

POPE MARTIN I AND MAXIMOS THE CONFESSOR IN THEIR STRUGGLE FOR ORTHODOXY AGAINST THE EMPIRE

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In 649 the Pope—Pope Martin I—called a synod of the Church to condemn the doctrines, known as monenergism and monotheletism, promulgated by the Emperor and Patriarch in Constantinople. He had been encouraged to do this by a number of Greek monks who had fled from the Eastern Provinces—Syria and Palestine—after they had succumbed to an Arab invasion and conquest, inspired by a new religion that came to be known as Islam. Prominent among these Greek monks was a certain Maximos, most likely, I think, a former high-ranking imperial civil servant, by then for a decade a prominent opponent of monotheletism, who in 645 had debated monotheletism in Carthage with one of its proponents, one Pyrrhos, one-time Œcumenical Patriarch (who was again to regain that position), who, worsted in the debate, had departed for Rome to seek absolution for his heresy from the Pope.

In calling an œcumenical synod Pope Martin was usurping an imperial prerogative; synods claiming universal scope for their decisions (and therefore any synod concerned with doctrinal matters) had traditionally been called by the emperor. The synod not only condemned monotheletism and monenergism, but defined the true doctrine of two wills and two activities in Christ, furthermore it condemned the *Typos*, an edict which forbade discussion of the number of wills or activities, issued by the Emperor Constans II in 647/8: in sanctioning this, Pope Martin, and his adviser, Maximos, were deemed guilty of treason, the penalty for which was death. Pope Martin was soon arrested—though not nearly soon enough, in the eyes of the imperial court, as the imperial writ did not run smoothly in Italy—taken to Constantinople, tried as a traitor to the Empire and condemned to death. The death penalty was commuted to exile in Chersonesos (present-day Crimea), where he expired, miserable and abandoned in 655. Imperial attention now turned to Maximos, who was arrested and brought to Constantinople, where he, too, was accused of sedition. This accusation could not be sustained, and so was changed to one of heresy. The trial ended with Maximos being sent into exile and separated from his companions, both called Anastasius, one a monk who had been with him from Maximos' early days as a monk, the other a papal ambassador—*apocrisiarius*—to the imperial court, who had thrown in his lot with Maximos on his arrival in the capital. Maximos' exile was, however, intended to break his

resistance and secure his assent to the imperial policy enshrined in the *Typos*: what the court authorities wanted was for Maximos publicly to change his mind and support the Emperor. To that end, a bishop, Theodosios of Caesarea in Bithynia, was sent to Bizya, Maximos' place of exile, to convince him. He failed and finally in 662 Maximos was brought back to Constantinople, together with his companions, the two Anastasii; they were condemned as heretics; the Anastasii were flogged (Maximos was by this time an old man of 82 and apparently spared). Maximos and Anastasius the apocrisarius had their tongues cut out, and their right hands cut off, the instruments by which they had propagated heresy; then all three were paraded round the city and sent into exile in Lazica, the Byzantine place of exile—St John Chrysostom had also been exiled there—where they soon died of their wounds and further ill-treatment, Maximos on 13 August 662.

That was intended as a brief account of the historical facts of what was regarded from the side of the Byzantine Emperor as the seditious activity and punishment of a pope and a monk. But as you can see, even stating the bare facts is not easy or simple. Many such events in the Byzantine Empire from this century and the next two or three must remain at this level of bare facts. In this case, however, we have more information. There is a dossier containing accounts of the trials of Maximos and some further documents, put together only a decade or so after Maximos' death, probably to make known in Rome the circumstances of his defence of the faith and his martyrdom.¹ There is a collection of similar material in relation to Pope Martin I, more occasional and much less revealing, put together in its Latin dress two centuries later by Anastasius the Librarian to provide support for the claims then being made by popes such as Nicolas I: claims to a universal authority over the Church invested in the pope of Rome himself.² Martin's spectacular defiance of imperial authority was a crucial part of this case. Nevertheless, whatever the reason, this sequence of events in the middle of the seventh century is far better documented than we might have expected.

I am afraid I must detain you further, before we get to the events themselves, for the violence, both physical and emotional, that we find in these accounts,

1 Edited with English translation by Pauline ALLEN and Bronwen NEIL, *Maximos the Confessor and his Companions*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford University Press, 2002); text taken from *Scripta Saeculi VII Vitam Maximi Confessoris Illustrantia, una cum Latina interpretatione Anastasii Bibliothecarii iuxta posita*, edd. Pauline ALLEN and Bronwen NEIL, Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca 39 (Turnhout: Brepols/Leuven: University Press, 1999).

2 Edited and translated by Bronwen NEIL in *Seventh-Century Popes and Martyrs: the Political Hagiography of Anastasius Bibliothecarius*, *Studia Antiqua Australiensia* 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).

will make little sense without a firm grip on the context, both theological and political.

I think, in this gathering, I can deal in a fairly summary way with the theological context. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 sought to find an enduring solution to the union of Christ: two perfect natures, human and divine, were united in one Person. Far from solving anything, it led to a schism in the Church, a schism that still lasts. Such schism weakened the Roman or Byzantine Empire; this weakness was exposed in the invasions of the Byzantine Empire in the seventh century—first by the Persians, and then by the Muslim Arabs: the latter invasion changed forever the political geography of the region from the Mediterranean to the borders of India. In response to the Persian invasion, attempts were made by theologians, encouraged by the Emperor, to heal the divisions caused by Chalcedon. First, there was the proposal that Chalcedon's definition of Christ one divine person, uniting in himself perfect divinity and perfect humanity, be accepted, with the rider that his activity, *ἐνέργεια*, is single: so there is one *θεανδρική ἐνέργεια*, one divine-human activity, in Christ. This doctrine, called monenergism, formed the basis for a striking ecumenical agreement between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians in Egypt in 633, masterminded by the Patriarch and Augustal Prefect Cyrus and expressed in a statement called the *Nine Chapters*. This was condemned by Sophronios, the newly-elected Patriarch of Jerusalem, who denounced monenergism, maybe a little unfairly, as no better than Apollinarianism. Patriarch Sergios reported the ecumenical triumph in Egypt to the Pope, who replied in warm terms, in which he spoke of 'one will', one *θέλημα*, in Christ. Thus emerged the doctrine of monotheletism, that maintained that in Christ there was one person, two natures, but only one will, and that divine: this doctrine was enshrined in the *Ekthesis*, promulgated in 638, with the authority of the Emperor Herakleios. There was strong opposition to the *Ekthesis*, at the centre of which was a revered monk, our Maximos; in 647/8 the then Emperor, Constans II, issued a decree, called the *Typos*, which forbade any discussion of one or two wills in Christ.

By this time, however, the political situation had deteriorated dramatically, for the Persian invasion of the early seventh century, which left both the Persian and the Byzantine Empire exhausted, was followed by invasion by Arab tribes from the south, united in their profession of Islam. Muḥammad, the prophet of Islam, had died in 632; during the next thirteen years, the Arabs conquered the Eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire—Syria, Palestine, and Egypt; the holy city of Jerusalem and the holy places being surrendered to the Caliph Umar by the patriarch Sophronios in 638—and the Persian Empire collapsed altogether before the Arabs. A new Islamic Empire was soon to emerge with its capital, first in Damascus, later in Baghdad. The Byzantines never recovered their Eastern provinces. By the 640s, the sense in the imperial court

of the urgency of attempts to heal the divisions caused by Chalcedon was at fever pitch; the attempts by Maximos and others to undermine the imperially-backed doctrine monotheletism were regarded not just as a theological matter, important as these were in Byzantium, but as a direct challenge to the political authority of the Emperor, to whom care for the unity of the Church and Empire had been confided by God.

It is in the light shed by all these considerations that we need to read the precious documents that survive about these events. The most important account of Pope Martin's suffering and death is called *Narrationes*, which include four letters from the pope himself.³ Martin had early declared himself against the imperial policy of what one might call Christological appeasement. Before he became pope, as a deacon he had been *apocrisiarius* in the Imperial City; he understood well the issues surrounding monotheletism, and left Constantinople when the *Typos* was issued. On election as pope, he did not seek the usual imperial ratification: an act that enraged the Emperor who refused to accept his legitimacy as pope. During his trial, he was treated as a deacon and former *apocrisiarius*. The narrative draws out parallels between the pope's suffering and the passion of Christ: he is presented as a martyr to the truth. The letters themselves expose the depths of despair and abandonment into which the pope fell. It was as a sick man, suffering from gout and dysentery, that he had been arrested in the Lateran Basilica in Rome. He complains of his ill-treatment, of the rare opportunities for having a bath, of the extortionate cost of food; most of all he complains about his abandonment by Rome which, under imperial pressure, went on to elect his successor while he was still alive (Pope Eugene was elected to succeed Martin in 654, more than a year before Martin's death), and failed to see that his physical needs in exile were met. His trial was conducted, as in the case of Maximos, by the *sacellarios*, the keeper of the imperial purse, a figure who had risen to prominence in the administrative reforms (about which we are poorly informed) that began in the seventh century.⁴ His tone was aggressive from the beginning: 'Tell us, you wretch: what wrong did the emperor do to you? Did he take anything from you? Did he oppress you by force?'.⁵ The way in which the first official, Olympius, sent to arrest Martin, had, seeing the support for Martin in Rome, thrown in his lot with the pope was brought against him. An attempt by the pope to turn from political to theological matters was cut short by the prefect Troilus, who shouted at him, 'Do not speak to us here about the faith: you are now being examined concerning the mutiny, since we are also Romans and

3 Text and translation in NEIL, *Popes and Martyrs*, 166–233.

4 For a lucid account of the obscure administrative changes in seventh-century Byzantium, see John HALDON, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge University Press, revised edition, 1997), 173–253.

5 *Narrationes* 15; NEIL, *Popes and Martyrs*, 192/3.

Christians, and orthodox ones at that'.⁶ The author of the *Narrationes* has little difficulty in portraying the pope's trial in the light of Christ's trial, at one point calling the hall of the sacellarius, the aula Caiphae, the 'hall of Caiaphas'.⁷ When the pope is condemned to death, he says that 'all who saw this man and knew that God witnessed in heaven what was happening drew back, troubled, with downcast faces and great sorrow' (cf. Luke 23:48). This reluctance was not matched by the executioners, who 'seizing him, ripped off his outer garment' and his priestly robes... 'wound iron chains around his holy neck and his whole body',⁸ and dragged him through the city, with a naked sword in front of him. Eventually at the request of the Œcumenical Patriarch, Paul, himself on his deathbed, the death penalty was commuted to exile in Chersonesos, where he died of the cold, starvation, and ill-treatment. The author of the *Narrationes* notes that he completed 'the journey of his martyrdom... keeping the good faith, on the sixteenth of September, the day on which the most precious and blessed memory of Euphemia—the most happy martyr and guardian of the correct faith—is celebrated': St Euphemia, whose relics had, according to legend, endorsed the Chalcedonian Definition.⁹

With Maximos we have more abundant evidence, including what appear to be transcripts of the trial in Constantinople in 655 (*Relatio motionis*) and the debate he had with Bishop Theodosios at Bizya seven years later. Both these accounts reveal Maximos, despite his age and the ill-treatment he had received since his arrest, fully in control, perfectly aware of the conventions of the court procedures to which he is being subjected (a decisive argument, in my view, for his having been a high-ranking civil servant under Herakleios).¹⁰ First of all, various attempts are made to charge him with treason. Maximos calmly asks for the evidence; usually there was none, but when an accuser said that everyone knew about an alleged letter of sedition against Herakleios, he remarks that, if everyone knew of it, why is there only one accuser? He also analyses the charges made, often drawing on his philosophical learning; accused of a seditious dream, he introduces the distinction between what is controlled by the will and what not (the dream clearly belonging to the latter category), elsewhere he introduces the Aristotelian/Stoic distinction between what is up

6 *Narrationes* 17; NEIL, *Popes and Martyrs*, 196/7.

7 *Narrationes* 19; NEIL, *Popes and Martyrs*, 200/1.

8 *Narrationes* 20; NEIL, *Popes and Martyrs*, 202/3.

9 *Narrationes* 28; NEIL, *Popes and Martyrs*, 218/19.

10 Although I would make no great claims for the Greek *vita* of St Maximos, I remain convinced of Maximos' Constantinopolitan origins and his early years in Emperor Herakleios' court, against the view that gives credit to the Syriac *vita*, depicting him as a Palestinian monk, now becoming canonical (see *The Oxford Handbook to Maximus the Confessor*, edd. Pauline ALLEN and Bronwen NEIL, Oxford University Press, 2015).

to us (ἐφ' ἡμῖν) and what it not. After a series of these exchanges, Troilus (the prefect whom we have already met at Martin's trial) complains that Maximos is playing with them, and doesn't realize where he is. Interestingly, one of the patricians present, Ephiphanius, supports Maximos, remarking, why shouldn't he play with us, if these accusations aren't true. The only point that is discussed at length is the claim that Maximos said that the emperor shouldn't be considered a priest; here Maximos defends himself at length, arguing that the emperor has no priestly liturgical functions, and pointing out that deceased emperors are prayed for among the 'laypeople who have fallen asleep in the faith' (τῶν ἐν πίστει κεκοιμημένων λαϊκῶν).¹¹

At this, Menas, a monk whose presence at the trial is unaccounted for, shouts out (there is a lot of shouting in both trials), 'By making these statements you have split the Church',¹² and the discussion moves to the question of communion. This is first raised in connexion with the dispute with Pyrrhos, which had taken place in Carthage in 645. Troilus and another ask Maximos how he brought Pyrrhos round to his teaching, to which Maximos retorts, 'I don't have a teaching of my own, but the common one of the Catholic Church'.¹³ He is then asked whether he is in communion with the throne of Constantinople. No, he says, because they have rejected the 'four holy synods' (Nicaea, Constantinople I, Ephesus, and Chalcedon) by accepting the *Nine Chapters*, the *Ekthesis*, and the *Typos*. For this they (the patriarchs involved) have been condemned the Lateran Synod in Rome. To this comes the retort: 'How can you say that? Is it the case that you're the only one who'll be saved, and everyone [else] lost?' Maximos replies that he passes judgment on no one; he simply prays that God will 'grant me not to pass judgment on anyone or to declare that I'm the only one to be saved', but that he must act in accordance with his conscience (κατὰ τὸ συνειδός).¹⁴

The debate continues, raising the possibility (likelihood, in the eyes of the court) that, sooner or later, the Romans 'will agree with the Byzantines [= the people of Constantinople]';¹⁵ Maximos shifts the discussion from the hypothetical to Christology. Then, the courtier Sergius, presenting himself as a friend and one-time disciple of Maximos, remarks that 'there's only one point on which you distress everyone, namely that you're causing many people to be separated from the communion of the Church here'.¹⁶ Maximos protests he has

11 *Relatio motionis* 4; ALLEN-NEIL, 58/9. The rest of the paragraph summarizes *Relatio motionis* 1-4; ALLEN-NEIL, 48/9-58/9.

12 *Relatio motionis* 4; ALLEN-NEIL, 58/9.

13 *Relatio motionis* 6; ALLEN-NEIL, 60/1.

14 *Relatio motionis* 6; ALLEN-NEIL, 60/1-62/3.

15 *Relatio motionis* 7; ALLEN-NEIL, 62/3.

16 *Relatio motionis* 9; ALLEN-NEIL, 64/5.

never forbidden anyone to communicate with the ‘Church of the Byzantines’ (i.e., the church of the imperial city).¹⁷ His example is brought against him, but Maximos points out, again, that his conscience is his alone (as an Englishman, I am reminded of the trial of St Thomas More, where the deposed Chancellor of England refused to accept that his rejection of Henry VIII’s Act of Supremacy was any kind of public judgment, but simply his own conscientious decision). Various attempts are made to get Maximos to agree that in anathematizing the *Typos*, he is anathematizing the emperor, but, at best, Maximos replies, all he is doing is anathematizing a document, and those who persuaded the emperor to endorse it. That provokes discussion, followed by silence. Then, the *sacellarios* asks, ‘Why do you love the Romans (Ρωμαίους) and hate the Greeks (Γραικούς)?’¹⁸ To which Maximos replied, with dignity, ‘We have a commandment not to hate anybody. I love the Romans because we share the same faith, whereas I love the Greeks because we share the same language’. The trial draws to a close: Maximos is exiled, alone without his companions, to Bizya.

The discussion at Bizya begins with Bishop Theodosios asking Maximos how he is: Πῶς ἔχεις, κύρι ἀββᾶ;¹⁹ As at the trial, Maximos’ reply takes the discussion from the mundane to the philosophical: ‘As God before all the ages preordained a way of life for me in his providence, so I am’. There follows an interesting, and characteristically Maximian, exposition of foreknowledge and preordination and the nature of virtue. Theodosios seizes the opportunity to suggest that Maximos’ suffering is a sign of guilty misdeeds for which he is being punished, a suggestion that Maximos deftly turns to a discussion of the endurance of the saints. The discussion then turns to the question of communion. All that is being asked, Theodosios argues, is that Maximos receive communion with the church of Constantinople. The problem is the *Typos*, as Maximos explains at length, repeating the arguments he used at the trial. The only point of importance raised is who has authority to ratify synods of the Church; Maximos points to many synods, ratified by the emperor, that promulgated heresy. Theodosios tries to justify the doctrine of one will in Christ by citing various Fathers; when Maximos calmly points out that they are Apollinarian forgeries, Theodosios becomes enraged (θυμῶ ζέσας).²⁰ There is much more of interest that we must pass over. Later on in the discussion, which lasted over several days, the patricians, Epiphanius and Troilos attend. Troilos tries to preempt discussion by asking directly if Maximos will obey the Emperor. What is he asking? Maximos responds. Troilos gives up. Then Epiphanius intervenes in the words of the emperor himself:

17 *Relatio motionis* 9; ALLEN–NEIL, 66/7.

18 *Relatio motionis* 11; ALLEN–NEIL, 70/1.

19 *Disputatio Bizyae* 3; ALLEN–NEIL, 76/7.

20 All this summarizes *Disputatio Bizyae* 3–7; ALLEN–NEIL, 78/9–104/5. I have passed over virtually all the detailed discussion.

Since all the West and those in the East who are causing subversion look to you, and they all stir up strife because of you refusing to be reconciled with us in the cause of faith, may God compel you to enter into communion with us on the terms of the *Typos* which was published by us, and we will go out of our own accord to the Chalke, and we will embrace you, and we will lay our hands on you, and with every mark of honour and glory we will lead you into the Great Church. And together we will stand where the emperors stand by custom, and together we will celebrate the synaxis, and together we will partake of the pure and life-giving mysteries of the life-giving body and blood of Christ, and we will proclaim you as our father; and there will be joy not only in our royal city which loves Christ, but also in the whole world...²¹

Maximos is moved to tears, but cannot accept communion at the expense of the Truth, invoking the Gospels, the life-giving Cross, the image of our God and Saviour, and of the most holy ever-virgin Mother who bore him. Very gently, Epiphanius asks if there is anything he could request from the emperor. Maximos repeats what he has said. At this, 'rage overpowered them all, ... they got up, and disabled him by repeatedly pulling and shoving and hustling him, saturating him from head to toe by their spitting'.²²

Perhaps Maximos' worst moment had already come—four years before—as he reveals in a letter written on the day after the feast of Mid-Pentecost in 658 (18 April) from Bizya to his disciple Anastasius in exile in Perberis. The day before, the patriarch in Constantinople had sent him a message, saying, 'What Church do you belong to? Constantinople? Rome? Antioch? Alexandria? Jerusalem? See, all of them are united, together with the provinces subject to them. If, therefore, you belong to the Catholic Church, be united, lest perhaps you devise a strange path by your way of life and you suffer what you don't expect.'²³ Maximos' reply is to ask how they confess the faith. The reply seems to refer to the compromise offered in Rome in the time of Pope Eugene, Martin's successor—a muddle which might be called tritheletism. The letter has an appendix, written maybe by Anastasius himself, praying that the 'seed of piety' may remain 'at least in older Rome, confirming the promise he made to the prince of apostles, which does not deceive us'.²⁴ Maximos could not accept communion with the Church on the basis of its abandoning the faith of the Œcumenical Synods; truth could not be deserted in the interests of the

21 *Disputatio Bizyae* 10; ALLEN-NEIL, 108/9.

22 *Disputatio Bizyae* 11; ALLEN-NEIL, 110/11.

23 Maximos, *Ep. ad Anastasium discipulum*; ALLEN-NEIL, 120/1.

24 Maximos, *Ep. ad Anastasium discipulum*; ALLEN-NEIL, 122/3. This appendix only survives in the Latin translation of Anastasius Bibliothecarius.

consolation of communion.²⁵ Not many have faced the conflict between truth and communion so starkly as did Maximos and Pope Martin.

What can we learn from all this? We have explored a clash between what was perceived as faithfulness to the Orthodox faith declared by the Œcumenical Councils and obedience to the Emperor, who was regarded as the only one capable of convening such a council. I think this exposes the ambivalence, at least, maybe even fragility, of the political and institutional structures embraced by the Church in the wake of the Emperor Constantine's conversion. These structures are not ultimate, and cannot make the claim to ultimate obedience that can only be made by the One who said, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life'. In the case of Maximos and Martin, we see that Christ's promise to the Church that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her is not a promise to the Church as an institution, but a promise that the Church will never be bereft of those, even if only one, ready to confess the truth that is Christ to the point of death. This is a disturbing truth, but the example of St Maximos and St Martin requires that we face it.

25 For a discussion of this letter, setting it in the broader context of St Maximos' ecclesiology, see my 'The Views of St Maximus the Confessor on the Institutional Church', in *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through the Resurrection*, ed. Bishop Maxim (VASILJEVIĆ) (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2013), 347–55.