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Christ and Human Flourishing in Patristic Theology

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The mystery of the incarnation of the Logos holds the power of all the hidden meanings (logoi) and figures of Scripture as well as the knowledge of visible and intelligible creatures. Whoever knows the mystery of the cross and the tomb knows the principles (logoi) of these creatures, and whoever has been initiated into the ineffable power of the resurrection knows the purpose (logos) for which God originally made all things.

—St. Maximus the Confessor

From the earliest apostolic writings Christian teachers have understood the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in terms that exceed anything that we would call historical, biographical, national, or, in most cases, even religious. For the Apostle Paul, the earliest Christian writer, Jesus is the one “through whom all things came and through whom we live,” a figure so closely connected with the “one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live” that Paul names them together in a startling expansion of the Jewish Shema, possibly quoting an even earlier Christian creed. Paul’s confession, which stands in opposition to the many so-called gods and lords of the nations, is that the one God and the one Lord Jesus Christ together are the source of all things and the aim of human life (1 Cor. 8.5-6). Theologians across the patristic period followed the same line of thinking as they looked to Jesus as the one in whom true life is to be found. As Maximus Confessor comments, Christ crucified and risen is nothing less than the principle of all creaturely existence. Although we do not normally view things in this way—one must be “initiated” into this mystery—Jesus Christ is the basis of human life and the rationale of the universe itself. To inquire into the nature of human flourishing—what it means to live a good life individually and socially, to thrive, to have a sense of purpose, and to know joy in the midst of life’s challenges—is, in the mind of the patristic theologians, an invitation to see Christ as the source, the definition, and the means of a life worth living.

Attention to human flourishing in relation to Christ runs from the beginning to the end of the patristic period—from the teaching and witness of the martyrs, the apologists’ attempts to recommend Christianity to its cultured despisers, and the great hermeneutical and ascetical synthesis of Origen, to the intensification of Christian practices in the emerging monastic movement and the major theological syntheses of the fourth century and beyond.


2 In Paul, see also 1 Cor. 10.26; 2 Cor. 5.19; Phil. 2.6. In the later New Testament writings, Jn. 1.1-4; Col. 1.16-20; Eph. 1.10; Heb. 1.2-3; 3.3-6; Rev. 3.14.
In systematic terms, the fathers of the church\(^1\) and the major councils that gave expression to their thought understood the nature of human persons and society, the definition of salvation, and the way we ought to live now chiefly in terms of the identity and work of Jesus Christ. Christology, in other words, lies at the heart of early Christian anthropology, soteriology, and ethics, or, in a slightly different key, the church’s understanding of creation, salvation, and eschatological consummation. As Cyril of Alexandria preferred to call it, “the mystery of Christ” is the centerpiece of the good life, both now and in the age to come.

The Christological focus of patristic spirituality announces itself in the first sentence of the first work of Christian systematic theology, Origen’s *First Principles*. Origen begins by signaling the basic principle on which his entire system of biblical and speculative theology rests:

> Those who have come to believe and are convinced that grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (Jn. 1.17) and that Christ is the truth, according to his own statement “I am the truth” (Jn. 14.6), derive the knowledge that calls human beings to live a good and blessed life from no other source than the very words and teaching of Christ.\(^4\)

For Origen and the other major early theologians, all truth about human and cosmic life, and especially our understanding of the good life—*beata vita*, or human flourishing—comes to us from Jesus Christ, and in fact *is* Christ. The teaching of Christ appears in both Testaments of the Christian Scriptures as they are summarized in the rule of faith and interpreted within the context of the church’s life of worship, prayer, and discipleship. Whatever may be discerned of Christ’s teaching from the observation of the world or of human mental and social life as we find them, and whatever special revelations may occur among the saints, the early fathers routinely interpret such knowledge in light of the given data of Scripture.

The patristic doctrine of Christ centers on his incarnation, which theologians after Irenaeus often call the “economy” in a more specific sense. In patristic theology the incarnation includes the entire Christ event and has its focus and primary aim in the crucifixion and resurrection; it does not refer to Jesus’ conception or birth as distinct from his Passion, as many moderns since the nineteenth century have understood it. Christ’s death and resurrection are the focal point of Scripture, the key to its interpretation “according to the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3.6), and the centerpiece of our knowledge of all creatures. In patristic literature Christ is thus the necessary and permanent focus of the knowledge and love of

\(^1\) In this paper I refer to the early church “fathers,” since each of the major early theologians was male, most of them being bishops. In some cases the teaching that we possess from female theologians of the period, such as Desert Mothers Synceleica and Theodora, or Macrina, the elder sister and teacher of Basil the Great, corroborates the teaching of the male bishops; yet in many other cases is difficult to read behind the influence of male scribes or hagiographers in order to assess the doctrine of early Christian women themselves. On the state of current scholarship on early Christian women and the great complexities involved, see Ross Shepard Kraemer, “Women and Gender,” in Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David C. Hunter, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 465-92, with additional bibliography.

God, so that Christocentrism and Trinocentrism are in reality two aspects of the same enterprise.  

When I speak of orthodox patristic Christology I refer to the broad stream of unitive doctrine that begins in the Scriptures, appears in second-century figures like Ignatius of Antioch, Melito of Sardis, and Irenaeus, culminates in the Nicene councils of 325 and 381, the work of the Cappadocians, Augustine, and Cyril of Alexandria, and carries forward in the Neo-Chalcedonian orthodoxy of the later Byzantine councils and much miaphysite Christology of the Oriental Orthodox churches. This paper concentrates on the most comprehensive and highly developed expressions of orthodox Christology, those of Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine, and Maximus Confessor.

(I) Christological Principles

For patristic theologians Christ represents and promotes human flourishing not merely through his creating, saving, and consummating work, but, in a more fundamental sense, through his very identity. Christ is himself the archetype and first instance of human flourishing, and other human beings flourish by participating in Christ’s divine-human life. We will therefore do best to begin with a summary account of the rudiments of patristic Christology.

5 This applies as well to the work of Augustine, which has often been misinterpreted on this point.

Patristic theologians normally define Christ’s identity in dynamic, narrative-theological terms rather than in metaphysical terms of how divine and human natures go together. Orthodox Christology thus includes the narrative, biblical account of creation, salvation, and consummation, as well as the more abstract statements about Christ’s identity implied in that account. To offer a summary definition:

Jesus Christ, the child of Mary who was crucified for our sins and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, is the divine Son of God and co-creator of the world, who has taken upon himself mortal and sinful human existence from the race of Adam in order to heal, save, and divinize it; and he will come again in the glory of God the Father to judge the living and the dead and to bring to fulfillment God’s renewal of all creation.

As the early rules of faith and the Nicene Creed state, Jesus himself—a single subject of reference—is the divine Son of God who became human, died and rose for our sins, will return to judge the living and the dead, and will reign forever at the right hand of God the Father.

Several further points either accompany or are implied in patristic confessions of Christ’s identity.

(1) Most importantly, the focus of orthodox Christology is on Christ’s divine identity. “Why is Christianity precious?” Gregory of Nazianzus asks; “Is it not that Christ is God?” Or as Augustine comments, Christ is imitable because he is divinely human: “he was human in such a way that he was also God.” At the heart of the faith and at the root of our understanding of human flourishing is the belief that the created, limited, and even suffering man Jesus is the infinite Creator God, the second person of the Trinity. In Gregory’s words, Christ is that human being who is “God on earth” and “God made visible” to those who are able to perceive his true identity. Similarly Maximus writes that the main subject of the orthodox faith is Christ, “the great God and Savior of all.” To declare Christ’s divine identity, together with that of God the Father and the Holy Spirit, is the primary meaning of “theology” in Greek patristic writing.

(2) Throughout the incarnation, Christ remains the divine Son of God. Gregory comments, following a similar statement by Origen, “What [Christ] was he continued to be; what he was not he assumed.” Likewise, Augustine notes: “The same only-begotten Son of the Father is both in the form of a servant and in the form of God.”

(3) In the incarnation the divine Son of God “took on” or “assumed” human existence into the preexistent divine being that he always is. The idea of assumption best

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8 Or. 37.17.
9 En. Ps. 56.1.
10 Or. 29.19.
11 Or. 30.20.
12 Opusc. 7.73A.
13 Or. 29.19. See Origen, Princ. pref.4: “He remained what he was, namely God.”
14 Trin. 1.14.
captures several other traditional concepts, such as becoming flesh, condescension, self-emptying, and self-humbling.\(^{15}\) In the incarnation the simple, divine Son of God therefore becomes composite (\textit{suntithēs}).\(^{16}\) The incarnation is the unique and supreme instance of God’s uniting himself with human existence.

(4) Jesus Christ is a single subject of existence, predication, action, and passion: the divine Son of God in human form; he is neither two “things” nor two “sons.” As Gregory comments,

[Christ] deigned to be made one thing out of two (\textit{ben ek ton duo}). For both are God, that which assumed and that which was assumed, the two natures coming together in a single thing (\textit{duo physeis eis ben sundramousai}). But not two sons: let us not give a false account of the blending.\(^{17}\)

Even though God and human existence remain in one sense different realities (\textit{allo kai allo}), when the divine Son became human they became “one thing” (\textit{ben}: the terms are neuter in both cases), and the only-begotten Son remains the single subject of existence (\textit{allo}) that he has always been.\(^{18}\) In language introduced by Irenaeus, Christ is “one and the same” Son of God both before and in the incarnation, “a complete human being and also God.”\(^{19}\)

Some patristic theologians express Christ’s singularity in strong terms such as “unity,” “union,” “hypostatic union,” “mixture,” “blending,” or even a single “nature.”\(^{20}\) Although they are not necessary for expressing a unitive Christology, such terms dramatically convey the dynamic, unifying action of the incarnation and the mysteriously intimate union of God and humanity in Christ. Christ’s union can just as rightly be called a union in nature or being, since the Son who unites humanity to himself is the divine nature,\(^{21}\) as a union in or by hypostasis, which draws our attention to the particular instance of the divine nature that is uniting itself to humanity: the only-begotten Son. (In his famous phrase “hypostatic union,” Cyril of Alexandria is not preferring the latter over the former meaning, as is often thought.)

(5) The unifying principle of the incarnation is the divine Son of God himself, who is, in technical terms, both divine nature and hypostasis, or hypostasized Divinity. The Son is able to assume humanity and blend it with himself, in the divine nature, because of his divine identity. Again Gregory comments, “[Christ] was born as a single entity (\textit{heis}) because the


\(^{16}\) Origen, \textit{Cels.} 1.66; Gregory of Nazianzus, \textit{Or.} 29.18; Cyril of Alexandria, \textit{Ep.} 46.3; Maximus Confessor, \textit{Ep.} 15.553D.

\(^{17}\) \textit{Or.} 37.2.

\(^{18}\) \textit{Ep.} 101.20–21. See also Augustine, \textit{En. Ps.} 56.5; \textit{Trin.} 1.14; Maximus Confessor, \textit{Pyrrh.} 344B-D.

\(^{19}\) \textit{Ep.} 101.15. See also Cyril of Alexandria, \textit{Ep.} 4.6; Maximus Confessor, \textit{Opusc.} 7.84B.


\(^{21}\) Cyril of Alexandria, \textit{Ep.} 4.3-4; Maximus Confessor, \textit{Opusc.} 7.73B-C.

\(^{22}\) Origen, \textit{Princ.} 2.6.3; Gregory of Nazianzus, \textit{Or.} 38.13; Gregory of Nyssa, \textit{Antirrh.} 217.

\(^{23}\) Gregory of Nazianzus, \textit{Or.} 29.18; Cyril of Alexandria, \textit{Un. Chr.} 736A–737C/77-79.

\(^{24}\) E.g., in Christ there is a “natural union” (\textit{symphonia}, GregNaz., \textit{Ep.} 101.31) or a “union in being” (\textit{kat’ oniastin sunaptēsin}, \textit{Ep.} 101.22). See also Gregory of Nyssa, \textit{Antirrh.} 172; Cyril of Alexandria, \textit{Ep.} 17.4-5, 12 anath. 3.
One who is more powerful prevailed\(^{25}\) and because “both are God, that which assumed and that which was assumed,”\(^{26}\) including Christ’s physical body.\(^{27}\) Hence there is a fundamental asymmetry between Christ’s divinity and humanity. As Augustine puts it, Christ is equal to God “by nature,” yet less than him “by condition (\(\text{habit}a\))\(^{28}\) and, in Pauline terms, Christ is in the form of God, but he \(\text{assumed}\) the form of a servant.\(^{29}\)

(6) Christ’s incarnation is therefore God’s human action and passion for our salvation. Not only is Christ’s divinity evident in the plainly divine statements of Scripture; even more importantly, God’s presence and love for his people is visible in those passages which indicate Christ’s limitation, suffering, and death. The central purpose of the incarnation was for the Son of God to undergo a human death in order to save us; God therefore suffers in the incarnation. The patristic notion of divine suffering involves two important qualifications. (i) It is human or creaturely suffering that we are talking about, suffering within the realm of creation and according to its terms, or, as the Greeks say, “in the economy,” not divine suffering per se. (ii) Nevertheless, it is God who directly and immediately undergoes creaturely suffering in Jesus Christ, a belief that calls forth a whole range of theopaschite expressions from the second to the eighth century. Gregory Nazianzen and Cyril thus speak of God’s “impassible passion” in Christ, and the Second Council of Constantinople confesses that “one of the Trinity was crucified” in the Incarnation.

In the great test cases of Christ’s agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and the crucifixion itself, the fathers are concerned to emphasize that God has \(\text{not}\) abandoned Jesus in the hour of his greatest need (in which case there would be two acting subjects). Far from it, the cross is exactly where God means to be present. Jesus’s cry of abandonment from the cross represents God’s inclusion and incorporation of Christ’s human suffering into the saving embrace of the divine life, and Christ’s suffering shows us just how much God loves broken and sinful creatures. As Augustine stresses, the incarnation shows that God is not compromised or polluted by contact with human flesh, as the Platonists believed, and that the true God is in fact superior for having done so. Porphyry’s great mistake was that he refused to believe that God could take on human existence and suffer for his people, which, Augustine says, is the only belief that deserves the name “the love of wisdom,” or philosophy.\(^ {30}\)

Christ’s identity is therefore best expressed in realistic theopaschite statements, some of which make for memorable, paradoxical antitheses. Such expressions appear regularly in second-century theology, long before the later fathers reflected more formally on their meaning.\(^ {31}\) As Gregory comments, echoing early formulations, “the Uncontained now moves from place to place; … the One who exists beyond time has come to exist under

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\(^ {25}\) Or. 29.19.
\(^ {26}\) Or. 37.2.
\(^ {27}\) Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 39.16; Maximus Confessor, \(\text{Opusc.} 7.73\text{C-D}.\)
\(^ {28}\) \(\text{Trin.} 1.14.\)
\(^ {29}\) \(\text{Trin.} 1.22; 2.2, 4. \) See also Gregory of Nazianzus, \(\text{Ep.} 101.36-39.\)
\(^ {30}\) \(\text{Civ. Dei} 9.16-17; 10.24.\)
\(^ {31}\) In the high-patristic period, see, e.g., Ambrose, \(\text{Inc.} 5.36;\) Cyril of Alexandria, \(\text{Ep.} 17.7-12;\) Augustine, \(\text{Trin.} 1.28.\) For second- and third-century references, see Frances M. Young, “Monotheism and Christology,” in Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young, eds., \(\text{Cambridge History of Christianity, vol. 1: Origins to Constantine}\) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
time; ... [and] the Invisible One has become visible.”32 Again: “What we needed was an incarnate God, a God put to death, so that we might live, and so we were put to death with him.”33 The glory of the Christian faith is best summarized in shocking terms: “to see God crucified.”34 Augustine likewise affirms that “the one single Son of God... truly underwent all that belongs to a human person” in Jesus,35 and he insists that Christians should ascribe Christ’s human experiences and suffering directly to the transcendent God.36

(7) As a result of the unity of the incarnation, Christ’s divinity and humanity mutually condition and inform one another. As Augustine notes, “both are God and both are human,” yet without changing their fundamental natures as God and creature.37 Again: “God the Word, by taking up the whole reality belonging to a human person, becomes a human being, and the assumed human being, by receiving the whole reality belonging to God, can himself be nothing else but God.”38 Gregory introduces the language of perichoresis into Christian theology to make just this point: “Just as the natures are blended and flow into (perichorauon) one another, so too do his [divine and human] titles, according to the principle of their natural union.”39

(8) God’s assumption of human existence divinizes Christ’s own human nature, purifying it from sin at his conception, defeating all human sin and death on the cross, and transforming humanity from mortality to immortality in the resurrection. Christ is thus the New Adam, the first instance and the progenitor of a renewed and recreated human race,40 and, as for Irenaeus, the recapitulation of all of God’s generosity toward creation.41 Christ’s humanity is the paradigm and the archetype of human flourishing.42

(9) There is no competition or contradiction between Christ’s divine nature and his human form, including Jesus’ mental functioning. The Incarnation does not represent an ontological conflict, as is sometimes thought, nor is it a paradox in the strict sense, although it is certainly a wonder (paradocon) of unanticipated divine activity and manifestation. As Gregory of Nyssa comments, the only thing that is opposed to God is sin; creaturely nature in itself is not opposed to its Creator.43 On the contrary, the incarnation of the divine Son leads to the full, natural functioning of human nature for the first and only time.

32 Or. 37.1-3.
33 Or. 45.28-29.
34 Or. 43.64.
35 Libel. 6, CCL 64.117, a Western Christological statement signed by Augustine in 418 or 419, a decade before the Nestorian controversy erupted. Translation by Brian E. Daley, “Christology,” in Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 166.
36 Trin. 1.14.
37 Libel. 3, CCL 64.114. See also Maximus Confessor, Opusc. 7.84C.
39 Athanasius, Ar. 1.51; Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 30.1, 5; 39.13.
40 Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 2.23-24; 38.7.
41 See also Athan., Ar. 1.38, 41-43; Gregory of Nyssa, Eun. 3.3.67-68; Maximus Confessor, Opusc. 7.81C.
42 Or. cat. 5, 9-10. See also Gregory of Nazianzus, Ep. 101.37-45; Or. 37.2; Ambrose, Inc. 5.36; Augustine, Civ. Dei 9.16-17; Maximus Confessor, Pyrrh. 291A.
(10) Christ’s possesses a complete and fully functioning human mind and will. In Gregory Nazianzus’s famous dictum, “That which has not been assumed has not been healed, but that which is united to God is also being saved.” Christ is a complete human being, possessing human choice and self-determination. Maximus analyzes the several aspects of human willing accordingly: Jesus possesses a human will (to thelema); his will has real aims and objectives (to theleton); and his willing has a certain quality (to pos thelein), which in his case is pure righteousness, or perfect obedience to the objectives of the divine will. Yet unlike all other humans, the actual subject who does Jesus’ human willing (bo thelon) is the divine Son of God, since the Son provides the hypostasis of Jesus’s human existence. Hence, it is the divine Son’s human mind and will that we are talking about, and their perfect functioning is the direct result of the incarnation. Augustine comments that Jesus’ divinity causes his human obedience and sinlessness, and, following Gregory, Maximus argues that Jesus’ 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.” Christ’s human will—and his alone—was “properly natural” and truly human.

(11) Orthodox Christology arises directly from the biblical witness, and it involves a corresponding method of biblical interpretation. As many have noted, the Scriptures contain both divine and human statements about Christ. Even more remarkable, they also make divine statements about the human Jesus and human statements about the divine Son of God, a pattern of cross-predication known as the communicatio idiomatum. Taken as real and true statements of Jesus’ identity, these various statements all refer to a single subject, the divine Son of God, either in his purely divine form apart from any involvement in the economy or in his created, human form as the incarnate Lord. Accordingly, all of Jesus’ acts and experiences reported in Scripture—and especially his suffering and death—are understood to be the human acts of the divine Son of God, and the second person of the Trinity is the true subject throughout. There are therefore no merely human acts in Jesus, nor can we ascribe any of the events of his life to his human nature apart from his divine nature. As Augustine summarizes, all biblical statements about Jesus are “Scriptures about the [divine] Son of God.”

(II) Divinization in Christ

In patristic theology, human flourishing is defined chiefly in terms of the divinization of human beings. Divinization or deification (theosis, theopoiesis, deificatio) means the transforming participation of human beings in the very being and life of God, with the result that they become divine or godlike as human beings. The divinization of humanity in Jesus

Ep. 101.32, quoted in Maximus Confessor, Opusc. 7.76D.
Pyrrh. 293A.
C. serm. Ar. 7.6.
Or. 30.12: Christ’s human will in Gethsemane “was not opposed [to God], but completely deified.”
Opusc. 7.80C-D.
Trin. 1.22. See also Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 29.18; Cyril of Alexandria, Ep. 4.3; Ep. 17.8; Un. Chr. 758A/107; Augustine, Trin. 1.28.
Christ is the aim of our original creation, our deliverance from the fallen condition in which we currently exist, and our eschatological fulfillment. It is the rationale of the entire divine economy. Hence the commonplace notion that the Creator God is the same one who recreates us in Christ and brings creation to its fulfillment. Gregory describes the whole process in his oration On the Theophany: God created the human being (individually and socially) to be “a living being cared for (oikonomein) in this world and later transferred to another, and, the final stage of the mystery, made divine (theoun) by its inclination towards God.” Similarly Augustine argues that the original human was incomplete at creation because Adam foreshadowed something greater still to come. The image of God in him longed to be like God, and his humanity pointed to the means of divinization yet to come in Christ’s incarnation. Divinization is the main goal of natural human life, Maximus writes, and the loss of it is the only real failure that one can experience. Our basic constitution as human beings is thus a kind of dynamic process, and our created nature is already eschatologically oriented: we were created in a condition of movement towards God which has its center in Christ and will reach its fulfillment in the age to come.

Yet because of the sin and death under which humanity now lives, we come to know the full scope of God’s divinizing work only through the saving work of Christ’s death and resurrection. In the early fourth century Eusebius of Caesarea and Athanasius of Alexandria definitively summarized our deep need for Christ’s saving grace. In once respect the incarnation serves a revelatory function. Immersed in sin and evil, humanity is trapped in incomprehension and idolatry and no longer worships the eternal Son and Word of God through his creatures. In response, the divine Son took on corporeal existence to recapture

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51 See, e.g., Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 21.1; 38.7, 9; 40.5. For divinization as the goal of creation: Maximus Confessor, Ep. 24.609C; Or. Dom. prol.; as eschatological: Qu. et Dub. 61, CSG 10.48 and Qu. et Dub. 81, CSG 10: the saints, having been deified to some extent already by grace, will be with Christ in the age to come.

52 Athanasius, Inc. 1, 7; Augustine, En. Ps. 45.14: “I created you, and I recreate you; I formed you, and I form you anew; I made you, and I remake you. If you had no power to make yourself, how do you propose to re-make yourself?” (trans. Boulding).

53 Or. 38.11.

54 Gen. litt. 3.24.

55 Or. Dom. 4.893D.

56 Scholars have long recognized the need for a new comprehensive study of early Christian soteriology. Classic treatments include H.E.W. Turner, The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption: A Study of the Development of Doctrine during the First Five Centuries (London: Mowbray & Co., 1952); Gustav Aulén, Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement, trans. A.G. Herbert (London: SPCK, 1953); and Frances M. Young, Sacrifice and the Death of Christ (London: SPCK, 1975). One of the most glaring omissions in the literature is the seminal contribution made by Eusebius of Caesarea, which parallels and may well have funded Athanasius’ work in several key respects, and was more influential on later Greek theology for some time.
out attention “showing us God through human existence.”\(^{57}\) Yet, in a second sense, the crown and sum of all Christ’s saving work\(^{58}\) and “the primary cause of the Savior’s becoming human”\(^{59}\) is Christ’s passion and resurrection undertaken to deal with sin and death in the deepest sense. On the cross Christ freed human existence from our mortally decaying nature, transforming our mortality into immortality, and he wins the victory over the evil powers, defeating death by death, all of which the resurrection then vindicates and makes public.\(^{60}\) Christ died as a redemptive sacrifice for the sins of the world, as the sacrificial lamb, ransom, and propitiation for Jews and Greeks alike. In Eusebius’ words, Christ’s death is “the first and most mandatory doctrine of all,”\(^{61}\) the necessary and loving act of salvation foretold by the prophets; yet, at the same time, it is a mystery that can never be fully explained.\(^{62}\)

In the fall of Adam, then, the original divinizing process of human existence was interrupted: we were cut off from Tree of Life, banished from paradise, and ceased to grow toward union with God.\(^{63}\) Augustine comments that Satan tempted us initially by perverting our good and natural impulse for divinization, alluring us with the belief that we “will be like gods” (Gen. 3.5) on our own account, rather than being divinized by grace through participation in God.\(^{64}\)

The divinizing purpose of the incarnation is a constant refrain in patristic Christology: God was born, Gregory says, “so that I might be made God so far as he is made human.”\(^{65}\) And Augustine: “The blessed and blessing God became a partaker of our nature and thus offered us a path to participation in his divine nature,”\(^{66}\) and “the Son of God became a son of man, in order to make sons of men into sons of God.”\(^{67}\) For Maximus, Christ came “that nature might be thoroughly deified.”\(^{68}\) Christ’s saving work restores the created process of divinization which will be fulfilled in the age to come, and salvation is the restoration of our creationary-eschatological trajectory of divinization.\(^{69}\)

Christ’s identity as God-made-man thus repairs the breach between humanity and God. As Augustine puts it: “To make those who were human into gods, the one who was God became a human.”\(^{70}\)

Human flourishing—the result of salvation, which reestablishes the trajectory of creation leading toward eschatological fulfillment—consists chiefly in restoring the process of divinization through the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit. In patristic theology, human flourishing is not a condition or experience attainable by human resources alone, nor is it even definable in merely human or cosmic terms. It is the divine life that believers share “in Christ,” as Paul likes to say. Accordingly, Gregory’s fullest discussion

\(^{57}\) Eusebius, *Dem.* 4.10; *Theoph.* 3.9. See also Athanasius, *Inc.* 14

\(^{58}\) Eusebius, *L.C.* 15.1.


\(^{60}\) *Theoph.* 3.60; Athanasius, *Inc.* 10.

\(^{61}\) *L.C.* 15.7.

\(^{62}\) *Theoph.* 3.59.

\(^{63}\) Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 38.12; 39.13.

\(^{64}\) *Ver. rel.* 45.84. See also *Civ. Dei* 14.13; *Trin.* 10.5.7.

\(^{65}\) *Or.* 29.19.

\(^{66}\) *Civ. Dei.* 9.15.

\(^{67}\) *Serm.* 23B.1, trans. Hill.

\(^{68}\) *Opusc.* 7.77C. See also *Or. Dom.* 1.

\(^{69}\) Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 38.2-4.

\(^{70}\) *Serm.* 192.1.
of divinization occurs in a dominical feast celebrating Christ’s birth and baptism, and each of Augustine’s treatments of divinization occurs in a discussion of the incarnation.

As we participate in Christ’s death and resurrection, Augustine says, we are made “not only Christians, but Christ.” Through the mixture of God with human existence in Christ, Christians are “intertwined (plakenai) with God and become God,” Gregory writes.

Through the incarnation we come to share in what is properly Christ’s own, the divine nature, so that in the end “God will be all in all” (1 Cor. 15.28) and we will be filled with God and him alone. Just as the incarnation causes Jesus’ humanity to function perfectly, so too his grace aims to restore our humanity and to bring true human flourishing. Whereas Jesus is naturally human and truly righteous “by nature,” on account of his identity as the Son of God, Christians can be healed and divinized as humans only by the grace of Christ.

Moreover, if Jesus himself has a fully functioning human mind, then we should expect that deification involves the re-empowerment and natural functioning of our proper human capacities, not their obliteration or neglect. As Gregory famously comments, it was the human mind that needed healing most of all, since it, not the body, was the source of our sin. Maximus too argues that the human power of self-determination stands most in need of restoration. Divinization thus occurs primarily through the reformation and godly exercise of the will, which includes our deeper motivations, our passions, and our full emotional life, not merely our conscious choices. The flourishing human self is not an existential nothingness or a pure contingency, as some have imagined, but a robust, fully functioning creature whose thriving arises from the gift of divine grace in Christ.

At the same time, because of the great difference in being between God and humanity, there is, in a more profound sense, a single, divine energy operating in the humanity of Jesus and the divinized human wills of his followers, a point that Maximus emphasizes somewhat to the perplexity of his strict Chalcedonian detractors.

Similarly, Augustine comments that when Christians love God and their neighbors, it is, in a deeper sense, “only Christ loving himself.” Yet, lest we be misled to imagine that there is an ontological conflict between God’s singular action and the natural human functioning of believers, Augustine comments on Philippians 2.13 that when God is “at work in you,” he is “enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure,” as Paul goes on to say in this

71 Or. 38–40, delivered at Christmas and Epiphany 380/81.
72 E.g., Serm. 23B.1; En. Ps. 49.2.
73 Jo. ev. tr. 21.8.
74 Or. 30.3.
75 Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 30.6.
76 Ep. 101.50-55.
77 Pyrrh. 325B. Maximus’ point echoes Gregory’s argument against Apollinarius: the mind was the first thing to sin and stood most in need of healing. It also resembles Augustine’s defense of the goodness of creation and his location of evil in the will of rational beings, against the Manichees; and it harkens back to the anti-Gnostic arguments of Irenaeus and Origen that sin arises from the soul, not the body or the material world.
78 Maximus Confessor, Cap. car. 3.25.
79 Maximus Confessor, Amb. 7.1076B-C. Maximus is here defending the notion in Pseudo-Dionysius that in Christ there is a single “theandric energy,” a phrase that sounded overly monophysite.
80 Ep. Jo. 10.3.
passage, since God’s indwelling grace liberates our natures to function properly in themselves.81

(1) Life in the Spirit: Faith–Baptism–Eucharist

Human flourishing in Christ is a concrete form of life. In order to share in the divinization he provides, we come to Christ by repentance and faith, are baptized into his death for the forgiveness of sins, receive the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit, continue in the transforming life of discipleship, and share in the eucharistic feast of Christ’s Passion and coming kingdom.

Christ is himself the first instance of re-divinized humanity. Yet, properly speaking, Christ represents human flourishing in himself alone; as the New Adam, he is restored humanity in principle. It is the Holy Spirit that actualizes in believers the new life that has been achieved in Jesus.82 Augustine was fond of quoting Paul’s statement that the love of God must be “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom. 5.5); without the gift of the Spirit it is not there. It is noteworthy that the orthodox proof of the divinity of the Holy Spirit is the deification of Christians that the Holy Spirit brings about through baptism: because the Spirit divinizes in baptism, it is therefore known to be divine and worthy of worship.83

Gregory describes the process of divinization as a dialectical movement of purification and illumination leading to union with God. By the grace of Christ the Holy Spirit purifies believers of their sin and fills them with the light of the knowledge of God. Baptism is the paradigmatic instance of both experiences, and it stands at the center of the Christian life.84 Baptism is the great illumination of God’s people, which Gregory signals by calling it by a new word, to photisma (illumination), to rhyme with baptisma. As such, it is many things at once:

the splendor of souls, the conversion of life, the conscience’s appeal to God. [It] is help for our weakness, the renunciation of the flesh, the following of the Spirit, communion with the Word, the improvement of the creature, the destruction of sin, participation in light, the dissolution of darkness. It is the carriage that leads to God, dying with Christ, the perfecting of the mind, the bulwark of faith, the key of the kingdom of heaven, a change of life, the removal of slavery, the loosing of chains, the renewal of our complex being. … [It] is the greatest and most magnificent of the gifts of God.85

For Maximus, faith and baptism together effect our purification, illumination, and filial adoption,86 as they do for Augustine as well: through baptism Christians enter into Christ’s

81 Spir. et litt. 2.2; 33.57.
82 A notion found in patristic writers from Irenaeus to Maximus Confessor. On Gregory, see Beeley, Gregory of Nazianzus, p. 154; on Maximus, see Larchet, La divinisation, p. 375 and Russell, Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition, p. 269.
83 Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 31.28.
84 Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 39.1–2; 40.5.
85 Or. 40.3.
86 Qu. ad Thal. 6.280C; see Larchet, La divinisation, pp. 409-24.
life, death, and resurrection and are “born again, cleansed, justified by the grace of God” and receive the forgiveness of sins.

When we read patristic discussions of baptism, it is important to note that the sacrament includes both the preparation leading to the font and the eucharistic feast in which it culminates; rarely are early theologians commenting on the effects of baptism apart from the Eucharist, or vice-versa. As an ongoing participation and remembrance of Christ’s passion, the Eucharist nourishes and reinforces our divinization. In the Eucharistic sacrifice, Christ is both priest and victim, continually uniting believers to Christ’s original sacrifice through the offering of themselves in the eucharistic celebration. Hence Gregory calls the Eucharist “the mystery of divinization.” Through it the Word of God communicates himself to the believer through the reality of his divine humanity, dwelling completely in the recipient, as Maximus comments, and giving participants a divine quality. For Augustine, baptism and Eucharist together are the two primary sacramenta, among many other things that merit the name.

(2) Life in the Word: Christological Exegesis and Spirituality

Human flourishing also involves the spiritual practice of coming to know Christ in Scripture. From the early collection of Paul’s letters and the stabilization of a core of authoritative Christian writings by the mid-second century, Christians have read the Scriptures chiefly in light of Christ’s death and resurrection. After Origen, such reading became widely known through the Pauline phrase of interpretation “according to the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3.6). Two overlapping interpretive approaches comprise the most basic spiritual practice of patristic exegesis.

(a) Ascent to God through the Names of Christ

In patristic theology we find the common practice of making a meditative ascent through the various names and descriptions of Christ in Scripture. As Origen first described it, the most basic method of Christian spiritual development is to reflect on the various conceptions (epinoiai) of Christ given in Scripture, beginning with the most mundane, human ones and ascending to the loftiest and most divine ones. In this scheme “Son of God” is Christ’s proper name, to which all other conceptions refer. Among the many epinoiai of Christ, Wisdom and Word represent the pinnacle of the knowledge of Christ’s divinity, along with Truth, Life, and Light. Above all, Christ the Son is God’s eternal Wisdom, the one who eternally contains all the thoughts and plans of God and who, in the economy of creation, has become incarnate as the human Jesus. Yet in order truly to know Christ as God’s Wisdom, Word, and Life, we must first appreciate his identity as the “way,” the “door,” and

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87 Enchir. 14.52.
88 C. litt. Pet. 3.50.62.
90 Civ. Dei 10.20.
91 Or. 25.2.
92 Maximus Confessor, Myst. 23.
93 Maximus Confessor, Or. Dom. 90.877C.
95 Origen, Princ. 1.2.4; C. Jn. 1.118-36.
96 This idea is central to the Christology of both Origen (C. Jn. 1.111) and Augustine (Doctr. 1), who the most influential Greek and Latin Christian writers after the apostles.
the “Lamb of God” who has taken away the sins of the world, and so on. By proceeding upward through Christ’s titles, believers are purified more and more and ascend to the knowledge of the invisible God.  

Through this method of spiritual ascent the doctrine of Christ itself serves as the main vehicle of spiritual transformation and growth in human flourishing. Gregory Nazianzen argues that Christ became human and humbled himself to the point of death so that through our knowledge of him our existence might be renewed and elevated to share in God’s nature. By coming to appreciate that Christ’s humiliation is the humiliation of God in human form, Christians are enabled to identify their own humble condition with Christ’s and thereby to ascend with him to God. 

As Augustine comments, Christ gives humans a path to God “through the human being who was God (per hominem Deum),” being simultaneously the means of the journey as a human being and the goal as God. God’s Wisdom and Life, by which alone we can live and become wise, adapted herself to our weakness and offered an example of how to live. Hence Augustine glosses John 14.6, “I am the way, the truth, the life,” by saying in the voice of Jesus: “You come by me; you come to me; you abide in me.” 

The Christological ascent is an imaginative participation in Christ and a participatory imitation of his saving life. Gregory concludes his oration On the Theophany by exhorting his congregation to “travel blamelessly” through all the stages of Christ’s career. Christian salvation is thus to ascend to God through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, and our ascent is the ultimate meaning of Christian doctrine. Gregory summarizes, “God rejoices in nothing so much as the correction and salvation of human beings, which is the purpose of every doctrine (logos) and every sacramental mystery.”

(b) Radical Inclusion in the Whole Christ

Building on the first mode, the second mode of Christological interpretation leads to the radical inclusion of believers in what Augustine calls the “whole Christ” (totus Christus), the full scope of Christ’s divine-human identity that includes his Body, the church. As one considers who Christ has become for us, the Son of God who has taken on our sin and

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97 This spiritual method forms the climax of Gregory’s treatment of Christ in the Theological Orations (Or. 30.21), and it provides Augustine with his basic scheme that Christ is both the way (via) to God, in his humanity, and also the homeland (patria) in his divinity (Doctr. 1.34.38; Civ. Dei 11.2). Augustine includes this same method in his argument at the beginning of The Trinity that the knowledge of the Trinity comes by the road of faith, through God’s self-revelation in Christ in the reliable language of Scripture, rather than by the human reason of the philosophers (Trin. 1.2-3).
98 Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 29.18-19.
100 Doctr. 1.8; Conf. 7.23.
101 Doctr. 1.38.
102 Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 40.30.
103 Or. 38.18.
104 Or. 39.20.
death, one is moved to see oneself included in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. Gregory frequently speaks of Christ in inclusive, first-person terms: Christ bears “all of me in himself, along with all that is mine…, so that I may share in that which is his through the intermingling.”\(^{106}\) In a real sense, Gregory adds, all people were put to death and rose again and were glorified with Christ, so that all might be purified.\(^{107}\) This sense of being included in Christ’s own life through the reading, hearing, and liturgical celebration of Scripture promotes the ongoing purification, illumination, and divinization of Christians.

For Augustine, Christ includes human life in himself to such an extent that the body of believers throughout the ages is itself part of Christ’s very identity. He observes that the many voices that sound in Scripture, particularly in the Psalms—voices of petition, lament, praise, imprecation, fear, hope, and so on—are each the voice on the one Christ, either in his purely divine status, as God-made-human, or as “the whole Christ (\textit{totus Christus}) in the fullness of the church, that is, as head and body, according to the completeness of a certain ‘perfect man’ (Eph. 4.13), the man in whom we are each of us members.”\(^{108}\) The reading and praying of Scripture thus engrafts believers in the full particularity of their hopes and sufferings, their joys and sorrows.

The effect is quite moving. Augustine tells his congregation in a sermon on Psalm 56, “The one who together with the Father has mercy on you—he is crying out \textit{in} you, ‘Have mercy on me!’” because the Son assumed full human existence, including our sufferings.\(^{109}\) “Just as he suffered in order to teach us how to suffer, and rose form the dead to teach us to hope for resurrection,” so Christ begs mercy from God (in Psalm 56) to teach us how to pray. On account of Christ’s passion, then, “\textit{God} says to God, ‘Have mercy on me!’”\(^{110}\) In light of Christ’s unity in the incarnation, when Christians read and pray the Scriptures, they find not only Christ, but themselves in him.\(^{111}\) Having been made members of the body of Christ through faith and baptism, in the Eucharist believers celebrate and receive both the heavenly Lord (in his spiritual body and blood) and also themselves as his body.\(^{112}\) The incarnation of Christ thus makes possible the union of all people in a single community of love, and this love among God’s people is the aim of all biblical interpretation.\(^{113}\)

Augustine comments further that this experience of inclusion in the mystery of Christ depends entirely on Christ’s personal unity, so that, here again, orthodox Christology is the lifeblood of Christian spirituality and ethics. As we noted above, the marvel of God’s grace is that we have been made not just Christians, but Christ himself.\(^{114}\) In Maximus’ telling, the church of God enables us “to be Christ’s and to carry his name.”\(^{115}\)

\textbf{(3) The Reformation of Human Willing}

The is a range of descriptions in patristic literature of what the Christian life looks like as one is undergoing the dynamic process of divinization. At the heart of the matter is

\(^{106}\) \textit{Or.} 30.6.
\(^{107}\) \textit{Or.} 45.28.
\(^{108}\) \textit{Serm.} 341.1, trans. Hill.
\(^{109}\) \textit{En. Ps.} 56.5.
\(^{110}\) \textit{En. Ps.} 56.13.
\(^{111}\) \textit{En. Ps.} 142.3.
\(^{112}\) \textit{En. Ps.} 32, \textit{exp.} 2.4.
\(^{113}\) \textit{Doctr.} 1.39-41.
\(^{114}\) \textit{Jo. ev. tr.} 21.8.
\(^{115}\) \textit{Myst.} 1, trans. Berthold, p. 187.
the conversion, purification, and illumination of the human mind and will. Arguably the most penetrating analyst of this process was Maximus Confessor, who drew on much early Greek theology and whose doctrine is so similar to Augustine’s that for many years scholars assumed that he had read his Latin predecessor in North Africa. As Maximus describes it, the grace of Christ serves to renew and recreate our human nature per se, empowering and re-engaging our wills. In terms of its basic principle or rationale (logos), our humanity does not itself change. In Christ we do not cease to be human beings; we become true human beings for the first time, much as for Augustine the City of God is the only true society. As Maximus describes it, the grace of Christ serves to renew and recreate our human nature per se, empowering and re-engaging our wills. In terms of its basic principle or rationale (logos), our humanity does not itself change. In Christ we do not cease to be human beings; we become true human beings for the first time, much as for Augustine the City of God is the only true society. As Maximus describes it, the manner (tropos) of our existence is radically changed by participation in God’s being and life, a change that centers on the movement of the human will. Our disposition (diathesis) as renewed creatures consists in a new set of habits and virtues, which are reinforced by basic Christian practices and the keeping of God’s commandments, all of which is made possible by divine grace in a perfect “synergy” with the human will. Similarly, for Augustine, the image of God in each of us is restored when we turn to Christ, fix our gaze on God, move from the earthly knowledge of faith to the heavenly Wisdom that Christ is, and are thereby transformed into the likeness of God’s own image. The resulting manner of life expresses the true nature and logos of our existence, so that our lives become perfectly natural and truly human as a result of the infusion of divine energy, just as Jesus is the New Adam as a result of being God made flesh.

Gregory Nazianzen offers a rich description of the Christian life as one of spiritual practices that lead to contemplation. These practices include prayer, meditation, public witness, and praise, as well as hospitality, brotherly love, conjugal affection, sexual purity, feeding the poor, penitence, fasting, meditation on death, and the mastery of the passion. Maximus echoes this list in many places, placing a special emphasis on the mastery of the passions (as did Augustine), for it is here that the whole person is integrated into a singularity of will and purpose. In Maximus’ terms, the holy and virtuous life—a life of human flourishing—consists in being transformed from merely existing (einai) to existing well (eu einai) and, eventually, to existing forever (aei einai), each stage of which is founded in the divine nature and freely given by God’s grace. Yet living well and living eternally, Maximus cautions, depend on the disposition of the will to alter our manner of life in accord with God’s will. The goal of the Christian life is therefore to conquer sin as understood in the sort of terms that Evagrius of Pontus had popularized in his famous list of eight deadly thoughts (the original “seven deadly sins”), which drew on various teachings he had encountered in his tour of monastic settlements. The essence of each of the virtues and capacities of

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117 Civ. Dei 19.
118 Qn. ad Thal. 59 604D-605B.
119 Amb. 7.1073C-D.
121 Amb. 42.1329A.
122 Or. 27.4, 7.
123 Cap. car. 3.23-25; see Larchet, La divinisation, pp. 165f.
124 See Thunberg, Microcosm and Mediator, pp. 267f.
human nature, Maximus says, is Jesus Christ himself, including faith, hope, love, divine knowledge, wisdom, and contemplation; yet above them all, love holds the place of honor. As a result of Christ’s divinizing grace and the reform of the human will, the “syzygies” of the soul—the active and contemplative aspects of the mind—become integrated together as one moves closer to the divine simplicity, and one acquires a disposition characterized by “the divine existence and precise knowledge, the love and peace, in which and through which divinization arises.”

(III) Love and Peace

There are several ways in which patristic theologians describe the process of divinization and human fulfillment: purification and illumination, adoption as sons and daughters of God, ascent to God, the recapitulation of creation in Christ, participation in the divine nature, and union with the Holy Trinity. Among these various motifs, two major themes recur which express the immediate and future result of human flourishing: love and peace.

(1) The Love of God and Neighbor

In keeping with Christ’s healing and restoration of the human will in the fullest sense, the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor likewise concerns our deepest motives and the ultimate ends of our lives. And here again the basis is the incarnation of Christ.

Christ’s incarnation and Passion show, above all, God’s love for creation. To be united with Christ’s death through faith and baptism plunges us into Christ’s love for the world and leads to an outpouring of service to the places of greatest need. Maximus comments that divine love alone can unify human beings beyond the motivation of mere self-love and enlightened self-interest. Divine love is the most godlike and mysterious thing we can experience; it is the power that elevates humans beings to divinization. In his Chapters on Love Maximus writes, “The one who loves God cannot help but love also every man as himself.” Yet, in the truest sense, “the mystery of love, which makes us from human beings into gods” is the incarnation itself. In the incarnation, Augustine writes, God overcomes our sin by revealing the love in which we cannot even believe. God’s love for us in Christ is the strongest possible invitation to love, because one far greater than us has shown us how much he loves us. By “ beholding the incarnation” as God’s humble descent to us in the one Christ, we are moved to humility, gratitude, and outpouring love of others. As we learn that the all-powerful Creator of all things has loved us in our unloveliness, our faith in Christ overcomes the presumption of our sin and inspires us to

125 Amb. 7.1081D-1084A.  
126 Ep. 2.393B-C.  
127 Myst. 5, 680B.  
129 Ep. 2.393B.  
131 Ep. 2.393C.  
132 Trans. Louth.  
133 Catech. rud. 7; Trin. 4.2; 13.13; Burnaby, Amor Dei, p. 168.  
134 Civ. Dei. 10.28-29.
grow in virtue and thus to become truly lovely.\textsuperscript{135} Again, Christ’s identity is foundational for our experience of God’s love and our ability to love one another: “[Christ] is God with the Father; he is a human being with us,” and because of his divine-human identity, his love for us enables us to love others.\textsuperscript{136}

Our love for God in response to Christ’s self-offering is yet another gift—the person of the Holy Spirit implanted in our hearts. By the Holy Spirit, Augustine says, “we love God through God”;\textsuperscript{137} so he exhorts us, “In order to love God, let him dwell in you and \textit{love himself through you},” arousing us to love God in our human wills.\textsuperscript{138} The love of God through Christ and the Holy Spirit produces the bonds of unity in the church and extends our concern to our neighbors everywhere. Commenting on 1 John 5.1f, Augustine observes the abrupt shift in the text from the love of Father and Son to the love of sons, which is appropriate, he says, “because the sons of God are the body of the only Son of God,” and the Son is one because he is the head and we his body. For this reason, the love of the sons in the body of the church is love for the Son, and consequently of the Father as well. No one can love the Father or the Son, Augustine continues, without also loving the Son’s members, the children of God, the church, and through the church’s mutual love the one Christ loves himself.\textsuperscript{139} “Love, then, cannot be separated.” If we don’t really love the members, we should hear with fear Christ’s words to Saul, “Why are you persecuting me?” (Ac. 9.4), for the persecutors of the members persecute the Head.

In \textit{De doctrina Christiana} Augustine gives a classic statement of the all-encompassing nature of the love of God. In keeping with Christ’s commandment to love God with \textit{all} of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, Augustine argues that only God deserves the full “enjoyment” of our love and desire, while everything else must be nothing more and nothing less than a means to the end of loving God.\textsuperscript{140} Here again the Christological principle of inclusion and empowerment is at work. The supreme worth of the love of God does not rule out or render powerless our love of other human beings; far from it. Like Christ’s divine nature, the love of God is the one thing that truly enables the love of self and neighbor. On our own power we are unable to participate in the divine Wisdom that is the Life of all things. But because divine Wisdom has adapted herself to our infirmity and condescended to live and die as one of us, we are able to live in God and to love ourselves, our neighbors, and God in ways we would have never thought possible.\textsuperscript{141} The Scriptures, which contain “the words and teaching of Christ,” as Origen had said, constantly proclaim the message of the love of God and neighbor,\textsuperscript{142} and the entire order of creation is given to us as a school of love.\textsuperscript{143}

\begin{footnotes}
\item 135 \textit{Serm.} 142.5.
\item 136 \textit{En. Ps.} 56.1.
\item 137 \textit{Serm.} 34.2.
\item 138 \textit{Serm.} 128.4.
\item 139 See also \textit{Ep. Jo.} 20.55.
\item 140 \textit{Doctr.} 1.22.20-21; 1.7.7.
\item 141 \textit{Doctr.} 1.12-14.
\item 142 \textit{Doctr.} 1.35-36.
\item 143 See also Maximus, \textit{Amb.} 21.1249B: Christian love, which Jesus Christ reveals to us, leads ultimately to our divinization.
\end{footnotes}
Finally, the healing of the human will and the work of love produce the fruit of true peace. In Maximus’ theological vision, Christ performs a series of mediations from the bodily to the cosmic level. Christ is our peace between male and female, between heaven and earth, among human beings, within suffering human bodies, among the conflicting differences of all creatures, and ultimately between God and all of creation. At the completion of God’s work, when all believers are divinized, the peace of Christ will reign in the human mind, body, and society, and, above all, between humans and God. Augustine famously expands on the idea of the peace of God in The City of God book 19. All creatures long for peace in one way or another, he observes, and most people can recognize that peace involves things like the tranquility of order, oneness of heart (concordia) among our fellows, well ordered loves in the human heart, and the attainment of one’s desires. Perfect peace thus involves internal and external harmony: the body in organic balance, the soul enjoying the ordered satisfaction of its appetites, and the cessation of conflict among human beings. Yet both Augustine and Maximus emphasize that this state of affairs requires a pure will, which none of us possesses; consequently, true peace is dependent on God’s grace in Christ and the gift of the Spirit to make us a new creation.

In the largest scope, the City of God, the community of humans and angels that God created us to enjoy but which we have repeatedly sabotaged and betrayed, will be constituted by the love of its citizens for God and for one another, once Christ has finally purged creation of all that stands opposed to God. But we are not there yet. In the meantime Christians make their primary aim the peace of the City of God, rejoicing in God and in other people on account of God. For those who pursue the ends of the City of Man, focusing on temporal values, material goods, and self-love alone and promoting a justice that is based on self-interest rather than on respect for the integrity and needs of others, true peace will be constantly fleeting. Yet for those whose devotion is the glory of God among his people, their constant aim will be to pursue what peace can be had now, even amidst the inevitable conflicts of life, as a consolation and a preparation for the total peace to come. Anyone with eyes to see knows that peace with oneself and others is precarious, and the members of our own household can present as great a challenge as the peoples of other cultures. To live the good life now—to flourish as human beings by dwelling in the grace of Christ—means to undertake the hard work of seeking Christ’s peace in oneself and

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144 See esp. Amb. 41 and Qu. ad Thal. 48; Thunberg, Microcosm and Mediator, chap. 6.
145 For additional references and bibliography, see Donald X. Burt, “Peace,” in Fitzgerald, ed., Augustine through the Ages, pp. 629-32. See also Gregory of Nazianzus’ three orations “On Peace” (Or. 6, 22, 23).
147 En. Ps. 84.10; Serm. 357.2.
149 Enchir. 23.91.
150 Civ. Dei 15.4.
151 En. Ps. 98.4.
153 Jo. ev. tr. 77.5.
154 Jo. ev. tr. 104.1.
155 Civ. Dei 19.5.
among one’s neighbors, whatever the circumstances may be.\textsuperscript{156} For now we love God and our neighbors in Christ with a trust that is based on faith,\textsuperscript{157} seeking to benefit them as far as it lies in our power as we look in hope to the perfect peace promised in Christ’s resurrection.\textsuperscript{158} To flourish as human beings is to believe, love, hope, and suffer in the trust that one day God’s peace will reign, and the saints will be “intoxicated with the sweetness of God’s house” as they are fully made divine.\textsuperscript{159}

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\textsuperscript{158} Civ. Dei 19.14; En. Ps. 122.9; 147.20.  
\textsuperscript{159} En. Ps. 35.14.}


**Cyril of Alexandria**


Note:  
*Ep. 4 = Second Letter to Nestorius*  
*Ep. 17 = Third Letter to Nestorius*  
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