

God and the Universe

Chapter One: The God who is found in the universe

Ps 144/145.3: 'Your greatness cannot be measured.'

Ps 118/119.64: 'The earth is full of Your steadfast love.'

1 Jn 4.8: 'God is love (and) love ... is ... not resentful.'

Introduction

People have long regarded gods as pervading and closely connected with the universe. If the universe was regarded as an entity rather than a myriad of competing elements, there would be a case for regarding all the gods behind those elements as compatible with each other and benevolent towards the universe. This compatibility could give rise to the conclusion that all these many gods of the earth were actually a single God.

Another type of god was a vengeful one who demanded physical penalties from humankind in return for the release of the benefits of the universe or relief from hardships. Such gods might be seen as responsible for hardships such as famine, harsh weather, earthquakes and volcanoes. This belief could lead humankind to a policy of appeasement.

If a god was associated with earthly phenomena, he could still be seen as a powerful. This tendency could occur whether that god was benevolent or vengeful. In both cases, unexplained natural phenomena tended to be attributed to these gods.

A. THE GOD OF THE PATRISTIC TRADITION

The discovery of God by Abraham and his descendants

Abraham presumably found a single God and this concept continued through Judaism and thence through Christianity and Islam. Abraham had a personal relationship with God. In that relationship, he was humble to God even to the extent of sacrificing his son Isaac. He thus acknowledged that the God he had found was infinitely greater than him. Belief in this single God has become so widespread in humankind that perhaps we should regard that belief as a feature of modern humankind and that the God of Abraham is the 'natural' God of the universe.

Also Abraham's descendants appeared individually to find the single God. These discoveries tended to be made in certain places on the earth. For example, it was at Luz which Jacob renamed Bethel that he became aware of a ladder between heaven and earth.¹ It was at Jabbok that Jacob wrestled with what he thought was a man but realised was actually God.² It was at Horeb/Sinai, the mountain of God, that Moses encountered God in the burning bush but he was afraid and hid his face.³ Elijah found God in the silence at the same place, but the presence of God was so powerful, he wrapped his face in his mantle.⁴ All these

¹ Gen 28.16-17.

² Gen 32.30-32. Cf. Ps 147/147B.19: 'God makes His word known to Jacob.'

³ Ex 3.2-6.

⁴ 1 Kings 19.11-13

encounters were with a personal God albeit an awesome one. These encounters confirmed that the God they had found was infinitely greater than them.

In Isaiah 6, Isaiah's vision of God was also an awesome one but 'the whole earth was full of His glory (Heb. *kavod*).'⁵ The first type of encounter was with a deeply personal God beyond our usual senses while the second type indicated a more outgoing God, a God of all things.

We need to ascertain the attributes of God's glory. Both Jacob and Moses agreed that God has steadfast love⁵ and the psalms confirm the concept of the benevolent God.⁶ God is therefore the God of Love.⁷ It became established that God has 'no delight in sacrifice'⁸ but would rather receive obedience⁹ and righteousness.¹⁰ Furthermore, God desires that His love be returned as Hosea stated that God desires 'steadfast love (*hesed*) (but) not sacrifice.'¹¹ Deuteronomy¹² also confirmed that God demands that humankind returns His love. An exchange of love implies a personal God as implied by the experiences of Jacob, Moses and Elijah.

Nevertheless, the Jews at the time of Abraham did not appear to realise that the true God was the God of all things and not merely the god of the Jews. The Jews therefore expected their 'God' to bring vengeance on other peoples from time to time as illustrated by the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. It therefore appears that although the Jewish God loved the Jews, that love was not the love of all things at all times.

The discovery of God by the fathers of the Church

The fathers made clear that God can be found by contemplation (*theoria*). St Maximus stated that as God lies beyond the usual senses and therefore is beyond words so we have to find 'a hidden spirit beneath the letter ... which is the true meaning of contemplation.'¹³ This we are able to do as St Pseudo-Dionysius stated that 'the human mind has a capacity ... which transcends the nature of the mind (so) it is joined to things beyond itself.'¹⁴ In other words, human persons have a spiritual sixth sense.

The fathers also acknowledged the discovery of God in the legends of the Old Testament. St Maximus implied that, after 'Abraham ... free from any material bond ... enters the divine and blessed land of knowledge ... by (a) contemplation (that) friendship with and likeness to God are securely established'¹⁵ Abraham found God by contemplation. St Maximus described such contemplation as when the mind 'withdraws from every thought'¹⁶ and 'passes outside the flesh and the world and (so) praying is completely without matter and form.'¹⁷ St Isaac of Nineveh described such an 'immaterial contemplation' as 'nakedness of

⁵ Gen 32.10 and Ex 15.13.

⁶ Ps 35/36.8: 'The children of the earth find refuge in the shelter of Your wings.'

⁷ 1 Sam 15.22 and Prov 21.3.

⁸ Ps 39/40.6 and Ps 50/51.16.

⁹ 1 Sam 15.22.

¹⁰ Prov 21.3.

¹¹ Hosea 6.6.

¹² Deut 6.4-6 (Shema).

¹³ St Maximus, *Myst*, CWS-MC, pp. 195-96.

¹⁴ St Pseudo-Dionysius, *Div Nom* 7.1; PG 3, col. 865C; trans. CWS-PD, p. 106.

¹⁵ St Maximus, *Amb* 10.50; PG 91, col. 1145CD; trans. NC-AMB1, p. 229.

¹⁶ St Maximus, *Lib Asc* 24; PG 90, col. 929C; trans. ACW-MC, p. 116.

¹⁷ St Maximus, *Char* 2.61; PG 90; trans. CWS-MC, p. 55.

the mind.¹⁸ St Maximus described the consequences of such contemplation as when the ‘the grace of prayer joins the mind to God.’¹⁹ and ‘the mind (is then) taken hold of by the divine’,²⁰ Therefore, with a mind uncluttered by earthly things, the contemplative discovers knowledge of God. The God that Saints Maximus and Isaac described appears to be the same as that of Jacob, Moses and Elijah which is personal and immaterial. Accordingly, St Maximus recalls the encounter of Moses with God stating that Moses ‘entered the *darkness*’ and then describing the darkness as ‘formless’ and an ‘immaterial place of knowledge’²¹ and that the contemplative ‘understands things invisible to mortal nature.’²² Earlier than St Maximus, St Gregory Nazianzus similarly noted that ‘Moses ... only (saw) with difficulty the back parts of God.’²³ He also stated that

By an undivided and absolute abandonment of yourself and everything, shedding all and freed from all, you will be lifted to the ray of the divine shadow which is above everything that is (and those who do) leave behind them every divine light, every voice, every word from heaven, and ... plunge into the *darkness* where ... there dwells the One who is beyond all things, (the darkness being) the truly mysterious *darkness of unknowing*.²⁴

St Pseudo-Dionysius thus confirmed that the contemplative mind abandons all material things as indicated by St Maximus. St Pseudo-Dionysius states that a human person ‘can have direct knowledge of God who has made the shadows His hiding place’²⁵ and that ‘as we plunge into that *darkness* which is beyond intellect, we shall be actually speechless (and) at one with Him who is indescribable.’²⁶ Let us term the God found by this type of contemplation as the God of Darkness (*gnophos*, γνόφος).

Not all contemplation discovers the God of Darkness as it can also discover a God described in terms of light. St Pseudo-Dionysius states that a contemplation can become ‘close to (God) in the knowledge of the divine lights working out of Him.’²⁷ Similarly, St Maximus stated that ‘when the mind ... contemplates things spiritually, it is variously conformed to each object contemplated. When it comes to be in God, it becomes wholly without form and pattern, for in contemplating the One who is simple, it becomes simple and entirely patterned in *light*.’²⁸ Such a light is ‘truly mysterious’²⁹ and so is not the same as physical light. As such a light is what is ‘working out of him,’ we conclude that such a light is equivalent to the glory experienced by Isaiah. St Maximus tended to couple light and love. For example, he

¹⁸ St Isaac of Nineveh, *Tract Myst* 40.303; trans. Wensinck, p. 202.

¹⁹ St Maximus, *Lib Asc* 24; PG 90, col. 929C; trans. ACW-MC, p. 116.

²⁰ St Maximus, *Char* 2.6; PG 90; trans. CWS-MC, p. 47.

²¹ St Maximus, *Gnost* 1.84; PG 90; trans. CWS-MC, p. 144.

²² St Maximus, *Gnost* 1.84-85; PG 90; trans. CWS-MC, p. 144. Ex 33.7.

²³ St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orat* 37 on Mt 19; PG 36; trans. NPNF2, Vol 7, p. 339.

²⁴ St Pseudo-Dionysius, *Myst Theol* 1.1/1.3/1.3; PG 3, cols. 1000A/1000C/1001A; trans. CWS-PD, pp. 135/136/137.

²⁵ St Pseudo-Dionysius, *Myst Theol* 1.2; PG 3, col. 1000A; trans. CWS-PD, p. 136. Also, Ps 96/97. 1-2: ‘The Lord is ... surrounded by clouds and darkness.’

²⁶ St Pseudo-Dionysius, *Myst Theol* 3; PG 3, col. 1033BC; trans. CWS-PD, p. 139

²⁷ St Pseudo-Dionysius, *Cel Hier* 7; PG 3, col. 208C; trans. CWS-PD, p. 163.

²⁸ St Maximus, *Char* 3.97; PG 90; trans. CWS-MC, p. 74-75.

²⁹ St Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ep* 9; PG 3 or 4, col. 1105C; trans. CWS-PD, p. 283. Cf. Rom 1.20, Jn 16.13.

stated that ‘the mind is taken hold of by the divine and infinite *light* (*phos*, φῶς) and is conscious neither of itself nor of any other being whatever except of Him who through *love* brings about such *brightness*.’³⁰

Scripture states that God relates through love. For example, ‘God is love,’³¹ cited by St Maximus. Similarly, St Gregory of Nyssa stated that love is ‘the very life of the divine nature’³² Love is of no importance unless it is in relationship between persons so that love and relationship are essentially coupled. St Maximus confirms that God relates to parts of the universe by stating that God’s ‘infinite power ... gathers ... all things to Himself’ by ‘bringing them together .. in a *relationship* ... with Himself.’³³ This passage implies that God is personally involved with parts of the universe. Relationships are important because it leads to movement as we shall discuss in future chapters. St Maximus stated that ‘singular force of the *relationship* to (God) leads ... all things ... to a common identity and *movement* and existence.’³⁴ God must therefore love and relate the universe as a whole as well as its parts.

Reconciliation of the God of Otherness and the God of Love

We need to ascertain if and how the above aspects of God are compatible. The God of Darkness appears to be more ‘Other’ than the universe than the God of Love. However, if God was *only* ‘Other’ than the universe, God would be entirely unknowable to humankind and He would not have been found by Jacob, Moses and Elijah. He would not therefore have anything to do with the world of time and the light and love would be merely an earthly phenomenon.

The critical problem is between otherness and relationship. If we emphasized the otherness, God would not relate to the universe and He would be irrelevant and would not exist from a temporal view. If we emphasize relationship, there would be no divine otherness, and therefore no God from that view but ‘God’ could be an earthly phenomenon. To reconcile the God of Otherness and a God of Love is therefore a dialectic.

Let us first consider the patristic position regarding the God of Otherness. St Maximus stated that ‘God is ... beyond all things’³⁵ so that God is not therefore a phenomenon of the material universe but ‘other’ than it. He emphasized the distinction between God and the universe by using the terms ‘chasm’ (*chasma*, χάσμα) and ‘ocean’ (*pelagos*, πελαγος).³⁶ He stated that ‘there is a great chasm which ... separates ... the whole of nature that has come into being ... from that nature which is uncreated and at rest.’³⁷ As living beings are part of the universe, there must also be a ‘difference between God and creatures.’³⁸ There is therefore a fundamental difference (*diaphora*, διαφορά)³⁹ or distinction (*diakrisis*, διάκρισις) between God and the universe.

In the context of the difference between God and the universe, St Gregory Nazianzus

³⁰ St Maximus, *Char* 2.6; PG 90; trans. CWS-MC, p. 47.

³¹ St Maximus, *Char* 1.38 and 4.100; PG 90; trans. CWS-MC, pp. 39 and 87 quoting 1 Jn 4.8. Ps 85/86.5 similar. Also, *Ep* 2; PG 91; trans. LOU-MC, p. 91.

³² St Gregory Nyssa, *Hom* 53.2; trans. LOS-MT, p. 213.

³³ St Maximus, *Myst* 1; PG 91; trans. CWS-MC, p. 186, 188.

³⁴ St Maximus, *Myst* 1; PG 91; trans. CWS-MC, p. 186.

³⁵ St Maximus, *Amb* 9.2; PG 91, col. 1105C; trans. NC-AMB1, p. 149.

³⁶ St Maximus, *Char* 4.1; PG 90; trans. CWS-MC, p. 75.

³⁷ St Maximus, *Amb* 71.6; PG 91, col. 1413A; trans. NC-AMB2, p. 323.

³⁸ St Maximus, *Myst*, Intro; PG 91; trans. CWS-MC, p. 185.

³⁹ Cf. St Maximus, *Amb* 15.11; PG 91, col. 1221A; trans. NC-AMB1, p. 375.

stated that God is ‘limitless and unbounded’⁴⁰ and St Maximus stated that God is ‘absolutely undetermined.’⁴¹ We conclude that *although the universe is restricted by its attributes but God was unrestricted,*⁴² *God would not necessarily be completely divorced from such attributes including time and a distinction between God and the universe would remain.* Regarding the acts of God, God could not act directly in a particular time and He would relate to the universe in no particular time. In that case, He would appear to be always existing.

Under this principle, St Maximus stated that, in contrast, ‘God is completely without change’⁴³ and ‘the Divine (is) completely unmoved ... by essence (*ousia*, οὐσία) and nature (*physis*, φύσις)’⁴⁴ in accordance with scripture.⁴⁵ As the universe is in motion, it therefore differs from God in essence and nature. He also stated that God is ‘without dimension.’⁴⁶ Similarly, Clement of Alexandria stated that ‘God is ... above both space and time’⁴⁷ and St Maximus stated that ‘God (is) apart from time ... as well as place.’⁴⁸ Also, St Pseudo-Dionysius stated that God ‘has neither shape nor form, quality, quantity, or weight.’⁴⁹

St Maximus stated that ‘God is whole in all things commonly ... without separation or being subject to division’⁵⁰ and that ‘the Godhead is above and beyond all division.’⁵¹ From a temporal point of view, if one divided Something which is ‘Other,’ each part would still be ‘Other’ and thus no different from the whole. St Maximus accordingly stated that ‘the divine is completely without parts.’⁵² If God was unrestricted by the attributes of the universe, He could not have number as noted by St Pseudo-Dionysius above. Consequently, when St Maximus states that ‘there is only one God’⁵³ and He ‘is ... One’⁵⁴ (*en, ἐν*), he was expressing the indivisibility of God from a view within time although the ‘one’ would not be in a numerical sense.

If God was thus unrestricted, He would have an *infinite* quality relative to the universe but, as He is also the God of Love, His love would also have an infinite quality. He would be a benevolent God to an infinite degree. God cannot therefore act in one manner on a part of the universe and differently upon another. He therefore also loves without partiality⁵⁵ as He ‘loves all things ... that exist ... at all times’⁵⁶ so that God thus does not love some things but

⁴⁰ St Gregory Nazianzus, *Orat* 38.7; PG 36; trans. NPNF2, Vol 7, p. 346.

⁴¹ St Maximus, *Amb* 17.12; PG 91, col. 1232B; trans. NC-AMB1, p. 397.

⁴² Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 1990, 2000) p. 123.

⁴³ St Maximus, *Myst* 5; PG 91; trans. CWS-MC, p. 194.

⁴⁴ St Maximus, *Amb* 23; PG 91, col. 1260B; trans. NC-AMB2, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Jas 1.17: ‘The Father ... with whom there is no variation’. See also Mal 3.6.

⁴⁶ St Maximus, *Myst* 5; PG 91; trans. CWS-MC, p. 192.

⁴⁷ St Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.2; trans. ANF2, p. 348.

⁴⁸ St Maximus, *Amb* 10.58; PG 91, col. 1153B; trans. NC-AMB1, p. 243.

⁴⁹ St Pseudo-Dionysius, *Myst Theol* 4; PG 3; trans. CWS-PD, p. 141.

⁵⁰ St Maximus, *Amb* 22; PG 91, col. 1257B; trans. NC-AMB1, p. 451. Also *Myst* 5; PG 91; trans. CWS-MC, p. 192. Also, *Gnost* 2.1; PG 90; trans. CWS-MC, p. 147.

⁵¹ St Maximus, *Amb* 10.98; PG 91, col. 1185D; trans. NC-AMB1, p. 307.

⁵² St Maximus, *Amb* 17.12; PG 91, col. 1232D; trans. NC-AMB1, p. 397.

⁵³ St Maximus, *Amb* 10.99; PG 91, col. 1188A; trans. NC-AMB1, p. 307. Also *Char* 2.29.

⁵⁴ St Maximus, *Myst* 5; PG 91; trans. CWS-MC, p. 193.

Cf. Ex 20.3, Ps 70/71.22: ‘The Holy One’; 1 Cor 8.6: ‘There is One God’.

⁵⁵ Acts 10.34. Also, Rom 2.11 and Gal 2.6.

⁵⁶ Wis 11.24. Also Ps 32/33.5. Ps 144/145.9: The ‘Lord (is) compassionate to *all* (His) creatures; Ps 99/100.5: ‘Lord ... whose merciful love is eternal’. 1 Chr 16.34: ‘His steadfast love endures for ever’.

not others. Similarly, St Maximus states that ‘God ... loves all ... in an equal way.’⁵⁷ God’s love (*agape*, ἀγάπη) of *all* things at *all* times is therefore very different from love for only *particular things only* or beings (e.g. desirous love, *eros*, ἔρως) at particular times. If however the divine love had no effect upon the universe, we must doubt its existence and the ideal super-benevolent God. God must therefore influence the universe and must somehow work in the universe.⁵⁸

Divine essence and energies

Relationship depends on the parties being aware of each other so that patristic references tend to use the term ‘knowing’ rather than ‘relating’. If God was truly other than the universe, even though He could be discovered within the universe, the true extent of His nature could not be grasped because its infinite quality. The God of Darkness can therefore be no more than a glimpse of the divine nature. The God of Otherness must therefore be essentially unknowable. Although the divine nature is love, it is infinite love and it is the infinite quality of that love that is difficult to grasp from a view within time.

The Church fathers therefore tended to term the unknowable God as the divine essence as opposed to His influence upon the universe. Accordingly, Gregory of Nyssa stated that ‘He who is invisible by nature becomes visible by His energies.’⁵⁹ St Pseudo-Dionysius also supported this apophatic view that God is unknowable in Himself as he states that ‘nothing at all participates ... in ... Being Itself’⁶⁰ and that ‘we cannot know God in His nature.’⁶¹ In patristic terminology, the divine nature was considered equivalent to the divine essence.

According to St Pseudo-Dionysius, who preceded St Maximus, God is ‘nothing of which the senses may be aware’⁶² and St Maximus followed him by stating that God is ‘supremely unknowable’⁶³ Such a situation implies that there is no relationship between God and parts of the universe implying, in turn, that God is only the God of Otherness and not the God of Love. St Maximus also stated that He has ‘a simple existence, unknowable and inaccessible to all and altogether beyond understanding which *transcends* all affirmation and negation.’⁶⁴ ‘Inaccessible to all’ also implies that God is only the God of Otherness.

However, St Maximus and other earlier eastern fathers mitigated this negative or apophatic approach as follows. He stated that ‘God is, in one sense, knowable and in another sense unknowable: knowable in ideas about Him, unknowable in Himself’⁶⁵ which St Maximus defined as the divine ‘essence’.⁶⁶ St Maximus expressed this by stating that ‘to know God ... in His essence ... is impossible.’⁶⁷ Similarly, St Basil of Caesarea stated that ‘we

⁵⁷ St Maximus, *Char* 1.25; PG 90; trans. CWS-MC, p. 38.

⁵⁸ Ps 66/67.5: ‘You guide the nations on earth.’

⁵⁹ St Gregory of Nyssa, *Hom* 6 (on the Beatitudes); PG 44, col. 1269; trans. LOS-VG, p. 85.

⁶⁰ St Pseudo-Dionysius, *Div Nom* 11.6; PG 3, col. 953D-956A; trans. CWS-PD, p. 125.

⁶¹ St Pseudo-Dionysius, *Div Nom* 7.3; PG 3, col. 869C; trans. CWS-PD, p. 108.

⁶² St Pseudo-Dionysius, *Myst Theol* 4; PG 3, col. 1040D; trans. CWS-PD, p. 141.

⁶³ St Maximus, *Char* 3.99; PG 90; trans. CWS-MC, p. 73.

Cf. Heb 11.27: God ... is invisible; Jn 1.18: ‘No one has seen God’.

⁶⁴ St Maximus, *Myst, Prooem* (Introduction); PG 91, col. 664AC; trans. CWS-MC, p. 186.

Also, St Maximus, *Amb* 41.2; PG 91, col. 1305A; trans. NC-AMB2, p. 103: What ‘they call “division” (is) the ignorance of what it is that distinguishes creation from God.’

⁶⁵ St Maximus, *Char* 4.7; PG 90; trans. CWS-MC, p. 76.

⁶⁶ St Maximus, *Amb* 34.2; PG 91, col. 1288B; NC-AMB2, p. 67.

⁶⁷ St Maximus, *Amb* 15.2; PG 91, col. 1216B; trans. NC-AMB1, p. 363.

know our God from His operations, but do not undertake to approach near to His essence. His operations come down to us, but His essence remains beyond our reach.’⁶⁸ As God is indivisible, He can have only one essence as more than one essence would lead to ‘polytheism’.⁶⁹ All we know of God is therefore His works. God therefore relates to the universe through His works. We ascertained that the divine work or energies (*energeiai*, ἐνέργειαι) depend upon the love of God so they must be given freely in love or, as St Maximus expressed it, they are ‘gifts which God gives to men’⁷⁰ who pray to receive them.

Parts of the universe cannot bridge the ‘gulf’ that separates them from God as they are restricted by time so any bridging of the gulf has to be by God. Because God is distinct from the world of time, He cannot act directly within time so even His energies must be distinct from the universe. If however God was merely unrestricted by time as some of the above statements of St Maximus imply, the energies could operate in the universe provided that the distinction between God and the universe was maintained. Moreover, as God loves all things, we must expect that His energies would not only penetrate the universe as a whole but also its parts over all time. Accordingly, St Maximus stated that ‘the Divine is immovable (but) fills all things.’⁷¹

However, we need to be certain that St Maximus regards the energies as truly divine. He confirms this by saying that God ‘by being ... shared *without division* reflects the simplicity and indivisibility of the divine activity.’⁷² This implies that even though God relates to individual parts of the universe, the divine activity remains undivided as is God Himself. The divine works therefore have otherness so that there must be a distinction between them and the universe. If both the essence and energies of God were divine, this must be in a manner which avoids a division in God. God must therefore be wholly in His energies as well as in His essence. This was later affirmed at the Council of Constantinople of 1351. We conclude that relationship with God is through the divine energies even though our knowledge of the divine works or energies is limited. We conclude that the God of Otherness and the God of Love can be reconciled with the concept of the divine essence and energies. However, we still have not ascertained *how* the divine energies can affect the universe especially as God is ‘unmoved.’

⁶⁸ St Basil of Caesarea, *Ep* 234, 1; PG 32, col. 869AB; trans. NPNF 2, Vol 8, p 274.

⁶⁹ St Maximus, *Amb* 16.2; PG 91, col. 1221D; trans. NC-AMB1, p. 379.

⁷⁰ St Maximus, *Or Dom* 3; PG 90; trans. CWS-MC, p. 105.

⁷¹ St Maximus *Amb* 7.3; PG 91, col. 1069B; trans. NC-AMB1, p. 77.

⁷² St Maximus, *Myst* 5; PG 91; trans. CWS-MC, p. 193.

B. THE GOD OF TEILHARD

Discovering God by contemplation

Similarly to St Pseudo-Dionysius and St Maximus, Teilhard stated that in contemplation one moves ‘further away from the conventional certainties’,⁷³ ‘beyond themselves’⁷⁴ and ‘everything there is in the world’.⁷⁵ He also appears to have had experiences of both the God of Darkness and the God of Light. It appears that Teilhard was already ordained before he began to contemplate so he had already gained knowledge of God through the scriptures.

With regard to the God of Darkness, Teilhard experienced ‘a deep abyss’.⁷⁶ It appears that he was not looking for a certain God but his true self,⁷⁷ but he nevertheless appears to have encountered a truly awesome God within himself as implied by his words ‘Be not afraid.’⁷⁸ This is consistent with the words of St Antony of Egypt when he said that ‘he who knows himself also knows the dispensations of his Creator.’⁷⁹ If so, it would be the nearest a human person could experience the God of Otherness. Compatibly, Teilhard also stated that ‘knowledge of God arouses in us ... His beneficent strength’ which would be truly awesome.⁸⁰ It appears that Teilhard experienced the God of Darkness as did St Pseudo-Dionysius.

The God of Otherness and the God of Love

Having discussed the two contrasting aspects of God according to St Maximus, we need to ascertain whether or not Teilhard describes God in a similar manner. Regarding the God of Otherness, Teilhard stated that ‘God ... is essentially distinct from creation’⁸¹ and uses the expression ‘God and His *transcendence*.’⁸² St Maximus and Teilhard therefore appear to have a measure of agreement on the aspect of God which is the God of Otherness.

Regarding the God of Love, Teilhard referred to ‘divine love’⁸³ and ‘God as love,’⁸⁴ and stated that ‘God (loves) the world and each of its elements.’⁸⁵ This implies that He has no impartiality but also loves each element individually. Accordingly, Teilhard stated that ‘God (is) *personal* and loving.’⁸⁶ We can therefore say that Teilhard agreed in principle with St Maximus regarding the God of Love and how He relates. Teilhard also implied that he understands the contrast between the God of Otherness and the God of Love by stating, for example, that ‘God is ‘infinitely close’ and yet ‘infinitely remote,’⁸⁷ ‘God is an Infinite that

⁷³ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 1927; 4DM, p. 37.

⁷⁴ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 1927; 4DM, p. 29.

⁷⁵ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 1927; 4DM, p. 54 n.

⁷⁶ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 1927; 4DM, p. 37.

⁷⁷ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 1927; 4DM, p. 37-38.

⁷⁸ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 1927; 4DM, p. 39.

⁷⁹ St Antony of Egypt, *Ep 3*; trans. Rubenson, p. 206.

⁸⁰ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 1927; 4DM, p. 97.

⁸¹ Teilhard, *The Universal Element*, 1919; 12WW, p. 294.

⁸² Teilhard, *The Spiritual Contribution of the Far East*, 1947; 11TF, p. 141.

⁸³ Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 1950; 13HM, p. 41.

⁸⁴ Teilhard, *Human Energy*, 1937; 6HE, p. 157.

⁸⁵ Teilhard, *Introduction to Christian Life*, 1944; 10CE, p. 152.

⁸⁶ Teilhard, *Mastery of the World and the Kingdom of God*, 1916; 12WW, p. 81.

⁸⁷ Teilhard, *The Mass on the World*, 1923; 13HM, p. 132.

knows and attracts and loves'⁸⁸ and God is 'a personal and loving Infinite.'⁸⁹ If God loves the universe and its parts, He must also relate to them. Accordingly, Teilhard specifically stated that it is '*relations* that unite God to the elements of the world.'⁹⁰

Unfortunately, on this fundamental doctrine, Teilhard appeared to contradict himself regarding the principle of the God of Otherness by implying movement of God by stating that 'God transforms Himself'⁹¹ and 'God (is) born from the welding together of the elements of the world'⁹² and 'everything happens *as though* the One were formed by successive unification of the Multiple.'⁹³ This transformation or fulfilling of God according to Teilhard appears to be complementary to the transformation of the universe by God. Teilhard expresses this by stating that 'God 'metamorphized' the (universe) from the depths of matter to the peaks of Spirit, so in addition the (universe) must inevitably and to the same degree endomorphize God.'⁹⁴ If God really transformed Himself, He would become within the world of time and not God. If parts of the universe were united with God, the two together would appear to change but it must be the universe which actually changes. It may be notable that Teilhard qualified his 1924 statement by 'as though' so it is just possible that his later statements could mean an *appearance* of transformation rather than an *actual* one. It is noted that Teilhard's orthodox opinions regarding God tend to be earlier than those implying that God changes. This may indicate a change of mind by Teilhard.

The divine essence and energies

The principle of the divine essence or nature and energies according to St Maximus was helpful in understanding how the unknown God of Otherness and the God of Love could be reconciled. The notion that there was a distinction between the divine essence and energies as supported by St Maximus was not prominent in the western tradition at the time of Teilhard. Nevertheless, he appears to agree with St Maximus that there is a 'distinction between the Creator and His work.'⁹⁵ Teilhard also acknowledged that both God and His energies are one as he states that 'in the beginning (there was) energizing ... Power'⁹⁶ implying that the energies are beyond the gulf between God and the universe.

Teilhard appears to understand that even the divine energies are basically unknowable by stating that we should 'regard ... the divine energy as being imperceptible,'⁹⁷ 'mysterious'⁹⁸ and 'unknown'⁹⁹ and presumably uncreated. Such a description of the divine energies does not necessarily rule out an awareness of them from within time. He describes the divine energies as 'the divine at the heart of a glowing universe.'¹⁰⁰ He stated that 'we cannot pin

⁸⁸ Teilhard, *Cosmic Life*, 1916; 12WW, p. 48.

⁸⁹ Teilhard, *Cosmic Life*, 1916; 12WW, p. 52.

Also, *Mastery of the World and the Kingdom of God*, 1916; 12WW, p. 81.

⁹⁰ Teilhard, *The Soul of the World*, 1918; 12WW, p. 189.

⁹¹ Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 1950; 13HM, p. 53.

⁹² Teilhard, *Introduction to the Christian Life*, 1944; 10CE, p. 171.

⁹³ Teilhard, *My Universe*, 1924; 9SC, p. 45.

⁹⁴ Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 1950; 13HM, pp. 52-53.

⁹⁵ Teilhard, *Forma Christi*, 1918; 12WW, p. 265 n.

⁹⁶ Teilhard, *The Mass on the World*, 1923; 13HM, p. 121.

⁹⁷ Teilhard, *The Modes of Divine Action in the Universe*, 1920; 10CE, p. 25-26.

⁹⁸ Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 1950; 13HM, p. 33.

⁹⁹ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 1927; 4DM, pp. 1 and 50.

¹⁰⁰ Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 1950; 13HM, p. 16.

down the point at which the hand of God is apparent (as) it acts ... without making itself evident at any point.¹⁰¹ This statement appears to confirm that God acts in no particular time over all time. Also, he stated that ‘God has the faculty of acting upon the whole at once’ and ‘must be able to make (Himself) felt at the core of each element of the world individually.’¹⁰² This statement implies the universality of the divine energies.

While Teilhard’s belief in eschatological movement was not in doubt, his understanding of the divine energies would help to explain how God can assist the universe to move towards Him. Teilhard’s acceptance of the divine energies therefore give his belief a measure of theological reasoning. It is however unclear whether Teilhard learnt this principle from others or devised it himself. We know that Teilhard read the works of St Gregory of Nyssa¹⁰³ and St Gregory of Nazianzus¹⁰⁴ so it may be possible that Teilhard may have also read St Basil of Caesarea who stated that ‘we know our God from His operations, but do not undertake to approach near to His essence. His operations come down to us, but His essence remains beyond our reach.’¹⁰⁵

Teilhard described the divine energies as ‘the primal and universal energy,’¹⁰⁶ ‘a subtle and essential energy ... emanating from the heart of God (transmitting) the pulsations of God’s will’¹⁰⁷ so that ‘all around us, we ... see the divine welling up and shining through’¹⁰⁸ as ‘fire’,¹⁰⁹ ‘the universe (being) illuminated from within’ implying that they penetrate the universe.¹¹⁰ Teilhard maintained the eschatological direction of the energies by calling them ‘a synthesizing and directing energy, that stirs up and impels creatures towards a higher state of unity.’¹¹¹ These energies therefore ‘animate our being’,¹¹² and are ‘energizing’¹¹³ the universe converting it ‘into good.’¹¹⁴ He also recognizes that the universal quality of this energy is based upon love as follows:

Since the Christian universe consists structurally in the unification of elemental persons in a supreme personality (presumably the personhood of God), the dominating and ultimate *energy* of the whole system can only be a person-to-person attraction: in other words, a love-attraction.¹¹⁵

This citation includes not only divine love but also implies the relationship between God and the universe which are attributes of the God of Love discussed above. As the above energies

¹⁰¹ Teilhard, *The Modes of Divine Action in the Universe*, 1920; 10CE, p. 26.

¹⁰² Teilhard, *The Modes of Divine Action in the Universe*, 1920; 10CE, p. 27.

¹⁰³ Teilhard, *The Progress of History*, 1921; 2AM, p. 32.

¹⁰⁴ Teilhard, *Reflections on Original Sin*, 1947; 10CE, p. 191.

¹⁰⁵ St Basil of Caesarea, *Ep 234*, 1; PG 32, col. 869AB; trans. NPNF 2, Vol 8, p 274.

¹⁰⁶ Teilhard, *The Spirit of the Earth*, 1931; 6HE, p. 33.

¹⁰⁷ Teilhard, *Cosmic Life*, 1916; 12WW, p. 60.

¹⁰⁸ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 1927; 4DM, p. 73.

¹⁰⁹ Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 1950; 13HM, p. 44.

Cf. St Maximus, *Amb 10*, 628-30; PG 91, col. 1148D; trans. LOU-MC, p. 121 which refers to the burning bush.

¹¹⁰ Teilhard, *The New Spirit*, 1942; 5FM, p. 92

¹¹¹ Teilhard, *The Soul of the World*, 1918; 12WW, p. 182.

¹¹² Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 1927; 4DM, p. 41.

¹¹³ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 1927; 4DM, p. 2 n.; *The Heart of Matter*, 1950; 13HM, p. 41.

¹¹⁴ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 1927; 4DM, p. 111.

¹¹⁵ Teilhard, *Introduction to the Christian Life*, 1944; 10CE, p. 152

are described as those which 'emanate from the heart of God' which are based upon love and direct creature 'to a higher state of unity', it appears that such energies are equivalent to the divine energies cited by St Maximus and earlier fathers.

C. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Both St Maximus and Teilhard understood that God could be found by contemplation and that God could be described as the God of Otherness and the God of Love. Both of them agreed that, despite the fact that God is unrestricted by the attributes of the universe, He was able to relate to the universe through the divine energies. We concluded that there was no significant difference between the views of St Maximus and Teilhard regarding God and His energies.

When the patriarchs, prophets and later Christian fathers found God by contemplation, there were no words to describe Him. They and others following had to make a subtle journey to find the best words to express the God who they found within the limitations of their languages. As language and circumstances change, the task of expressing God in human terms is without end.

Religions usually select people to teach and proclaim the faith and it is therefore their particular responsibility to protect the essence of the Truth about God and its effect upon the universe and express it in a manner which is relevant to the world of that time.

Word count, 17 Apr 17: 6,266