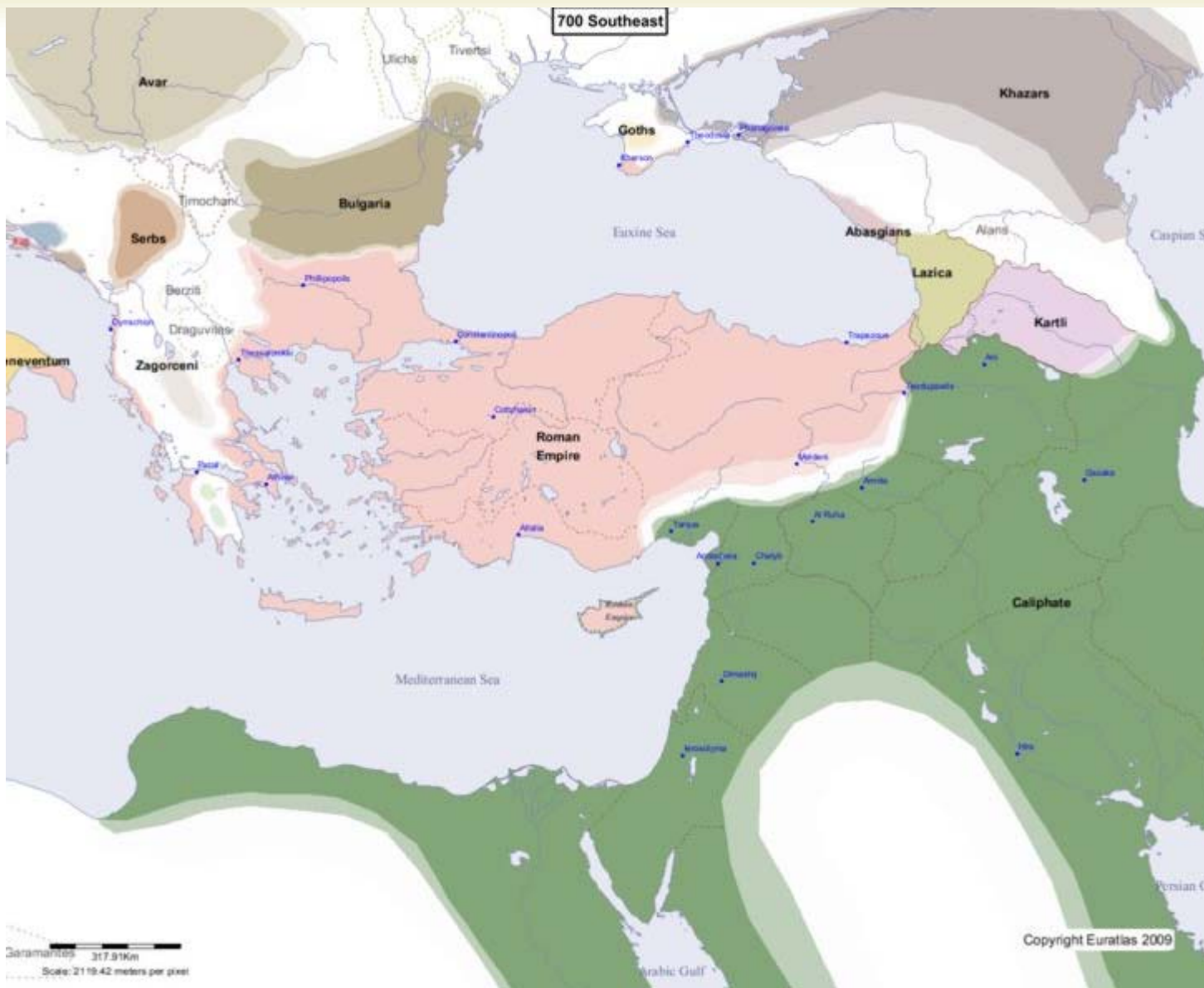


St Maximus
surrounded by his
persecutors

Maximus' third trial (662)



- Trial held in Constantinople.
- Was asked to endorse the *Typos*, but Maximus refused.
- Maximus was stripped of his status as a monk, beaten savagely, and thrown into prison.
- On the next day, his tongue and right hand were amputated.
 - The same was done to Anastasius the Disciple.
 - They were then taken about the city, exposed to the scorn of the populace.
- Then shipped off to exile in Lazica.



Map of Europe: 700 AD

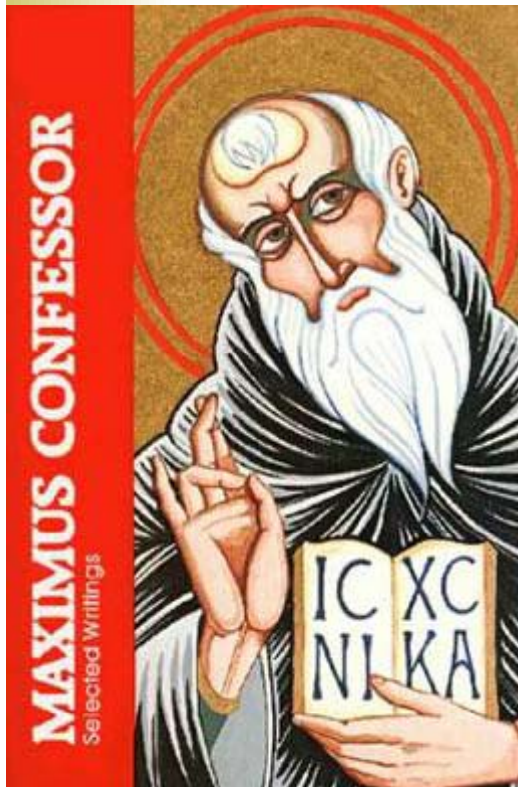


Death of Maximus



- 13 August 662: died in the wilderness near the Black Sea.
- Over 80 years of age.
- Died abandoned, except for his two disciples.
- No protest from anyone.
 - “Friends are abundant – that is, in times of prosperity. In time of trial you can barely find one.” (CC IV.94)
- 6th Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (680-81): Maximus finally vindicated.

Maximus' writings



- *Centuries on Love*
 - arranged in groups of 100 – a century
- *Ambigua*
 - *Ambiguum* 7: “the single most significant anti-Origenist writing from Greek patristic literature” (Hans Urs von Balthasar)
- *Mystagogia*: a treatise on liturgical symbolism
- Biblical commentaries, letters

Deification



- the goal of life is deification (θέωσις)
- We are called to be “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), to become by grace what God is by nature.
- “For unto this He made us, that we might become partakers of the divine nature and sharers of His eternity, and that we appear like to Him according to the deification of grace, on account of which there exists and abides the system of created things, and the creation from nothing of non-existent things.” (Maximus, *Epistle 24*)
- parallelism between Incarnation and deification
- deification of all creation: “cosmic theology”

απάθεια - αγάπη



- απάθεια: passionlessness, impassibility
- struggle against the *passions*

“Passion is a movement of the soul contrary to nature either toward irrational love or senseless hate of something or on account of something material. For example, toward irrational love of food, or a woman, or wealth, or passing glory or any other material thing or on their account. Or else it can be toward a senseless hate of any of the preceding things we spoke of, or on account of any one.”
(CC II.16)
- Not all passions are bad or harmful.
- αγάπη: love – the true heart of Maximus’ theology
- But how to reconcile Maximus’ emphasis on *apatheia* and his emphasis on the cultivation of “the blessed passion of holy love”?

“For the mind of the one who is continually with God even his concupiscence abounds beyond measure into a divine desire and whose entire irascible element is transformed into divine love. For by an enduring participation in the divine illumination it has become altogether shining bright, and having bound its passible element to itself it, as I said, turned it around to a never-ending divine desire and an unceasing love, completely changing over from earthly things to divine.”

(CC II.48)

Select passages from the *Centuries on Love*



1. Love is a good disposition of the soul by which one prefers no creature to the knowledge of God. It is impossible to attain a lasting possession of this love if one has any attachment to earthly things.
2. Love springs from detachment, detachment from hope in God, hope from patient endurance and long-suffering; and these from all-embracing self-mastery; self-mastery from fear of God, and fear of God from faith in the Lord.
13. The one who loves God cannot help but love also every man as himself, even though he is displeased by the passions of those who are not yet purified. Thus when he sees their conversion and amendment, he rejoices with an unbounded and unspeakable joy.
17. Blessed is the man who has learnt to love all men equally.
18. Blessed is the man who is not attached to any corruptible or transitory thing.
19. Blessed is the mind which has gone beyond all things and takes unceasing delight in the divine beauty.
33. The mind is pure when it is removed from ignorance and illuminated by divine light.
34. The soul is pure when it has been freed from the passions and rejoices unceasingly in divine love.