

The Early Church Theologians on Jesus' Atonement: Physical Redemption

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'When we ask what the precise nature of this vicarious activity of Christ was, we find Nicene theologians regularly falling back upon familiar biblical and liturgical terms like ransom, sacrifice, propitiation, expiation, reconciliation to describe it, but always with a deep sense of awe before the inexpressible mystery of atonement through the blood of Christ. They used these terms, however...to refer, to not any external transaction between God and mankind carried out by Christ, but to what took place within the union of divine and human natures in the incarnate Son of God.'¹

'Atonement thus occurs for the Fathers through the dynamic of the incarnation itself, not by way of some extrinsic theory, i.e., satisfaction, penal substitution, and so on. Why, one wonders, did theology subsequently fail to reflect this? I am not sure. Part of the reason, I suspect, lies in how the incarnation came to be largely understood. With focus on the miracle of God becoming flesh in the birth of Jesus, the saving significance of the rest of Jesus' life was overshadowed. With focus returned, so to speak, on the Cross, the climactic end of Jesus' life, the impression de facto was that the real meaning of God's identification lay at the beginning and at the end, not in the entire range of Jesus' life.'²

Jesus Took Sinful Human Nature, Yet Did Not Sin

For, in what way could we be partaken of the adoption of sons, unless we had received from Him through the Son that fellowship which refers to Himself, unless His Word, having been made flesh, had entered into communion with us? Wherefore also He passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God. Those, therefore, who assert that He appeared putatively, and was neither born in the flesh nor truly made man, are as yet under the old condemnation, holding out patronage to sin; for, by their showing, death has not been vanquished, which 'reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression.' But the law coming, which was given by Moses, and testifying of sin that it is a sinner, did truly take away his (death's) kingdom, showing that he was no king, but a robber; and it revealed him as a murderer. It laid, however, a weighty burden upon *man, who had sin in himself*, showing that he was liable to death. For as the law was spiritual, it merely made sin to stand out in relief, but did not destroy it. For sin had no dominion over the spirit, but over man. For it behooved *Him who was to destroy sin*, and redeem man under the power of death, that *He should Himself be made that very same thing which he was, that is, man*; who had been drawn by sin into bondage, but was held by death, so that *sin should be destroyed by man*, and man should go forth from death. For as by the disobedience of the one man who was originally moulded from virgin soil, the many were made sinners, and forfeited life; so was it necessary that, by the obedience of one man, who was originally born from a virgin, many should be justified and receive salvation. Thus, then, was the Word of God made man, as also Moses says: 'God, true are His works.' But if, not having been made flesh, He did appear as if flesh, His work was not a true one. But what He did appear, that He also was: God recapitulated *in Himself* the ancient formation of man, that *He might kill sin*, deprive death of its power, and vivify man; and therefore His works are true.

Irenaeus (130 – 200 AD, Lyon in Roman Gaul), *Against Heresies* 3.18.7, see also 2.12.4, 3.18.1

Our contention, however, is not that the flesh of sin, but that the sin of the flesh, was brought to naught in Christ, not the material but its quality, not the substance but its guilt, according to the apostle's authority when he says, 'He brought to naught sin in the flesh.' For in another place also he says that Christ was in the likeness of the flesh of sin: not that he took upon him the likeness of flesh, as it were a phantasm of the body and not its reality: but the apostle will have us understand by 'the likeness of sinful flesh' that the flesh of Christ, itself not sinful, was the like of that to which sin did belong, and is to be equated with Adam in species but not in defect. From this text we also

¹ T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, p.168. I am indebted mainly to two works: T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 1983), p.161 – 168, and Thomas Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh: An Essay on the Humanity of Christ* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), for the citations in this section.

² Father Henry Charles (Roman Catholic parish priest in Trinidad and Tobago), *The Eucharist as Sacrifice*, November 19, 2006; http://www.catholicnews-tt.net/v2005/series/euch_sacrifice191106.htm

prove that in Christ there was that flesh whose nature is in man sinful, and it is by virtue of this that sin has been brought to naught, while in Christ that same flesh exists without sin which in man did not exist without sin. Moreover it would not suit Christ's purpose, when bringing to naught the sin of the flesh, not to bring it to naught in that flesh in which was the nature of sin: neither would it be to his glory. For what would it amount to if it was in a better kind of flesh, of a different (that is, a non-sinful) nature, that he destroyed the birthmark of sin? 'In that case,' you will reply, 'if it was our flesh Christ clothed himself with, Christ's flesh was sinful.' Forebear to tie up tight a conception which admits of unraveling. By clothing himself with our flesh he made it his own, and by making it his own he made it non-sinful.

Tertullian (160 – 220 AD, Carthage in Roman North Africa), *De Carne Christi*, 16.10 – 25

¹ Then I was crowned by my God,
 And my crown was living.
² And I was justified by my Lord,
 For my salvation is incorruptible.
³ I have been freed from vanities,
 And am not condemned.
⁴ My chains were cut off by His hands,
 I received the face and likeness of a new person,
 And I walked in Him and was saved.
⁵ And the thought of truth led me,
 And I went after it and wandered not.
⁶ And all who saw me were amazed,
 And I seemed to them like a stranger.
⁷ And He who knew and exalted me,
 Is the Most High in all His perfection.
⁸ And He glorified me by His kindness,
 And raised my understanding to the height of truth.
⁹ And from there He gave me the way of His steps,
 And I opened the doors which were closed.
¹⁰ And I shattered the bars of iron,
 For my own shackles had grown hot and melted before me.
¹¹ And nothing appeared closed to me,
 Because I was the opening of everything.
¹² And I went towards all my bound ones in order to loose them;
 That I might not leave anyone bound or binding.
¹³ And I gave my knowledge generously,
 And my resurrection through my love.
¹⁴ And I sowed my fruits in hearts,
 And transformed them through myself.
¹⁵ Then they received my blessing and lived,
 And they were gathered to me and were saved;
¹⁶ Because they became my members,
 And I was their Head.
¹⁷ Glory to You, our Head,
 O Lord Messiah. Hallelujah.
 Odes of Solomon 17:1 – 17

Comment: The *Odes of Solomon* is a collection of the earliest known Christian book of hymns and psalms, called *odes*. Many scholars believe the Odes date from before 100 A.D., and not later than the mid 2nd century.³ The

³ The full collection has been reconstructed from manuscripts in the British Museum, John Rylands Library, and Bibliothèque Bodmer. James H. Charlesworth (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, v.6, p.114) writes: 'The date of the *Odes* has caused considerable interest. H. J. Drijvers contends that they are as late as the 3d century. L. Abramowski places them in the latter half of the 2d century. B. McNeil argued that they are contemporaneous with *4 Ezra*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Polycarp, and Valentinus (ca.100 C.E.). Most scholars date them sometime around the middle of the 2d century, but if they are heavily

authors were probably Jewish Christians because the originals are in Aramaic. This collection of 42 odes is called the *Odes of Solomon* because that is the name used in references to it in other ancient writings; the name probably connects Jesus to ‘Solomon,’ the royal Son of David. The many parallels with the Gospel of John are striking: their references to ‘the Word’ and ‘living water’; the many references to the Holy Spirit; salvation consists in knowing and loving God; and the saving significance of the incarnation; etc. Three of the odes are worth mentioning here: 17, 15, and 11.

Ode 17 is one of the odes which use the startling convention of speaking from the first person as Jesus himself (Odes 8, 10, 15, and 42 do this, and possibly 9 as well). The ode refers to the disciples’ failure to recognize the identity of the resurrected Jesus (Lk.24:13 – 34; 24:37; Jn.20:11 – 16; 21:12) in v.6, even down to the ‘amazement’ with which the disciples responded to him, and even offered an explanation in v.4. Ode 17 speaks of Jesus loosening the bindings of the ‘bound ones’ (v.12). I take this as referring to the corruption of sin in human nature in human beings. How is Jesus portrayed as doing this? In the very next poetic line, Jesus shares his ‘resurrection’ – that is, his new humanity – with these ‘bound ones’: ‘I gave my knowledge generously and my *resurrection* through my love’ (v.13). As Jesus shares his new humanity with his followers, he plants new life and transformation in them: ‘And I *sowed my fruits* in hearts, and *transformed* them through myself’ (v.14). The phrase ‘through myself’ is remarkable because the new life and transformation come, not through a psychological rationale of debt-forgiveness, as in penal substitution, but through sharing in the ontological personhood of Jesus, by his Spirit. This anticipates the later Nicene formulation of salvation: Jesus united human nature with divine nature in his one person, and then shares himself by the Spirit. Jesus, in and *through himself*, redeemed human being and reconciled human nature with God, and what Jesus worked out *in himself* the Spirit works out *in us*. Reception of this ‘blessing’ results in ‘life’ in the Johannine sense: ‘Then they received my blessing and lived, and they were gathered to me and were saved’ (v.15).

^{15:5} The thought of knowledge I have acquired,
 And have enjoyed delight fully through Him.
⁶ I repudiated the way of error,
 And went towards Him and received salvation from Him abundantly.
⁷ And according to His generosity He gave to me,
 And according to His excellent beauty He made me.
⁸ I put on immortality through His name,
 And took off corruption by His grace.
⁹ Death has been destroyed before my face,
 And Sheol has been vanquished by my word.
¹⁰ And eternal life has arisen in the Lord’s land,
 And it has been declared to His faithful ones,
 And has been given without limit to all that trust in Him.
Odes of Solomon 15:5 – 10

Comment: Ode 15 appears to speak of Jesus’ earthly life as he repudiated ‘the way of error’ (v.6) in his struggle against sin in his flesh. The ‘salvation’ he received ‘from Him [i.e. God the Father] abundantly’ might be *physical* salvation from death. The contrast between ‘immortality’ and ‘corruption’ in v.8 along with the references to ‘Death’ and ‘Sheol’ in v.9 stress the physical deliverance from death that Jesus experienced. But it also might be a *spiritual-moral* salvation from sinful actions as well, which is suggested by the Odist repudiating ‘the way of error’ and enjoying ‘delight through Him.’ And of course the ‘eternal life’ ‘given without limit to all that trust in Him’ (v.10) is not just *physical*, but *spiritual-moral* as well. In any case, in biblical thought, physical death follows spiritual-moral death (e.g. Rom.5:12 – 21). The former is an expression of the latter, because death is what relational

influenced by Jewish apocalyptic thought and especially the ideas in the Dead Sea Scrolls, a date long after 100 is unlikely. H. Chadwick, Emerton, Charlesworth, and many other scholars, are convinced that they must not be labeled ‘gnostic,’ and therefore should not be dated to the late 2d or 3d century.’ Charlesworth comments on the attestation to the *Odes of Solomon* (op. cit., v.6, p.114): ‘The 11th ode was found among the Bodmer Papyri in a 3d-century Gk manuscript (no.11). Five were translated into Coptic in the 4th century and used to illustrate the *Pistis Sophia* (*Odes Sol.* 1, 5, 6, 22, and 25). Also in the 4th century Ode 19 was quoted by Lactantius (*Div. Inst.* 4.12.3). In the 10th century a scribe copied the *Odes* in Syriac, but only *Odes Sol.* 17:7 – 42:20 are preserved (British Museum ms. Add. 14538). In the 15th century another scribe copied them into Syriac, but again the beginning is lost (John Rylands Library Cod. Syr.9 contains only *Odes Sol.* 3.1b – 42:20).’

alienation from God, as the source of life for all things, entails. Thus, Ode 15 attests to a very early Christian understanding of Jesus' human nature, and what he accomplished for that human nature: Jesus' personal decisions to align his life and human nature ('I repudiated the way of error' in v.6) with the Father serves as the basis for his resurrected 'new humanity.' And this 'eternal life' – life centered and expressed physically, morally, and spiritually in Jesus' own resurrection body – 'has been given without limit to all that trust in Him' (v.10). The fact that these two songs are expressions of worship in liturgical settings makes this all the more significant for historical purposes.

^{11:1} My heart was pruned and its flower appeared, then grace sprang up in it,
And my heart produced fruits for the Lord.

² For the Most High circumcised me by His Holy Spirit,
Then He uncovered my inward being towards Him,
And filled me with His love.

³ And His circumcising became my salvation,
And I ran in the Way, in His peace, in the way of truth.
Odes of Solomon 11:1 – 3

Comment: Ode 11 describes salvation in Christ as a fundamental heart transformation. This is, from a theological standpoint, is the outcome of the transformation of human nature in Christ. The language of circumcision of the heart follows the usage by Moses, Jeremiah, and Paul regarding heart transformation. God would circumcise hearts when he renewed His covenant with Israel following the exile. Moses anticipated this in Dt.30:6, and Jeremiah in Jer.31:31 – 34. Then Paul in Romans 2:28 – 29 says that circumcision of the heart is ultimately what constitutes the true Israel of God. Hence this Ode is firmly anchored in biblical language of Israel's heart-level renewal when people participate by faith in the circumcision of *the flesh of Christ* (Rom.8:3; Col.2:11): Jesus' cutting away of sin's corruption *in himself* from the originally good human nature God designed.

Had it been a case of a trespass only, and not of a subsequent corruption, repentance would have been well enough; but when once transgression had begun men came under the power of the corruption proper to their nature and were bereft of the grace which belonged to them as creatures in the Image of God. No, repentance could not meet the case. What – or rather Who – was it that was needed for such grace and such recall as we required? Who, save the Word of God Himself, Who also in the beginning had made all things out of nothing?... Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father... This He did that He might turn again to incorruption men who had turned to corruption, and make them alive through death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of His resurrection. Thus He would make death to disappear from them as utterly as straw from fire.

Athanasius (296 – 373 AD, Alexandria, Egypt), *On the Incarnation 2:8 – 9*

It was impossible to pay one thing as a ransom in exchange for a different thing; on the contrary, he gave body for body and soul for soul and complete existence for the whole man. This is the reconciling exchange of Christ.

Athanasius (296 – 373 AD, Alexandria, Egypt), *Against Apolinarius 1.17*

For God took upon himself the flesh in which we have sinned, that by wearing our flesh he might forgive sins; a flesh which he shares with us by wearing it, not by sinning in it.

Hilary of Poitiers (300 – 368 AD, Poitier in Roman Gaul), *On the Trinity 1.13*⁴

The unassumed is the unhealed; but what is united to God is saved. If it was half of Adam that fell, then half might be assumed and saved. But if it was the whole of Adam that fell, it is united to the whole of him who was begotten, and gains complete salvation.

⁴ However, Hilary of Poitier's understanding is ambiguous and inconsistent, as Torrance p.162 notes; Weinandy cites Hilary's inconsistent view of Jesus' physical body: 'The ordinary behavior of the body was accepted to show the reality of his body...When he took drink and food, he did not submit himself to bodily necessity, but to customary bodily behavior. He had a body, but one appropriate to its origin; not owing its being to the faults of human conception, but existing in the form of our body by his divine power. He bore the form of a servant, but he was free from the sins and weaknesses of a human body.' Hilary of Poitiers (315 – 367), *De Trinitate 10.23*

Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 389 AD, Constantinople), *Epistle 101.7*

Just as he was called a curse for the sake of our salvation, who cancels my curse, and was called sin, who takes away the sin of the world, and instead of the old Adam is made a new Adam – in the same way he makes my rebellion his own as Head of the whole Body. As long, therefore, as I am disobedient and rebellious by the denial of God and by my passions, Christ also is called disobedient on my account. But when all things have been subjected to him, then he himself will have fulfilled his subjection, bringing me whom he has saved, to God.

Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 389 AD, Constantinople), *Epistle 101.7*

In order that he might destroy that condemnation by sanctifying like by like, then, as he needed flesh for the sake of flesh which had incurred condemnation, and soul for the sake of soul, so too he needed mind for the sake of mind, which not only fell in Adam but was the first to be affected... that which transgressed was that which stood most in need of salvation; and that which needed salvation was that which he took upon him. Therefore mind was taken upon him

Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 389 AD, Constantinople), *Epistle 101, cf. Oration 1.13; 30.21*

[Regarding Jesus' cry of dereliction on the Cross quoting Psalm 22,] Christ was in his own person representing us, for we were the forsaken and despised before, but now by the sufferings of him who could not suffer, we were taken up and saved. Similarly he makes his own our folly and our transgressions... The same consideration applies to the passages, 'he learned obedience by the things he suffered', and his 'strong crying and tears', and his 'entreaties' and his 'being heard' and his 'godliness' [Hebrews 5:8ff.] all of which he wonderfully wrought out, like a drama whose plot was devised on our behalf... In the character of the form of a servant, he condescends to his fellow servants and servants, and assumes a form that is not his own, bearing all me and mine in himself, so that in himself he may consume the bad, as fire does wax, or as the sun does the mist of the earth, and that I may partake of what is his through being conjoined to him.

Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 389 AD, Constantinople), *Oration 30.5 – 6, cf. Oration 2.23ff.*

Believe also that he, the only begotten Son of God, for our sins came down to earth from heaven, assuming a manhood subject to the same feelings as ours, and being born of a holy virgin and the Holy Spirit: and this not in appearance or in imagination, but in reality. He did not pass through the Virgin as through a channel, but truly took flesh and truly fed with milk from her. He truly ate as we eat, and truly drank as we drank. For if the incarnation was a figment then our salvation was a figment.

Cyril of Jerusalem (315 – 386 AD, Jerusalem), *Catechesis Lecture 4.9*

Since therefore an image of man was falsely worshipped as God, God became truly Man, that the falsehood might be done away. The Devil had used the flesh as an instrument against us; and Paul knowing this, saith, But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity, and the rest. By the very same weapons, therefore, wherewith the Devil used to vanquish us, have we been saved. *The Lord took on Him from us our likeness, that He might save man's nature: He took our likeness, that He might give greater grace to that which lacked; that sinful humanity might become partaker of God.* For where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. It behooved the Lord to suffer for us; but if the Devil had known Him, he would not have dared to approach Him. For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. His body therefore was made a bait to death that the dragon, hoping to devour it, might disgorge those also who had been already devoured. For Death prevailed and devoured; and again, God wiped away every tear from off every face.

Cyril of Jerusalem (315 – 386 AD, Jerusalem), *Catechesis Lecture 12.15*

Just as death was brought to naught in no other way than by the Death of the Saviour, so also with regard to each of the sufferings of the flesh: for unless he had felt dread, human nature could not have become free from dread; unless he had experienced grief, there could never have been any deliverance from grief; unless he had been troubled and alarmed, no escape from these feelings could have been found. And with regard to every one of the affections to which human nature is liable, you will find exactly the corresponding thing in Christ. The affections of his flesh were aroused, not that they might have the upper hand as they do indeed in us, but in order that when aroused they might be thoroughly subdued by the power of the Word dwelling in the flesh, the nature of man thus undergoing a change for the better... For the Word of God made one with himself human nature in its entirety, that so he might save the entire man. For that which has not been taken into his nature, has not been saved.

Cyril of Alexandria (376 – 444 AD, Alexandria, Egypt), *Commentary on John 12.27*

If Christ had not come in our flesh, he could not have slain sin in the flesh and restored and reunited to God the humanity which fell in Adam and became alienated from God.

Basil the Great (330 – 379 AD, Cappadocia in Turkey), *Epistles 261.2*

Although Christ took our filth upon himself, nevertheless he is not defiled by the pollution, but in his own self, he cleanses the filth, for it says, the light shone in the darkness, but the darkness did not overpower it.

Gregory of Nyssa (335 – 394 AD, Cappadocia in Turkey), *Adv. Apol. 26*

Although he was made sin and a curse because of us, and took our weaknesses upon himself, yet he did not leave the sin and the curse and the weakness enveloping him unhealed... Whatever is weak in our nature and subject to death was united with his Deity and became what the Deity is.

Gregory of Nyssa (335 – 394 AD, Cappadocia in Turkey), *Ep. adv. Apol.*

He who came for the cause, that he might seek and save that which was lost (i.e. what the shepherd in the parable calls the sheep), both finds that which is lost, and carries home on his shoulder the whole sheep, not just the fleece, that he might make the man of God complete, united to God in body and soul. And thus he who was in all points tempted as we are yet without sin, left no part of our nature which he did not take up into himself.

Gregory of Nyssa (335 – 394 AD, Cappadocia in Turkey), *Against Apolinarius 16*

You ask the reason why God was born among men... If, then, love of man be a special characteristic of the Divine nature, here is the reason for which you are in search, here is the cause of the presence of God among men. Our diseased nature needed a healer. Man in his fall needed one to set him upright. He who had lost the gift of life stood in need of a life-giver, and he who had dropped away from his fellowship with good wanted one who would lead him back to good. He who was shut up in darkness longed for the presence of the light. The captive sought for a ransom, the fettered prisoner for someone to take his part, and for a deliverer he who was held in the bondage of slavery. Were these, then, trifling or unworthy wants to importune the Deity to come down and take a survey of the nature of man, when mankind was so miserably and pitifully conditioned?

Gregory of Nyssa (335 – 394 AD, Cappadocia in Turkey), *The Great Catechism, ch.15*

‘Him who did not know sin, He made sin on our behalf.’ It says that God the Father made his Son, Christ, sin; because having been made flesh he was not altered but became incarnate and so was made sin... On account of this his entire flesh is under sin, therefore since it has been made flesh, it has also been made sin. And since he has been offered for sin, not undeservedly is he said to have been made sin; since also a victim which was offered for sins under the law was named sin.

Ambrosiaster (a Latin commentary written between 366 – 384 AD), *Second Corinthians 5.21*

Never would you have been freed from sinful flesh, had he not taken on himself the likeness of sinful flesh

Augustine (354 – 430 AD, Roman North Africa), *Sermon 185*

The Son of God assumed human nature, and in it he endured all that belongs to the human condition. This is a remedy for mankind of a power beyond our imagining.

Augustine (354 – 430 AD, Roman North Africa), *De Agone Christiano 12*

He there [was made] sin, as we [were made] justice; not our justice, but that of God; not in ourselves, but in him; just as he [was made] sin, not his own sin, but our sin.

Augustine (354 – 430 AD, Roman North Africa), *Enchiridion 41*

But what is the meaning of “justified by his blood?” What power, I ask, is there in this blood that believers are justified by it? And what is the meaning of “reconciled by the death of his Son?” Perhaps that when God the Father was angry with us, He saw the death of His Son for us, and was appeased with us? Or was His Son then appeased with us to such an extent that He even deigned to die for us, but that the Father was still angry with us to such an extent that, unless His Son died for us, He would not be appeased? What is it that the same Teacher of the Gentiles says in another place: “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who has not

spared his own Son, but has delivered him for us all; how has he not also, with him, given us all things?" [cf. Romans 8:31–32] Unless the Father had already been appeased, would He have delivered His own Son, not sparing Him for us? Does not this opinion seem, as it were, to contradict that which we have just mentioned? For in that the Son dies for us, and the Father is reconciled with us by His death; but in this the Father, as it were, first loved us, and He does not spare His Son on account of us, and delivers Him to death for us. But I see that the Father also loved us previously, not only before His Son died for us, but before He founded the world, as the Apostle himself bears witness, who says: "As he chose us in him before the foundation of the world" [Ephesians 1:4]. Nor was the Son delivered for us, as it were, unwillingly, when the Father did not spare Him, because it was also said of him "Who loved me and gave himself up for me" [Galatians 2:20]. Therefore, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit of both, work all things together, equally and harmoniously; yet we are justified by the blood of Christ, and we are reconciled to God by the death of His Son; and I shall also explain here how this was done, as far as I shall be able, and as much as shall seem sufficient.

By the justice of God the whole human race was delivered into the power of the devil, the sin of the first man passing originally into all of both sexes, who were born through conjugal union, and the debt of our first parents binding all their posterity. This delivering was first indicated in Genesis, where, when it was said to the serpent: "Earth shalt thou eat," it was said to the man: "Earth thou art, and into earth shalt thou return" [cf. Genesis 3:14, 19]. The death of the body was foretold by "into earth shalt thou return," because he would not have experienced it, if he had remained upright as he had been created. But what He says to the living man: "Earth thou art," shows that the whole man has been changed into something worse, for "earth thou art," is just the same as "My spirit shall not remain in those men, because they are flesh" [cf. Genesis 6:3]. Hence, God showed that He had then delivered man to the devil, to whom he had said: "Earth shalt thou eat." But the Apostle proclaims this more clearly where he says: "And you were dead in your offenses and sins, wherein once you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of this spirit which now works on the children of unbelief, in which even we, all of us, once led our lives in the desires of the flesh, doing the promptings of our flesh and of our affections, and were by nature children of wrath even as the rest" [cf. Ephesians 2:1–3]. The children of unbelief are the infidels, and who is not such before he becomes a believer? Wherefore, all men by their origin are under the prince of the power of the air "which works on the children of unbelief." I have said "by their origin"; this has the same meaning as the words of the Apostle "by nature," when he says that he had been by nature as the rest, that is, by the nature as it was corrupted by sin, not as it was created upright from the beginning. Yet as regards the manner by which man was delivered into the power of the devil: it ought not to be understood as though God had done this or ordered this to be done, but only that He permitted it, yet justly. For when He abandoned the sinner, the author of sin immediately entered into him. Nor has God indeed so abandoned His creature, as not to show Himself to him as the God who creates and vivifies, and in the midst of the evils that were inflicted for man's punishment, He bestows many good things even upon the wicked, for He has not shut up His mercies in His anger [cf. Psalm 76:10]. Nor has He allowed man to depart from the law of His power when He permitted him to be in the power of the devil, because not even the devil himself is withdrawn from the power of the Omnipotent One, just as he is not withdrawn from His goodness. Would even the wicked angels be able to subsist with whatever kind of life they have, except through Him who vivifies all things? If, therefore, the committing of sin, by the just anger of God, subjected man to the devil, then certainly the remission of sins, through the gracious reconciliation of God, has rescued man from the devil.

What is the justice, therefore, by which the devil was conquered? What, unless the justice of Jesus Christ? And how was he conquered? Because, although he found in Him nothing worthy of death, yet he slew Him. And it is certainly just that the debtors, whom he held, should be set free, since they believed in Him whom he slew without any debt. It is in this way, then, that we are said to be justified by his blood [Romans 5:9]. For so that innocent blood was shed for the remission of our sins. Therefore, it is said in the Psalm that he is free among the dead [cf. Psalm 87:6]. For only he that is dead is free from the debt of death. Hence, it is also said in another Psalm: "Then did I pay that which I took not away" [cf. Psalm 68:5]. By the thing which He took away is meant sin, because sin is taking hold against what is lawful. And hence, He also says through the mouth of His flesh, as it is read in the Gospel: "Behold, the prince of this world is coming, and in me he has not found anything," that is, no sin, "but that all may know," He said, "that I do the will of my Father, arise, let us go from here" [cf. John 14:30–31]. And He went from that place to His passion, in order that He might pay for us, the debtors, that which He Himself did not owe. Would the devil have been conquered by this most just right, if Christ had willed to contend with him by power and not by justice? But He held back what He could, in order that He might first do what was fitting, and for this reason it was necessary for Him to be both man and God. For unless He were man, He could not be slain; unless He were God, men would not

believe that He did not will what He could, but would believe that He could not do what He willed; nor would we think that He preferred justice to power, but that He lacked the power. Now, on the contrary, He suffered human things for us because He was man; but if He had been unwilling, He could not have suffered these things because He was also God. His justice, therefore, was made more pleasing by His humiliation, because the power in His divinity was so great that He could not suffer if He had not willed this humiliation. And thus by the death of One so powerful, justice was commended and power promised to us helpless mortals. He did the first of these two things by dying, and the second by rising from the dead. For what is more just than to come for the sake of justice even to the death of the cross? And what is more powerful than to rise from the dead, and to ascend into heaven with the same flesh in which He was slain? And, therefore, He conquered the devil first by justice and afterwards by power, namely, by justice because He had no sin and was most unjustly slain by him; but by power because the dead One has lived again, never afterwards to die [Romans 6:9]. But He would have conquered the devil by power, even if He could not have been slain by him, although it is a sign of greater power to overcome even death itself by rising again, than to avoid it by living. It is, however, for another reason that we are justified by the blood of Christ when we are rescued from the power of the devil through the remission of sins; it pertains to this, that the devil is conquered by Christ by justice, not by power. For Christ was crucified through the weakness which He took upon Himself in our mortal flesh, not through His immortal power; yet of this weakness the Apostle says: "The weakness of God is stronger than men" [1 Corinthians 1:25].

Why, then, should not the death of Christ take place? Nay rather, why should not the innumerable other ways which the Almighty could make use of to liberate us be passed over, and this one chosen before all as the means to bring it about? For by it nothing is lessened or changed from His divinity, and so great a benefit is conferred upon men from the human nature which He took upon Himself, that a temporal death which was not due was rendered by the eternal Son of God, who is at the same time the Son of man, whereby He might free them from the eternal death that was due. The devil was holding fast to our sins, and by means of them was deservedly fixing us in death. He, who had no sins and was undeservedly led by him to death, released them. So great a price did that blood have that he who slew Christ for a time by the death that was not due should no longer detain anyone who has put on Christ in the eternal death that was due.

Augustine, *On the Trinity*, book 13, chapters 11 – 16

If, then, Adam obeyed of *his own will* and ate of *his own will*, surely in us *the will* is the first part to suffer. *And if the will is the first to suffer, and the Word Incarnate did not assume this with the rest of our nature, it follows that we have not been freed from sin.* Moreover, if the faculty of free-will which is in nature His work and yet He did not assume it, He either condemned His own workmanship as not good, or grudged us the comfort it brought, and so deprived us of the full benefit, and showed that He was Himself subject to passion since He was not willing or not able to work out our perfect salvation.

John of Damascus (676 – 749 AD), *Orthodoxy*, Bk III, 14

Since our Lord Jesus Christ was without sin, for He committed no sin, He Who took away the sin of the world, nor was there any deceit found in His mouth. (Isa.53:9; Jn.1:29) He was not subject to death, since death came into the world through sin. (Rom.5:12). He dies, therefore, because He took on Himself death on our behalf, and He makes Himself an offering to the Father for our sakes....Wherefore death approaches, and swallowing up the body as a bait is transfixed on the hook of divinity, and after tasting of a sinless and life-giving body, perishes, and brings up again all whom of old he swallowed up. For just as darkness disappears on the introduction of light, so is death repulsed before the assault of life, and brings life to all, but death to the destroyer.

John of Damascus (676 – 749 AD), *Orthodoxy*, Book III, 27
(<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf209.toc.html>)

The word corruption has two meanings. For it signifies all the human sufferings, such as hunger, thirst, weariness, the piercing with nails, death, that is, the separation of soul and body, and so forth. In this sense we say that our Lord's body was subject to corruption. For He voluntarily accepted all these things. But corruption means also the complete resolution of the body into its constituent elements, and its utter disappearance, which is spoken of by many preferably as destruction. The body of our Lord did not experience this form of corruption, as the prophet David says, For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine holy one to see corruption. Wherefore to say, with that foolish Julianus and Gaianus, that our Lord's body was incorruptible, in the first sense of the word, before His resurrection is impious. For if it were incorruptible it was not really, but only apparently, of the same

essence as ours, and what the Gospel tells us happened, viz. the hunger, the thirst, the nails, the wound in His side, the death, did not actually occur. But if they only apparently happened, then the mystery of the dispensation is an imposture and a sham, and He became man only in appearance, and not in actual fact, and we are saved only in appearance, and not in actual fact. . . . For our Lord by His own body bestowed the gifts both of resurrection and of subsequent incorruption even on our own body, He Himself having become to us the firstfruits both of resurrection and incorruption, and of passionlessness. (1 Cor.15:20). For as the divine Apostle says, This corruptible must put on incorruption.

John of Damascus (676 – 749 AD), *Orthodoxy*, Bk III, 28

The Assumed is Healed

As long then as the former time endured, He permitted us to be borne along by unruly impulses, being drawn away by the desire of pleasure and various lusts. This was not that He at all delighted in our sins, but that He simply endured them; nor that He approved the time of working iniquity which then was, but that He sought to form a mind conscious of righteousness, so that being convinced in that time of our unworthiness of attaining life through our own works, it should now, through the kindness of God, be vouchsafed to us; and having made it manifest that in ourselves we were unable to enter into the kingdom of God, we might through the power of God be made able. But when our wickedness had reached its height, and it had been clearly shown that its reward, punishment and death, was impending over us; and when the time had come which God had before appointed for manifesting His own kindness and power, how the one love of God, through exceeding regard for men, did not regard us with hatred, nor thrust us away, nor remember our iniquity against us, but showed great long-suffering, and bore with us, He Himself took on *Him the burden of our iniquities*, He gave His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy One for transgressors, the blameless One for the wicked, the righteous One for the unrighteous, the incorruptible One for the corruptible, the immortal One for them that are mortal. For what other thing was capable of covering our sins than His righteousness? By what other one was it possible that we, the wicked and ungodly, could be justified, than by the only Son of God? O sweet exchange! O unsearchable operation! O benefits surpassing all expectation! that the wickedness of many should be hid in a single righteous One, and that the righteousness of One should justify many transgressors! Having therefore convinced us in the former time that *our nature was unable to attain to life*, and having now revealed *the Saviour who is able to save even those things which it was [formerly] impossible to save*, by both these facts He desired to lead us to trust in His kindness, to esteem Him our Nourisher, Father, Teacher, Counsellor, Healer, our Wisdom, Light, Honour, Glory, Power, and Life.

Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus, chapter 9; date unknown but likely to be late first century to early second century because of the comment in chapter 11, 'I do not speak of things strange to me, nor do I aim at anything inconsistent with right reason; but having been a disciple of the Apostles, I am become a teacher of the Gentiles. I minister the things delivered to me to those that are disciples worthy of the truth.'

Of course he endured the suffering for all: everything in possession of created nature needed this healing. ...only the divine nature is without need (he is saying); all other things needed the remedy of the incarnation.

Theodoret of Cyr, *Interpretation of Hebrews 2*

"The one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin." This is a reference to the humanity of the one who sanctifies, for the assumed nature is created. The creator of him and us is one. We are sanctified through him.

Theodoret of Cyr, *Interpretation of Hebrews 2*

It may be, however, that, though shamed into agreeing that this objection is void, the Greeks will want to raise another. They will say that, if God wanted to instruct and save mankind, He might have done so, not by His Word's assumption of a body, but, even as He at first created them, by the mere signification of His will. The reasonable reply to that is that the circumstances in the two cases are quite different. In the beginning, nothing as yet existed at all; all that was needed, therefore, in order to bring all things into being, was that His will to do so should be signified. But once man was in existence, and things that were, not things that were not, demanded to be healed, it followed as a matter of course that the Healer and Savior should align Himself with those things that existed already, in order to heal the existing evil. For that reason, therefore, He was made man, and used the body as His human instrument. If this were not the fitting way, and He willed to use an instrument at all, how otherwise was the Word to

come? And whence could He take His instrument, save from among those already in existence and needing His Godhead through One like themselves? It was not things non-existent that needed salvation, for which a bare creative word might have sufficed, but man – man already in existence and already in process of corruption and ruin. It was natural and right, therefore, for the Word to use a human instrument and by that means unfold Himself to all. You must know, moreover, that the corruption which had set in was not external to the body but established within it. The need, therefore, was that life should cleave to it in corruption's place, so that, just as death was brought into being in the body, life also might be engendered in it. If death had been exterior to the body, life might fittingly have been the same. But if death was within the body, woven into its very substance and dominating it as though completely one with it, the need was for Life to be woven into it instead, so that the body by thus enduing itself with life might cast corruption off. Suppose the Word had come outside the body instead of in it, He would, of course, have defeated death, because death is powerless against the Life. But the corruption inherent in the body would have remained in it none the less. Naturally, therefore, the Savior assumed a body for Himself, in order that the body, being interwoven as it were with life, should no longer remain a mortal thing, in thrall to death, but as endued with immortality and risen from death, should thenceforth remain immortal. For once having put off corruption, it could not rise, unless it put on life instead; and besides this, death of its very nature could not appear otherwise than in a body. Therefore He put on a body, so that in the body He might find death and blot it out. And, indeed, how could the Lord have been proved to be the Life at all, had He not endued with life that which was subject to death? Take an illustration. Stubble is a substance naturally destructible by fire; and it still remains stubble, fearing the menace of fire which has the natural property of consuming it, even if fire is kept away from it, so that it is not actually burnt. But suppose that, instead of merely keeping the fire from it somebody soaks the stubble with a quantity of asbestos, the substance which is said to be the antidote to fire. Then the stubble no longer fears the fire, because it has put on that which fire cannot touch, and therefore it is safe. It is just the same with regard to the body and death. Had death been kept from it by a mere command, it would still have remained mortal and corruptible, according to its nature. To prevent this, it put on the incorporeal Word of God, and therefore fears neither death nor corruption any more, for it is clad with Life as with a garment and in it corruption is clean done away.

Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 7.44

Jesus Shared Our Nature, Generally

Turn a deaf ear to any speaker who avoids mention of Jesus Christ who was of David's line, born of Mary, who was truly born, ate and drank; was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, truly crucified and died.

Ignatius of Antioch (d.107), *Letter to the Trallians* 9, cf. *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 1 – 4

Or how shall man pass into God, unless God has [first] passed into man? And how shall he (man) escape from the generation subject to death, if not by means of a new generation, given in a wonderful and unexpected manner (but as a sign of salvation) by God--[I mean] that regeneration which flows from the virgin through faith? Or how shall they receive adoption from God if they remain in this [kind of] generation, which is naturally possessed by man in this world? And how could He (Christ) have been greater than Solomon, or greater than Jonah, or have been the Lord of David, who was of the same substance as they were? How, too, could He have subdued him who was stronger than men, who had not only overcome man, but also retained him under his power, and conquered him who had conquered, while he set free mankind who had been conquered, unless He had been greater than man who had thus been vanquished? But who else is superior to, and more eminent than, that man who was formed after the likeness of God, except the Son of God, after whose image man was created? And for this reason He did in these last days exhibit the similitude; [for] the Son of God was made man, assuming the ancient production [of His hands] into His own nature, as I have shown in the immediately preceding book.

Irenaeus (130 – 200 AD), *Against Heresies* 4.33.4

When he took upon him the nature of human flesh, he fully accepted all the characteristics properties of humanity, so that it be realized that he had a body of flesh in reality and not in mere appearance.

Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 92

The whole man would not have been redeemed if he had not assumed the whole man

Origen, *Dialektos*, 7

Had it been a case of a trespass only, and not of a subsequent corruption, repentance would have been well enough; but when once transgression had begun men came under the power of the corruption proper to their nature and were bereft of the grace which belonged to them as creatures in the Image of God. No, repentance could not meet the case. What – or rather Who – was it that was needed for such grace and such recall as we required? Who, save the Word of God Himself, Who also in the beginning had made all things out of nothing?... Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father... This He did that He might turn again to incorruption men who had turned to corruption, and make them alive through death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of His resurrection. Thus He would make death to disappear from them as utterly as straw from fire.

Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 2:8 – 9

As, then, he who desires to see God Who by nature is invisible and not to be beheld, may yet perceive and know Him through His works, so too let him who does not see Christ with his understanding at least consider Him in His bodily works and test whether they be of man or God. If they be of man, then let him scoff; but if they be of God, let him not mock at things which are no fit subject for scorn, but rather let him recognize the fact and marvel that things divine have been revealed to us by such humble means, that through death deathlessness has been made known to us, and through the Incarnation of the Word the Mind whence all things proceed has been declared, and its Agent and Ordainer, the Word of God Himself. He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God. He manifested Himself by means of a body in order that we might perceive the Mind of the unseen Father. He endured shame from men that we might inherit immortality. He Himself was unhurt by this, for He is impassable and incorruptible; but by His own impassability He kept and healed the suffering men on whose account He thus endured. In short, such and so many are the Savior's achievements that follow from His Incarnation, that to try to number them is like gazing at the open sea and trying to count the waves. One cannot see all the waves with one's eyes, for when one tries to do so those that are following on baffle one's senses. Even so, when one wants to take in all the achievements of Christ in the body, one cannot do so, even by reckoning them up, for the things that transcend one's thought are always more than those one thinks that one has grasped.

Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 8.54

The Saviour having in very truth become man, the salvation of the whole man was brought about... Truly our salvation is not merely apparent, nor does it extend to the body only, but the whole body and soul alike, has truly obtained salvation in the Word himself.

Athanasius, *Ad Epict.* 7

The very purpose for which he came was to save the whole man. If he had not redeemed the whole man, he would have failed.

Ambrose, *Epistle* 261.2

“He will not be ashamed.” He highlighted the difference. Even though he is truly human, he is our brother not according to nature but according to his love toward humankind, as he remains truly God.

Photius, *Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews* 2:11

How could it be possible to name him our brother or to call us sons and daughters properly if it were not for the nature—the same as ours—with which he was clothed?... And it was especially necessary for Paul to say “in the same way” so that he might refute the reproach of making the incarnation a fantasy.

Theodoret of Cyr, *Interpretation of Hebrews* 2:14 – 15.

For “since the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature,” that we, sharing his incarnate life, might also share his divine grace.”

Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 3.11

In what is he a priest, except in that which he took to himself from the priestly nation? It is a priest's duty to offer something, and, according to the law, to enter into the holy places by means of blood... this High Priest was indeed bound to make passage and entry into the holy of holies in heaven through his own blood in order that he might be the everlasting propitiation for our sins. Priest and victim, then, are one; the priesthood and sacrifice are, however, exercised under the conditions of humanity.

Ambrose, *On the Christian Faith* 3.11

How is it possible, he is saying, for Christ to style himself our brother or call us really children unless he bears the same nature. Hence on assuming it he overcame the influence of death and did away with the dread besetting us.

Theodoret of Cyr, *Interpretation of Hebrews* 2

The Only Begotten operated not through his own nature, for that would in no way have improved our state, or though the nature of angels; but he operated through “the seed of Abraham,” as Scripture has it. For in this way and in no other could the race, fallen into corruption, be restored to salvation.

Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 684

He went through the very experience of that which we have suffered. Now he is not ignorant of our sufferings, not only because as God he knows them, but also because as man he knows them through the trial with which he was tested.

John Chrysostom, *On the Epistle to the Hebrews* 5.2

He is high priest not as God but as human.

Theodoret of Cyr, *Interpretation of Hebrews* 2

Because it is also the work of a high priest to enter God's presence first and then to bring the others close to him, he [Paul] quite rightly calls him high priest, because he did this in fact.

Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 15.16

In truth Christ is not a faithful servant like Moses, but “as a son” he was faithful, and not over the shrine of the temple but over the souls of people.

Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Hebrews*

So let us in the future believe, blessed brethren, in accordance with the tradition of the apostles, that God the Word came down from the heaven into the holy virgin Mary...Once he had taken flesh out of her and taken a soul of the human kind—a rational one I mean—and had become everything that a human is, sin excepted, he might save fallen Adam and procure incorruption for such as believe in his name.

Hippolytus, *Against Noetus* 17.2

But God, who is served by myriads of powers without number, who “upholds the universe by his word of power,” whose majesty is beyond anyone's endurance, has not disdained to become the father, the friend, the brother of those rejected ones. He willed to become incarnate so that he might become “like unto us in all things except for sin” and make us to share in his glory and his kingdom. What stupendous riches of his great goodness! What an ineffable condescension on the part of our master and our God

Symeon the New Theologian, *Discourse* 2.4

He whom presently you scorn was once transcendent over even you. He who is presently human was incomposite. He remained what he was: what he was not he assumed....But later he came into being because of something, namely, your salvation, yours who insult him and despise his Godhead for that very reason, because he took on our thick corporeality. Through the medium of the mind he had dealings with the flesh, being made that God on earth which is human. Human and God blended; they became a single whole, the stronger side predominating, in order that I might be made God to the same extent that he was made man. He was begotten—yet he was already begotten—of a woman.

Gregory of Nazianzus, *On the Son, Theological Oration* 3(29).19

It was not for this reason that he called “days of his flesh” the days when the Lord was upon the earth visibly, as if now he had put off the flesh. Perish the thought! For he still has the flesh, even if it is now imperishable. But he calls “the days of his flesh” the days in his fleshly life.

Oecumenius, *Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews* 5 – 7

As Word, he was neither obedient nor disobedient—the terms apply to amenable subordinates or inferiors who

deserve punishment. But as the “form of a servant” he comes down to the same level as his fellow servants; receiving an alien “form,” he bears the whole of me, along with all that is mine, in himself, so that he may consume within himself the meaner element, as fire consumes wax or the sun ground mist, and so that I may share in what is his through the intermingling.

Gregory of Nazianzus, *On the Son, Theological Oration 4* (30).6

Let us become like Christ, since Christ also became like us; let us become gods because of him, since he also because of us became human. He assumed what is worse that he might give what is better. He became poor that we through his poverty might become rich. He took the form of a slave, that we might regain freedom. He descended that we might be lifted up, he was tempted that we might be victorious, he was dishonoured to glorify us, he died to save us, he ascended to draw to himself us who lay below in the Fall of sin.

Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 1: On Pascha and On His Slowness*

He comes forth, God with what he has assumed, one from two opposites, flesh and spirit, the one deifying and the other deified. O the new mixture! O the paradoxical blending! He who is comes into being, and the uncreated is created, and the uncontained is contained, through the intervention of the rational soul, which mediates between the divinity and the coarseness of flesh. The one who enriches becomes poor; he is made poor in my flesh, that I might be enriched through his divinity. The full one empties himself; for he empties himself of his own glory for a short time, that I may participate in his fullness. . . . I participated in the [divine] image, and I did not keep it; he participates in my flesh both to save the image and to make the flesh immortal. He shares with us a second communion, much more paradoxical than the first; then he gave us a share in what is superior, now he shares in what is inferior. This is more godlike than the first; this, to those who can understand, is more exalted.

Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 38*

That is, although having the very great advantage of being a Son, which enabled him to do all things by his own autocratic opinion without any petition or request, even as the Father does, nonetheless, since he was in the days of the flesh, he offered petitions and supplications....It really cannot be that he himself learned from the things he suffered to obey his Father and that by testing he acquired knowledge of how to obey him, can it? Or is it not rather that by testing he learned such was the greatness of the obedience, with which the Father hearkened to him, in that he was crucified and died and rose and exalted the human race to be at the right hand of the Father and to save our race?...Christ, being the Son and God just as much as the Father, already knew this obedience and how great it was, even before he rendered obedience to the Father, but “having been heard” he learned it through the things he suffered and through the testing he underwent.

Photius, *Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews 5.7 – 9*

The inspired author is, so to speak, stupefied by the mystery that the Son, existing by nature truly and endowed with the glories of divinity, should so abase himself that he endured the low estate of our impoverished humanity.

Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ 755*

Consider the fact that the only begotten spoke these words only when he had become man and insofar as he was one of us and spoke on our behalf. It was just as though he had said, “The first man sinned by falling into disobedience....But you have established me as a second beginning for those on earth, and I have been named a second Adam. In me you see human nature purified, established sinless, holy and pure.

Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ 757*

“He became the source of our eternal salvation” by replacing Adam, who had been the source of our death through his disobedience. But as Adam's death did not reign in those who did not sin, so life reigns in those who do not need to be absolved.

Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*

By “being made perfect” he referred to resurrection and immortality, this being the completion of the incarnation.

Theodoret of Cyr, *Interpretation of Hebrews 5*

This faith promises, however, not by human reasoning, but by divine authority, that the whole man, who certainly consists of soul and body, will be immortal and, therefore, truly happy. And consequently, when it was said in the

Gospel that Jesus gave to those who “received him the power of becoming sons of God,” and when the meaning of to receive Him had been briefly explained by saying “to those who believe in his name”; and when it was added in what manner they should become the sons of God “who were born not of blood, of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,” then lest this weakness, which we see and bear, should despair of such great excellence it was immediately added: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,” in order that men might be convinced, by contrast, of that which seemed incredible. For if the Son of God by nature became the Son of man out of compassion for the sons of men – this is the meaning of “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” men [John 1:12–14] – how much more credible it is that the sons of man by nature become the sons of God by grace, and dwell in God in whom alone and from whom alone the blessed can be made sharers of His immortality; and that we might be convinced of this, the Son of God was made a sharer of our mortality?

Augustine, *On the Trinity*, book 13, chapter 9, paragraph 12

In order to make gods of those who were merely human, one who was God made himself human; without forfeiting what he was, he wished to become, because what he did was add man to God, not lose God in man.

Augustine, *Sermon 192.1.1*⁵

Christ’s deformity is what gives form to you. If he had been unwilling to be deformed, you would never have got back the form you lost. So he hung on the cross, deformed; but his deformity was our beauty.

Augustine, *Sermon 27.6*, commenting on Isaiah 53

Christ is the former and reformer of humans, the creator and recreator, the maker and remaker.

Augustine, *Tractate on John’s Gospel 38.8*

The Teacher of humility became a sharer in our infirmity to enable us to share in his divinity; he came down to us both to teach us the way and to become the way, and he graciously willed to make his own humility above all a lesson to us.

Augustine, *Psalms 58 (sermon 1).7*

He shares in the inferior part, I mean our own nature, in order that through Himself and in Himself He might renew that which was made after His image and likeness.

John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith*

By his gracious condescension God became man and is called man for the sake of man and by exchanging his condition for ours revealed the power that elevates man to God through his love for God and brings God down to man because of his love for man. By this blessed inversion, man is made God by divinization and God is made man by hominization.

Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium 22: On Jesus Christ and the End of the Ages*, in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor*, trans. and ed. Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 115.

Jesus Experienced Human Weakness

As he was man that he might be tempted, so he was the Word that he might be glorified

Irenaeus (130 – 200), *Against Heresies 3.19.3*

‘Jesus took our flesh and was so tempted in every way as we so that he might obtain victory for us.’

Origen (185 – 254), *Homilies on Luke, 29*

⁵ My quotes from Augustine are cited in Stanley P. Rosenberg, ‘Interpreting Atonement in Augustine’s Preaching’, edited by Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James, *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers’ Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p.233 – 238. It is notable that the editors of this book wanted to honor Dr. Roger Nicole, an American evangelical theologian, who upheld the penal substitution view. Rosenberg, however, recognizes that Augustine held the physical redemption theory, and cannot be pressed into this editorial purpose.

We Share in the Son's Sonship

But following the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is in himself.

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*

For he was made man that we might be made [divine].

Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*.

For both we and he have one Father, but it is clear that he is son by nature, we by grace. The fact that it says, "He Sanctifies, but we are sanctified," teaches us this difference.

Theodoret of Cyr, *Interpretation of Hebrews 2*

"For it was fitting for him, because of whom and through whom all things exist." Quite clearly he is speaking about the divine Word, inasmuch as he shared with many his sonship and led them into this glory.

Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Frag. On Epist. To Hebrews*

We must say that our Lord, being Word and Son of God, bore a body and became Son of Man, that, having become Mediator between God and men, He might minister the things of God to us and ours to God.

Athanasius, *Against the Arians*

But that men might be born of God, God was first born of them....Marvel not, then, O Man, that thou art made a son by grace, that thou art born of God according to His Word. The Word Himself first chose to be born of man, that thou mightest be born of God unto salvation.

Augustine, *Homily on John 1:15*