

MOTIONLESS MOVE

Each Christmastide, Christians habitually focus their attention on God's intrusion into time despite being Himself timeless, without beginning and without end. His unanticipated entry into a universe where *"everything suffers mutation and decays"* as Aristotle put it almost compels Christians to weigh themselves against the challenging and perennially unanswered question of time versus eternity. Aristotle had only assessed phenomena and did not provide any answer as to why all beings *"suffer mutation and decay"*. He thus reached the limit of human observation which, at its best, can in this case merely speculate on where the roots of creatures lie but cannot discover to what extent these roots expand, because in this life, according to St. Maximus the Confessor, *"of all beings, none can know itself or any other being as regards their very essence."* Therefore, the discoveries of the minute constituents of matter (nuclei, neutrons, electrons, etc.) have nothing to do with either the essence of what we call "matter" or any true knowledge of the universe. Indeed, God's uncreated energies whereby He ceaselessly determines His own creatures remain inconceivable and incomprehensible to the human mind, although they are accessible through human participation in the divine life *"by actual experience alone. Without the mediation of any reasoning or perception, the uncreated energies make us thoroughly sense the One, who makes Himself known through impartation of His own Self by grace"*.

A sense of "mystery" looms in every attempt human minds make in order to understand exactly how the roots of our being are made steadfast within the inaccessible reality of God, how they expand so far beyond the universe, and how they are thence vivified. And the "mystery" becomes even more profound when, quite unexpectedly, from "over there," from the infinite depths of the Goodness which transcends all reasoning and conception, the Ultimate Cause of all arises in the precise form of a human being, impregnated with the fullness of His own Divinity, *"twofold in natures and yet a single Divine Person"*, One and Unique, of whom *"nothing is more unitary"*, He aims at uniting all humans with Himself and each other into His Immortal Body so that the abundance of His Goodness may not be pointless.

Certainly Aristotle could never imagine such a development nor could he assign to a Human Body in which *"dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead"* either the cause of all creation or the ultimate purpose for the existence of time; nor even could he see that the reason why all beings decay is due either to failing to arrive or procrastinating their arrival at this End. Although he had correctly postulated that *"all motion can only occur within time,"* he nonetheless was unable to discern the sole reason why each particular motion takes place. All the more so it remained inconceivable and beyond Aristotle's imagination that the *One Forever-Immovable Mover* could ever *"move without motion, so that, all things that move according to their nature, cease their own motion by attaching themselves to the One who is essentially immovable and thus thoroughly abort their motion toward themselves and each other."* On the contrary, Aristotle in his strenuous effort to create his primitive "theory of general relativity" perceived an eternal recycling of beings who suffered mutation and decay because of their motion within time, as well as a "god" enslaved to the maintenance of this wheel-well known as "the universe," by remaining himself, by necessity, the immovable centre of that balance. "He" is deprived of all motion and therefore is incorruptible, unable to interfere even faintly with anything eternally moving, since the slightest move on his part, would inevitably cause this irrational balance to collapse.

Yet this imaginary and Sisyphean balance could not but prove itself non-existent. The failure or procrastination of God's creatures to arrive at their primeval destiny, the very "End" for the sake of which they have been created, ought to have come to a halt. The decay had to cease and the mutation-suffering creatures had to re-orientate irreversibly themselves towards the Origin by which *"all things were made."* This is the reason why *"the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us"* thus revealing the transient inter-connection between Creator and creation, time and eternity, decay and incorruption, necessity and freedom, beginning and end, motion and stability, *"if at all, the ending of all ages is to be realized within Him alongside the stability of all moving beings whereby of all beings, none shall any longer suffer mutation."* In perceiving the forthcoming end of all motion St. Maximus has completely transformed the static Aristotelian "relativity" theory into Christian Eschatology by infusing into it Christ-centric relevance.

Indeed, by the incarnation of the Word, the very reason for the existence of the universe has been definitively elucidated and the created order has been disconnected from the futility of irrational repetition thereby obtaining meaning and content of paramount significance. The vicious circle of human concepts and speculation, of philosophical quest for truth or scientific hypotheses, of theories or unrestrained poetic fantasies, were all proven irrelevant to the Eternity towards which mankind looks. Decay is being steadily and slowly abolished by this unique God-Creator, who is fully man as well, without His divine attributes

undermining His humanity or vice versa. Because of His co-substantiality with our flesh, He has proved Himself capable of destroying of decay itself, first upon His own body and then upon the bodies of all human beings.

Moreover, His union with our flesh reveals Him to be beyond any necessity, absolutely free in both His natures, enabled with two invincible and utterly natural freedoms - the divine and the human freedom – whereas we, because of our faults and failures, cannot even enjoy our natural freedom intact, invulnerable and inviolable by unnatural choices of personal whim; all our choices - without exception- thoroughly stain us with desires, options, decisions and other personal, unnatural predispositions and thus, incarcerate us into vicious circles of lust and pain which human means and ways cannot transcend...

For the sake of our liberation from such horrendous prisons of utter individuality "*the essentially Immovable One has moved without motion*" by becoming incarnate and accessible to time and decay. This means that God became incarnate without His Essence being affected by His entry into the created realm. Space and time were proven unable to condition or diminish His Divine Nature and thus He remained Lord in both realms just as He ever was. The amazing event, ineffable in all its aspects, has only been suggested by early Christian writers mainly in terms of Aristotelian Physics – the scientific language of that time – not in philosophical or "theological" conjectures. From a historical point of view, this signifies that it was "Science" and "Physics" what initially constituted the quintessence of Christian Theology. Aristotle had inadvertently provided the "appropriate" infrastructure, enabling the Eastern Fathers to convey realistically to their contemporaries the consequences of the Incarnation. It was all about Physics: these consequences had nothing to do with relationships but only with "natures" or "essences" and "energies", namely Reality, Divine and human; they had nothing to do with metaphysics, contemplation, or speculation "*by analogy*". They involve astrophysics, cosmology, anthropology, all branches of the primitive science of that time, so that the Incarnation made great sense to all human beings-not just Christians- and revealed to everyone how seriously were always being taken by their Creator... Yet the Aristotelian universe itself had to be turned upside –down by being deprived of its Forever Immovable Mover (once the latter had made a move) in order to accommodate a much more realistic world meaningfully pre-conceived before all ages by a Saviour, determined "*to turn all of it into Himself out of goodness*"!

Having been born as a human "*incorruptibly*," He had *de facto* banked on the end of all physical corruption, the abolition of death, the resurrection of mankind, and the incorruption of the life to come; these have nothing to do with Aristotelian immobility, but rather with ceaseless perfection, that final and everlasting balance which posits the entry of His reasonable creatures into the fullness of His own uncreated Glory and, consequently, the disappearance of evil, injustice, inequality and imperfection; it is the return to the "*Beginning*" which consists of the "*pre-conceived End*." All creatures which are endowed with reason and naturally determined by a beginning and end are now "by grace" deemed worthy to become without beginning and without end. Hence, Eternity ceases to be a mesmerizing trick to our intellect and becomes Reality, if not yet tangible, still utterly inescapable: a reality so overwhelming, that it already fights off our fallen status by obliging us back to our pristine beauty.

St. Maximus the Confessor, one of the greatest theologians of the Eastern Church, affirms that what stabilizes the time-protractable fluidity of our decaying existence is *True Vision*, namely the state into which the shepherds of Bethlehem were deemed worthy to be admitted, once "*the glory of the Lord shone round about them*." "*This thing*" (Luke 2:15) has nothing to do with eyesight and human vision and yet It always remains accessible to all, being the true vocation of mankind, the only one that turns human beings into beholders of God, "*glorifying and praising Him for all things*." It is the Christmas experience. What determines it has nothing to do with any creaturely experiences like those routinely occurring to us. It is rapture into what transcends the universe, the sudden lightning which enabled the shepherds to hear and see all, without the need for ears and eyes.

Hence, the Eternity that Christians look forward has nothing to do with the sensory data of this world; it is not a re-creation of beautiful moments, landscapes, faces, relationships or fleeting happiness. All these cannot be resurrected or extended forever. Created reality cannot determine the uncreated Glory, nor can fallen human feelings be exalted to the point of being mistaken for Divine "Sensitivity". Hence, Anselm's ludicrous speculative arguments in his *Cur Deus Homo* have been convincing to no one since the 11th century, nor were serious Christians ever persuaded that the Divinity of the Omnipotent and Omniscient One could indeed suffer insult or offense by His own disobedient creatures. Therefore, the perennial Christmas Event constitutes neither an antidote to incontinent Divine Wrath and Anger nor abundant Satisfaction of any perceivable sense of Justice; it consists only of that sudden eruption of the uncreated Glory experienced by the shepherds, which extinguishes all creaturely experiences by its brightness. Any

humans *round about* whom such a Glory has shone, exist ever since as if they had never come into this world.

We celebrate Christmas every year lest we forget that we have been eternally predestined for this Glory. Whatever experiences we may go through in this life shall be thrown into oblivion forever once the ultimate and lasting experience of Christ's glorious Presence is realized; it will be a Presence *"so gratuitous to all beings, that It shall grant them all the knowledge of each other's essence alongside with the revelation of the uncreated Reasons for their creation which uniformly pre-existed in Him..."*

Maximos Lavriotes
Peterhouse, Cambridge