

# **A Preliminary Conversation with an Eastern Orthodox Monk on the Will of Christ**

Father Peter Farrington

I am most grateful for the emails you have sent, and which provide a useful set of criteria with which to consider the topic of the will in Christ. I am especially glad that you have taken time to consider some of the obstacles to understanding which might be presented, and have explained your own understanding of this subject so clearly and precisely. It does help, because when I engage with some Eastern Orthodox online I find myself presented with views which appear to be heterodox, even by Eastern Orthodox theological authorities, or else reduce themselves to a polemical insistence on counting two wills rather than one.

I have, until now, hesitated to delve too deeply into the teachings of Maximos the Confessor on this subject because I have always thought of him, rightly or wrongly, as adding to the polemical quality of the seventh century, when it seems to me that there was always to a great extent an agreement on the substance of the matter which could have been discovered. Nevertheless, as I have been in any case, preparing material to write a paper on the issue of will in the teachings of Severus of Antioch, it is absolutely necessary that I consider Maximos the Confessor honestly and open-mindedly. Indeed I bought Father Andrew Louth's edition of some of the writings of Maximos the Confessor last night and have it downloaded to my tablet and smartphone and I have been reading the most relevant portions. I will refer to Maximos and Severus in this response because my great devotion to Severus could not be increased by insisting on using the term saint, and my respect for Maximos and for you might be seen as being lacking if I do not use the term saint only in regard to him.

Let me say at the outset that much of what Maximos says is immediately and completely acceptable to an Oriental Orthodox Christology. However, there are also turns of phrase which produce some confusion as to what exactly he means. It would seem to me that those things which I will describe and agree with in this response are those areas where an Eastern Orthodox might have most concerns about the Oriental Orthodox position, and those places where I do have some confusion about what Maximos means are, I expect and hope, to be understood in a manner which is consistent with a Cyrilline Christology.

I am glad that this opportunity to correspond has occurred at this time, as I have hesitated to write anything about Maximos the Confessor, as I must do in a paper on the teaching of Severus of Antioch, as I would not wish to misrepresent him.

I intend in this response to examine several of the writings of Maximos in enough detail to describe both my own understanding of the Oriental Orthodox position, and those areas where there is a need for me to have a greater clarity of his views. I am of the opinion that much of the present controversy about the will in Christ is due to a lack of resort to primary texts, and the application of vague understandings of the issue by online correspondents. I hope to avoid that by having a correspondence and dialogue with you, rather than an argument. Indeed every online reference to this topic ends up in Gethsemane with a polemical resort to counting wills.

Perhaps I will begin by responding to the sections of your own emails, and discover if we have a substantial agreement, and will then turn to the writings of Maximos the

Confessor to see if the agreement can be sustained in the context of considering his teachings as an expression of Eastern Orthodox Christology.

In the first email you state,

Without confusion, the statements of the Oriental Orthodox over the last decades have repeatedly affirmed the true and perfect (unaltered and unconfused, yet truly and perfectly and hypostatically united) Divinity and Humanity of the One Only-Begotten Son and Incarnate and Crucified Word of God (contra Diodore of Tarsus, Nestorius, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus and Ibas of Edessa and all crypto-Nestorians ancient and modern), as taught by St Cyril of Alexandria. This I know of. We ourselves heard this from Pope Shenouda's on lips at St Paisius Monastery in the Summer of 1997.

So, we have no doubts regarding the facts of explaining what "Mia-physitism" means to the Oriental Orthodox Churches (namely, not "Mono-physitism", Synousiasm, or Eutychianism, or Apollinarianism). This is clear.

But we were wondering if you could tell us whether the Oriental Churches have ever made any explicit statements about the controversy (w/in our Byzantine Church) regarding the heresy called "mono-thelitism" in the 7th Century, when our champion (St Maximos the Confessor) defended the truly divine AND human (not merely or simply Divine) and truly VOLUNTARY (and that not merely or simply Divine) character of God incarnate's willing acts, especially in the Garden of Gethsemane on the way to the Cross, saying: "Not my will, but thine be done".

This seems a good place to start. We are agreed then that the Oriental Orthodox INTEND (leaving room to say that we fail), to confess that the humanity of Christ is true and perfect, and is united to the Word in a manner which is unconfused. You have understood what we intend, and you point out, quite rightly, that what is required is a clarification of what type of humanity is truly and perfectly present and united, especially in regard to will.

This has become an important area for clarification, not least since it seems to me that the Oriental Orthodox insistence on 'one united will', however we come to describe that, is confused with the heretical position of 'one only will', however we come to describe that. This is one of my great frustrations, that engagement with other communions comes down, all too often, to insisting on a one word answer to complex questions, where there might well be substantial, and even complete, agreement.

I will say immediately that we do not confess that the will of the Word incarnate is merely or simply Divine. I do think that we need to unpack the word 'voluntary' when speaking of the human willing of the Word incarnate. It cannot help but raise anxieties in my mind, which I am sure exist because I have not yet understood entirely what is meant. I hope that as I work through some of Maximos' own writings this issue might be cleared up.

Before I say more I will respond to the statements you provided in your second email.

1. "Whatever is not assumed is not saved" (St Gregory the Theologian vs Apollinarius).

Yes, this is also axiomatic for the Oriental Orthodox. The humanity of Christ must be the same humanity as ours or we are not saved. This was especially dealt with during the Julianist controversy in the 6th century. As you know, Julian wished to say that the humanity of Christ was already immortal and incorruptible from the moment of the incarnation, but Severus insisted that this meant that not only was the Christ of Julian unable to redeem our own mortal and corruptible humanity, but indeed being immortal and incorruptible he could neither suffer death nor blameless passions. Julian tried to say that he

suffered impassibly in his immortal and incorruptible humanity, but Severus responded by pointing out that his suffering and death could not therefore be said in any sense to belong to him as his own natural death and suffering, rather they were an almost docetic appearance of death and suffering in a nature that could not suffer and die.

It is clear from the writings of Severus that the very seat of the confrontation of the Word incarnate with Satan, taking up again the contest in which Adam had been defeated, is the human will. I will try to provide references for all of the points I make in due course, and I have asked online to see if someone can get me a copy of Homily XXII by Severus on the account of the prayer in Gethsemane, as I think this will provide useful material for understanding his view.

But it seems clear to me that the Oriental Orthodox tradition has always insisted on the presence in Christ of a human will, as a necessary aspect of human existence. I understand this does not answer all the questions we need to consider about the nature and function of that will. But Severus, as far as I have understood him, and I have been studying him as much as you have been studying Maximos the Confessor, requires entirely that it is a man who is God who wins salvation for us by living perfectly as man in obedience to the divine will, and that sense of obedience requires itself that there be a human will (however constrained or free) in which obedience takes place.

In the writings of Severus, though he does occasionally refer to will, since he writes 100 years before the later controversy, he tends to prefer to use the term rational as meaning a willing and thinking soul, and almost always when he refers to Christ being incarnate it is with a clear statement that he is incarnate in flesh with an intelligent and rational soul.

2. Ergo, just as human "mind or nous" was constituent of the Logos's own humanity taken from the Theotokos, contra Apollinarius, so human will or "thelema" must be constituent of the incarnate Logos's own humanity.

I agree, and I believe that Severus would agree and does agree. He does speak of the human will in several places. I'll just quote one reference here at the moment..

Even less is Christ divided into two natures. He is indeed one from two, from divinity and humanity, one person and hypostasis, the one nature of the Logos, become flesh and perfect human being. For this reason he also displays TWO wills in salvific suffering, the one which requests, the other which is prepared, the one human and the other divine.

There are other such explicit references to the presence of the human will in Christ, but this will suffice to show that the humanity of Christ is not considered as being without a properly human will, however that is understood.

3. Thus, He willed not merely in a Divine way (as if he had never become incarnate), nor merely in a separated Human way (per Adoptionism or the confirmed tendencies of Antiochene thinking), but in a truly "Theanthropic" way, inclusive of BOTH the faculty of Divine Will/Willing which he shares with the Father and Spirit, and of Human Will/Willing, since the Logos became True Man, the God-Man.

I am glad that you use the word Theanthropic, because what we are always seeking to avoid is a sense that the proper activity of the human will defines a second subject in Christ, the man Jesus. Severus speaks of the Theandric activity which he finds in Dionysius..

As we have already developed in full breadth in other writings, we understood and understand the statement of the utterly wise Dionysius the Areopagite, who says, 'Since God has become a human being, he performed among us a new theandric activity' of the one composite activity..

This theandric activity is understood by us as referring to the activity in union of the humanity and Divinity and not the creation of a new ousia. This is by way of agreeing with your statement that the theanthropic way of willing, which we mean when we speak of one will, is a way of willing that includes and preserves the integrity of both the divine and human faculty of will.

Severus describes the willing in human way when he says..

But because the Emmanuel is by nature also God and goodness itself, although he has become a child according to the economy, he did not await the time of the distinction (between good and evil), on the contrary. From the time of swaddling clothes, before he came to an age of distinguishing between good and evil, on the one side he spurned evil and did not listen to it, and on the other he chose good. These words 'he spurned' and 'he did not listen', and on the other 'he chose' show us the Logos of God has united to himself not only to the flesh but also to the soul, which is endowed with will and understanding, in order to allow our souls, which are inclined towards evil, to lean towards choosing good and turning away from evil. For God as God does not need to choose good; but because for our sakes he assumed flesh and spiritual soul, he took for us this redress.

This seems to me to show that Severus understands that it is the human will of Christ which must be the active faculty in this choosing good. He says in the middle of this passage..

The Logos of God has united to himself... the soul which is endowed with will... in order to allow our souls... to lean towards choosing good.

This must be understood surely as insisting on the presence of a functioning faculty of human will which has been explicitly and necessarily preserved in the humanity of Christ for a particular purpose in the economy. It is not accidental, a vestigial organ like the appendix, but a necessary aspect of the nature of humanity which serves a necessary purpose in union with the divine will, and as the own human will of the Word incarnate.

The insistence on the human will being necessary, 'in order to', seems to me to speak of a proper and natural functioning of that faculty of will, however that is understood.

4. Note: In EO dogma, truly human "freedom of will", which the Incarnate Logos DID indeed take upon Himself is NOT to be found in the so-called "gnomic will," or "halting between two opinions," or deliberative and wavering "dialectic between good and evil".

I am still struggling to understand exactly what is meant by 'freedom of will' in this context. I am obviously affected by the sense of human freedom of will meaning a freedom to choose evil, when I do understand that it means the freedom to choose God. I have said myself in other conversations that Christ is truly and humanly free to choose God, when others have wanted to say that his freedom of will means that he must be free to choose evil. This is one area I need clarity concerning the formal teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy rather than the pop polemics of some I have corresponded with in past years.

In terms of freedom of will, I am also trying to fit this into the Definition of the Sixth Council..

..his human will follows and that not as resisting and reluctant, but rather as subject to his divine and omnipotent will. For it was right that the flesh should be moved but subject to the divine will, according to the most wise Athanasius. For as his flesh is called and is the flesh of God the Word, so also the natural will of his flesh is called and is the proper will of God the Word, as he himself says: "I came down from heaven, not that I might do mine own will but the will of the Father which sent me!" where he calls his own will the will of his flesh, inasmuch as his flesh was also his own. For as his most holy and

immaculate animated flesh was not destroyed because it was deified but continued in its own state and nature (ὁρῶ τε καὶ λόγῳ), so also his human will, although deified, was not suppressed, but was rather preserved according to the saying of Gregory Theologus: "His will [i.e., the Saviour's] is not contrary to God but altogether deified."

This seems to me to speak to a proper subordination of the human will to the Word Himself whose flesh and will it is, not so that it does not exist and operate, but that it does not exist and operate independently. I need to understand how to interpret 'moved but subject to the divine will' in terms which make sense of the notion of freedom. I have corresponded with some EO who wish to deny any sense of 'being subject', and indeed one, when shown this statement, insisted it was monophysite heresy.

I don't believe that the human will was suppressed by union with the Word whose human will it is, and I do believe it is deified, beyond the experience of those saints whose own entirely human wills were made freely subject to the divine will. But the idea of some human subject willing to be subject to some divine subject is naturally unacceptable. I can appreciate saying that the Word incarnate wills in his humanity to be subject to the divine will.

There is also, however, the teaching that as the Word incarnate willed, so he suspended some aspects of the natural operation of his own humanity. I think of the fasting for forty days, of which St Cyril says that the Word chose to not allow His humanity to feel any hunger until the end of that period, when He willed that His flesh be moved by the natural human desire for food. I need to understand how you incorporate this sense that the humanity is not a mere humanity, or a humanity outside the purpose of the economy. But that as the Word incarnate wills He can suspend all manner of properties of His own humanity for a season, without those properties always being natural to His humanity. I mean that it seems to me that St Cyril refers to the Gethsemane account with a view to showing that the Word incarnate allowed His humanity to be moved by the natural operation of his human will, which seems to indicate that the natural operation of the human will is not an absolute, but is subject to the divine will.

I suppose I am thinking that when the human will operates it does so freely and naturally, but it is not absolute in its operation, and at some level the Word incarnate chooses not to feel hunger. Would you wish to understand the restriction of the blameless passion of hunger to be at a lower level than the will, such that the will is not being suspended in its operation, rather one of the movers of the will is being suspended? How would you understand St Cyril on this point in regard to the human will in Christ?

I am glad that you exclude all thought of deliberation in Christ, and this is in accordance with the passage from Severus of Antioch already quoted, which refers to the infant Christ as always choosing the good. This is one area of concern, since others have not expressed it as well as you. Some EO do seem convinced that there is a deliberation in Christ or else there is no freely operating human will.

5. That is to say that Kazantzakis, the modern Greek novelist and Nestorianizer and blasphemer, is entirely heretical in his views of Christ's human mind and willing faculty, for the Logos Incarnate could NEVER have sinned and could NEVER EVEN have "entertained" thoughts of sin in his mind. Rather, He possessed the true freedom of the one and Only-Begotten Son of God in a way BOTH truly Divine AND truly Human -- in true and unconfused union -- that is to say "Theanthropically".

There is a lot of discussion online about whether Christ could sin, or even entertain thoughts of sin. Some EO do seem to think that this is necessary. I don't doubt that they are speaking in an heretical manner. I think that I am comfortable with my own understanding

of the one will of the Word incarnate, standing for a theandric and composite will, in the sense that it is always the one Word of God incarnate who wills all things both humanly and divinely and therefore in complete accord. The human willing of Christ is the expression and manifestation in a truly human manner, of the divine willing.

6. The Incarnate Logos's own human mind and human faculty of willing, constitutive of His own true humanity (contra any kind of Apollinarianism that truncates His human properties), were deified from the very moment of His conception in the womb of the Theotokos, and never susceptible to the slightest possibility of any "fall" or "blameworthy passion".

Certainly we would agree that the humanity of the Word incarnate was deified from the instant of the incarnation, and that this necessarily includes the human mind and faculty of willing. There was nothing lacking in the humanity of Christ and he was entirely consubstantial with us.

I suppose I have some anxiety about what is meant by deification in this context. Is it that you are saying he his deified by the indwelling Holy Spirit, as if he were a bare man, or that he is deified by the union with the Word of God Himself? This is not to deny that the Holy Spirit 'came upon' the Virgin Mary, and that the Word is 'incarnate of the Holy Spirit', and that the Holy Spirit also descended upon Christ in the Jordan 'and remained upon him'. But I am not comfortable with any idea that if the Holy Spirit were not present then the union with the Word of God would not have been sufficient to entirely transform the humanity, not from its nature, but into the glory of the Word.

Of course we are in complete agreement that there was not the slightest possibility of a fall, nor any movement of any blameless passion whatsoever. This rejection of the possibility of sin is based on the exercise of the human will in always choosing the good, and not from an external coercion, but this freedom is dependent on the union, and is the proper human expression of the divine will which is goodness itself.

7. So, the Incarnate Logos possessed as His own (in perfect and unconfused union) all the qualities and energies of Divinity and Humanity, therefore He possessed the truly human capacity to will and choose.

Certainly the Word incarnate possessed the truly human capacity to will and choose, but not in independence from the Word incarnate Himself as if the human will marked the presence of some other subject. The willing and choosing of the good by the human faculty of will is always, as you say, the 'own' willing and choosing of the Word in His own flesh and according to His own human will. Severus of Antioch teaches us to reject division, but never to refuse to confess the distinction between those natures of which Christ is. If there was no human will then there would be no true humanity, simply an animated body, moved by some external force. But we do wish to avoid at all and any cost the slightest sense that there is another subject in Christ other than the Word of God incarnate. The one who says, 'if it is possible', is the same Word of God incarnate and no other.

8. We interpret as follows, "nevertheless, not my will [my natural, good, laudable and truly human desire and will for "self-preservation"], but thy will be done [that very Divine Will which I share with Thee and the Holy Spirit]".

This is how I interpret the passage, based on the commentary of St Cyril. I have not always found that other EO, or even OO, accept such a view. And there is a tendency among some to want to find two willing subjects in Christ. But this denies the hypostatic union, as far as I can see. The desire for 'self-preservation' is indeed natural and blameless. St Cyril says..

He sent from heaven His Son to be a Saviour and Deliverer: Who also was made in form like to us. But even though He foreknew what He would suffer, and the shame of His passion was not the fruit of His own will, yet He consented to undergo it that He might save the earth, God the Father so willing it with Him, from His great kindness and love to mankind.

Here we see that humanly he did not naturally will the suffering and shame which was about to come upon Him, nevertheless he willed to undergo it, 'the Father so willing it with Him'.

In this instance we would still wish to speak of the one will of the Word incarnate, even though we see the human faculty of will being naturally and freely moved. It seems me that the movement to avoid death is not the same as the choice to do the Father's will. The faculty of will was certainly moved by the blameless passion, but it was not acted upon, and therefore it was not the expression of the one choice of the Word of God incarnate.

How would you speak of this? He is not deliberating between two different actions, as if manifesting a gnomonic will. He is making a determined choice to do the will of the Father, while recognising and expressing the movement of his will by the desire for self-preservation. But this movement of the faculty of will is not the same as the choice made by the faculty of will, otherwise we must say that he hesitated between two comparable options. And we would surely have to say that every blameless movement of the faculty of will must be the same as a choice, when it is clearly not. Our Lord was moved in his faculty of will by the blameless desire for food, but willed not to eat. Both are movements of the will, but both are not choices.

How do we understand the fact that there are physical aspects to the movement of the faculty of will, such that I might be hungry. But there are also intellectual aspects, such that I might desire to study more than satisfy my natural hunger and so I will to continue my study rather than eat. But there are also spiritual aspects, such that I might be moved by a desire for prayer, and so submit both the physical and intellectual movements of my faculty of will to the spiritual movement, and so will to give myself to prayer. Which of these is actually WILLING, and which are only movements of the faculty of will. I might, for instance, be only a little hungry, or I might be very hungry indeed, and surely these various states will exert a different movement in the faculty of will, but the actual choice I make is different and belongs to me as a subject, though still exercised within my own faculty of will, more than the simple movement of the faculty of will, which could be caused by many, diverse, and simultaneous passions.

I'd appreciate some insight here.

I hope you can see that generally speaking I don't see a great difference between the substance of what we seem to believe about the human will of Christ. There are still things to explain, but certainly there should be no doubt that recognising two wills is not problematic, even though we speak of one. And that human will is the active faculty in freely choosing the good in a human manner, since, as Severus of Antioch says, God does not need to choose the good.

I'd like to look at a few passages in Maximos the Confessor, as in the end an understanding of this issue cannot be constructed without reference to him. I'll just refer to a few passages in this response. The first is Opuscule 7 from the translation by Father Andrew Louth.

In one passage he says..

It has been confessed and believed in an orthodox manner that the only begotten Son, one of the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity, being perfect God by nature, has become a perfect human being in accordance with His will, assuming in truth flesh, consubstantial with us and endowed with a rational soul and mind, from the Holy Mother of God and ever Virgin, and united it properly and inseparably to himself in accordance with the hypostasis, being one with it right from the beginning. But the hypostasis was not composite nor the nature simple. But remaining God and consubstantial with the Father, when he became flesh he became double, so that double by nature, he had kinship by nature with both extremes, and preserved the natural difference of his own parts each from the other.

There would be no problem with the first sentence. Nor with the third sentence. The humanity of the Word incarnate is certainly perfect and true flesh, and is consubstantial with us and is endowed with a rational soul and mind. He has certainly also remained God, and although we do not use the term double or feel comfortable with it. It can be understood in this passage as surely referring to the diversity of natures from which is the one Christ.

The second sentence is rather confusing, since we would want to say that the hypostasis of the Word of God does become composite in the incarnation, meaning that the identity of the Word of God is expressed both humanly and Divinely. The Fifth Council says..

If anyone shall not acknowledge as the Holy Fathers teach, that the union of God the Word is made with the flesh animated by a reasonable and living soul, and that such union is made synthetically and hypostatically, and that therefore there is only one Person, to wit: our Lord Jesus Christ, one of the Holy Trinity: let him be anathema. As a matter of fact the word "union" (τῆς ἐνώσεως) has many meanings, and the partisans of Apollinaris and Eutyches have affirmed that these natures are confounded inter se, and have asserted a union produced by the mixture of both. On the other hand the followers of Theodorus and of Nestorius rejoicing in the division of the natures, have taught only a relative union. Meanwhile the Holy Church of God, condemning equally the impiety of both sorts of heresies, recognises the union of God the Word with the flesh synthetically, that is to say, hypostatically. For in the mystery of Christ the synthetical union not only preserves unconfusedly the natures which are united, but also allows no separation.

Since the word composite is synthesis in the Greek texts then it would seem to me that the Fifth Council agrees with the Oriental Orthodox position that the union is composite and hypostatic. How then does Maximos insist that the hypostasis is not composite? From the Oriental Orthodox point of view it could be said that his hypostasis remains that of the Divine Word, and certainly it is not meant that his identity is based in some confusion of nature, but the idea of the composite hypostasis means that the identity is expressed in a union of two natures which continue in their integrity.

Who does this sentence address when it speaks of the partisans of Apollinaris and Eutyches? If it means the Oriental Orthodox communion then it is based on a complete misrepresentation of what has ever been taught among us. How do you handle something which is stated by an ecumenical council but is wrong? If there were partisans of Eutyches still around in 553 AD then it is correct to address them and condemn them, but if it is intended to target the Oriental Orthodox (using that term as shorthand) then it is neither accurate nor just. There has never been a confusion of natures among us. Severus of Antioch says, 'We do not reject recognising the distinction between those things of which Christ is. God forbid!'. I raise this issue because I am not convinced that Maximos the Confessor also properly represents those he is opposing. How do we handle the right people opposing the wrong people for the right reasons?

Maximos goes on to say..

He was the same at once God and man. Those who irreverently think that there is a natural diminishment in what has come together present him as imperfect and as suffering the lack of what is naturally his. For unless the Incarnate Word guards without loss the properties of both natures without sin, according to the teaching of the divine Fathers, out of which and in which he properly is, even after the union, then he exists as a defective God. His Godhead is then altogether imperfect. And his humanity is also defective, since it is altogether diminished in what is natural to it.

Well I certainly agree that the humanity and divinity must remain perfect in the integrity belonging to them otherwise the Word is not God, and/or he is not man. Who are those who diminish him? Again, if he intends the Oriental Orthodox then he is mistaken. And I am not yet confident that speaking of one will is the same as refusing to recognise that the humanity also has the proper and natural faculty of will.

I start to particularly disagree with him in the following passage..

For either, as making a whole out of parts, we melt down the two essential wills and the same number of natural energies and recast them by composition as one will and one energy, as in the myths, and there is manifest something completely strange and foreign to communion with the Father or with us, for he does not have by nature a composite will or energy, nor do we.

This strikes me as a rather unfair statement made without a desire to understand what his opponents might mean, and it seems no different at all to the criticism which St Cyril faced when he spoke of 'one incarnate nature of the Word'. I know exactly what those who speak of one composite will mean, and it is certainly not how Maximos wishes to describe it. Those who speak of one composite will mean no more than that the human and divine will are so united that they express a divine-human willing of the Word incarnate. There is no creation intended of a third nature, as Maximos must surely have been aware. The human will is consubstantial with our own human will, and the divine will is consubstantial with the will of the Father, but we may still, and must still, confess a composition as the Fifth Council determines, which is not a confusion, or a mixture, but a true union.

Maximos goes on to reiterate that the humanity of the Word incarnate must have all those properties of our own humanity. And this is of course entirely acceptable and agreed. He then says..

How again, if the Word made flesh does not himself will naturally as a human being and perform things in accordance with nature, how can he willingly undergo hunger and thirst, labour and weariness, sleep and all the rest? For the Word does not simply will and perform these things in accordance with the infinite nature beyond being that he has together with the Father and the Son..

It is a little confusing in this passage that the Word, in the last sentence, is opposed to the Son, and I wonder if there is a translation error. But the substance of this passage is entirely acceptable to the Oriental Orthodox. Severus of Antioch would ask how he could suffer for us if it was not in a flesh which was able to suffer, and how he could be obedient if not according to a will that could choose the good. So it is entirely necessary that the humanity of the Word incarnate have the human faculty of will. It is not only as God that he wills, but he wills, we would want to say, always in a composite manner as the Word of God incarnate, which composition describes the union and not any mixture or confusion.

He says...

If then his humanity has a rational soul then it possesses the natural will. For everything that is rational by nature, certainly also possesses a will by nature.

This is also agreed. And as I have mentioned earlier, Severus is always careful to speak of the Word having united to himself flesh with a rational soul.

Therefore as God by nature he willed what is divine by nature and belongs to the Father... and again the same, as man, he willed those things that are naturally human.

This is not quite so straightforward. I think I am anxious because he appears to be setting up two exclusive categories of willing. That God the Word incarnate willed humanly is not in dispute, but what does it mean to say that the Word of God willed only human things humanly? And only willed Divine things divinely? I am not comfortable with that. When our Lord walked on the water he did so in a theanthropic manner. It is not human to walk on water, but it is not divine to walk at all. We surely understand this as an action of God the Word incarnate in a complete and perfect union of his own humanity and divinity. When our Lord says, 'I will, be healed', is this an exercise only of the human will, or is it the human manifestation and expression of both divine and human willing?

I would want to try and think that there was in the Word incarnate a perfect unity of will and willing such that at the same time in the humanity he wills the object of this union of will as far as is appropriate and possible, and in the divinity he wills the object of this union of will as far as is appropriate and possible. This is not to suggest that the human faculty of will was changed into what it is not, but I hesitate to even suggest that the human faculty of will was occupied with earthly things only, and the divine faculty of will had not thought of the human movement of will but was busy with holding the universe in place. In some sense I would want to say that he was humanly willing the universe to be held in place by his own divine power to the limit of his human faculty of will, while also divinely willing to resist the temptations of Satan in some sense by his own human will to the limit that was appropriate to the freedom of his humanity. It is not the reality and integrity of the humanity I am afraid of losing, but the composite and hypostatic union.

I agree with Maximos that in the humanity of the Word incarnate there is no resistance to the good, and so his humanity is always naturally turned to the good. And I have no hesitation in again affirming that the perfection of humanity requires the presence of the human will and energy. But again I would insist that this is not a duality of independent wills and energies, but is an expression of the natural and proper diversity in the natures of which Christ is.

Maximos comes to describe the Gethsemane incident, and he doesn't express himself as I had expected, from correspondence with some Eastern Orthodox.

For that he has by nature a human will just as he has an essentially divine will, the Word himself shows clearly when in the course of the economy that took place for our sake he humanly begged to be spared from death... in order to manifest the weakness of his own flesh. ... Again the human will is wholly deified, in its agreement with the divine will itself, since it is eternally moved and shaped by it and in accordance with it, is clear when it shows that all that matters is a perfect verification of the will of the Father... giving himself as a type and example of setting aside our own will by the perfect fulfillment of the divine....

This is all agreeable. The use of the words type and example are consistent with St Cyril. There is no problem with understanding this passage as a manifestation of both human natural weakness which the Word assumed to himself, and also a perfect obedience

of the human will to the divine will. What we would want to avoid is any sense that there is in Christ some area which expresses a contrary will to the divine, and therefore is a second subject. The expression of blameless passion is not the same as a deliberate choice against the will of God, and this is what we would want to exclude.

Indeed when Maximos says..

The will can properly be said to have become truly divine in virtue of the union, but not by nature.

I would entirely agree, and would consider this as a very good statement of concord in the substance of our Christologies, even if the terminology is different. I note with gladness that Maximos refers to St Gregory and says...

..he completely excludes any contrariety from the mystery of Christ, as if there were two beings willing opposing actions.... He points to the innate movement of Christ's human will and its essential and natural difference from the divine will of the Father and completely excludes confusion.

Yes, absolutely there is no contrariety and there cannot be two beings willing opposing actions. In regard to 'natural difference', there is indeed a difference of will, but it is a difference according nature, but in regard to the object of will there is no difference even while the things that are willed are diverse.

Maximos goes on to defend the dogma of the 'difference and the union'. This is where it gets rather frustrating. The Oriental Orthodox understanding of St Cyril's Christology is built upon the idea of the 'difference and the union'. Why then was there such misunderstanding? He goes on to insist that the presence of diversity in the Word incarnate requires that those things of which Christ is must be counted, and they must be counted as two. But this seems to me to be a difference of position that has no meaning that is worth division.

Of course there are two natures, wills and energies. But we do not count them in regard to the Word incarnate because we are concerned that to count them is to divide them. This has never meant that they have not been distinguished en theoria which you know does not mean 'in theory' as some polemicists online insist, being unaware that the Fifth Council uses this term. Of course there is a proper and natural human energy, but it is not proper to an accurate Christology to so describe this proper human energy as though it acted always and only independently of the divine energy. Indeed it never acts independently, just as the proper and natural human will never acts independently. This being so, it seems to us entirely proper to speak of one will and energy which is composite or theanthropic.

How is this practically different to what Maximos says, rather than just semantically different? It begins with the union, which Maximos confesses, and understands the difference, which Maximos confesses.

Maximos then turns to the Dionysian phrase, theandric. Why does he dismiss the idea of a theandric energy and will , since this is what Dionysius says, and it is what is meant by those who speak of one will and energy. He says..

For by the word theandric the teacher obviously refers periphrastically to the double energy of the double nature.

Well of course Dionysius means to refer to both the human and divine energy, but it seems disingenuous of Maximos to exclude all sense of one or a new theandric energy, as Dionysius writes, and instead simply use the term to indicate two natural energies, which one could equally say are obviously not intended. Indeed Maximos agrees that Dionysius speaks of this energy, and not these energies. I would not want to suggest that anyone means by theandric a confusion of mixture, which is why it is frustrating that Maximos will not consider that his opponents do not mean such a confusion or mixture, or simple divinity, but wish to describe the unconfused union. Maximos says that when Dionysius speaks of this energy he does not harm the natural difference and does not propose an essential identity. Why then does he not extend the same explanation to his opponents?

He quotes his opponents as saying, if he has one energy, the same is also theandric. I don't have any problem with this phrase within my own understanding and terminological usage. Theandric refers to the union of natural energies and does not refer to a single energy. It seems rather unfair then for Maximos to continue and say..

But what if the Word incarnate possessed one natural energy and no-one objects. How is the one natural energy to be divided into two?

Who are these who would say that the Word incarnate possessed one natural energy without intending in any sense to describe the union of natural energies? Were there such in the controversy or is this just a straw man?

Certainly Maximos should have been able to find common ground with the Oriental Orthodox based on the substance of what I have read. He then seems to make a controversy where I am not sure or convinced there is one. Later I will consider the statement of Cyrus at the time of the union in Egypt between the two communions to see whether it should be read as speaking of one natural energy, or one united and theandric energy.

Maximos then returns to his point that neither the Father nor humanity have a theandric energy and therefore it must be an energy that is not consubstantial with either. I find it very hard to believe he did not understand what was meant. Why then does he act as though the term theandric must refer to a new and confused union of energies rather than accept that it could well mean what he insisted that Dionysius had meant, to refer to the union of energies. He then says that this energy could only be one if it were referred to the hypostasis, but that this would make him alien to the Father. None of this seems fair. He presents only two options, neither of which were held by the Oriental Orthodox certainly, and therefore I must question if they were held by the monothelites, or all the monothelites. He refuses to allow that speaking of one theandric energy, or even one energy, could refer to the union of diverse natural energies.

Of course based on his own interpretations of what must be meant it is the case that the opposing Christology must fail, but I am not at all convinced that he has properly considered all the possibilities of meaning. Certainly neither of the two options he produces are ones which I hold, and yet I do not wish to use his terminology either.

Indeed he quotes from St Cyril who says, the energy shown to have kinship with both, and has to find another exception to his criticism when a single energy is described. He says of St Cyril..

[this] is not affirmed by the teacher to destroy the essential difference of the natural energies out of which and in which the one and only Christ God exists, but to maintain their exact union.

Of course the term one energy affirms the union and does not disregard the difference. But if St Cyril and Dionysius are allowed this usage then why not Maximos'

opponents? Why must their use of 'one' and 'theandric' be considered only according to obviously and manifestly deficient Christological premises? He says..

Then, as he showed that the natural energies of Christ the God, who is composed of both are perfectly preserved, that of his Godhead through the almighty command, and that of his humanity through the touch, he proves them both to be thoroughly united by their mutual coming together and interpenetration, showing that the energy is one through the union of the Word himself to his holy flesh and not naturally or hypostatically.

This is an entirely acceptable statement of the Oriental Orthodox understanding of the union of energies in Christ. How then can one who makes such a statement, and even speaks of 'one energy' then go on to condemn others who also speak of 'one energy'. If it is the case that some others truly believed in a single and confused energy, or simply a divine energy, then that would be a valid condemnation, but certainly the Oriental Orthodox have never confessed such a thing.

Maximos continues to speak of the natural difference which remains after the union. This is always the teaching of the Oriental Orthodox. He says that this teaching drives away reduction and division, and he is perfectly correct. But he then returns to accuse those who speak of one energy as having affirmed an Apollinarian or Eutychian confusion of essences. Who are these people who make such a confusion?

He does accept that the Fathers speak of one incarnate nature of God the Word, and the theandric energy. But he will not allow that the same necessity of confessing the union which leads to these terms may also properly be applied to the will so that a theandric will is also a proper term. This does not diminish or deny the natural faculty of will in the humanity, but expresses the union of all aspects of the being of the humanity in a perfect hypostatic union with the divinity.

I was going to consider Opiscule 3 which refers to Severus of Antioch, but I will not do so just now.

It seems to me that I am in agreement with your own eight statements, and I am in essential agreement with Maximos. I am confused by him in some places, and frustrated in others but I think that I have understood the substance of his position and agree with it. My issue with him is the way he treats others in his argument, rather than the substance of his own arguments, with which I tend to agree. He says, for instance, that Severus teaches that Christ is non-existent. I have to say that this strikes me as the argument of one who is not seeking to engage with another and does not properly understand the other.

I will in due course produce references from the Oriental Orthodox Fathers and St Cyril, not least because I want to write a paper on this subject. But I believe it will be very helpful to have your own response to this response. Do you think there is a degree of agreement, at least between my own position and yours? Would you consider it a substantial degree of agreement? What about the issue I have a little anxiety around? My criticism of some aspects of Maximos the Confessor's text should not be considered as intended disrespectfully, not least because his value as a spiritual father is undoubted. Indeed I hope that I could also consider the writings of my own master, Severus of Antioch, with enough honesty to see where he has not properly understood another's point of view. In those days it was not at all easy to conduct a lengthy conversation, and I am grateful for the opportunity to refer my own questions about Maximos' meaning back to you for further comment.

Let me quote again a passage from Severus,

He also displays two wills in salvific suffering..

I will also say that I have made reference to Cyril Hovorun's volume *Will, Action and Freedom*. It is useful for references, but it is defective in that he depends entirely on Grillmeier for his appreciation of Severus, and Grillmeier is unfortunately completely lacking in an understanding of the Oriental Orthodox, or even Cyrilline, Christology. Therefore Hovorun tends to view every reference to 'one' as referring to a simple one, when the very basis of our Christology is that the unity and union of natures in Christ, through producing a real, natural and hypostatic union, does not damage or eliminate the difference in natural quality of those things of which the one Christ is composed.

I hope that this response is of some interest, and that you will in turn be able to consider it with your spiritual father and allow us to continue this dialogue as far as we are able. It is an encouragement to me to engage in that detailed study which I have long wanted to do.