

UNIT 2C: TRADITION

56: The Third to the Sixth Ecumenical Councils

What Do the Ecumenical Councils Mean to Us Today?

Unlike the 1st and 2nd Ecumenical Councils which defined the creed, it is not immediately obvious why the four Ecumenical Councils held between 325 and 692 are worthy of careful study today. A possible important reason is implied by the Old Testament scholar, Bernhard W. Anderson, in the opening words of *The Living World of the Old Testament*:

Memory is one of humanity's supreme endowments. Each of us acts today and hopes for tomorrow in the light of past experiences that have been woven into a life-story. When we want to know someone else, we ask that person to tell us something of the story of his or her life, for in this way personal identity is disclosed. To be a self is to have a personal history. This is what defines one's uniqueness.

In a larger sense this is true of communities, especially those in which people are bound together primarily by shared experiences rather than by natural factors like blood and soil. National self-consciousness finds expression in the remembrance of events that people have lived through and that have given them a sense of identity and destiny.¹

Analogically, the Ecumenical Councils set out the “shared experiences” of the Church; the Councils weave the past experiences of the Church's understanding of God “into a life story” built on memory, affirming the possibility that humanity can deepen its understanding of who God is and what His purposes were and are in creating humanity.

As we began to see with the earlier lectures on the Nicene era, the Ecumenical Councils of the Orthodox Church left behind an immense number of canons norms for Christian living. These are best viewed not as rules or regulations “but rather in the sense of a straightedge, a ‘ruler’: an absolute standard for straightness or measurement . . . a standard for determining the correctness of an action or

¹ (Harlow: Longman, 1975), p. 1.

belief.”² What we have in the canons of these councils is the human “horizontal community” of the Church on earth juxtaposed with the “vertical communion” of the Church as a sacrament that reaches out to the human community, so that “the life of communion ... makes possible life as community.”³ In other words, our experience of the sacraments can guide us into an understanding of how to live our lives; and the Ecumenical Councils of the past are there to help us determine how to live today. The Orthodox historian and former Dean of St Vladimir’s Seminary, Father John Erickson, is right when he urges: “We Orthodox Christians today desperately need to rediscover the implications of communion for community.”⁴ In the context of liturgical theology, that would mean considering how liturgy goes out into the world, how the reality of the Divine Liturgy can be lived throughout the week, not just experienced on Sunday.

Consider the attitude of St Basil the Great to the Ecumenical Councils: “St Basil the Great constantly refers to the canons as ‘what we have learned from the ancients,’ ‘what we have been taught,’ or what the fathers have handed down to us; (literally, ‘traditioned to us.’⁵ In Galatians 6:16, St Paul expresses the blessing that the canons can give: “Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by the canon [Greek for ‘rule of conduct’] upon the Israel of God.”⁶ Certainly, St Basil communicates that the aim of the Councils is not to frighten or impress us, but to bless us with an understanding of the traditions of the Church. The lecturers in this E-Quip course share that aim: to bless you with an understanding of the traditions of the Church, not simply impress you with these.

The Ecumenical Councils developed canons to deal with “the disease that is sin,” and called people to “participation in God, to be by participation what God is

² John H. Erickson, *The Challenge of Our Past* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1991), p. 14.

³ Erickson, p. 13.

⁴ Erickson, p. 20.

⁵ Erickson, p. 14.

⁶ Cf. Erickson, p. 14.

by nature.”⁷ Each of the Councils was called to deal with specific questions and controversies (e.g. What do Christians believe? Who is Christ?). These seven Councils often began as local or regional councils to sort out limited problems, but only later came to be called “ecumenical” (or “oecumenical”) because the teachings and practical norms they agreed were applied to all of the Church.⁸

If the emperor and his advisers decided to call a Council, it was a sign they believed that the unity of the Empire in which Christianity was the religion of the state was being threatened by a lack of unity within the Christian faith itself.⁹ The heresies that threatened the Church were framed “in the language of philosophy” and were sometimes defined “in what one might call a spirit of aggression.”¹⁰ Therefore, those who were invited to a Council knew that there would be significant theological arguments with practical outcomes that would guide the doctrines, organisation and future leaders of the Church.

Let’s consider briefly the theological and pastoral work of the four Ecumenical Councils held between 431 and 692—four gripping stories on different stages with different casts that moulded life within the Empire and life within the Church.

The Third Ecumenical Council: The First Council of Ephesus in 431

The 3rd Ecumenical Council was called by the Emperor, Theodosius II and his advisers who wished to see the Council “decide everything in complete independence.”¹¹ The key protagonists were the Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius (c. 358-452), and the Patriarch of Alexandria, St Cyril, (c. 378-444), with the key issue as the nature of Christ and his relationship to his mother, Mary.

⁷ Erickson, pp. 10-11.

⁸ Archbishop Peter L’Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils: The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), p. 206.

⁹ Philip Sherrard, *The Greek East and the Latin West: A Study in the Christian Tradition* (Limni, Evia, Greece: Denise Harvey, 1995), p. 57

¹⁰ Sherrard, p. 58.

¹¹ L’Huillier, p. 146.

Nestorius was a Syrian monk in Antioch who had possibly studied under Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428). In 428 he was called by Theodosius II to the see at Constantinople and promptly began a campaign “to rid the city of heretics and schismatics.”¹² When the new Patriarch’s chaplain, Anastasius, preached against the term *Theotokos* (“Birth-giver of God”) to describe Mary, Nestorius supported him on the ground that Mary had given birth to the man Jesus Christ, not the Logos which “only dwelt in Christ, as in a Temple,” so therefore, in Nestorius’s view, Mary should simply be called *Christotokos* (“Mother of Christ”).¹³

Today “opinion is widely divided as to what the doctrine of Nestorius really was and how far it was heretical.”¹⁴ What is clear is that the Council “was conducted in a heated atmosphere of confrontation and recriminations,”¹⁵ because in attempting “to impose a Syrian theological vocabulary” on the people of Constantinople, Nestorius “involved every major Christian see in one of the greatest Christological arguments ever witnessed.”¹⁶ The difficulty was that Nestorius wished quite properly “to show the full integrity of *human nature* of Christ”; however, “then there was the risk of minimising the perfect unity of *the person* of Christ by insisting too strongly on [the human nature].”¹⁷ Furthermore, as the [Orthodox] Archbishop Peter L’Huillier has explained:

[The dispute] was complicated by a serious misunderstanding about the meaning of the word ‘nature.’ While the Alexandrians [led by St Cyril] understood it to mean a concrete individual, a being existing in an independent manner, the Antiochians [led by Nestorius] used it to designate either the divinity or the humanity seen together as a package of characteristics or attributes.¹⁸

¹² Cross & Livingstone, p. 1138; L’Huillier, pp. 145-46.

¹³ http://orthodoxwiki.org/Third_Ecumenical_Council.

¹⁴ Cross & Livingstone, p. 1139.

¹⁵ http://orthodoxwiki.org/Third_Ecumenical_Council.

¹⁶ McGuckin, p. 237.

¹⁷ L’Huillier, p. 143; emphasis added. One might clarify this comment from an Orthodox point of view by substituting “exclusively” for “strongly.” One can never emphasise “too strongly” either the humanity or the divinity of Christ.

¹⁸ p. 143.

Nestorius lost the argument, both theologically and pastorally: his books were condemned and he was sent back to his monastery in Antioch and then to Petra, when he continued to protest that his Christological thinking was Orthodox.¹⁹

The victor was St Cyril of Alexandria, although his behaviour before and during the Council was often hardly saintly—refusing to seek reconciliation with Nestorius, deliberately convening the Council before the Syrian bishops who supported Nestorius could arrive, as well as refusing to recognize any linguistic ambiguities.²⁰ “There is no doubt that [Nestorius] did not receive a fair hearing,”²¹ yet the theological conclusions of the Council were sound:

The Council decreed that Christ was one person, not two separate “people”: fully God and fully man, with a rational soul and body. The Virgin Mary is Theotokos because she gave birth not to a mere man but to God as a man. The union of the two natures of Christ took place in such a fashion that one did not disturb the other.²²

However, the 1st Council of Ephesus did not fully resolve the question of how the two natures of Christ were united:

Was Christ a single union ‘out of two natures’ (Cyril’s preference) or was he a single person existing ‘in two natures’ (the preference of Rome and Syria)? ... The great controversies that then resulted in Christology led to major disruptions in the life of the Eastern churches that have still not been doctrinally resolved.²³

While the 2nd Ecumenical Council refined and confirmed the work of the 1st Ecumenical Council, the 3rd Ecumenical Council opened up an agenda for future Councils.

¹⁹ Cross & Livingstone, p. 1139; McGuckin, pp. 237-238.

²⁰ Cross & Livingstone, p. 550.

²¹ McGuckin, p. 87.

²² http://orthodoxwiki.org/Third_Ecumenical_Council.

²³ McGuckin, pp. 87, 236. Classically the breach after the 4th Ecumenical Council led to the Coptic, Syrian and Armenian schisms.

The Fourth Ecumenical Council: The Council of Chalcedon (451)

The 4th Ecumenical Council was called by the Empress St Pulcheria (399-453) and her consort, the Emperor Marcian, who “were determined to effect [a peaceful] reconciliation of the Byzantine, Syrian, and Roman traditions of Christology, and rein in the Egyptian church (and its tradition so deeply indebted to Cyril of Alexandria) which had hitherto been highly dominant.”²⁴ The key argument was over whether *The Tome of Leo*, with its stress on the dual nature of Christ should be adopted in preference to Cyril’s understanding of Christology, which was strongly supported, but then pushed over into heresy, by the influential monk Eutyches of Constantinople (c. 378-454) and Patriarch Dioscorus of Alexandria (d. 454).²⁵

Pope St Leo I had argued in his *Letter to Flavian (Epistle 28)*, better known as *The Tome*, that *the communicatio idiomatum* (the interchange or communion of the properties of the human and divine natures of Christ) represented the official Christological teaching of the Roman church and should be adopted by the eastern churches.²⁶ The Alexandrians finally agreed to this “dynamically unifying concept of the communion of idioms” in which Christ’s humanity was indicated by such signs as mortality, hunger and weakness, while his divinity was shown in his immortality and infinite power; but both the human and divine signs “must always be attributed to the self-same person, the divine Word who had become flesh.”²⁷ By the end of the Council the teachings of both men, St Leo (two natures, one person) and St Cyril, (one nature of the incarnate Logos) were both endorsed as complementary expressions of this Orthodox christology.²⁸ This rapprochement was not accepted, however, by a large part of the church in Egypt

²⁴ McGuckin, p. 79; Cross & Livingstone, pp. 1347-1348.

²⁵ McGuckin, pp. 79, 105; Cross & Livingstone, p. 577. The Copts have continued to insist that Dioscorus did not support the doctrine of Eutyches. This contention remains an obstacle to any possible union between the Oriental and Chalcedonian Orthodox churches to this day.

²⁶ McGuckin, p. 70; Cross & Livingstone, p. 386.

²⁷ McGuckin, p. 71.

²⁸ This issue is comprehensively surveyed in a paper by Fr John Romanides at:
http://www.romanity.org/htm/rom.08.en.st._cyrils_one_physis_or_hypostasis_of_god_the_log.htm#1

which then fell into schism with those churches who had supported Chalcedon. As a result, *both* Eutyches and Dioscorus were deposed and exiled by the Council; however, the Oriental Orthodox churches were not in accord; and Dioscorus remains venerated today as a saint in the Coptic Church.²⁹

Father McGuckin comments that the Definition of Chalcedon (or the Chalcedonian Creed)³⁰ “had all the enforced clarity of a committee statement intended to bring an end to discussion.”³¹ In that sense, the Council was only partially successful. Furthermore, “one of the unintended effects of the [careful] Chalcedonian language was to make Christology primarily a matter of ‘balance’, instead of an expression of the restless energy of God’s mystery of salvation.”³² Furthermore, those who continued to oppose the Christology affirmed at Chalcedon became classified as a heretical branch of Monophysitism (from the Greek for “only one nature”) who claimed that the Incarnate Christ had only one nature;³³ and “semantic confusions made the controversy run for centuries.”³⁴

Perhaps the most helpful analysis of this council is to affirm that “its purpose was to define the limits of legitimate speculation rather than to make an exact and final statement of a theological position.”³⁵ As Philip Sherrard has explained:

²⁹ Cross & Livingstone, pp. 315, 416, 486, 577.

³⁰ The Chalcedonian Creed is: “We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.” See: http://orthodoxwiki.org/Chalcedonian_Creed .

³¹ McGuckin, p.81.

³² McGuckin, p. 80; cf. Cross & Livingstone, p. 315.

³³ Cross & Livingstone, p.1104.

³⁴ McGuckin, pp. 228-229.

³⁵ Cross & Livingstone, p. 315.

“Christianity is first of all a Way, and not a philosophy, not a system of human thought, and ... its doctrines cannot be fully expressed in logical and conceptual categories.”³⁶ Although an attempt needed to be made to agree Christian doctrine in the Ecumenical Councils, the confrontations at those councils exposed Christianity to “the infiltrations of the philosophical mentality” in which Truth is seen “not as something which can only be known through initiation [into The Way], but as something which the human mind can know and define through its own innate logical powers.”³⁷ That confrontation of theology, of knowing God, with “the philosophical mentality,” the logical but (as some but not all might suppose) “unaided process of human thought,” continues today. This antithesis was and is perhaps at its strongest in the growth of and reaction to scholasticism in the Latin Church of the late Middle Ages.

The Fifth Ecumenical Council: The Second Council of Constantinople (553)

The 5th Ecumenical Council was called by the Emperor Justinian (c. 483-565; ruling from 527), himself a passable theologian, to resolve a continuing dispute over *The Three Chapters* written by Syrians, “namely (1) the person and works of Theodore of Mopsuestia, (2) the writings of Theodoret against Cyril of Alexandria, and (3) the letter of Ibas of Edessa to Maris.”³⁸ The Emperor had already condemned these teachings in an edict of 543-544; however, the disputes between the Nestorians and the Monophysites had continued, framed as a dispute between East and West, between the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Alexandria on the one hand, and Pope Vigilius on the other.

Why did these earlier disputes prove so difficult to resolve? Justinian, with his strong commitment to the importance of law set out in the *Corpus Juris Civilis*,³⁹

³⁶ Sherrard, *The Greek East and the Latin West*, p. 51.

³⁷ Sherrard, pp. 56-57.

³⁸ Cross & Livingstone, pp. 407, 1619-1620; McGuckin, p. 83.

³⁹ See Cross & Livingstone, p. 916.

had formally established five distinct patriarchates—Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, Jerusalem and Constantinople—in which “the bishops were invested with a primacy of honour and a certain jurisdiction over other bishops.”⁴⁰ However, in the assimilation of ecclesiastical and civil organisation within the Empire, “the rank of bishops was, from the fourth century on, determined by the civic rank of the towns of which they were the bishops.”⁴¹ If one particular patriarch strongly urged the adoption of a particular doctrine, the theological and pastoral response of the other patriarchs might be influenced by which patriarch was promoting the doctrine. Furthermore, the Roman state often became involved in the resolution of theological disputes because the imperial authority (*imperium*) and the priesthood (*sacerdotium*) were interdependent.⁴² Thus geographical, political and doctrinal concerns created an unusual amalgam of forces pulling in different directions, making the resolution of Empire-wide Church disputes quite difficult.

The official acts of the 5th Ecumenical Council have not survived, “so it is difficult to tell exactly what happened.”⁴³ However, Father McGuckin’s summary is helpful:

The council was a bold attempt to reconcile the Syrian and Egyptian monophysites, on the basis of Cyrilline theology [i. e. the theology of St Cyril of Alexandria], retaining Chalcedon, but glossing it so as to reduce the impact of *Leo’s Tome*. It failed, in the end, to achieve what was hoped for, largely because Egypt and Syria were soon lost to the Byzantine world through Islamic invasion.⁴⁴

In a sense, war intervened to separate the theological combatants, before the theological issues were fully resolved. Intriguingly, there is considerable ecumenical interest in this 5th council today in the context of reconciling Coptic and Armenian Orthodox Christianity with their Byzantine and Latin cousins.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Sherrard, pp. 51-52.

⁴¹ Sherrard, p. 81.

⁴² Cross & Livingstone, p. 916.

⁴³ McGuckin, p.82.

⁴⁴ McGuckin, p. 84.

⁴⁵ McGuckin, pp. 84-85, 31-32.

The Sixth Ecumenical Council: The Third Council of Constantinople (680-681)

The 6th Ecumenical Council was called by the Emperor Constantine IV to resolve the Monothelite heresy in which Christ was deemed to have only one will—a doctrine that opposed the Orthodox interpretation that Christ has both a human and a divine will.⁴⁶ This heresy of Monothelitism was linked to a more general attempt to side-step the two-nature theology of the Council of Chalcedon through the doctrine of Monoenergism in which the divine and human natures of Christ were viewed as “a matter of single energy whereby the one Christ, simultaneously man and God ... acted within human history in a single divine-human energy.”⁴⁷

Attempts to resolve this Christological dispute spanned almost the entire seventh century. Sergius, who was Patriarch of Constantinople from 610 to 638, tried to develop a doctrine of “two natures, but only one activity.” His approach was initially approved by Pope Honorius I (d. 638) and the Emperor Heraclius, as well as councils held in Constantinople in 638 and 639, but was then disowned by Heraclius and Honorius’ two successors as Pope, one of whom, Pope Agatho (c.577-681), at the age of 101, convened a council in Rome in 678 whose doctrinal formula was adopted at the 6th Ecumenical Council itself.⁴⁸ After decades of Christological controversy, the Byzantine emperors had come to recognize by 680 “that their policy of trying to suppress Christological arguments in the East, or, of controlling them by imperial dictat, had utterly failed.”⁴⁹ Constantine IV himself personally presided over the first eleven of the eighteen sessions of this Council which “was one of the few times Christian theologians of antiquity considered the dimension of personal freedom and psychological identity.”⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Cross & Livingstone, pp. 407, 1106.

⁴⁷ McGuckin, pp. 84-85, 227-228.

⁴⁸ Cross & Livingstone, pp. 1485-1486, 528, 27.

⁴⁹ McGuckin, p. 85.

⁵⁰ McGuckin, p. 85

The Quinisext Council (or Council in Trullo) (692)

The work of the 5th and 6th Ecumenical Councils was not completed until the Council in Trullo, known as the Quinisext Council (i.e. a footnote or addendum to the Fifth and Sixth Councils) which met, like the 6th Council, in the domed room (*trullus*) of the Emperor Justinian II's palace at Constantinople.⁵¹ This Council passed the disciplinary canons to implement the two earlier Councils and is often, perhaps incorrectly, viewed as a minor administrative event. The 102 canons of the Quinisext Council included 55 guidelines for Church rules and ecclesiastical and lay behaviour, 20 prohibitions and guidelines about women and sexuality, and 17 rules about clergy and lay Christian relationships in the world.⁵² As an example, consider the 20 canons that mention women, whose existence is seen as raising many problems, because men enjoy their company so much. The only reference to women, other than as to whether their sexual partnership with a man is or is not appropriate, is in Canon 70: "Women are not permitted to speak at the time of the Divine Liturgy ... but if they wish to learn anything let them ask their husbands at home." Unfortunately, it is clear that the Church of the seventh century did not view women as independent persons in their own right.

However, the Quinisext Council is much more important than is often recognised. This was the Council that firmly established the important principle that the universal law of the Church took precedence over the customary practices of local churches.⁵³ At the same time, Canon 39 of the Quinisext Council affirmed that "the customs of each church should be preserved." Lewis J. Patsavos, Professor of Canon Law at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, argues persuasively

⁵¹ Cross & Livingstone, p. 1644.

⁵² Philip Schaff & Rev. Henry Wallace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series, Vol XIV: The Seven Ecumenical Councils* (New York: Cosmo Classics, 1900/2007), pp. 355-408; cf. Demetrios J. Constantelos, *Renewing the Church: The Significance of the Council in Trullo*, (Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006),

⁵³ L'Huillier, p. 206.

that since no Ecumenical Councils have been held since 787,⁵⁴ “the emergence and growth of local custom ... is what in large measure has sustained the Orthodox Church throughout the ages.⁵⁵ The Council also established the principle of iconography that the proper depiction of Christ should always be as a man and not figuratively in the depiction of the Lamb of God.⁵⁶ In a very real sense then, the Canons of the Quinisext Council remain relevant to our lives today by encouraging us to seek God’s will within our own local church communities.

The Theology of St Maximus the Confessor

St Maximus the Confessor (c. 580-662) was one of the great Byzantine theologians, who with St Sophronius of Jerusalem (c. 560-638) fought for many years against Monothelism, the scourge of the 6th Ecumenical Council. St Maximus is called “the Confessor” because he confessed and gave public witness to the faith and was tortured for his witness.⁵⁷ “A probably true tradition says that ... his tongue and his right hand were cut off;” and he died soon after in exile in Georgia.⁵⁸ The writings, prayer life and witness of this remarkable man have led to his being

⁵⁴ There are however, two other contenders after the 7th Council. These two councils are regarded as ecumenical by some in the Orthodox Church to this day, but not by other Orthodox Christians, who instead consider them to be important local councils.

VIII. Fourth Council of Constantinople, (879-880); restored St. Photius the Great to his see in Constantinople and anathematized any who altered the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, abrogating the decrees of the Robber Council of 869-870. This council was at first accepted as ecumenical by the West but later repudiated in favour of the robber council in 869-870 which had deposed Photius.

IX. Fifth Council of Constantinople, (1341-1351); affirmed hesychastic theology according to St. Gregory Palamas and condemned the Westernized philosopher Barlaam of Calabria.

⁵⁵ *Spiritual Dimensions of the Holy Canons* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2003), p. 7.

⁵⁶ The 82nd canon declared: “In certain reproductions of venerable images, the precursor [John the Baptist] is pictured indicating the lamb with his finger. This representation was adopted as a symbol of grace. It is a hidden figure of that true lamb who is Christ, our God, and shown to us according to the Law. Having thus welcomed these ancient figures and shadows as symbols of the truth transmitted to the Church, we prefer today grace and truth themselves as a fulfilment of this law. Therefore, in order to expose to the sight of all that which is perfect, at least with the help of painting, we decree that henceforth Christ our God must be represented in His human form but not in the form of the ancient lamb.”

⁵⁷ Cf. McGuckin, pp. 72-73.

⁵⁸ Cross & Livingstone, p. 1061.

described as “a member of that small and select group of saints of the Church who belong almost equally to the Western and Eastern traditions of Christian spirituality.”⁵⁹

One Orthodox scholar of St Maximus, Protopresbyter George Dragas, has offered important guidelines as to why the Church Fathers are important for us:

In studying the spirituality of the Fathers, we find their spiritual resources, which enabled them to act responsibly and authoritatively, in their own time and history. It is such resources that we need to rediscover and appropriate today in order to achieve contemporary patristic conquests in doctrine and history. Integrity of Christian life has always been the indispensable matrix of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. We could become more flexible and creative in thought, speech and act, if we became more consistent with the fundamental verities of Christian Life. The Fathers are the foremost guides to these verities and appropriation.⁶⁰

In other words, in studying the Church Fathers we seek not only to understand their lives and teachings, but also to apply their vision and perspectives to contemporary issues and to our own lives.

An important theme from his theology continues to resonate today. St Maximus saw “the Incarnation as the high point of all human history ... the dynamic method and means of the deification of the human race.”⁶¹ As the Lutheran scholar, Lars Thunberg, points out in a very orthodox interpretation of Maximus’s theology, the saint focused on “the reciprocity between God and man”—an existential “double movement: God’s movement toward man in the Incarnation ...and man’s movement toward God in the imitative process of deification.”⁶² That is a profound understanding of how we grow in our Christian lives: precisely because Christ moves toward us in the Incarnation, we are offered the possibility of deification—of growing closer and closer to God.

⁵⁹ Jaroslav Pelikan, “Introduction,” in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), p. 1; see also Chapter VII, “The Lord’s Prayer: Guide to the Christian Life According to St Maximos [sic] the Confessor.” in Protopresbyter George Dion. Dragas, *Ecclesiasticus II: Orthodox Icons, Saints, Feasts and Prayer* (Rollinsford NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2005), pp. 209-275.

⁶⁰ Protopresbyter George Dragas, *Ecclesiasticus II: Orthodox Icons, Saints, Feasts and Prayer* (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2005), p. 210.

⁶¹ McGuckin, pp. 220-221.

⁶² Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cross: The Vision of St Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), p. 62, back cover.

This unification of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ with our own movement as persons toward deification is a fitting finale to this lecture on the 3rd to the 6th Ecumenical Councils. St Maximus the Confessor catches perfectly that quality which Father McGuckin pointed out had been diminished by the balance achieved by the Council of Chalcedon—“the expression of the restless energy of God’s mystery of salvation.”⁶³ For St Maximus, and for us, “the goal of the Incarnation is precisely to make possible a communion between energies [i.e. the divine and the human energy in Christ], which alone can bring into being the divinisation that is the final goal of human life.”⁶⁴ Divinization then is not so much a human struggle to find God, but rather an opportunity to participate in the linking of the divine and human energies of Christ in which we too can participate in our daily lives.

The words with which Jaroslav Pelikan closes his introduction to the writings of St Maximus the Confessor offer an apt closing for this lecture:

There are some things we can say better on our knees at the altar than on our feet in the classroom, although neither of these postures by itself is sufficient: When we rise from our knees, we also need to reflect critically and systematically about what we have been praying, just as conversely, the content of spirituality and prayer must in turn become a source for the data of theology and of dogma: *lex orandi, lex credendi*.⁶⁵

That last Latin phrase, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, means “the rule of worship is the rule of belief”; and it is often completed with *lex vivendi*, meaning “the rule of life.” In other words, “the way we are oriented in worship ... orients the way we believe and the way we live.” Our worship, our beliefs and our lives form a unity. Let us pray with St Augustine of Hippo, who, in a more literal translation than that which is familiar,⁶⁶ said: “[God,] You prompt us yourself to find satisfaction in

⁶³ McGuckin, p. 80.

⁶⁴ Thunberg, p. 72.

⁶⁵ p. 11.

⁶⁶ “You move us to delight in praising You; for You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in You.”

praising you ...You made us tilted toward you, and our heart[s] [are] unstable until stabilised in you.”⁶⁷

⁶⁷ *Confessions*, trans. Gary Wills (New York: Penguin, 2006), p.5; quoted by Jill Carattini in “Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi” which sets out how difficult it is in the age of Google to focus on God alone” at:

www.rzim.org/resources/read/asliceofinfinity/todaysslice.aspx?aid=10203.