

Cristian-Sebastian Sonea

Man's Mission as *Mediator* for the Entire World according to Saint Maximus Confessor's Theology

Abstract

Saint Maximus Confessor talks about the role of the work of mediation in creation, as a condition for achieving the deification of man and of the entire creation in and through man. Out of this work of mediation we can derive some important ideas concerning man's mission in the present context: man's relation with the others and with the entire creation is based on the pattern of the hypostatic union specific to Chalcedonian Christology; the fulfilling of this mission reveals man's true dignity; the relationship between a male and a female should develop in such a manner that they become one; the relationships between the members of the Christian family should be consummated from the perspective of the eternity, a fact which requires the presence of the conjugal chastity; the Christian's true life is the spiritual life; man's relation with the surrounding universe may be perceived as the basis for an ecotheology.



Rev. Assist. Prof. Dr. Cristian-Sebastian Sonea is Assistant Professor of Missiology and Ecumenism and Vice-Dean of the Theological Faculty of „Babeş-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania

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In a utilitarian society in which the image is rarely the representation of its content and in which consumerism and the fight for “more” prevail, man is reduced to a mere biological existence in which the consecutive substitutes of immortality disappear dramatically. *Homo sapiens* has only one chance: that of rediscovering who and what it is. The process of rediscovery must be learnt. It is not enough to look inside oneself, it is necessary to look beyond the self to the One who created the human person.

In the context of the divine Revelation, man's mission is that of carrying out the worldly mission of the Trinitarian Persons through the ecclesial space. Each person's destiny is connected to the destiny of mankind in Christ, to its Christological state. Being in the image of Christ means being an icon, a means through which God is revealed, the topos through which God plenarily reveals Himself. Accordingly, man's dignity as an *icon of the divinity* implies the perfection of life, deification, holiness; in other words, it implies the quality of being the image of the *pleroma of the content*, which is the life in Christ. When it becomes holy, the human being truly discovers its natural state of humanity, what it really means to be a human person.¹ Considering that man was created in the image of the Holy Trinity, it is a personal being, open to communication and communion. It is created to meet the other and to go beyond the natural in order to provide a creative answer to the divine calling.

¹ Leonid Uspensky, *Teologia icoanei (Theology of the Icon)*, (Bucharest: Anastasia Publishing House, 1944), pp. 122-123.

Man's protological destiny is found in Christ; this can be truly recognized only in the eschatological figure of Jesus Christ. The mystery of God and the mystery of man are found in the Embodied Son of God. According to St Maximus the Confessor, man's likeness to God is represented by its renewed identity through the resemblance of those who commune with the One with whom they commune, as much as it is possible², the contents of the resemblance implies man's participation in the unspoken and recondite union between the Godhead and the Manhood in the single hypostasis³ of Jesus Christ. Thus, the Son of God is sent in the world as Christ, as Proto-image of man, so that He might reveal Himself to the human person as Telos. In this hypostasis of Jesus Christ as Proto-image and Telos we must see that the Archetype is both image and likeness of man. These qualities are assigned in God's "creation" of the human being⁴. We could call the range from the image to the likeness man's *original mission* and the passage between them makes man an *ab initio* messenger. God's image in man makes the fulfilment of the latter's mission possible since, in the dynamic of achieving the likeness, the human being - enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit - gathers within it everything, according to the image of the Archetype so that, fulfilled through it, man might surrender itself to the Telos Christ.

In a theological discourse based upon the Chalcedonian Christology of the unconfused and unchangeable union of the two natures, Saint Maximus the Confessor, when interpreting Saint Gregory the Theologian's words - "the natures renew and God become man" -, explained man's mission in the world as mediator of five types of different classifications of the created

² Saint Maximus the Confessor, Răspunsuri către Talasie/Questions to Thalassius in *Filocalia/Philokalia* (trans. Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, 3rd vol, French ed, Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 1999), p. 294.

³ Ibid, p. 303.

⁴ Ibid., p. 82.

being. These five types of mediation have as common goal one union – the charismatic union between the created mankind with God – reality which constitutes the contents of the deification of man and of the cosmos in the man and through the man. The accomplishment of this unifying mission belongs to the Christians, to the only people who ordinarily live in the Kingdom of grace. Due to its means of fulfilment this mission is addressed to the entire people of God, even to laymen.

The process of unification of the being with God has five stages that regard the five types of mediation; these are expressions of man's unifying character as centre of the creation and in the God-creation relationship⁵. In a synthetic manner, the five divisions than man needs to achieve the unity are those between: 1. male and female 2. the paradise and the inhabited world; 3. heaven and earth; 4. the intangible and the sensible; and 5. God and His creation⁶. Each of these structures represents the natural division of the created categories encompassed in one of the binomial elements of the prior category.

"The substance of everything that has come into being is divided into five divisions. The first of these divides from the uncreated nature the universal created nature, which receives its being from becoming. [...] The second division is that in accordance with which the whole nature that receives being from creation is divided by God into that which is perceived by the mind and that perceived by the senses. The third is that in accordance with which the nature perceived by the senses is divided into heaven and earth. The fourth is that in accordance with which the earth is divided into paradise and the inhabited world [the *oikoumenê*], and

⁵ Idem, *Ambigua in Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* (trans. Fr. Dumitru Stăniloac, 80th vol, Bucharest: IBMBOR Press, 1983), p. 260.

⁶ Ștefan Buchiu, *Întrupare și unitate/Embodiment and Unity* (Bucharest, Libra Publishing House, 1997), p. 33.

the fifth, that in accordance with which the human person, which is the laboratory in which everything is concentrated and in itself naturally mediates between the extremities of each division, having been drawn into everything in a good and fitting way through becoming, is divided into male and female"⁷.

Man is introduced in the creation as the only one that naturally has the quality of being in a relationship with all the extremities and it has the power of unifying and interceding between all these⁸.

However, after he was created, the human person did not move "as it was fashioned to do, around the unmoved"⁹ in order to gather everything to Him "but contrary to nature is voluntarily moved in ignorance around those things that are beneath it, to which it has been divinely subjected, and since it has abused the natural power of uniting what is divided, that was given to it at its generation, so as to separate what is united"¹⁰. Therefore the Embodiment of Christ was necessary. He encompasses the type of the perfect human being, the Adam that the Creator wanted, an Adam that interceded between heaven and earth, between male and female, and the rest, through whom man might gain a

⁷ Saint Maximus the Confessor, Ambigua in Jacques Paul Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, (vol. 91, Apud Garnier Fraters and J.-P. Migne Successores, 1865) col. 1304D-1305B. For the English version: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), pp. 154-155.

⁸ Ibid, col. 1305B. For the English version: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* p.155: "Through that capacity it can come to be the way of fulfilment of what is divided and be openly instituted in itself as the great mystery of the divine purpose. It proceeds harmoniously to each of the extremities in the things that are, from what is close at hand to what is remote, from what is worse to what is better, lifting up to God and fully accomplishing union".

⁹ Ibid, col. 1308C. For the English version: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* p. 156.

¹⁰ Ibid, col. 1308C. For the English version: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* p. 156.

unifying function in the creation¹¹ with the help of which he could unify everything with God.

There is a model and an objective mode of unifying everything: the model of Christ and the inconfused, unchangeable, indivisible, and inseparable mode of the union between manhood and the Godhead in the human and divine Person of Jesus Christ. Fr. D. Stăniloae affirms that this idea pertains to Saint Athanasius the Great who saw this union fully accomplished in Christ.

Saint Maximus says that the Embodied Christ reunified nature's elements which were meant to preserve the creation intact and which were surpassed by Christ and His all-comprising power. Through His birth, Christ overcame the contradiction of the genres. *For in Christ Jesus*, says the divine Apostle, *there is neither male nor female* (Gal. 3:28). Because He returned on earth after His resurrection, Christ proved to the entire mankind that in Himself heavens and earth are one and the same and that man regained the access to Heaven he had lost with the fall. Heavens and earth became united at Christ's Ascension and since He ascended with His body and His spirit above the hosts of angels, He re-established the union between the sensible and intangible worlds, thus guaranteeing a harmonious existence for the whole creation.¹²

The definite starting point in man's mission of fulfilling these intercessions is Saint Maximus the Confessor's manner of envisaging man as a *microcosm* and the universe as a *macroanthropos*. The human being is the one that encompasses diminutively all reasons of things. At this point, "the human person unites the created nature with the uncreated [...] the whole [creation] wholly interpenetrated by God, and become

¹¹ Ștefan Buchiu, *Întrupare și unitate*, p. 140.

¹² Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* in *PG*, col. 1309A-C. For the English version: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 157.

completely whatever God is, save at the level of being"¹³. There are some subjective conditions that accompany this quality: the assembly of the senses, of the soul and of the mind that intercede between the human person and each existing thing. Their real union is accomplished in the human being through the orientation of the mind towards God. Otherwise, the three interceding works would be separate in the human person. In this state, man is ununified and cannot unify the world with itself and with God¹⁴. Another condition is the defeat of passions and the acquisition of virtue. According to Father Stăniloae, the spiritual power helps to overcome the various divisions and contradictions and it is activated through holiness¹⁵. The human being should become dispassionate in order to be able to overcome the temptation of the egotistical division of the world¹⁶. It is necessary for man to become more spiritual, to grow, to sanctify himself to be able to overcome the barriers of the matter and to enter in the absolute communion with the Trinitarian God.

Applied to our theme, these interceding works have a determinant part because they are paradigms in the postmodern man's assuming of his profoundly theological mission.

1. The Mediation of the Union between Male and Female

If the division of the created being's subsisting categories is presented by Saint Maximus the Confessor starting from God towards the human person, man's mission as mediator in the world starts naturally from the human person towards God.

¹³ Ibid, col. 1308B. For the English version: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* p. 156.

¹⁴ Idem, *Ambigua in PSB*, note 332, p.261.

¹⁵ Ibid, note 330, p. 265.

¹⁶ Ibid, note 328b, p. 263.

The first mediation has as object the accomplishment of the union between male and female. They must become one without losing the identity of the created being in a depersonalized mixture. They remain male and female in a mysterious union of an antinomic type. From a missionary perspective, this mediation shows Christ, the New Adam, as Creator of the first Adam, as prototype of the man freed from the bonds of the sin and as unifier of the human nature that was divided after the Fall. In this respect, Saint Maximus the Confessor tells us that Christ had done that since God intended to create a human being undivided into genres – male and female - according to His perfect knowledge¹⁷.

Contemporaneity, through the postmodern and feminist trends, brought about a surrogate of this mediation: the equality of sexes. However, we can sense an almost irremediable polarity between the two types of fulfilment of the humankind's goal. This polarity is achieved from the very origin of these ideas since the former is revealed and the latter is profoundly humane and emptied of its original value by its placement inside a totally different sphere. This problem would require some further details. The type of mediation that Saint Maximus promotes is one that necessitates man's sanctification which is translated into man's eternal communion with God.

"In order to bring about the union of everything with God as its cause, the human person begins first of all with its own division, and then, ascending through the intermediate steps by order and rank, it reaches the end of its high ascent, which passes through all things in search of unity, to God, in whom there is no division"¹⁸.

¹⁷ Idem, Ambigua in *PG*, col. 1305C-D. For the English version: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 155.

¹⁸ Ibid, col. 1305C. For the English version: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 155.

In this respect, from a missionary perspective we can speak of a true incorporation of the human person within the Church and an assuming of its condition as the crown of the creation that finds its fulfilment only in the Reason of its existence: in Jesus Christ. Moreover, the same person should be aware of the multiple possibilities that it has: on one side, the Church offers the possibility of redemption and, on the other, postmodern society offers programmes that claim to be better when they are just some incomplete substitutes for the advice of the Church and have as secret goal the alienation of man from Christ.

Saint Maximus the Confessor wishes that the family truly were a miniature *ecclesia*. Saint Paul tells us in the Ephesians 2: 15-16 that "by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility". A first image of what creating a new humanity means can be found in the Mystery of the Marriage: "the two will become one flesh" (Eph 5:31). However, according to Thunberg, for Saint Maximus the Confessor, "sexuality is necessarily linked to the fatal dialectic between pleasure and pain that appears in man's life as a sinner"¹⁹. Since Saint Maximus believed that God had in mind another means of reproduction and fertility for the pure man, this negative perspective upon sexuality does not involve the fact that man's creational powers are evil. The male and female elements are not meant to disappear but are meant to fall into the category of a common human nature²⁰.

¹⁹ Lars Thunberg *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p. 82.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

If for Maximus the Confessor the human being initially was (as the heavenly man) in a state that we could translate as *metagenetic*, in which the genders were inexistent. After the Fall, man no longer had the ability of perpetuating this sexual union and thus he fell into the slavery of the passion of the flesh²¹.

Lars Thunberg says "the first mediation is particularly applicable to those elements of created life that are separated because of sin and are against the original intention of God"²² because according to Maximus, the sexual difference (namely, that part of sexuality that has to do with procreation) or, at least, part of it was introduced by God as a result of the Fall. Before the Fall another form of procreating had been prepared for the human person.²³

Hence, passions must be transformed into virtues. Man must imitate the one that bestowed His reason upon everything, Jesus Christ who is "the Logos, already embodied in a preliminary way in the logoi of created beings"²⁴. Marriage is not blamed but in St. Maximus's vision it can have the value that Christ intended it to have through the incorporation of the male and female in their common logos: the human person - the correspondent of the human nature. Theologian Doru Costache has an answer to those who would like to understand the Saint's words in order to support the idea of an androgynous type as model of the human being: "after all, the Saint does not conceive an androgynous or transsexual humanity in the way these are understood nowadays," but he speaks about a "male" and a "female" that, from multiple perspectives, need not be viewed as a tense separation. Understanding *ad literam* the

²¹ Adam G. Cooper, *The body in St. Maximus the Confessor: holy flesh, wholly deified* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 209.

²² Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, p. 81.

²³ Saint Maximus the Confessor, Ambigua in *PSB*, p. 265.

²⁴ Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, p. 82.

unification of the sexes would lead to the idea that the saint only connects this difference to the situation of the Fall. However, Saint Maximus is interested in showing that Christ attained an entirely reinstated, reconstructed, well articulated, and plenary humanity.²⁵ At first, He united us with ourselves in Himself [ένώσας ήμίν εαυτούς έν έαυτψ] by blotting out the difference between the masculine and the feminine – through which you can notice especially the type of the difference [της διαίρέσεως τρόπος] -, He taught us not only to be human, in the real and true sense of what this means: entirely fashioned after Him [κατ' αυτόν δι' όλου μεμορφωμένους] but to bear the unspoiled, completely uncorrupted and untouched by any form of decay²⁶.

The goal of the Christian mission is that of making the human person part of a symphony in the same manner in which Christ has done it. Behaving as a link, man is the only one capable to mediate within the creation.

2. The Mediation of the Unity between the Paradise and the inhabited World

In order to understand correctly man's mission as mediator in the world, we must take into consideration that the consequent mediation works depend one on the other. For example, the unity between the paradise and the inhabited world is not possible if the unity between male and female has not been accomplished, in its turn, in man's state of innocence.

"Then, by a way of life proper and fitting to Saints, the human person unites paradise and the inhabited world to make one earth, no longer is it experienced as

²⁵ Doru Costache, *Logos și Creație. De la principiul cosmologic anthropic la perspectivele theanthropologice/Logos and Creation. From the Cosmological Principle to the Theanthropological Perspectives*, (Bucharest: PhD Thesis in Theology, 2000), p. 127.

²⁶ Saint Maximus the Confessor, Ambigua in *PSB*, pp. 265-266.

divided according to the difference of its parts, but rather as gathered together, since no introduction at all of partition is allowed"²⁷.

The second work of mediation attributed to man allows the rediscussing of the theme of the identification of the earthly paradise. It is in Christ that it became obvious that the paradise no longer was mainly a place but the state of the deified man in which, according to Saint Gregory the Theologian, the earth has been renewed for God (The Second Theological Discourse, 1). The cancellation of the difference between παράδεισος and οἰκουμένη brought about the accomplishment of the earth's unity – undivided in itself, in the rationality which, at the same time, encompasses and overcomes the differences. It is the refinding of the authentic relationship between the human being and its native planet since Jesus Christ – humanized God and deified man - sanctified our inhabited world²⁸.

Saint Maximus supports the idea of the existence in the same reality of the terrestrial world and of the paradise. However, this is a paradise of virtues. L. Thunberg explains that in Origen's allegorical perspective upon paradise, seen as a place of virtues, the idea of the terrestrial paradise is not excluded. Nevertheless, this tendency is more explicit for Saint Maximus who combines the idea of a concrete and terrestrial paradise with a specific idea of a paradise of virtues²⁹.

Through the theological mission, this mediation is translated through man's possibility of transforming the environment where he lives in what it really is: paradise. This paradise will not be a transcendental one, as we often project, but a paradise that will not be separated from the terrestrial reality. This

²⁷ Idem, Ambigua in *PG*, col. 1305D. For the English version: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 155.

²⁸ Ibid, col. 1305D. For the English version: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 155.

²⁹ Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, p. 84.

mediation presupposes that man accomplishes the paradisiacal harmony. This means that the relationships between man and the other creations must be similar to the ones that Adam had before the Fall.

However, the fulfilment of this mediation is not a simple one. It is necessary to follow the model of Christ, to have a divine life such as the one that Jesus Christ had and in which a holy man is formed. L. Thunberg says that this life must be truly lived in a theandric dimension³⁰.

3. The Mediation between Heaven and Earth

The idea of a unity of the creation appears as a main theme in Saint Maximus' explanation to Saint Gregory's words on the renewal of the nature. The mediation between earth and heaven and between the intangible and the sensible complete each other. According to Saint Gregory, Christ united heavens and earth so that men could identify themselves as much as possible with the angels. Since He had become light in spirit and was not detained on earth by any bodily burden that might impede His ascension, Christ made the sensible creation to be undivided in space or time. Saint Gregory continues by saying that Christ's ascent to the heavens is not obstructed "thanks to the perfect invisibility to these things of the mind that is genuinely hastening towards God, and wisely stretches out towards him step by step, as on an ordinary path, naturally overcoming any obstacles that stand in its way"³¹.

Mediation between heaven and earth is possible only to the extent to which the Christians' life resembles the one of the angels. In fact, on the missionary ground, this mediation is possible only to the extent to which it relates to the first two types of mediation. Bringing the state of the human person to

³⁰ Ibid, p. 83.

³¹ Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua in PG*, col. 1305D-1308A. For the English version: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, pp. 155-156.

the state of an angel is possible to the extent to which the environment in which it develops is brought to the state of the paradise of virtues. In other words, having Christ as the model who succeeded in accomplishing this mediation for the first time by becoming the matrix of all future mediations, man can fulfil the mission in which he agreed to actively participate by assuming a mediator's role and working together with the grace of the Baptism and of the other Mysteries.

Practically, this mediation is possible only in the moment in which the human person assumes its whole human condition. "Through the suppleness of his spirit he should surmount his bodily heaviness in a permanent and spiritual ascension toward heaven, as he desires communion with God"³². However, according to the same L. Thunberg, this mediation represents a mere stage in man's contemplative ascension which is symbiotically connected to the fourth mediation, as it was said above.

It is important for us to know that man is not only flesh but also spirit. In the same time, the two elements of the human nature present their value together and not separately. That is why the soul and the body will be resurrected together in the same way in which our Saviour was taken up to heaven in his resurrected body. This also represents a fortification for the ones who, because they are scared of the material limitations, might think that reaching a stage in the contemplation of God is possible only if this excludes the body. For Saint Maximus, the contemplative ascension through what really is a more "practical" use of the sensitive things from *vita practica*, ascension in which the Logos becomes "thinner", does not ever imply the idea that man transcends in a certain way the categories of the Embodiment of the Son of God. On the contrary, Saint Maximus refers to the spiritual communion with

³² Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, p. 85.

Christ in a pure contemplation state which does not basically differ from the activity performed through the virtues of the practical life³³.

4. The Mediation between the Intelligible and the Sensible World

The mediation of the unity between the pleroma of the sensible creation and the intelligible creation is the culmination of man's work compared to the creation as a whole. This places man on the same step with the angels.

"And then the human person unites what is perceived by the mind and what is perceived by the senses with each other by achieving equality with the angels in its manner of knowing, and thus makes the whole creation one single creation, no longer divided by what it can know and what it cannot know, through its equality to the angels lacking nothing in their knowledge and understanding of the *logoi* in the things that exist, according to which the infinite pouring out of the gift of true wisdom inviolably and without intermediary furnishes, so far as is permitted, to those who are worthy a concept of God beyond understanding or explanation"³⁴

For the last work of mediation connected to the created being to be fulfilled, man has to yield his entire self to God in order to accomplish the long desired unity of the creation with its Creator. From the beginning, the human person has had an ontological connection to everything and a desire to perfect this connection. Man has the ability of being united with everything else, of bringing everything to God by uniting everything with

³³ Ibid, p. 85.

³⁴ Saint Maximus the Confessor, Ambigua in *PG*, col. 1308A-B. For the English version: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 155.

himself³⁵. This is what makes the human being a priest of the creation and a missionary of Christ.

5. The Mediation of the Unity between God and His Creation

Saint Maximus shows that the Son of God made Himself human because the human person is the connecting link between all the parts of the creation and God. In the humanized Son everything will be gathered and united. Saint Maximus says that in the end, Christ unifies the created world with the uncreated one. In this state, man is complete and he is interpenetrated by God “and becomes completely whatever God is, save at the level of being, and receiving to itself the whole of God himself”. Thus, the human person has God as unique prize for the ascension on God Himself towards the final goal of his movement. God represents the „the firm and unmoved rest of everything that is carried towards it, being the undetermined and infinite limit and definition of every definition and law and ordinance, of reason and mind and nature”³⁶.

God created the human person so that it might unite all other beings with Him. The parts of the creation are the parts of the human person. The human person is not a part of the universe, but all the parts of the universe are part of the human person³⁷. Father D. Stăniloae in his comment to Saint Maximus’ account of this type of mediation develops a theological argument which, on one side, states man’s responsibility towards the entire creation as its master and priest.

³⁵ Idem, *Ambigua* in *PSB*, note 8, p. 262.

³⁶ Idem, *Ambigua* in *PG*, col. 1308B. For the English version: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 156.

³⁷ Ibid, col. 1308B. For the English version: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 156.

The human person is not a microcosm next to or in the macrocosm but it is the world itself since it truly unifies and gives a complete meaning to all the parts of the creation. The parts of the creation are human and are called to an even more actual humanization. The human person is not the one that is included in and adapted to any of the parts of the creation, but the parts of the creation are the ones that are included and adapted to the human person. The creation becomes a universe inside the human being since it is completely unified and humanized in it. The arms of the human person are bigger than all the other dimensions of the creation. They are more comprising that the entire inanimate creation, reaching God and mediating between the creation and God³⁸.

The fifth mediation that Saint Maximus discusses testifies for the missionary work so that the human being might be deified together with all other creatures. From this kind of all-comprising mediation derive a few important observations for man's mission in the current context: man's relationship to the others and to the entire creation is based upon the model of the hypostatic union specific to the Chalcedonian Christology³⁹; the fulfilment of this union reveals man's dignity is its sublime vocation; the natural relationship between the human beings is developed so that they might become a unity; the relationships between the members of the Christian family must be

³⁸ Ibid, For the English version: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 156.

³⁹ Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, p. 89: "Finally, through this mediation in Christ man should *penetrate* (through a process of circumincession, *perchoreisis*, analogous to that which takes place between the natures in Christ) *entirely into God* and become all that God might be, without, however, any ontological assimilation. He should receive Him as a substitute for his own ego, being compensated by the gift of God alone, through his ascension in Christ. In this way God and man are united without confusion according to the model of the hypostatic union in Christ, as it is conceived within the theological tradition of Chalcedon".

consummated in the perspective of the eternal life, thus also experiencing a marital chastity⁴⁰; the true life of a Christian is the spiritual life; man's natural relationship with the universe as a whole offers him the theological fundamentals of his eco-mission.

By accepting these responsibilities, which were interpreted by Saint Maximus the Confessor as types of mediation between the various categories of the created existence, we must understand that our life as a whole is a gift from God. The world in which we live and over which we rule is also the gift of God. We are created and sent in the world to be deified and to transfigure the creation. From this perspective, our relationship with the world and with our fellows is eternal and our rule over the world is consumed in eternity according to the image of the divine Ruler. All these require from us responsibility and rationality in regard to how we use and exploit the bounty, the resources of this world. If throughout history we would manifest ourselves as responsible beings, aware of the mission that God has given us, the world would certainly be a different place. With this faith, we form a missionary and testifying community that takes from the created world certain elements and offers them to God. By doing this we bring the created being in communion with Him and we do not simply use it with the respect meant for something belonging to God. Moreover,

⁴⁰ Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), pp. 167, 171: "We do not refer to chastity only as abstinence but as an integrity and integrality of the spirit that a male and a female should seek. Sexuality is surpassed by its own symbolics; as a symbol of unity, it transcends itself toward the spiritual integrity of the being. It is only there that marriage rejoins monasticism, where the two are united in the eschatological representation of the Kingdom. [...] Under the grace of the sacrament, the sexual life lived without causing the slightest decline of the inner life. Through its symbolism, it becomes a pure source of immaterial joy".

we see it freed from its natural boundaries and becoming carrier of life.

Starting from fundamental theological truths, we can say that the Christological ontology of the human being has *in nuce* a missionary dimension. We can also say that, after becoming a member of the Church through the Holy Mysteries, the human person becomes *de facto* a missionary responsible for the fulfilment of the work appropriate to *the gift it was given* and meant for the ecclesial community in which it was reborn. The human person is through its very ontology a missionary. In this way we have one reply to the dilemma of the world about whom and what man is: the human person's real mystery and true meaning is discovered in God. He is the *Homo Religiosus* sent in the world as a *Misionarius Christi*.