

‘UNION WITHOUT CONFUSION’: NEMESIUS OF EMESA AND MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR ON THE CHRISTOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOUL AND BODY*

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The relationship between soul and body has been a central topic to ancient philosophy and medicine. However, it is now a generally accepted thesis that several important Patristic authors in Byzantium used to talk about the union of the two natures in Christ, divine and human, in analogy with the union of soul and body in one single human person. The aim of this paper is to contribute to this topic by proposing an unexplored link between Nemeseius of Emesa and Maximus the Confessor along the same lines of inquiry. In his third chapter of *On the Nature of Man*, Nemeseius offers us an extended discussion on the relationship between soul and body. In this work, he also talks about the ‘unconfused union’ (ἀσύγχυτος ἔνωσις) between these two substances as a model for interpreting the union between the two natures in Christ. Yet he also mentions a limit to this analogy, and this paper suggests that this could have influenced Maximus the Confessor in shaping his final arguments for the restriction of the model of the soul/body relationship for Christology.

Introduction

The relationship between soul and body has always been a central topic for ancient philosophy and medicine. The Church Fathers made no exception to this trend, but what is equally interesting in their case is that they dealt with this issue not just in their anthropological reflections, but also in their Christological arguments. It is now a generally accepted thesis that several important theologians spoke about the union of the two natures in Christ, divine and human, in analogy with the union of soul and body in one single human person.¹ As Anastasius the Sinaite claimed in

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¹ See, for details, A. Grillmeier and Theresia Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, part 2 (London: Mowbray, 1995), 200–212, and Marie-Odile Boulnois, ‘L’union de l’âme et du corps comme modèle christologique, de Némésios d’Émèse à la controverse nestorienne’ in *Les Pères de l’église face à la science médicale de leur temps*, eds. V. Boudon-Millot and B. Pouderon (Paris: Beauchesne, 2005), 451–77.

the seventh century, the 'paradigm of the constitution of man' represents a crucial model for the interpretation of the union of the divine and human natures because it directly calls into question the logic of union under the aspect of identity and difference of the natures in Christ.² Yet, as Anastasius himself was careful to remark, the soul/body union can represent a paradigm for the union of Christ only if it is soundly interpreted.³ Among the various interpretations produced by the Byzantine theologians, the one promulgated by Maximus the Confessor in seventh century Byzantium has distinguished itself as being the final expression of the Chalcedonian teaching on the 'unconfused union' in Christ. The peculiarity of Maximus' analysis is that it has imposed important limits for the soul/body relationship in analogy to the Christological union of the divine and human natures in Christ. Although recent commentators on Maximus have already well emphasized this aspect, not much has been said on the possible sources of Maximus' thoughts on these matters.⁴ The aim of this paper is to consider Nemesisius of Emesa as one possible neglected root of Maximus' reflections on the limit of the soul/body relationship in relation to Christology. Nemesisius offers us an extended discussion on the relationship between soul and body in the third chapter of his *On the Nature of Man*. It is in this work where he talks about the 'unconfused union' between these two substances as a model for understanding the union between the two natures of Christ. Yet he also puts a restraint to this analogy, and the goal of this paper is to suggest that this might have influenced Maximus the Confessor in shaping his thought on the role of the soul/body analogy for Christology.

I shall first review Nemesisius' arguments for the 'unconfused union' between soul and body. I will then mention the analogy with the anthropological model he makes in Christology. I will then move to Leontius of Byzantium who talked about the union in Christ in a similar manner to Nemesisius, though using much elaborated philosophical and theological terminology. I will finally consider the idea that Maximus the Confessor, an inheritor of both Leontius and Nemesisius, identifies a crucial dis-analogy between the 'unconfused union' specific to the human person and the one defining Christ. I claim the basis of his argument can be found lying hidden in Nemesisius' work.

² Anastasius the Sinaite, *Hodegos*, 18.1–2, cited in Karl H. Uthemann, 'Das Anthropologische Modell der Hypostatischen Union. Ein Beitrag zu den philosophischen Voraussetzungen und zur innerchalkedonischen Transformation eines Paradigmas' in *Kleronomia* 14 (1982): 217.

³ *Ibid.*, 11, note 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 299–312 and N. Madden, 'Composite *Hypostasis* in Maximus the Confessor', *Studia Patristica* 27 (Leuven: Peeters, 1993): 175–97.

Nemesius on the Union between Soul and Body

In the second chapter of his work *On the Nature of Man*,⁵ Nemesius aims to establish two important statements about the nature of the soul: that the soul is different from the body and that it is an essence in itself. After securing these propositions with several arguments, Nemesius goes on to discuss a much more complicated issue in chapter three, that is, the type of relationship that exists between soul and body. The Bishop of Emesa warns us from the outset that, 'It is a subject enveloped in uncertainties',⁶ and then proceeds to explain the core of the difficulty: 'For all that comes together to make one single being...the constituents all undergo change, and no longer remain what each was in isolation...For things that have undergone union with other things become different'.⁷

Nemesius seems to take for granted the validity of this principle of coordinating the destruction of entities produced by a physical union. However, he postpones his treatment of this principle until chapter five, where he elaborates on the various unions between the elements that compose the physical realm. He insists, in this case, on the ontological difference between the elements and the compound formed by them 'because, by the coming together of the four there has been formed a particular unity differing from any one of the components...'.⁸

The obvious question one would raise in following this line of thought, generally accepted in antiquity, is whether the same happens with the union of soul and body. Given his previously established position, according to which the soul is an incorporeal and self-subsistent entity, Nemesius suggests from the outset a negative answer to our question. He further supports his view by contrasting various Stoic models of physical union with that of the immaterial soul and the physical body: the first type of union mentioned by him is 'juxtaposition' (παράθεσις) as that of 'partners in a dance'. Nemesius dismisses the validity of this model for explaining the union of soul with body because it would amount to limiting the presence of the soul to a particular region in the body, whereas the soul, in his view, must penetrate the entire body.⁹ 'Mixture' or 'union by contact' (κρᾶσις) is not a better candidate for Nemesius. He thinks this sort of union, as presented by bits of wood or iron placed in contact, is nothing but an aggregation in which separated elements are easily discernible. The total blending or confusion (σύγχυσις) of wine and water might indeed be a good example of the interpenetration showed by soul and body. However, Nemesius limits its application because it is possible to separate the compounds in a perceptible manner, which is obviously not the case for soul and body.

⁵ Ed. M. Morani, *Nemesius. De Natura hominis* (Leipzig: Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana, 1987). For the English translation, we will refer to *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, trans. W. Telfer (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 203–463.

⁶ Telfer, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, 293.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 293–94.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 294.

We are now in a position to infer the conditions for the formation of the union (ένωσις) sought by Nemesisius to explain the relationship of the soul to the body: the necessary condition would be that the union formed must be different from its parts. And the requisite condition is that the parts united should not be separable in a perceptible manner. The Stoic examples of union do not comply with these conditions. Hence, Nemesisius' firm conclusion: 'If, therefore we must rule out union, juxtaposition, or mixture, in what manner can we say that a living creature is a unity?'¹⁰

The Aristotelian solution is not attractive to Nemesisius either, since the soul understood as the *entelechy* of the body conflicts with the self-subsistent character of the soul as established in chapter two of his work. Nor does the Platonic interpretation of the soul using its body as a tool make a valid case for Nemesisius. The Bishop doubts the true character of union in this case. It is at this point that Nemesisius proposes his own solution, which is actually a restatement of the one issued by the Neoplatonic philosopher, Ammonius:

Ammonius, the master of Plotinus, solved the problem thus. He said that it is in the nature of intelligibles both to be capable of union with things adapted to receive them, and to remain, nevertheless, unconfused with them while in union, and imperishable, just as though they were merely juxtaposed...So the soul is united to the body, and, further, this union is without confusion (ἀσυγχύτως ἦνεται).¹¹

It has been long accepted that the doctrine actually originates in Porphyry's treatise *Miscellaneous questions* (*Summeikta Zētēmata*).¹² It is in this work that Porphyry argues that the nature of intelligibles allow them to remain unconfused and uncorrupted (ἀσύγχυτα καὶ ἀδιάφθορα) when entering a union. The soul, being an incorporeal, penetrates the entire body in such a manner that they form together a perfect unity. Yet their differences remain unconfused.

Certainly, the similarity between Porphyry and Nemesisius is incontestable. However, does this constitute the final word on the matter? John Rist has observed that Porphyry is not as explicit in talking about 'unconfused union' between soul and body as Nemesisius himself is.¹³ Rist has argued that Porphyry mainly referred to the union between the intelligibles themselves, and less to their relation with the bodies.¹⁴ This, taken together with the fact that it is very difficult to document Porphyry's use of this expression in his other major works, has caused Rist to maintain that other sources for Nemesisius than Porphyry might also be identified.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 295.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 295–6.

¹² See, for details, John M. Rist, 'Pseudo-Ammonius and the Soul/Body Problem in Some Platonic Texts of Late Antiquity' in *The American Journal of Philology* 109 (1988): 402–15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 403.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 403.

Furthermore, he has found illustrations of this in Christian authors like Eusebius of Caesarea and Tertulian, who talked about the 'unconfused union' of the Logos to the flesh.¹⁵ Let us now see how Nemesisius elaborates upon the possibility that this model of 'unconfused union' can be used to describe the 'unconfused union' of the divine and human natures in Christ.

Nemesius on the 'Unconfused Union' of Christ's Two Natures

The Neoplatonic solution proposed by the Bishop of Nemesa relies, as he extensively explains, on the nature of intelligibles to preserve their state or remain unchanged by the unions which they undergo. The soul, being an intelligible, does not end in blending with the body, but rather saves its own identity in this composite being. Nemesisius feels the need to exemplify the difference between the two substances with the example of the soul being 'separate' during sleep or when it is immersed in the process of reasoning.¹⁶ However, the Christian writer, when coming to elaborate on the union of the soul and body, seems to slightly diminish the differences between the incorporeal and corporeal natures with respect to their receptive capacities. He thus suggests that the soul itself is somehow affected by the body. This, in Nemesisius' opinion, must be an indissoluble proof of the reality of the union. Yet, in chapter two, Nemesisius argues against Cleanthes' thesis that the soul suffers when the body suffers.¹⁷ Therefore, he seems at times to vacillate between making the soul totally impassible or granting it some receptive capacity turned towards the content handed down to it by the bodily passions. When he goes on to discuss on Christological matters, he is certainly committed to the first position. Shall we now infer, in light of this, that his anthropology perhaps gets modified by his Christology? This is a legitimate question, especially given what follows in Nemesisius' work. In the continuation of his analysis of the union of soul and body, the Bishop feels free to further contrast it with—in his own words—one other 'manner of mingling or union [that is] quite new'.¹⁸ The terms of contrast become apparent from his subsequent phrasing: 'The above arguments [about unconfused union] would apply in a more absolute and pure manner to the union of the divine Word with his manhood. For he [the Logos] continued thus in union, without confusion, and without being circumscribed, in a different manner from the soul'.¹⁹ This is obvious given the idea of reciprocal sympathy between soul and body presented before, whereas this cannot

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 412–15.

¹⁶ Telfer, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesisius of Emesa*, 297.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 267: 'But if anyone were to accept as true the proposition that no incorporeal thing is affected by what happens to a body, he ought not, as the same time, to accept the second proposition of Cleanthes, that if the body is sick or hurt, the soul suffers with it. The question is whether the body is the sole sufferer, deriving perception from the soul while the soul remains itself impassible, or whether the soul suffers together with the body. Most learned authors take the first alternative.'

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 301.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 300.

be true for God who is beyond passibility. Next, Nemesisius elaborates on the details of the opinion that ‘unconfused union’ properly qualifies the Christological union:

For the soul, being one of the things *in process of completion* (τῶν πεπληθυσμένων), because of its affinity (οἰκειότητα) with the body, seems even in some way to suffer with it, sometimes mastering it, and sometimes being mastered by it. But the divine Word suffers no alteration from the fellowship which he has with the body and the soul...he continues in that state in which he was, before his entry into that union [my emphasis].²⁰

Let us first remark that from the results of this comparison the soul might undergo a ‘change’ when united to a body, though not one that would harm its substance and identity. However, to both type of unions Nemesisius applies the adjective ‘unconfused’. In a different study, Marie-Odile Boulnois counts 11 occurrences of this word in Nemesisius, of which 6 denote the anthropological context, whereas 5 refer to the Christological one.²¹ Prior to Nemesisius, one could also find the term used in a Christological context by Tertullian, Apollinarius, and Didymus the Blind.²² Theodoret of Cyrus, amongst the other Christian writers, is explicit in championing the passibility of the soul together with the body in contrast with the impassibility of the Logos united to the flesh.²³

However, and I found this rather puzzling, beyond this basic difference Nemesisius draws between the divine and human unions, he makes no effort to elaborate on what makes the former truly unique. Instead of, for example, trying to delineate the contrast he observes between the two sorts of union, anthropological and Christological, as later authors will do, Nemesisius rather choses to praise Porphyry for having correctly understood that generally there are some unions in which beings complement each other without mutually annihilating each other.²⁴ Nemesisius then holds that, if this is made possible by the incorporeality of the soul, then ‘much more does it apply in the case of the divine Word, who is incomparably and truly

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 301. I have slightly altered Telfer’s translation here in favour of the one in *Nemesisius. On the Nature of Man*, trans. R.W. Sharples and P.J. Van Der Eijk (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 84: ‘For the soul, being one of the things which are complex...’ The reason for this approach is that the former translation seems to me more satisfactory in representing the idea that soul and body come into existence together and form a whole, a composite being, and therefore one is in need of the other in order for the whole to be completed. On the other hand, ‘complex’ may easily suggest a combination or union valid for properties alone, which is not the case for the sort of union demonstrated by soul and body.

²¹ Marie-Odile Boulnois, ‘Némésios d’Emèse et la comparaison de l’union de l’âme et du corps en Christologie’ in *Annuaire de l’Ecole pratique des hautes études. Section des sciences religieuses*, EPHE 119 (2012), 168, <https://asr.revues.org/1074?lang=en>.

²² *Ibid.*, 169, note 24–27.

²³ *Ibid.*, 170, note 28.

²⁴ Telfer, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesisius of Emesa*, 301: ‘any being is liable to be assumed as complement to another being. It can be part of a being, while preserving its own proper nature after it has afforded completion to other being.’

incorporeal'.²⁵ Now what should one infer from the foregoing? The above mentioned asymmetry between the anthropological and the Christological unions seems to be due only to the gradations of the incorporeal, everything taking from this point of view a subordinated position with respect to God. The same Neoplatonic picture of gradations of incorporeality appears to determining a sort of scale of impassibility: 'the more spiritual being is not impaired by the inferior being, but the later only is profited by the more spiritual...'²⁶

Thus, it seems that for Nemesisius, the difference between the two unconfused unions should be ascribed solely to the purity of the incorporeals involved in the unions. God is by definition the absolute pure being, and so this is why the 'unconfused union' properly applies to him and only improperly to souls.

Without questioning the virtues of this approach, it is interesting to see how the analogy evolved in later theological contexts. I shall first deal with Leontius of Byzantium, a 5–6th century Byzantine theologian, who himself was an heir of Nemesisius of Emesa. We will see that the theological challenges with which Leontius will be faced will also highlight the need to elaborate more on the difference between the anthropological and Christological union.

The Soul/Body Analogy for the Christology of Leontius of Byzantium

Leontius of Byzantium was a remarkable supporter of the dyophysite or Chalcedonian teaching, who strived to argue for the preservation of the two natures united in Christ in an unconfused union. As observed by Grillmeier, Leontius first follows Nemesisius by asking exactly the same question: what is 'the manner of union' (ὁ τρόπος τῆς ἐνώσεως)?²⁷ Leontius also discusses various forms of union and dismisses σύγχυσις as being unsuitable for the explanation of the relationship between the natures of Christ. The reason for this rejection is that it proposes an all-encompassing union: In the new body, new properties are generated which cannot be parted again in the initial elements.²⁸ However, following Nemesisius, Leontius insist on the integrity of the substances involved in an 'unconfused union'. Furthermore, Leontius is explicit in saying that, in contradistinction with the Logos, who suffers nothing from his union with human nature, the soul suffers from its union with the body. The explanation he provides for this is that, being created, the soul is a dynamic substance. Since it has a beginning it should also have an end. It is only through God's power that the soul remains in existence, whereas God is *per se* stable.²⁹ And it is due to this same divine power that the soul can be united with the body, for otherwise

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 301.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 302.

²⁷ Grillmeier and Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 205.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 205.

²⁹ Leontius of Byzantium, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* (PG 86:1284A–1285A).

there could not be a union of the two, given their difference in nature. What is crucial in these thoughts is that these differences do not affect the nature of the union: each of the two remains what it was before union, that is, the soul, incorporeal and immortal, and the body a corporeal entity and mortal. Similarly, divinity and human nature remain unmingled in their union in Christ, for divinity is not affected at all by the union with the flesh. In both cases, and this is a remarkable contribution by Leontius, the union is hypostatic, that is, the natures united do not compose a third, perhaps mixed nature, like some monophysites would posit, but a person, an individual or hypostasis. Thus, Leontius is able to circumvent the problems raised by his monophysite adversaries by working out the difference between nature and hypostasis, or individual, in a manner that surpasses the Christology of Nemesius. But however smart and crystalline Leontius' arguments were, he had to face a much subtler argument by the monophysites. Let me summarize it as follows: if soul and body are two complete natures, then one must actually count in Christ three natures: the divine, the soul, and the body, all partaking in Jesus.³⁰ To this penetrating argument Leontius replied as follows: considered in itself, one man has two natures, soul and body. But taken together with other human beings, he has exactly the same nature with them, made of soul and body. As Venance Grumel expertly observes in his classical article on Leontius, 'nature' has for Leontius two senses: one, physical, denoting its constitutive elements, *i.e.* soul and body, and another logical, denoting the universal, that is, the common elements of all the members of a species (*i.e.* rationality for the species of man).³¹

The question is to see what sort of relationship these two aspects of 'nature' have to one another? In the absence of a clearer demarcation between them, one could be easily drawn to the conclusion that it is the physical constitution of man which is responsible for determining what is common to all human beings. Supposing that this might indeed be true for human beings, it fails to hold true for the human nature of Christ, for it is precisely the physical constitution of Christ which is foreign to the laws of the production of human beings. It is only with Maximus the Confessor that this difference between the physical and the logical constitution of the universality of man has become apparent and, through this, the limit of the analogy between the anthropological and the Christological unions has been unveiled.

St Maximus the Confessor on the Limits of Soul/Body Analogy in Christology

In seventh century Byzantium, the theological issue evolved slightly from the problematic of the natures' 'union without confusion' to the relationship between Christ's wills and energies. The details of this new dispute do not concern us here.

³⁰ See, for details, V. Grumel, 'L'union hypostatique et la comparaison de l'âme et du corps chez Léonce de Byzance et saint Maxime le confesseur', *Echos d'Orient* 25, no. 144 (1926): 396.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 397.

It suffices to mention that they considered the same very pressing question of the nature of the union: how are the wills and energies of Christ united? Do they form one will and one energy, corresponding to the one hypostasis of Christ, or do they rather remain two, unconfused, though used unitarily by the individual Christ?³²

A subtle theological mind and well-versed in philosophy, Maximus the Confessor entered this dispute and provided the most forceful arguments for the union without confusion of the wills and energies of Christ. In his arguments, and generally in his theological approach, he relies extensively on Nemeseus and Leontius. As is well known, his anthropology is deeply influenced by Nemeseus' description of the faculties of the soul and their correspondence in the bodily senses.³³ Moreover, one of the most important definitions of the will by Maximus seems to be borrowed directly from Nemeseus' description of will as a free self-determinative power of the soul.³⁴ I would like to suggest that—with regards to the problem of the soul/body analogy in relation to Christological union—the Confessor seems to be close to Nemeseus' thoughts in explaining the difference between the two.

Maximus talks in a similar manner to the two previous authors about the relevance of the comparison between the two unions, and seems to rely on the Leontian language of hypostasis and nature in his way of describing the analogy. However, Maximus is also keen to qualify the analogy. He identifies three important differences between the anthropological and the Christological unions:³⁵

The first difference refers to the moment in which the parts come into existence. According to the Christian teaching proposed by Maximus, neither soul nor body preexist each other. Rather they come into existence at the same time and are thus simultaneous in time.³⁶ Christ, however, being God, is beyond time and so pre-exists his human nature. The second difference is directly following from the former: it plainly says that the anthropological union has no ratio in any of its parts: neither soul nor body has the power in itself to unite with the other.³⁷ They are, to use Maximus' words, united 'by necessity' (ἐξ ἀνάγκης).³⁸ In contrast to this, Christ willingly unites himself with the human nature. The third difference combines the previous ones as follows: the simultaneity of coming into existence of soul and body imposes an ontological relation upon them. This is why, Maximus says, the soul of a

³² For details, see, C. Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom. Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

³³ For details, see L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 2nd edition (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1995).

³⁴ Maximus the Confessor, *Opuscula Polemica et Theologica* (PG 91:277A).

³⁵ We follow here the comprehensive account of N. Madden, 'Composite Hypostasis in Maximus the Confessor', 175–97.

³⁶ Maximus the Confessor, *Ep.* 13.3–6 (PG 91:517A): "Ἐπειτα δὲ ἀλλήλοις ὁμόχρονα τὰ μέρη, καὶ ἑαυτῇ κέκτηται, κατὰ τὴν εἰς τὸ εἶναι γένεσιν συνυπάρχοντα, μηδετέρου μέρους θατέρου χρονικῶς προϋπάρχοντος.

³⁷ *Epistula* 13 (PG 91:516D–517D): Πᾶσα γὰρ σύνθετος φύσις, πρῶτον μὲν ἀπροαίρετον ἔχει τὴν πρὸς ἄλληλα τῶν μερῶν κατὰ τὴν σύνθεσιν σύνοδον.

³⁸ *Epistula*. 12 (PG 91:488D), also cited in N. Madden, 'Composite Hypostasis in Maximus the Confessor', 176.

man will be always related to a body and vice versa, even after death sets in.³⁹ Thus, the relationship of soul to body becomes constitutive for what man is, and hence defines what the nature of man is made of: a whole containing an unconfused relationship between two parts, soul and body.

Hence the parts get united in this special manner in order to compose a nature, the human nature or the human species. In Maximus' words, they contribute to the unfolding of the harmony of the universe by producing one of the many species that compose the universe.⁴⁰ Obviously, and this is actually the difference, the union in Christ cannot produce a species that helps to diversify the universe. Why not? Because, Maximus explains, God does not become incarnate for the completion of the species and, through this, of the universe itself. Rather, he did so to renew the laws of the universe in a mode foreign to the laws of the universe.⁴¹ Without the necessary distillation of this difference, Maximus warns us some absurd consequences would be forced upon us. They are best visible if placed in Maximus' ontology of universals and particulars, according to which the existence of an intermediary category of being is forbidden: 'If, according to them...[to Severus of Antioch] Christ is a synthetic nature, it is surely either general or singular...'⁴² Maximus further clarifies that, since by its definition and *logos* every general being exists only as instantiated in several individuals,⁴³ applied to Christ this amounts to stating the absurd possibility of many Christs instead of one.⁴⁴ Thus, Incarnation would be compatible with the producing of a Christological general nature or species which is comparable with all created species in that it may contain several members. If this disagrees with the orthodox teaching, what about the other possibility, that is the generation of a unique Christological species made of a single member that is Christ? Maximus rejects this option as interfering with the Biblical picture of the intra-specific succession of embodied beings from embodied parents, and also denies the occurrence of

³⁹ 'For after the death of the body, the soul is not called "soul" in an unqualified way, but the soul of a man, indeed the soul of a particular human being, for even after the body, it possesses, as its own species [*εἶδος*], the whole human being, which is predicated of it by virtue of its relation as a part to the whole,' in Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* (PG 91:1101A). The translations of the *Ambigua* (here slightly altered) are those of Nicholas Constas, *Maximos the Confessor. On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

⁴⁰ *Epistula* 13 (PG 91:517A): *Πρὸς ἔτι γε μὴν καὶ εἰς συμπλήρωσιν τῆς τὸ πᾶν μεγαλοφυῶς ὑπογραφούσης ὁλόκλητος γινώσκεται πεποιμένη*. also cited in N. Madden, 'Composite *Hypostasis* in Maximus the Confessor', 177.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* (PG 91:517BC): *Καὶ εἰς διόρθωσιν καὶ ἀνακαινισμόν, ἀλλ' οὐκ εἰς συμπλήρωσιν τοῦ παντός, ἐνανθρωπήσαντος. Τρόπῳ γὰρ οἰκονομίας, ἀλλ' οὐ νόμῳ φύσεως, ἀρρήτως ὁ τοῦ Θεοῦ πρὸς ἀνθρώπους διὰ σαρκὸς ἐπεδήμησεν Λόγος. Οὐκοῦν οὐκ ἔστι σύνθετος φύσις ὁ Χριστός, κατὰ τὴν καινοτομίαν τῶν κενούντων τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον· τῷ νόμῳ τῆς συνθέτου φύσεως, κατὰ τὸν εἶναι τρόπον, παντάπασιν οἰανοῦν κατ' εἶδος σύνθετον φύσιν αὐτῆς κατηγορουμένην οὐκ ἔχουσα*.

⁴² *Ibid.*, (PG 91:517C): *Εἰ δὲ κατ' αὐτοὺς ἐκείνους ὁ Χριστὸς σύνθετος ἔστι φύσις... ἡ γενικὴ πάντως ἔστι, ἢ μοναδική*.

⁴³ *Ibid.* (PG 91:517D): *Τοιοῦτος γὰρ ὁ πάσης γενικῆς φύσεως ὅρος τε καὶ λόγος*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* (PG 91:517D): *Πλήθος ἡμῖν Χριστῶν ἀνθ' ἑνός*.

any singular being in concrete existence.⁴⁵ Inspired by the classical counterexample of the phoenix as a singular being⁴⁶—a common topic in antiquity⁴⁷—the Confessor argues that since the phoenix is a sensitive animal, its existence is bound by the law of intra-specific reproduction of a body from another body. So, the phoenix cannot be alone, but must have some ‘parents’. Maximus thus insists that, for every species, including humans, the chain of procreation must be valid, and hence there is no unique hypostatic being in the world, except Christ.⁴⁸

Leontius also insists upon the unicity of Christ against, for instance, the supposed unicity of the sun, which he rather called a star among others.⁴⁹ But he did not adequately realise that the unity in Christ as compared that of men, despite their formal similarities, still retain a crucial difference. Maximus’ arguments show that this has to do with the results of the union: in the case of man, nature is essentially synthetic or composite, whereas Christ’s nature is only a composite individual or hypostasis. The difficulty in differentiating between the two is mainly determined by the fact that man is also a composite hypostasis. However, the crucial question which Maximus invites us to ask here is, what is the cause of the composition? As mentioned already, man is composite because his nature is composite, that is, his composition is solely determined by his nature. Christ, on the other hand, is composite not because of his nature, but only because of his will. And this is why he is only a composite individual, truly one composite in an absolutely unique way, but not also a composite nature.

A short digression on the corollaries of this view may be in order here. One can easily infer from the presentation above that the story of the virginal birth of Christ was certainly more than just a science-fiction story for the aforementioned Byzantine thinkers. It has some logical consequences that need not be underestimated. In the case of men, sexual reproduction assures the conservation of the species and hence shows how its members are bound together by the biological law of reproduction. In light of this, it should be no surprise that Christ breaks with this law when he incarnates himself.⁵⁰ Had he been produced through sexual intercourse,

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* (PG 91:517D–518B).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* (PG 91:520AB).

⁴⁷ See, for details, the discussion about the phoenix and its sexual implications for antiquity and Byzantium in Susan R. Holman, ‘On Phoenix and Eunuchs: Sources for Meletius the Monk’s Anatomy of Gender’ in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16, no. 1 (2008): 79–101.

⁴⁸ *Epistula* 13 (PG 91:520A): *Αὐτοὺς ἐρωτήσωμεν τοὺς σοφοὺς τῶν ὄντων θεάμονας, εἰ δυνατόν ἐστὶ τι τῶν ὑπὸ γένεσιν καὶ φθορὰν ἐμψύχων καὶ αἰσθητικῶν σωμάτων, μοναδικῆς ὑπάρχειν καθ’ ὑπόστασιν φύσεως· ὧν ἡ ἐξ ἀλλήλων κατ’ εἶδος διαδοχὴ, ἀρίδηνος χαρακτήρ τοῦ εἶναι καὶ ὅρος ἐστὶ.*

⁴⁹ See, for details, D. Krausmüller, ‘A Chalcedonian Conundrum: The Singularity of the *Hypostasis* of Christ’, *Scrinium* 10 (2014): 361–382.

⁵⁰ As suggested by the anonymous peer review comments to this paper, one could, at least based on *Ambiguum* 31 better assert that Christ does not break with the biological law of reproduction but rather ‘renews’ all the laws of the universe and creation. Yet, despite this being a justified observation which could also help us represent the future eschatological state of the universe, it should be clear so far that Maximus’ position is that the Incarnation of Christ is an absolute *exception* to any law-like description of the universe. Otherwise, the possibility of many Christs based on the *new* law-like structure of the species would again be forced upon us. To put it differently, the unicity of the Incarnation of Christ lies in the unique

he would have been determined by the conservatory force of the species. In other words, the unconfused union instantiated by him would have been produced by the very structure of the species and would have not been caused by Christ's will.

Returning now to Maximus' entire argument for the difference of the two unconfused unions, it could be summarized as follows: the unity of soul and body produces a composite nature and a composite individual or hypostasis—me or another particular person. The unity of the divine and human in Christ results solely in a composite individual or hypostasis, that is, Jesus Christ and not in a composite nature. The similarity of the two resides in the formal aspect of the union; it is an unconfused union, in which the parts united remain unimpaired and preserve their differences intact. The difference, however, is discernible from scrutinizing the results of the unions. In contrast with Christ, in the case of man, the union also produces a synthetic nature, human nature itself, which is nothing other than the whole composed of soul and body. Hence, the union of a soul and body in a human person or individual is but the union presented by the human nature alone. And since it is the same union present in all human individuals, the conclusion must be that it is a mechanism by which nature itself determines this union, which is secured by the biological law of reproduction.

Maximus' Debt to Nemesis

Maximus' argument for the limits of the anthropological model of union for Christology relies heavily on the idea that, in contradistinction to the divine nature, the soul enters into the union in order to create a whole, *e.g.* the human species. The argument that there is a sort of correspondence between soul and body, and that the two share in some powers which make possible their reciprocal accommodation and joint work, was certainly a well-known idea by the times of Nemesis and Maximus. What is striking, however, is that Nemesis does not just refer to the necessary completion of the two entities, but also makes apparent the asymmetry between the dominant natures in every union, *e.g.* the soul and the divine nature respectively: the former is in need of completion, whereas the latter is beyond this need. Maximus does not properly use Nemesis' phrase for describing that the soul is among those things which require completion (*τῶν πεπληθυσμένων*), yet it is likely that he knew about the strict delineation between the sort of 'unconfused unions' utilized by Nemesis. The reason for this could come from observing that Maximus seems to follow a rationale already present in Nemesis which points in the same direction

coupling of a *logos* of nature with a supernatural *tropos* of existence, a joining which is foreign to any law-like description. Seen from the perspective of the *logos-tropos* distinction, which is one of Maximus' crucial distinctions that can be applied here, I think the coherent manner of reading Maximus is to ascribe the law of reproduction to the *tropos*, which shows the mode every being enters existence and not to the *logos*. Yet, I would say that for Maximus the *tropos* shown by the Incarnation of Christ is truly unique and will not be available to anyone even in the eschaton.

as one of the Confessor's arguments for the contrast of the two 'unconfused unions'. As noticed already, Maximus considers the coming into existence of individuals as being the fulfilment of the species which contain them, and without which the species that form the beauty of the universe cannot exist. The following passage is an elaborate description of the whole process of mutual interaction and sustainment between universals and particulars:

And, again, universals are contained by particulars through alteration, whereas particulars mutate into universals when they are destroyed by dissolution. And the coming into being of the former is inaugurated by the destruction of the latter, while the destruction of the latter comes about through the generation of the former, for the combination of one universal with another, which brings more particulars into being, is a process of alteration that results in the destruction of the universal, whereas the reduction of particulars to universals, through the dissolution of their composition, is at once the cause of their destruction and the ongoing existence and creation of universals.⁵¹

It is well-known that Nemesius formed the basis of Maximus' reflections on providence over universals and particulars, as the following text-comparison should make plain.⁵²

Nemesius: And how could that be hid from God which no right-minded man could fail to see, namely that the total destruction of particulars would also imply the destruction of universals? For the universals are the sum-total of particulars.⁵³

Maximus: Knowing that without the care and protection of providence all the particulars would be destroyed, and that together with them the universals [species] would also be destroyed (since universals naturally consist of particulars)...⁵⁴

I would now like to suggest that Maximus is appropriating something more from Nemesius' excursus on providence over particulars. The next argument by Nemesius brings about a conception about species as a universal made of the totality of the

⁵¹ *Ambiguum* 10 (PG 91:1169CD).

⁵² See, for details, G. Benevich, 'Maximus Confessor's teaching on God's Providence', in *The Architecture of the Cosmos. St Maximus the Confessor. New Perspectives*, eds. A. Lévy, P. Annala, O. Hallamaa, and T. Lankila (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 2016), 123–41.

⁵³ Telfer, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, 442.

⁵⁴ *Ambiguum* 10 (PG 91:1189CD).

particulars, which is the same as that invoked by Maximus in the picture of mutual conservation of particulars and universals:

For surely, the species are the particulars taken together. They are convertible, perish and remain conserved together. And there is nothing to prevent from perishing every particular that goes to make the world, if so be that no care is being taken for them from above. Then when the particulars perish, the universals will perish too. Should they answer that God has a providence to this end only, that by keeping all particulars from perishing, he may preserve the species, they are caught admitting that some kind of providence over particulars exists. For it is by such providence over particulars that God, on their own showing, preserves the species and the genera of things.⁵⁵

The totality of particulars invoked here for the conservation of species is nothing but an alternative way of phrasing the same thing Maximus' wants to convey by the idea that individuals come into existence in order to fulfill the species, and thereby complete the harmony of the universe. In other words, by producing a synthetic nature in their union, soul and body bring about a composite hypostasis whose existence is simultaneous with composite nature. Yet, the hypostasis as a particular being fills in the chain of hypostases contained in the human species, and so contributes to the formation of the species itself. In other words—which holds for Nemesius as well—the soul's feature of being in need of completion appears interconnected not with the property of composition manifested by the hypostasis. Rather, it is interconnected with the property of being determined by the species itself, because the latter has no existence except as a plurality of individuals which fall within its extension. In conclusion, Maximus appears to have developed one implicit but important idea present in Nemesius: the completion of soul and body into a whole is driven by the nature of the universals, more exactly by the species' mode of existence as a totality of individuals, and not by the composite structure of the hypostasis. Yet, in contradistinction to Nemesius, who is favourable to the Neoplatonic model of union without confusion, Maximus succeeds in highlighting one crucial feature of Christian thought about the coming into existence visible in the Incarnation: the entering into embodied existence is solely based on a person's willing—God's will—and not just on the powers and mechanisms of nature. This should lead us to conclude that, in a world in which the idea of general divine providence over nature was not foreign to the pagan spirit, the Incarnation as a special act by God should have indeed appeared either impossible or an absolute novelty.

⁵⁵ Telfer, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, 442.