

The Christian Individual

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We are all individuals. In the Enlightenment, this word came to mean someone autonomous and alone. Thinkers like Kierkegaard and Sartre took individualism to its extreme. But in Greek, the word “individual” is simply ἄτομος: uncuttable. It meant roughly the same as our word before the Enlightenment connotations.¹ St. John of Damascus considered it equivalent to ὑπόστασις and πρόσωπον.² We are all individuals, but are we all autonomous, and are we all alone? Christianity would say no. It teaches us our proper relation to God, the Church, the sacraments, and one another, neither sacrificing the individual nor making of him a god, and thereby showing us our true place.

Individuality begins with our search for a purpose. Kierkegaard relates the individual to the temporal and the universal to the eternal. He teaches that we must hold the temporal and eternal in unity, as though “Pegasus and an old nag were hitched to a carriage.”³ The aesthetic person lives only for the temporal and disregards the eternal. His failure is his worldliness. He is the person who “might very well live on, marry, be respected and esteemed as husband, father, and captain of the popinjay shooting club.”⁴ But it is no better to hold the eternal and forget the temporal. Such a person is comical; he forgets that he is a real existing individual. These are the philosophers, so content with their proofs and systems that they forget to live. They are “absentminded.”⁵ The authentic person must hold the temporal and eternal together. He does this by expressing the

¹“ἄτομος,” Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, editors, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford, 1996) and “ἄτομος,” G.W.H. Lampe, editor, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford, 2004).

²John of Damascus, *Fount of Knowledge* 30.

³Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* 7.267. I quote from the translation *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, volume 1, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton, 1992). Following the Honges, my references are to volume and page from A.B. Drachman, J.L. Heiberg and H.O. Lange, editors, *Søren Kierkegaards samlede Værker* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1901–1906).

⁴Kierkegaard, *Postscript* 7.205.

⁵Ibid. 7.184.

eternal in his life.

St. Maximus teaches a similar union. God has an eternal purpose (σκοπός) for us, our λόγος, but we must act in accord with it. Our way of being, our τρόπος, can be either with or against our λόγος. The λόγος-τρόπος distinction causes a similar distinction between οὐσία and ὑπόστασις. By our λόγος, God defines our οὐσία, and by our τρόπος, we define our ὑπόστασις. Each person is a separate ὑπόστασις, all sharing one οὐσία or φύσις. Maximus adopts the Neochalcedonian use of these terms, where ὑπόστασις is an individual existent and οὐσία is a shared, abstract essence, synonymous with φύσις and akin to Aristotle's "second substance."⁶ We have the eternal by our λόγος and οὐσία, but we must express it through our temporal τρόπος and ὑπόστασις.

Kierkegaard gives no means for choosing what eternal principles we should follow. Although he does not regard this choice as indifferent, it is a risk, a leap of faith. He distinguishes between ethical knowledge and religious knowledge. In the ethical sphere, virtue cannot be taught, but the teacher must use indirect communication to lead his disciples to make their own discoveries.⁷ In the religious sphere, belief in a saving God can only be via a blind leap of faith. In both cases, direct communication hinders the subjective appropriation of truth, because when disciples hear conceptual teaching, they suppose they have acquired the truth, and they never appropriate it for themselves. To secure the ethical and religious from direct communication, Kierkegaard places them both beyond knowledge. In each case, we cannot know what is real; we must simply choose.

Sartre goes a step further. Kierkegaard said we cannot know; Sartre says there is nothing to know. Whereas a tool like a paper cutter is first conceived—given form and purpose—before it exists, man receives existence without any prior conception.⁸ We find ourselves born into existence, and we must fashion for ourselves an essence. This is the meaning of "existence precedes essence." Thus, "man is nothing else but what he makes of himself."⁹ Because we have existence but not essence, we have no governing principles.¹⁰ Each man must make his own meaning.

Maximus does not pose either difficulty. We do have an essence, the result of God's λόγος for us. We have an essence because we are created. As creatures, we receive our being from God. God

⁶See G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: S.P.C.K., 1952) 191, 215–216. This identification of οὐσία, φύσις, εἶδος, and μορφή is explicit in John of Damascus, *Fount* 30.

⁷Kierkegaard, *Postscript* 7.203–205.

⁸Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism*, trans. by Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947) 15–16.

⁹Ibid. 18.

¹⁰E.g. Ibid. 28–33.

alone has being *καρῶς* (properly); creatures have being *μεθεκτῶς* (by participation). We participate in the *λόγοι*, which make us what we are. Creation rules out chance. Even Sartre recognized that creation confers essence.¹¹ We are made for a purpose, and that purpose is union with God.

But Maximus and Dionysius would agree with Kierkegaard that divine knowledge requires individual appropriation. They both teach that knowledge of God is beyond concepts.¹² It cannot be taught directly, but we attain to it through ascetic struggle and mystical contemplation.¹³ Such knowledge cannot be taught, at least not directly. Therefore we each must arrive at this knowledge by our own efforts.

Kierkegaard denies that Christians can ever know that Christ is God. Our faith remains a blind leap. Historical research cannot help us, because it remains at best “approximation.”¹⁴ Philosophical speculation cannot help us, because it is limited to eternal truths, deduced by necessity, and the Incarnation is a historical and thus contingent claim.¹⁵ Moreover, if knowledge depends on history or speculation, no one will ever come to faith; we will always await the latest historical or speculative discovery.¹⁶ Finally, this speculation does nothing to make us saints.¹⁷

Maximus and Dionysius do not address the historical veracity of Christianity, and the Fathers make only limited use of the speculative approach. Maximus does teach that we can at least know that God exists. We cannot know His essence, but we can know that He is there. “God is called the unknown, and among all knowable things only His existence can be perceived.”¹⁸

But more important to the Fathers is the knowledge that comes from virtue. We can gain

¹¹See Ibid. 18, as pointed out in Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas*, trans. by John Murray and Daniel O’Connor (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s, 1999) 52–53. See also Sartre 26, where he writes: “The existentialist . . . thinks it very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas vanishes with Him.”

¹²E.g. Maximus the Confessor, *Chapters on Knowledge* 2.2, PG 90.1125C and Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology* 3–5, PG 3.1033C–1048B. All translations of *Chapters on Knowledge* are from George C. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1985), and all translations of Dionysius are from *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. by Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist, 1987).

¹³Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 10, PG 91.1105C–1109B.

¹⁴Kierkegaard, *Postscript* 7.12–37.

¹⁵Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* 4.236–239. For a translation, see *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton, 1985) 73–75.

¹⁶Kierkegaard, *Postscript* 7.86–103.

¹⁷Ibid. 7.37–43.

¹⁸Maximus, *Chapters on Knowledge* 1.8, PG 90.1128C–D. See also John of Damascus, *A Brief Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 1.3–4, which gives proofs of God’s existence while denying knowledge of His essence, and ibid. 1.9 along with David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2005) 208n.72: the divine name “ὁ ὢν” expresses God’s existence but not His essence. An crucial error in Migne is here corrected by the modern critical edition Bonifatius Kotter, editor, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, volume 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973) 32.

both ethical and religious knowledge—not through blind faith, but neither through historical and philosophical research. Maximus teaches that we know the good by cultivating prudence (*φρόνησις*), and we know divine truth by cultivating wisdom (*σοφία*). Our intellect has a potential for prudence; our mind has a potential for wisdom. As we gain the habit of right action, we being to attain virtue, which leads us to knowledge of the good. As we gain the habit of contemplation, we being to attain knowledge, which leads us to truth. We do not invent the good and true, but we learn them by worthy striving. And the true and the good reveal God.¹⁹

The knowledge the Fathers seek is not the Christ of history or the Christ of the philosophers, but Christ the Λόγος. This knowledge comes via the λόγοι, for “the one Λόγος is many λόγοι.”²⁰ Maximus calls the λόγοι blood and flesh of Christ.²¹ They are Christ’s presence in the world. Through them He is “whole in all things commonly, and in each being individuatingly.”²² Spiritual realities like the λόγοι can be known through contemplation of material realities.²³ Maximus calls the λόγοι “ἐξεταστικοί” (intelligible).²⁴ And by knowing the λόγοι, we know Christ. This knowledge is not the same as Kierkegaard’s “speculative” knowledge, because it is attained by individual discovery, through ascetic struggle and mystical contemplation.

The Church aids our knowledge, both of Christ and of the good and true. It teaches us by “perceptible images” whereby we are lifted up to God,²⁵ for “sacred symbols are actually the perceptible tokens of the conceptual things.”²⁶ In the liturgy, the divine readings give counsels for action.²⁷ By hearing the divine words we attain faith, virtue, and knowledge.²⁸ Thus, we are not trapped in unknowing, but we can know by our own efforts and by the witness of the Church.²⁹

All this severely limits our autonomy. God has created us, without our asking, and has endowed us with a purpose, so we have only one possibility for happiness: union with Him. We cannot even

¹⁹Maximus the Confessor, *The Church’s Mystagogy* 5, PG 91.672D–673D.

²⁰Maximus, *Ambigua* 7.2, PG 91.1077C, trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 2003) 54.

²¹Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones Ad Thalassium* 35, PG 90.380B.

²²Maximus, *Ambigua* 22, PG 91.1257A–B, trans. Eric David Perl, “Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in Saint Maximus Confessor,” Ph.D thesis, Yale (1991) 178.

²³Maximus, *Mystagogy* 2, PG 91.669B–D.

²⁴Maximus, *Ambigua* 7.2, PG 91.1077C.

²⁵Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1.2, PG 3.373B.

²⁶Ibid. 2.3.3, PG 3.397C.

²⁷Maximus, *Mystagogy* 10, PG 91.689B–C.

²⁸Ibid. 24, PG 91.704B.

²⁹The emphasis on virtue and community suggests that Newman and Polanyi are closer to a patristic understanding of knowledge. This would be a fruitful avenue of further research.

hide in our uncertainty, because God has made us capable of knowing Him. This is intolerable to those who would find their own way of being happy. Though we asked for neither, we find ourselves shackled with both existence and essence. This is what infuriated Kirilov in Dostoevsky's *Demons*.³⁰ He is a step beyond even Sartre. He is not content to choose his own happiness; he must choose even his own existence. The only rebellion he can imagine is suicide. He represents the ultimate refusal.

The Christian, on the other hand, finding himself created and God awaiting him, responds with gratitude and love. Since God is our end, we seek Him by love. We cannot separate $\xi\rho\omega\varsigma$ from $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\acute{\alpha}\pi\eta$.³¹ Christian love for God means many things, but if it means anything, it means desire. Maximus uses both terms together.³² He defines $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\acute{\alpha}\pi\eta$ as “a good disposition of the soul by which one prefers no being to the knowledge ($\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$) of God.”³³ Clearly, this is used in the sense of desire.

We fail to love God because of the passions. Although the passions hinder what Nygren would call $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\acute{\alpha}\pi\eta$, they even hinder our $\xi\rho\omega\varsigma$. They turn our attention away from God. “The one who has his mind tied to any earthly thing does not love God.”³⁴ There are two alternatives to loving God: indifference and hate.³⁵ Either can arise because of the passions. “Passion is a movement of the soul contrary to nature either toward irrational love or senseless hate.”³⁶

Augustine denied the possibility of self-mastery. If the advocates of individual autonomy commit one sort of error, Augustine commits the opposite. He renounces all hope in individual effort.³⁷ His influence, continued by Prosper of Aquitaine,³⁸ would lead to the implicit condemnation of St. John Cassian at the Council of Orange.³⁹ He could not accept a synergy between God and man, lest man possess some merit and grace become a reward.⁴⁰

³⁰See Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*, trans. by Andrew R. MacAndrew (New York: Signet Classics, 1962) 632–637.

³¹Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, trans. by Richard and Clara Winston (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986) 211–232.

³²Maximus the Confessor, *Four Hundred Chapters on Love* 1.1 and 1.10, PG 90.961A, 964A. See also *ibid.* 2.48, PG 90.1000C–D.

³³*Ibid.* 1.1, PG 90.961A. All translations of this work are from Berthold, *Maximus*.

³⁴Maximus, *On Love* 2.1, PG 90.984B.

³⁵*Ibid.* 2.50, PG 90.1001A.

³⁶*Ibid.* 2.16, PG 90.988D–989A.

³⁷E.g. Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 1.5.

³⁸E.g. Prosper of Aquitaine, *Contra Collatorum* 9.3–5.

³⁹Joannes Dominicus Mansi, editor, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio* (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck, 1960) 8.718.

⁴⁰Augustine, *Against Two Letters* 1.37 and Prosper, *Contra Collatorum* 9.1. See also *ibid.* 3.1, 5.1, 11.2, 15.1, 17;

But Maximus, who may have known Augustine’s teachings,⁴¹ taught free will.⁴² Man is saved by a synergy of his own effort with God’s grace. Part of God’s grace is the sacrament of baptism, which grants us freedom. “We were freed by holy baptism from ancestral sin (προγονική ἀμαρτία); but from the sin we had the effrontery to commit after baptism we are freed by repentance (μετάνοια).⁴³ Although we have free will, we find aid in the sacraments of the Church.

The relation between asceticism and sacraments has often proved difficult for Christians. At least in theory, we can have asceticism without the Church, but the sacraments require the Church, because there must be a minister. Likewise, we can receive the sacraments without individual struggle, but asceticism tests no one’s mettle but our own. Asceticism requires the individual, whereas the sacraments require the Church. The one is active; the other, passive.

Asceticism can become moralism and pride; the sacraments can become magical rites detached from prayer or virtue. Relying on asceticism at the expense of the sacraments can lead to individualism and contempt of the community. Relying on the sacraments without asceticism can lead to a shirking of individual responsibility. If the latter temptation is greatest for laity, the former is greatest for monks. It seems this is especially true for mystics.

Montanism is an early example of how rigorous self-denial can accompany contempt for the Church’s institutions and mysteries.⁴⁴ Tertullian claimed the sacramental power of the Church for the individual, when he taught that sacraments depend on the minister’s sanctity.⁴⁵ It follows that the office of bishop is vain. Moreover, he held that even the Church could not forgive certain post-baptismal sins.⁴⁶ This is fearsome: we must not sin lest we die, and should we err, we are entirely alone, beyond the help of the Church.

Dionysius stands in a sharp contrast. The Church is a hierarchy designed to lead us to God. The major hierarchy is sacraments–ministers–partakers.⁴⁷ This hierarchy shows that no one acts alone;

Prosper of Aquitaine, *Letter to Augustine* 5. This reasoning rules out freedom even after baptism.

⁴¹George C. Berthold, “Did Maximus the Confessor Know Augustine?,” *Studia Patristica* 17.1 (1982): 14–18.

⁴²E.g. Maximus the Confessor, *Disputation with Pyrrhus* 81–84, PG 90.308B–C. I use the paragraph numbering given in Joseph P. Farrell, *The Disputation of Our Father Among the Saints Maximus the Confessor* (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon’s Seminary, 1990). See also Maximus, *Chapters on Knowledge* 1.11, 13.

⁴³Maximus the Confessor, *Ascetic Life* 44, PG 90.956A. Sherwood translates this last word “penance” and treats it as the sacrament in Polycarp Sherwood, *Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life, the Four Centuries on Charity*, Ancient Christian Writers 21 (New York: Newman, 1955) 78–79, 135.

⁴⁴J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1978) 199–200.

⁴⁵Tertullian, *De Pudicitia* 21.

⁴⁶Ibid. 12.

⁴⁷Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 5.1.1, PG 3.501A.

the Church ministers the sacraments to the people.⁴⁸ The hierarchy is not exactly a mediator. Although from it we become deified,⁴⁹ our deification is not union with the hierarchy, but union with God.⁵⁰ The hierarchy is like a shepherd, guiding us to Christ.

At the top of the ministers is the bishop, who, in imitation of God, desires all to be saved.⁵¹ All the sacraments require the bishop. He gives chrism for baptizing new initiates, for consecrating the Eucharistic altar, and for ordaining priests.⁵² These sacraments are great gifts and require our gratitude.⁵³

The opposite of Tertullian is Augustine. He makes baptism everything, with no accounting for individual effort or even, ironically, God's mercy. He insists that since baptism is necessary for salvation, infants who die unbaptized are condemned to hell.⁵⁴ He explicitly rejects the Church's earlier teachings. St. Gregory the Theologian had suggested that these infants earn neither honor nor punishment,⁵⁵ while St. Gregory of Nyssa likened their blessedness, compared with those who attain virtue, to the pleasures of an infant compared to the pleasures of a man.⁵⁶ These Fathers do not treat baptism with a single relentless logic, but they account for individual circumstances.

Jesus tells us the right combination of individual and Church: "He who has believed and been baptized shall be saved, but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."⁵⁷ We see the need for act (belief) and sacraments (baptism). But Christ's words are not parallel. The second part is not a perfect negation of the first. This suggests that baptism is necessary, except when it isn't. Not all is revealed, and we must trust in God's righteousness.

Baptism is both freely-given and demands individual effort. It opens "the fount of all graces."⁵⁸ It is so free, the Church can baptize infants.⁵⁹ It does so in the hope that "children raised up

⁴⁸Ibid. 5.1.3, PG 3.504A.

⁴⁹Ibid. 6.3.5, PG 3.536D.

⁵⁰Ibid. 1.3, PG 3.376A.

⁵¹Ibid. 2.2.1, PG 3.393A. Cf. *ibid.* 2.2.7, PG 3.397D; 2.3.3, PG 3.400B.

⁵²Ibid. 5.1.5, PG 3.505B-C.

⁵³Ibid. 3.3.15, PG 3.445B-D.

⁵⁴Augustine, *On the Merits and Remission of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants* 23, 26, 55. According to P.J. Toner, "Limbo," Charles G. Herbermann et al., editors, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, 1913) 257, "St. Augustine and the African Fathers believed that unbaptized infants share in the common positive misery of the damned."

⁵⁵Gregory the Theologian, *Orations* 40.23.

⁵⁶Gregory of Nyssa, *On Infants' Early Deaths*.

⁵⁷Mark 16:16.

⁵⁸Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* 14, PG 150.400C. All translations are from *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, trans. by J.M. Hussey and P.A. McNulty (London: S.P.C.K., 1966).

⁵⁹Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 7.3.11, PG 3.565D-568D.

in accordance with holy precepts will acquire the habits of holiness.”⁶⁰ But baptism should be withheld if the child has no good teacher.⁶¹ Thus even infant baptisms require effort.

For adults, the effort is greater. They must be prepared to receive the sacrament, because when baptized, they renounce their own will. New initiates must have a sponsor and show complete obedience.⁶² The initiate must accept the “divine life” and “give himself totally.”⁶³ Baptism is purification from an evil way of life,⁶⁴ and this does not come easily.

After baptism, our labors continue. Initiates die to sin and become like athletes striving in a contest.⁶⁵ Maximus taught that by baptism, the “grace of adoption” is present in potency (δυνάμει). We have this grace by “faith alone.” But we must strive to grow in well-being in actuality (κατ’ ἐνέργειαν), which requires our will (γνώμη).⁶⁶ Dionysius’s preferred word for sacrament is τελετής (perfecter).⁶⁷

Like baptism, the Eucharist implies a balance between individual and Church. The Eucharist unites us to Christ, but only insofar as we are worthy. It “transforms into itself and renders similar to the causal good by grace and participation those who worthily share in it.”⁶⁸ Receiving the Eucharist is necessary—except, like baptism, when it isn’t. God grants mystical communion to those unable to attend, like hermits in the desert.⁶⁹

The consecration does not depend on the priest’s virtue. The Holy Spirit, through the priest, makes the change.⁷⁰ This consecration is not magic, but an answer to prayer. “It is nowhere stated that this will happen to those who speak this or that word.”⁷¹ Our confidence in the sacrament comes from God’s promise.

All the same, the Church does not permit the unworthy to serve. The priest prepares himself before consecrating the gifts.⁷² When the Eucharist is offered by evil men, it is rejected by the

⁶⁰Ibid. 7.3.11, PG 3.568B.

⁶¹Ibid. 7.3.11, PG 3.568B–C.

⁶²Ibid. 2.2.2, PG 3.393B.

⁶³Ibid. 2.2.5, PG 3.393D–396A.

⁶⁴Ibid. 2.3.1, PG 3.397A–B.

⁶⁵Ibid. 2.3.6, PG 3.401C–404A.

⁶⁶Maximus, *Ad Thal.* 6, CCSG 7.69–71. See also *ibid.* 22, CCSG 7.139. Blowers remarks, in Blowers and Wilken 104n.2, that Maximus has here not yet given γνώμη its purely negative sense.

⁶⁷Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 4.3.12, PG 3.485A.

⁶⁸Maximus, *Mystagogy* 21, PG 91.697A. All translations of this work are from Berthold, *Maximus*.

⁶⁹Cabasilas 42, PG 150.457D–460A.

⁷⁰Ibid. 28, 150.425D–428B.

⁷¹Ibid. 29, PG 150.433A.

⁷²Ibid. 25, PG 150.420D–421A.

Church, even though it would be accepted by God.⁷³ Yet the Church accepts men who are not yet perfect, as shown in the washing of hands. “The one who has already bathed needs only to wash his head and extremities.”⁷⁴ The washing purifies “whatever last fantasies there are in their souls.”⁷⁵

The Eucharist also requires preparation to receive. It is denied to catechumens, penitents, and the possessed.⁷⁶ Even though God consecrates the gifts in spite on the priest’s worthiness, the gifts may not consecrate us if we are unworthy. Without reverence, faith, and fear of God, it would be impious even to look on the holy mysteries.⁷⁷ We must be “ready and fit.” If unprepared, “we suffer grave harm and loss.”⁷⁸ The Eucharist sanctifies us if we come with “purity of heart, love of God, desire for the sacrament, zeal for communion, a glowing ardor, a burning thirst.”⁷⁹ We must also be at peace with our brother. This is the meaning of the kiss of peace.⁸⁰

But again, the requirement of worthiness is not a requirement of perfection. When the priest says, “Holy things for the holy,” “those whom the priest calls holy are not only those who have attained perfection, but those also who are striving for it without having yet obtained it.”⁸¹ It would be strange otherwise, since the Eucharist is given for our perfection. We can lose the grace received from the Eucharist. The priest prays, “Keep us in Thy holiness.” This shows that our continuing efforts are necessary. After receiving, we must meditate on God’s righteousness.⁸²

Finally, the effect of our deification is to turn us toward our neighbor. We do not approach God alone. “The one who loves God surely loves his neighbor as well.”⁸³ If the sacraments are deifying us, they are making us people who love.

The clear proof of this grace is the voluntary disposition of good will toward those akin to us whereby the man who needs our help in any way becomes as much as possible our friend as God is and we do not leave him abandoned and forsaken but rather that with fitting zeal we show him in action the disposition which is alive in us with respect

⁷³Ibid. 46, PG 150.465B–C.

⁷⁴Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 3.3.10, PG 3.437D–440B.

⁷⁵Ibid. 3.3.10, PG 3.440A–B.

⁷⁶Ibid. 3.3.6, PG 3.432C–D.

⁷⁷Cabasilas 1, PG 150.373C.

⁷⁸Ibid. 34, PG 150.445A.

⁷⁹Ibid. 42, PG 150.457C–D.

⁸⁰Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 3.3.8, PG 3.437A–B. See also Maximus, *Mystagogy* 13, PG 91.692C and Cabasilas 26, PG 150.424A–B.

⁸¹Ibid. 36, PG 150.418D.

⁸²Ibid. 41, PG 150.456D–457A.

⁸³Maximus, *On Love* 1.23, PG 90.965A. See also *ibid.* 1.13, PG 90.964B–C.

to God and our neighbor.⁸⁴

All our effort—the purpose of asceticism and sacraments alike—is to free us to better love God and neighbor.

Throughout the Christian life, we find a balance between the individual and the Church. We do not choose our own end, but it is given to us. We learn of our end by our own efforts and the Church's teaching. As we strive toward God, we rely on the deifying power of the sacraments, even as we train ourselves in virtue. And as we attain deification, we are turned from ourselves to love of neighbor.

⁸⁴Maximus, *Mystagogy* 24, PG 91.713A.