Irenaeus on 'Image and Likeness' and 'In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh': An Argument for Jesus' Incarnation into Fallen Human Nature

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Introduction: Unfallen or Fallen Humanity?

A relatively recent debate is unfolding about the nature of Jesus' humanity between conception and death. Did Jesus instantly cleanse human nature from conception and thereby become incarnate in a pre-fallen Adamic human nature? Advocates of this view are called the 'unfallenness' camp. Or did Jesus bear a fallen Adamic human nature from conception, fight the corruption of sin throughout his life, and finally defeat it at his death on the cross? Advocates of this view are called the 'fallenness' camp.

Eastern Orthodox writer Emmanuel Hatzidakis, for example, asserts that if Jesus assumed 'the ancient formation of man' (Adam), that this implies an *unfallen*, *uncorrupted* human nature at conception; he therefore claims that Jesus did not inhabit fallen humanity from his conception.[2] Wesleyan scholar E. Jerome Van Kuiken examines this question of whether Jesus assumed unfallen or fallen human nature, and leans towards the unfallenness camp.[3] This topic needs consideration for a number of reasons.

Attributing to Jesus' conception what properly belongs (I argue) to his lifelong human obedience opens the interpreter to exegetical difficulties concerning biblical passages about Jesus death. Jesus bestowed the Holy Spirit only after his death and resurrection, which becomes challenging to explain if Jesus already cleansed human nature at conception – what else did Jesus need to do to bestow the Spirit? Why was Jesus' death necessary? To answer that question, we must consult passages about Jesus' death. There we find that Jesus bore our sins in his body on the cross (and NASB considers possible 'carried our sins in his body up to the wood/tree') (1 Pet.2:24; Isa.52:13 – 15:12), put to death the old humanity (Rom.6:6), and condemned sin (Rom.8:3). The quizzical declarations that Jesus became sin (2 Cor.5:21) and became a curse (Gal.3:13) are often interpreted as referring to the cross, too. The interpreter who holds to the unfallenness view tends to interpret those passages as indicating that Jesus had to suffer some punitive action from God at the cross. Curiously, then, the unfallenness view *leads* to a penal substitution and retributive-satisfaction view of Jesus' death. Not coincidentally, certain *Protestants* hold a penal substitutionary atonement view of Jesus' cross together with the unfallen view of his incarnation. Although most of those Orthodox who support the unfallen view of Jesus' conception and also resist penal substitutionary atonement tend to deny this logical conclusion, their own interpretive work does not (in my opinion) successfully escape the gravitational pull in biblical exegesis to interpret Jesus' death in such a way.

Van Kuiken's contribution is valuable because of his effort to survey modern unfallenness and fallenness theologians, and their respective appeals to the patristic writers. Most welcome are his desires to read and define terms like 'sinful' and 'fallen' and 'unfallen' carefully, and to avoid extreme characterizations of either side. His sympathetic hearing of both the unfallenness and fallenness theologians is impressive. My concern with his work is that, by selecting five Greek fathers (Irenaeus of Lyons, Athanasius of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Cyril of Alexandria) and five Latin fathers (Tertullian of Carthage, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, and Leo the Great of Rome), he risks mischaracterizing the early church along several dimensions.

(1) Van Kuiken underestimates the significance of how the early theologians were wrestling with matters of theological anthropology and metaphysics which would also color their view of atonement. Chiefly, how did the changing and varying conditions of human life and the natural world relate to the unchanging God, logically? In what sense was the Triune God 'unchanging'? Did Jesus' growth as a human reflect the unchanging God? His limitations as a human reflect the infinite God? Did Jesus' emotions and suffering reflect divine 'emotions' and

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[1] This paper was originally, and still is, part of my lengthier paper exploring patristic atonement teaching, *Penal Substitution vs. Medical-Ontological Substitution: A Historical Comparison*. That paper can be found online on the website of The Anástasis Center for Christian Education and Ministry, on this page: https://www.anastasiscenter.org/atonement-sources-patristic.

[2] Emmanuel Hatzidakis, *Jesus: Fallen? The Human Nature of Christ Examined from an Eastern Orthodox Perspective* (Clearwater, FL: Orthodox Witness, 2013), p.213 – 215

[3] E. Jerome Van Kuiken, *Christ's Humanity in Current and Ancient Controversy: Fallen or Not?* (London: T&T Clark, 2017)

'suffering' as well? What is now called the tension between 'classical theism' and 'open theism' was already a major concern in the encounter between Jewish communities and Hellenistic philosophies, most notably the Septuagint (LXX) translation of the Hebrew Scriptures,[4] but not limited to that. When the Christian monastic movement developed negative attitudes towards sex, even marital sex, they came to view conjugal pleasure itself as the mechanism by which the ancestral sin was passed down to each human being. Sexual desire even for one's spouse – so celebrated in Hebraic Jewish history as *Song of Songs* attests – was seen as deeply problematic because the 'oneness' of husband and wife envisioned by Scripture was sacrificed in favor of the 'oneness' of the soul reigning perfectly over the body in one individual – a Hellenistic ideal. Origen was the first to attempt to 'neutralize' *Song of Songs*, as he focuses exclusively, in his commentary, on the allegorical union of God and the human soul; he dismisses out of hand the possibility that the book might be describing a human courtship and marriage. Correspondingly, the 'unfallenness' view of Jesus' humanity developed out of the view that the Virgin Mary did not pass down the corruption of sin to Jesus on the grounds that she had no sexual pleasure when the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus in her womb.[5] Van Kuiken does not explore the troubling network of ideas which facilitated the rise of the 'unfallenness' view.

(2) Relatedly, Van Kuiken downplays Origen's particular attempt at brokering a synthesis, and his subsequent influence on the Greek-speaking Cappadocians, the bilingual Ambrose, and the Latin-speaking Augustine. This means that Van Kuiken's categorization of theologians as 'Greek-speaking' or 'Latin-speaking' has less meaning then he suggests. (3) He neglects the Syriac-speaking church, which arguably was more Judaic in its orientation, due in large part to the relocation of Jerusalemites to Antioch after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. And (4) he overrepresents the significance of the Latin fathers relative to the earlier Greek and Syriac in terms of their theological weightiness and closeness to the apostolic sources.[6]

Van Kuiken approaches the question much more sensitively than does Hatzidakis, however. Hatzidakis assumes that there is a patristic consensus on these questions, when that is precisely what is being debated. Hatzidakis also works within a framework of Eastern Orthodox dogmatic commitments, valuing patristic quotations more than the findings of more recent biblical scholarship. Biblical scholarship has the potential, at its best, of renewing our sensitivity to Hebrew narrative, literary and canonical intertextuality, and the Judaic undertones of New Testament Scripture. To varying degrees, the Greek- and Latin-speaking churches gradually lost these sensitivities, though of course there are some who would contest such a claim. Nevertheless, since these questions swirling around the biblical narrative about what it means to be *human* (termed *theological anthropology*), and what it meant for *Jesus* to be human, were never answered definitively by an ecumenical council of the church, there has not yet been a proper dogmatic answer. In other words, while the more fiery debates about the divinity of the Son, the three persons of the Trinity, and the two natures of Jesus Christ were settled (or hardened, depending on one's perspective of Chalcedon 451 and Constantinople 680 – 681), matters of theological anthropology, which were in the background of all these debates, have yet to reach a stable conclusion. In my estimation, it is unlikely that there will be such a council. For that reason, the scholarship must move forward, involving the fields of both biblical scholarship and systematic-dogmatic theology.

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[4] Paul Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

[5] For example, Augustine of Hippo, *On the Grace of Christ and on Original Sin* 2.47 says that Ambrose of Milan believed that Mary's virginity allowed Jesus to have an unfallen humanity. The relevant passage is: 'The same holy man [Ambrose] also, in his Exposition of Isaiah, speaking of Christ, says: Therefore as man He was tried in all things, and in the likeness of men He endured all things; but as born of the Spirit, He was free from sin. For every man is a liar, and no one but God alone is without sin. It is therefore an observed and settled fact, that *no man born of a man and a woman, that is, by means of their bodily union, is seen to be free from sin. Whosoever, indeed, is free from sin, is free also from a conception and birth of this kind*. Moreover, when expounding the Gospel according to Luke, he says: It was no cohabitation with a husband which opened the secrets of the Virgin's womb; rather was it the Holy Ghost which infused immaculate seed into her unviolated womb. For the Lord Jesus alone of those who are born of woman is holy, inasmuch as He experienced not the contact of earthly corruption, by reason of the novelty of His immaculate birth; nay, He repelled it by His heavenly majesty.' (italics mine) We find precursors to this negative view of marital sex in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 3.17, who believed that Adam and Eve fell because they had sex without explicit permission to do so.

[6] For example, Tertullian is indeed noteworthy by virtue of being the first Latin writer, and because of his intellect and voluminous writing, which had an impact on Cyprian, bishop of Carthage in the next generation, and on Trinitarian language in Latin. But Tertullian also made curious exegetical mistakes (see below). Cyprian seems to have held some type of penal view of Jesus' death, supporting my concern that the unfallen view of the incarnation often leads to a penal view of the crucifixion and a retributive view of God's justice. And Carthage in the early centuries might represent a Christian missionary challenge because it was evangelized by courageous martyrs but not apostolic teachers, and was more relationally remote from the rest of the church. Hilary of Poitiers and Ambrose of Milan also spoke Greek, and their ties to Greek-speaking Christians are noteworthy: Hilary was called 'the Athanasius of the West' for his vigorous defense of Nicaea, but was probably influenced towards the unfallenness view through his contact with Origenist theology in Cappadocia while he was in nearby Phrygia. Leo of Rome famously did not know enough Greek to understand the controversy surrounding the Council of Chalcedon 451 of the two natures of Christ. And so on.

Reviewing Hatzidakis' arguments, however, will help us better understand a lively debate unfolding in Orthodox circles. We will also better understand Tertullian, who did stand in the unfallenness camp, and a later patristic tendency, initiated by Origen (our earliest witness), to explain our vulnerability to animal-like appetites and passions to the 'coats of skin' given by God (Gen.3:21), rather than the primal eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil itself. The Cappadocians received and modified Origen to varying degrees. These interpretations are being subjected to vigorous discussion, not least because some scholars are attempting to reconstruct and/or rehabilitate Origen. Their positions raise exegetical questions about the human body being part of the original *imago dei* or not (Irenaeus says yes, Origen says no). Were the 'coats of skin' animal skins (Irenaeus[7]) or the human bodies we now experience (Origen[8])? They raise theological questions about what is the 'ancestral sin' communicated from Adam and Eve to their descendants, where that 'ancestral sin' is 'located' (soul, body, or both), potentially impacting beliefs about the nature of Jesus' human body, human experience, and human emotions. These interpretations impact hermeneutical questions about the influence of Platonic and/or Stoic thought on Christian theology. Does God experience 'emotions' or suffer in His divine nature? Does 'divine simplicity' and/or 'impassibility' rule that out? Do Jesus' human emotions reveal anything about God? These interpretations bear on pastoral questions about to what degree Jesus' human emotions and moral endurance can serve as direct comfort for us, or challenge to us. They shape apologetic questions about the ongoing dialogue between Christian theology, pastoral ministry, and modern science, especially neuroscience, which implies a stronger body-brain-mind-soul connection than Origen's priority on the soul could admit. They also greatly determine our responses to historical and dogmatic questions about the degree of agreement among patristic writers. Views of atonement are deeply intertwined with those questions. In my opinion, as Hatzidakis is loathe to admit, Tertullian and Origen made serious mistakes on these points, and I will explore them below. Eastern Orthodox theologians such as Kallistos Ware, John Meyendorff, and Vladimir Lossky seem to also find their trajectory troubling, and correspondingly, also hold to the belief in Jesus' assumption of *fallen* human nature. Hatzidakis criticizes his fellow Eastern Orthodox theologians for doing so.

Unfortunately, Van Kuiken was almost finished with his considerable research by the time he encountered Hatzidakis' work, as well as an earlier version of this paper of mine, which contained this critique of Hatzidakis.[9] He did me the kindness of referring his readers to this essay in a footnote. While our methodologies are similar, we come to different conclusions about Irenaeus in particular. I wish to respectfully explore the differences here.

When Irenaeus speaks of Jesus taking up 'the ancient formation of man,' as Hatzidakis points out, what does he mean? He seems to mean the generic category of 'humanity,' which includes the basic qualities of being finite, having both a body and soul, being relationally dependent on God, and needing to develop from immaturity to maturity. More importantly, Irenaeus speaks of 'sin' as a corruption or disorder within human nature that needed to be dissolved through death rather than immortalized.[10] Hatzidakis does not comment on Irenaeus' statement that

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[7] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.23.5 says, 'Inasmuch as, he says, I have by disobedience lost that robe of sanctity which I had from the Spirit, I do now also acknowledge that I am deserving of a covering of this nature, which affords no gratification, but which gnaws and frets the body. And he would no doubt have retained this *clothing* for ever, thus humbling himself, if God, who is merciful, had not clothed them with tunics of skins instead of fig-leaves.' (italics mine) It is apparent that Irenaeus viewed the 'tunics of skin' as 'clothing' of the ordinary sort, with continuity of 'body' between creation and fall and exile, for uncomfortable clothing 'which gnaws and frets the body' at present today is the same bodily experience Adam and Eve felt wearing 'fig leaves,' prior to the 'tunics of skin.' It is precisely Irenaeus' *opponents*, the Valentinians, who argue that these 'skins' were 'the final stage of human formation as the sensible element of the human form.' See Stephen O. Presley, *The Intertextual Reception of Genesis 1 – 3 in Irenaeus of Lyons* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015), p.121. John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.119 concurs that Irenaeus interprets Genesis 3:22 in the more straightforward way.

[8] Origen of Alexandria, *Dialogue with Heraclides*, translated by Robert J. Daly, edited by Walter J. Burghardt, Thomas Comerford Lawler, and John J. Dillon, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation* No.54 (New York, NY: Paulist Press), p.69 says, 'In creation, therefore, the human being first created was the one in the image (Gen.1:26) in whom is nothing material. For what is made in the image is not made from matter.' Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Genesis*, translated by Ronald E. Heine, edited by Hermigild Dressler, Robert P. Russell, Robert Sider, Thomas P. Halton, Sister M. Josephine Brennan, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press), p.63 says, 'We do not understand, however, this man indeed whom Scripture says was made 'according to the image of God' to be corporeal. For the form of the body does not contain the image of God, nor is the corporeal man said to be 'made,' but 'formed,' as is written in the words which follow… But it is our inner man, invisible, incorporeal, incorruptible, and immortal which is made 'according to the image of God.' For it is in such qualities as these that the image of God is more correctly understood. But if anyone suppose that this man who is made 'according to the image and likeness of God' is made of flesh, he will appear to represent God himself as made of flesh and in human form. It is most clearly impious to think this about God.' Origen's 'Platonist-idealist' or 'spiritual' reading of the pre-fall world in Genesis 1 requires him to explain how human bodies came to be, which he assigns to both the 'earth' in Genesis 2:7 and the 'coats of skin' in Genesis 3:22.

[9] Van Kuiken, p.7

[10] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.23.6; 3.18.7

'man, who had sin in himself, showing that he was liable to death,' which is not referring to sin as 'poor behavior,' but as the quality or type of humanity ('man') which Jesus assumed, precisely 'so that sin should be destroyed by man, and man should go forth from death…, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man...'[11] So it is difficult to know what he thinks about Irenaeus' statements. In that passage and many others, Irenaeus stresses Jesus' death as the moment in which he 'destroyed' and 'kill[ed] sin,' just as Jesus' resurrection is the event in which he 'deprive[d] death of its power, and vivif[ied] man.'

Van Kuiken notes that, according to Irenaeus' fondness for parallels, the Virgin Mary is like the virgin soil of creation. Since the virgin soil of creation produced a human nature yet unstained by fallenness, Mary must have bestowed a human nature to Jesus that was purified from fallenness from conception.[12] Irenaeus does enjoy such comparisons but Van Kuiken overstates the significance of the parallel. Irenaeus' emphasis falls on how God brought about the first Adam and the second Adam. The parallel, Irenaeus says, and Van Kuiken agrees, indicates that 'humanity has been re-created' by God.[13] The virginal soil of creation was virginal in the sense of being prior to human involvement by cultivation or farming, and thus God alone shaped Adam and breathed life into him. The virginal womb of Mary also had to do with being prior to human involvement by male sperm, and thus God alone shaped the embryonic Jesus and breathed life into him. For the bishop of Lyons, the parallel is simply this:

> 'For if the one [who sprang] from the earth [i.e. Adam] had indeed formation and substance from both the hand and workmanship of God, but the other [i.e. Jesus] not from the hand and workmanship of God, then He who was made after the image and likeness of the former did not, in that case, preserve the analogy of man.'[14]

But Irenaeus does not press the parallel further to discuss the substance used as raw material (soil, womb) and what moral quality it had, before and after God's action. Had he done so, he would have to imply that human farming would have 'defiled' the original garden land in a moral sense, and that sexual intercourse even within marriage would have 'defiled' Mary *in a moral sense*. But both of those conclusions are untenable biblically and for Irenaeus. The latter position accompanies the Origenist monastic interpretation of marital sexuality I find problematic. On the virgin birth, Van Kuiken notes that scholars Antonio Orbe and Gustaf Wingren also hold to the unfallen view, and that Matthew Baker and Iain M. Mackenzie hold to the fallen view, but does not bring them into closer dialogue. Significantly, Baker points out the following: 'By summing up in Himself the whole human race from the beginning to the end, He has also summed up its death.'[15] That is, if Jesus' humanity was mortal, then the flesh of Jesus must have carried with it the reason for that mortality: the corruption of the ancestral sin. Baker continues, 'Nor was it only mortal, but, indeed, the very 'flesh which sin had mastered and seized and dominated… that He might fight for the fathers and vanquish in Adam that which had struck us in Adam.''[16] The notion of Jesus 'fighting' and 'vanquishing' the sin which had heretofore 'mastered and seized' human flesh lends support to the fallen view.

Is there any other evidence in Irenaeus that Jesus experienced an internal struggle with a contrary impulse? Irenaeus quotes Isaiah 7:14 in *Demonstration* 53 to describe Jesus' early childhood. 'Before the child knows good from evil, he shall reject the evil, to choose the good.' He reasons from this citation that Irenaeus must have believed that Jesus possessed a purity in his infant life that was free from any contrary impulses.[17] Van Kuiken offers, 'Since Irenaeus never ascribes a contrary impulse to Christ's flesh, we should understand the Christ-child's humanity as being perfectly submissive to the divine will.'[18] From there, Van Kuiken characterizes Irenaeus' interpretation of Jesus' temptation experience as still not involving any contrary impulses: 'Christ dispassionately and calculatingly countering Satan's stratagems.'[19]

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[11] Ibid 3.18.7
[12] Van Kuiken, p.99
[13] Ibid p.98
[14] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.22.1
[15] Ibid 5.23.2; cf. Matthew Baker, 'The Place of St. Irenaeus of Lyon in Historical and Dogmatic Theology According to Thomas F. Torrance,' in *Participatio: The Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship* (T.F. Torrance Theological Fellowship website, Volume 2, 2010), http://www.tftorrance.org/journal/participatio_vol_2_2010.pdf, p.22 – 23
[16] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstration* 1.3.31; Baker, p.22
[17] Van Kuiken, p.98
[18] Ibid p.98
[19] Ibid p.98

A major difficulty with Van Kuiken's and Hatzidakis' assessment is that they make Irenaeus' Adam-Christ parallel avoid passing through Jesus' Jewishness and the experience of Israel. While Jesus' three temptations certainly map onto the temptations of appetite, pride, and power faced by Adam and Eve in the garden, as Irenaeus recognized,[20] they are also temptations Israel faced in the wilderness, as Irenaeus also recognized.[21] Israel was meant to be a recapitulation of Adam and Eve in their own way: the people of God in God's garden land. Hence, when Jesus went through the wilderness temptation, he was recapitulating *Israel's* origin story as a nation: passage through water, temptation in the wilderness for forty years (days, for Jesus), and meditation on Deuteronomy. N.T. Wright has demonstrated that in the apostle Paul, an 'Adam christology' is also an 'Israel christology.'[22] By this, Wright means that we cannot jump from 'Adam' to 'Christ.' We must consider 'Israel.' Part of what is at issue here is whether Irenaeus, and Scripture, can be read in such a way that christology can be developed without much reference to Israel, and in particular, Israel's experience of their own humanness. It is perfectly plausible, theologically, that the infant Jesus had an awareness of God the Father even before he had some recognition of boundaries in a proper sense (cf. Rom.7:9, 'before the commandment came'), but this does not mean that Jesus never had any contrary impulses which he internally fought to subdue, by the Spirit. Given the apostle Paul's recounting of his specifically Jewish experience 'under the Law' in Romans 7:1 – 25 and his use of the phrase 'under the Law' in Galatians 4:4 – 5, removing any such struggle from Jesus would effectively make Jesus *non-Jewish*. The ramifications of that move for theodicy are vast.

Moreover, Irenaeus *does* refer to Gethsemane, and it is not likely he would describe Jesus as 'dispassionately and calculatingly countering Satan's stratagems' there, as Van Kuiken reads Irenaeus' recounting of the wilderness. Instead, the bishop of Lyons stresses that Christ had 'sweat great drops of blood'[23] and that Gethsemane was a token of Jesus' 'passion' and a participation in it already, because Jesus in Gethsemane awakened his disciples from sleep as he would descend into Hades and 'awaken' the dead from 'sleep,' in a deeper sense.[24] Since Gethsemane is the literary bookend of Jesus' public ministry, where the wilderness temptation is the opening, it follows that Jesus' struggle against a contrary impulse in Gethsemane strongly suggests such a struggle in the wilderness, and in all likelihood, the time in-between and on the cross as well. When, therefore, I read Irenaeus saying, 'He became man in order to undergo temptation… that He might be capable of being tempted,'[25] we must ask, 'What is the nature of a temptation?' Is it not by definition the experience of a contrary impulse of some sort?

Hatzidakis interprets Jesus' temptation narrative in a peculiar way which shows his reliance on categories in the classical Greek Orthodox tradition. He defines Jesus' temptations as belonging to the category of 'innocent passions' like hunger, thirst, and tiredness. He suggests that, just as Adam and Eve were capable of being tempted prior to the fall, so Jesus' humanity was still vulnerable to temptation, though unfallen. Therefore, he argues, Jesus need not have assumed a fallen humanity at conception. He further claims that the Son of God was vulnerable to ordinary bodily limitations like thirst by free choice(s) alone,[26] rather than his categorical commitment to become bodily human at conception, incidentally. He quotes approvingly other Christian writers who insist that Jesus must not have gotten physically sick at any time because he was able to miraculously heal others' sicknesses, so for him to acquire a common cold would be a theological embarrassment. But arguably, Jesus' wilderness temptation and Gethsemane experiences were not reducible to ordinary bodily desires to biologically live; the satanic appeals to power and ego make more sense if they were designed to trigger something in a fallen human nature, especially interacting with kingly prerogatives. And part of the temptation experience exemplified Jesus' commitment to not use his miraculous power for his own benefit. Turning stones into bread for his own hunger's sake was a temptation to use power for himself alone. I maintain that there is no theological embarrassment in suggesting that Jesus was vulnerable to viruses and bacteria because he was human. If he never used his power for himself, it makes sense that he would catch a cold, for the same reason that he got thirsty.

Two data points in Irenaeus are also relevant to this question of unfallen or fallen humanity assumed by the Son in the incarnation. First, recall Irenaeus' creative use of the Good Samaritan parable to illustrate a history of human

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[20] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 5.21.2
[21] Ibid 5.21.2 says, 'Fasting forty days, like Moses and Elias…'; in 5.22.1 quotes the Shema of the wilderness, Dt.6:4, 5, 13
[22] N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), p.39 says, 'First, the apocalyptic belief that Israel is the last Adam is the correct background against which to understand Paul's Adam-christology'; cf. p.35 – 40.
[23] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.35.3
[24] Ibid 4.22.1
[25] Ibid 3.19.3
[26] Hatzidakis, p.422

nature including the incarnation. In the same way that the Samaritan entrusted the innkeeper with the wounded man, the Son entrusted the Spirit with his own wounded humanity. This is suggestive that the human nature Jesus assumed was, between conception and death, wounded by the corruption of sin:

> '…the Lord commending to the Holy Spirit His own man [*suum hominem*], who had fallen among thieves, whom He Himself compassionated, and bound up his wounds, giving two royal denaria; so that we, receiving by the Spirit the image and superscription of the Father and the Son, might cause the denarium entrusted to us to be fruitful, counting out the increase to the Lord.'[27]

Admittedly, using a parable for a typological purpose like this can only be suggestive. But it is one consideration among many. Moreover, it corroborates Irenaeus' technical language of 'accustomization,' which is the second data point.

Irenaeus says that human beings have become 'accustomed' to our enslavement to sin after the fall,[28] and even 'accustomed to condemn the innocent, and to let the guilty go free.'[29] In response, God 'accustomed' Abraham 'to follow the Word of God'[30] and 'accustomed' Israel and her prophets to 'bear His Spirit,'[31] 'accustoming His inheritance to obey God.'[32] This process of 'accustomization' culminated in the ministry of the Son and the Spirit in the life of the incarnate Christ. In particular, the Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan River, and commenced a special and climactic process of accustomization.

> 'Wherefore He [the Spirit] did also descend upon the Son of God, made the Son of man, becoming accustomed in fellowship with Him to dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings, and to dwell in the workmanship of God, working the will of the Father in them, and renewing them from their old habits into the newness of Christ.'[33]

Reciprocally, Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, 'accustomed' his humanity to abide the Spirit. Since he had become genuine 'man, who had sin in himself… to destroy sin… so that sin should be destroyed by man, and man should go forth from death. God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man.'[34] Irenaeus' rather formal use of the term 'accustom,' along with his interpretation of the Spirit-baptism event in the Jordan, reinforces his use of the Good Samaritan parable wherein the Son entrusted the Spirit with his wounded human nature *all throughout his earthly human life*.

Romans 8:3: 'In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh'

Hatzidakis asserts that if Jesus had a fallen human nature that he would be personally guilty of sin. But, to anticipate a further exploration of this issue, certain attributes of human nature are not descriptive of the human person in this way even for us. 'Corrupted' is an attribute of our human nature, formally speaking. 'Guilty' is an attribute of a person who has taken a sinful action. One's humanity can be 'corrupted' without that person being 'guilty' of transgressing a given boundary or standard. It follows, contra Hatzidakis, that this was exactly the case with Jesus, who carried a 'corrupted' humanity without being 'guilty' of any transgression at all. In fact, Paul indicates that he, as a Jewish person 'under the Law,' was unable to control his own covetousness and lusting (Rom.7:7 – 25), but asserts that Jesus did (Rom.8:3 – 4). The fallenness camp asserts that Jesus' personhood and/or divine nature acted *with* and *under* his human nature (cooperatively, collaboratively, synergistically) in such a way so as to heal it. It is quite germane to Paul's argument in Romans 7:1 – 8:4 that Jesus never yielded to the impulse of coveting and lusting, though he bore the same 'flesh' as the rest of the Jewish people (and all humanity), where Paul had just described 'the flesh' as containing some contrary impulse. Jesus, however, wrestled down that impulse prior to that impulse finding expression as coveting or lusting. Moreover, this action had to be progressive and not instantaneous, precisely because human nature itself is developmental, and needed to be healed and cleansed in a developmental way, as Irenaeus argues when he offers his recapitulation theory. Jesus' most mature vocation as

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[27] Ibid 3.17.3
[28] Ibid 4.13.2
[29] Ibid 4.26.3
[30] Ibid 4.5.4
[31] Ibid 4.14.2
[32] Ibid 4.21.3
[33] Ibid 3.17.1
[34] Ibid 3.18.7

Davidic king provided the framework for his final and most intense temptations. For Jesus' temptations had to be framed for him not only against the Law of the Sinaitic covenant as if he were an ordinary Jewish person, but against the Davidic prerogatives to rule the nations because he was the heir of David. The uniting of divinity with humanity, as fire uniting with iron, needed to be a *process unfolding in a human way*. Suffice to say here that Hatzidakis deploys certain assumptions rather than engaging with the text of Irenaeus' work, which has considerable space devoted to the Sinai covenant and Davidic kingship. Also significant in the background is Augustine's problematic introduction of 'inherited guilt' from Adam as opposed to the more common 'inherited corruption' in the Greek fathers.

Along the lines of my argument, Irenaeus' reference to Paul's phrase 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' from Romans 8:3 is a data point that deserves very careful attention. In English, the word 'likeness' can mean 'resemblance' or 'the superficial appearance of.' In some uses, it implies an *antithetical* relation with the actual substance thereof. However, in Paul, the word 'likeness' cannot possibly mean that. For in Philippians 2:7, he says that Jesus was found 'in the likeness of humans,' and, lest we accuse Paul himself of being a gnostic dualist of the Hellenistic variety, he clearly does not mean 'resemblance only' or 'the superficial appearance of.' Consistency alone is a strong argument: this is the *same author* (Paul), writing in the *same time period* (he wrote *Romans* in 57 AD from Corinth, and *Philippians* most likely around 62 AD from Rome), about the *same subject* (the eternal Son of God), and the *same historical action of that subject* (the incarnation).

Furthermore, Paul seems to use 'likeness' in the more technical biblical sense derived from Genesis 1:26 – 28. 'Likeness' is complementary with 'image' but not reducible to it, or redundant with it. For God to make human beings 'in His image' means, at minimum, something about humanity's functional role in creation, moral value, and/or christological 'location.'[35] 'Likeness' in Genesis 1 seems to mean something akin to the 'growth in relationship and character' that God intended for human beings, or 'maturing' into the pattern of God's moral character of love, especially as it might have been expressed as a communal co-rulership over the creation as God's representatives. These meanings of 'image' and 'likeness' from Genesis 1:26 – 28 seem reinforced in Genesis 2:4 – 25 when God breathed into Adam to make him a living being (Gen.2:7), sharing something of Himself with human beings, and also expecting us to grow and mature, spreading the garden of Eden along the four riverways of creation, bringing beauty and order into the wild creation. If my thesis is correct, then when Paul says in Romans 8:3 that Jesus shared 'in the *likeness* of sinful flesh,' he was not saying that Jesus was only human by appearance but not in substance, or that Jesus took human flesh but not sinful human flesh. He was saying that Jesus 'shared in the mature substance of' our sinful flesh. Does Irenaeus' usage reflect this understanding? Do other second century writings connected to Christianity reflect it?

The Meaning of 'Likeness': Ebionite Literature

Literary data from the Ebionite Jewish Christian sect provides more support for my view that the phrases 'in the likeness of humans' (Phil.2:7) and 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' (Rom.8:3) preceded the apostle Paul and had a meaning that was anchored to the LXX Genesis 1:26 translation of 'likeness.' The Ebionites were a heterodox Jewish Christian group known to exist perhaps as early as the 1st century, but well into the 4th century, scattered in various places but centered in Palestine. Irenaeus mentions them.[36] Possibly, they existed well into the period of the Islamic caliphate. Like the Muslims, the Ebionites saw in Jesus 'the greatest of prophets and not the Son of God' in a divine sense.[37] Given that the Ebionites are thought to have rejected the apostle Paul, it is not likely that they would casually use the terms 'image' and 'likeness' in the same way Paul did, if Paul originated that usage. Yet their literature, the *Clementine Homilies* and *Clementine Recognitions*, where words are put into the mouth of Simon Peter, maintains the use of 'image' and 'likeness' in the way I described, above.

In *Clementine Homily* 10, the character Peter speaks of God creating heaven and earth and appointing man, 'being

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[35] The functional meaning is evident against the backdrop of other Ancient Near Eastern creation stories where a god or hero places his image in a temple-palace he erects on the site of a victory, signaling God making human beings His living representatives on the earth; see Rikk Watts, 'Making Sense of Genesis 1,' *Stimulus Journal*, November 2004. The moral meaning is such that God created humanity with moral value and goodness, which is now functionally 'intrinsic' to humanity. The christological meaning is such that God created humanity 'in the Son' in some type of locational-relational sense, therefore 'in him all things hold together' (Col.1:17; Acts 17:28).

[36] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.33.4

[37] Jean Daniélou, *History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea, Volume 1: The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, translated and edited by John A. Baker (London: Dartman, Longman, and Todd, 1964), p.56; cf. p.55 – 64

made after the image and likeness of God.'[38] Being made in the image of God has to do with our 'bodies,'[39] which seems to mean not simply embodiment but being able to move about in creation and exercise dominion, which means the fuller context of Genesis 1 is being considered. Being in the 'likeness,' however, has to do with exercising moral wisdom, judgement, personal holiness, and obedience. Growing in the 'likeness' is understood as the opposite of becoming like 'swine,' which are especially vulnerable to the demons. 'If, therefore, you receive the law of God, you become men… [for animals cannot respond to God's law]. Therefore do not refuse, when invited, to return to your first nobility; for it is possible, if you be conformed to God by good works. And being accounted to be sons by reason of your *likeness* to Him, you shall be reinstated as lords of all.'[40]

In *Homily* 11, which continues Peter's interest in discussing 'purity,'[41] the following passage establishes that 'in the image of God' is ontological, and even physical, whereas 'in the likeness of God' is moral, intellectual, and relational.

> 'You are the *image* of the invisible God. Whence let not those who would be pious say that idols are images of God, and therefore that it is right to worship them. For the *image* of God is man. He who wishes to be pious towards God does good to man, because the body of man bears the *image* of God. But all do not as yet bear His *likeness*, but the pure mind of the good soul does. However, as we know that man was made after the *image* and after the *likeness* of God, we tell you to be pious towards him, that the favour may be accounted as done to God, whose *image* he is. Therefore it behooves you to give honour to the *image* of God, which is man—in this wise: food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, care to the sick, shelter to the stranger, and visiting him who is in prison, to help him as you can. And not to speak at length, whatever good things any one wishes for himself, so let him afford to another in need, and then a good reward can be reckoned to him as being pious towards the *image* of God. And by like reason, if he will not undertake to do these things, he shall be punished as neglecting the *image*.'

This usage clearly relies on Genesis 1:26 – 28, where the term 'image' is assigned the meaning of an ontological category, a givenness. The 'image of God' cannot be lost, by definition of being human. The 'image of God' persists in the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, stranger, imprisoned – no matter if that person is of the same faith or not, apparently. In comparison, the 'likeness of God' *can* be lost. 'Likeness,' therefore, involves deliberate choices to develop one's self in various ways, with a view towards full participation in God's commandments, mission, and community. Developing the 'likeness of God' is predicated on hearing moral laws and acting on them. This growth involves listening, rationality, and will.

In my argument, the *Clementine Homilies* and the Ebionite Jewish Christians serve as a historical witness to Jewish Christians using the 'image – likeness' distinction in a way that supports my interpretation of both Irenaeus and Paul as we examine Romans 8:3. Specifically, growing in the 'likeness' of something has to do with developing and maturing in that something. As a technical term, being 'in the likeness' means a developed participation in the substance or object in which one participates.

What makes the Ebionites particularly interesting for this purpose is that apparently they did not believe in the divinity of Christ, or the virgin birth. Given their additional distaste for Paul, they would not have believed it appropriate to say that the Son came 'in the likeness of humans' (Phil.2:7), or that 'God sent His Son… in the likeness of sinful flesh' (Rom.8:3), for such statements implied the pre-incarnate existence of the Son. To them, Jesus was simply a human being with an ordinary human origin. That fact is germane to my argument because it is unlikely that they would take up creedal language which was thought to have been invented by Paul, and use it in the same way. After all, in Christian circles of orthodox and heterodox persuasions, the 'image – likeness' pairing of terms was used to describe the significance of creation *and* redemption. Instead, the Ebionites probably deployed the 'image – likeness' language because other early Jewish Christians – that is, the orthodox ones – had a developed use of those terms derived from Genesis 1:26 – 28. That would include the Ebionites' contemporary, Irenaeus, in the second century, and prior to him, the apostle Paul in the mid-1st century, and prior to him, the earliest Jewish Christians.

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[38] *Clementine Homilies*, Homily 10.3
[39] Ibid 10.6
[40] Ibid 10.6
[41] Ibid 11.1

The Meaning of 'Likeness': The Valentinians
Another point of evidence that the term 'likeness' had acquired a stable meaning, especially in relation to the term 'image,' is the description Irenaeus gives of the Valentinians. In the second century, Valentinus was head of a school in Alexandria, who, along with his disciples, were responsible for the *Gospel of Truth*, the *Treatise on the Three Natures*, and the Jung Codex in the Nag Hammadi library.[42] He was a Hellenistic gnostic teacher who deployed Jewish Christian terms in a new context, where the dualism of body-soul, earth-heaven, matter-spirit framed all other concerns. Irenaeus had encountered the teaching of Valentinus in Rome through the permissive attitude of Eleutherus of Rome, reportedly then bishop of Rome, rebuked Eleutherus, and wrote against it.[43]

Irenaeus recognizes that the Valentinians had subtle differences amongst themselves especially about the creation of humanity.[44] On Irenaeus' reporting of the Valentinians, 'image' and 'likeness' have the same basic meaning much of the time.[45] This raises the question of redundancy. Why would they use these terms as synonyms except that they are parasitic on Christian discourse, along with the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, and *had to* use them? Did they not have to redefine them as synonyms, to disarm them?

The Valentinian cosmology is significant here. In the long chain of beings, the Aeons are first and propagated themselves through conjugal union. Sophia, the youngest of the Aeons, was moved with 'passion' to search out the nature of another older Aeon called 'Nous' and 'Monogenes' and 'Father.'[46] While in this state of passion, she brought forth an 'amorphous substance,' without a corresponding 'form.'[47] In the Valentinian system, the female principle gives substance, the male, form. This substance was called an 'abortion' (*enthymesis*). While Sophia eventually returned to the midst of the Aeons (the *pleroma*), this substance did not, and is identified as 'Achamoth.' Two other Aeons, called 'Christ' and 'Holy Spirit' 'imparted a figure to her' and left her with 'the odor of immortality' so that she 'might be influenced by the desire of better things,' 'to return to him who gave her life.'[48] Achamoth, desiring to return to the Father and the pleroma, produced the Demiurge,[49] the Framer of all things material and corporal. This Demiurge is the God of the creation and the Old Testament, 'who said through the prophets, 'I am God, and besides me there is none else.''[50] The Demiurge 'created the earthy part of man, not taking him from this dry earth, but from an invisible substance consisting of fusible and fluid matter,' and then 'breathed into him the *animal part* [soulish] of his nature… which was created after his image and likeness.'[51] But his mother Achamoth hid within the Demiurge 'a spiritual nature,' even without his knowledge, which passed into all he created. That 'spiritual nature' caused in human beings the longing for a return to the higher spiritual realms, awaiting 'the reception of perfect rationality' to do so.[52] Human beings are therefore material and spiritual, and our a third part, the animal part, exists in-between the two and chooses between them. In the Valentinian system, 'knowledge' is sufficient for 'salvation,' even without living out an embodied morality, and Irenaeus criticizes them for it.[53]

Left to their own devices, the Valentinians would have probably preferred to dispense with one or both of these

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[42] Jean Daniélou, *History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea, Volume 1: The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, translated and edited by John A. Baker (London: Dartman, Longman, and Todd, 1964), p.76
[43] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 1 and 2
[44] Ibid 1.18.2 indicates that the Valentinians tried to apply a linear timeline to Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 and 2:4 – 25. Hence, they refer to humans being created on 'the sixth day' and yet also 'the eighth day,' sometimes in contradiction with each other. Irenaeus says, 'They affirm that man was formed on the eighth day, for sometimes they will have him to have been made on the sixth day, and sometimes on the eighth, unless, perchance, they mean that his earthly part was formed on the sixth day, but his fleshly part on the eighth, for these two things are distinguished by them. Some of them also hold that one man was formed after the image and likeness of God, masculo-feminine, and that this was the spiritual man; and that another man was formed out of the earth.'
[45] Ibid 1.8.1 says, 'if one, when a beautiful image of a king has been constructed by some skilful artist out of precious jewels, should then take this likeness of the man all to pieces…'; 1.14.6 says, 'in the likeness of an image…'; 1.23.4 says, 'They also have an image of Simon fashioned after the likeness of Jupiter, and another of Helena in the shape of Minerva; and these they worship'; 1.25.6 says, intriguingly, 'They also possess images, some of them painted, and others formed from different kinds of material; while they maintain that a likeness of Christ was made by Pilate at that time when Jesus lived among them'
[46] Ibid 1.1; 1.2
[47] Ibid 1.2.3
[48] Ibid 1.4.1
[49] Ibid 1.5.1
[50] Ibid 1.5.4
[51] Ibid 1.5.5
[52] Ibid 1.5.6
[53] Ibid 1.6.1 – 4

terms. But they could not, tethered as they were to the biblical text and pre-existing Jewish and Christian modes of discourse and liturgy, from which they borrowed. The Valentinians assigned meaning to what they considered to be female and male contributions to creation: substance and form. Those terms abound insofar as Irenaeus describes their cosmology accurately. Yet it is interesting that they did not, or could not, simply adapt the terms 'image' and 'likeness' to mean 'substance' and 'form' as they might have wished. The Valentinians posited sharp and sometimes tragic discontinuities between each successive tier of Aeons, then between Sophia and Achamoth, then between Achamoth and the Demiurge, and yet again between the Demiurge and the material creation. So the material world did not serve as an 'image' or 'likeness' for the spiritual in any meaningful way. By contrast, the invisible, animal, soulish part of humanity did bear some kind of resemblance or connection to the Demiurge. But because the Demiurge himself was ignorant of the possibility of returning to the higher spiritual realms, it is the 'spiritual outpouring' from Achamoth which is hidden in us that must be awakened with 'knowledge' of our origins and the cosmic origins.

The following usage of these terms is intriguing:

> 'Having thus formed the world, he (the Demiurge) also created the earthy [part of] man, not taking him from this dry earth, but from an invisible substance consisting of fusible and fluid matter, and then afterwards, as they define the process, breathed into him the animal part of his nature. It was this latter which was created after his image and likeness. The material part [of the human], indeed, was very near to God, so far as the image went, but not of the same substance with him. The animal [part], on the other hand, was so in respect to *likeness*; and hence his substance was called the spirit of life, because it took its rise from a spiritual outflowing. After all this, he was, they say, enveloped all round with a covering of skin; and by this they mean the outward sensitive flesh.'[54]

Not all questions about this passage might be answered. The Demiurge apparently took the material substance of something like the air of the world (invisible, fusible, fluid) and then breathed into humanity 'the animal part,' also called 'the spirit of life.' Then, he enveloped the human being with skin and flesh. The animal, soulish-spiritual part – the substance called the spirit of life – was 'created after his image and likeness.' But there is one subtle difference between the use of the terms 'image' and 'likeness.' The (material) part of human beings does not share in the same 'substance with him.' Yet they use the term 'likeness' when there is actual substance shared. For the Valentinians, the deliberative, rational, and willing function within the animal portion of our humanity is influenced by 'a spiritual outflowing.' It is from Achamoth – the mother of the God of the Old Testament, and behind him – and shares its substance with her.

Curiously, then, the Valentinians declare, with Scripture, that human beings are 'created after [the Demiurge's] image and likeness,' which of course in their view means the Demiurge's 'spirit of life.' Though we are made of a different material substance, we can be said to be in the 'image' of the Demiurge, though perhaps loosely. But when we are said to participate in the same 'spiritual outpouring,' they use the term 'likeness.' The former is more distant; the latter is more intensified, and more participatory.

Does this Valentinian usage of terms hint at how their neighbors, the orthodox Christians, were using 'image' and 'likeness' to speak of some kind of baseline ontology, and its intensification? I believe so. Like the Ebionites, the Valentinians serve as another historical witness to the orthodox Jewish Christian use of the terms 'image' and 'likeness' as meaning complementary but different things. It suggests that the orthodox Christians also used the term 'in the likeness' to mean 'growth by participation' or 'deeper participation in,' and said that Jesus came 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' to specifically mean 'deeper participation in sinful flesh.' To the representative of second century orthodox Christians we now turn.

The Meaning of 'Likeness': Irenaeus' View of Creation

In 1948, John Lawson asserted that Irenaeus is *not* consistent in his use of the terms 'image' and 'likeness.'[55] In 1999, Albert Collver III accepted Lawson's judgment.[56] More recent scholars have concluded otherwise – for

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[54] Ibid 1.5.2; italics mine

[55] John Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus* (London: The Epworth Press, 1948), p.200.

[56] Albert B. Collver III, 'Who is Man? Image and Likeness in Irenaeus,' *Concordia Student Journal*, Epiphany 1999, p.29 says, 'Inconsistencies do arise in Irenaeus where he does not appear to distinguish between "image" and "likeness." Depending upon which inconsistencies are lumped together, several possibilities exist for interpretation. Each of these interpretations appears to be largely based on the presuppositions of the

example, Matthew Steenberg in 2009. Steenberg recognizes that for Irenaeus, 'to be 'in the image' is to speak of the fabric of creation; to be 'in the likeness' is to realize economically the life that creation enables – the likeness of the incarnate Son, in obedience to his Father through the Spirit.'[57] This may seem like a circuitous way to demonstrate Irenaeus' meaning when he writes, 'in the likeness of sinful flesh.' But it is entirely worthwhile, for these observations strengthen our understanding of Irenaeus as he uses a very important theological term. By extension, these observations will also strengthen our understanding of early Christianity and the way various groups laying claim to the title 'Christian' deployed critical biblical terminology.

When Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* book 2 critiques the Valentinian system, his own use of the term 'image' seems to mean 'the fact of a relation between the copy and the original,' whereas 'likeness' refers to *how well* the copy approximates the original source. For example, he says:

> 'in some the *likeness* was preserved, while in others the *likeness* of the image was spoiled, that image which was here produced that it might be according to the image of that production which is above.'[58]

Irenaeus also argues that the creation contains far too much variety to be 'the images and likenesses' of the thirty Aeons. In that context, he says that the Valentinian attempt to trace human evil back to some Aeons, and human goodness to others, fails because the Aeons do not seem to have personal characteristics like that. While engaging in that argument, and while describing human beings' moral activities, Irenaeus uses the term 'likeness' and *not* the term 'image.'[59] That fact is suggestive, because for Irenaeus, 'likeness' seems to refer to the *quality* of the resemblance between archetype and copy.

On yet another occasion, he faults the Valentinian cosmology for maintaining that the pleroma of Aeons is ontologically greater than the creation, because it is neither numerically greater, nor functionally greater, since it was a stepping stone with which to create the universe as we know it. Irenaeus says:

> 'the Pleroma can no longer be regarded as having been formed on its own account, but for the sake of that [creation] which was to be its *image* as possessing its *likeness*, just as the clay model is not moulded for its own sake, but for the sake of the statue in brass, or gold, or silver about to be formed.'[60]

For Irenaeus, as he refutes the Valentinians, he relies on Christian definitions behind the terms 'image' and 'likeness.' 'Image' means a model, like a statue. 'Likeness' means the quality of the copy, or how well the image resembles the original. The 'quality of the resemblance' is clearly the meaning here:

> 'For a type and emblem is, no doubt, sometimes diverse from the truth [signified] as to matter and substance; but it ought, as to the general form and features, to maintain a *likeness* [to what is typified], and in this way to shadow forth by means of things present those which are yet to come.'[61]

In *Against Heresies* book 3, Irenaeus begins to expound on the biblical story of creation, fall, and redemption, and the apostolic teaching as he received it. He uses the term 'likeness' six times. Four of those times he uses the biblical phrase 'image and likeness' from Genesis 1:26.[62] In those cases, he does not expound on the difference he may perceive between those two terms, reserving that for books 4 and 5. The other two occasions of 'likeness' occur in the passage already studied above:

> '…looking forward to the time when he shall become like Him who died for him, for He, too, 'was made in the *likeness* of sinful flesh,' to condemn sin, and to cast it, as now a condemned thing, away beyond the

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interpreter rather than on a clear text for Irenaeus. For example, Duncker sees the "image" of God as part of man's nature before the Fall, while the "likeness" is the goal of perfection that is obtained at a future date. This interpretation fits well with those who seek to make evolutionary theory and Christian doctrine compatible. On the other hand, Zeigler would connect the "likeness" of God with man's reason and free will. Others would follow Aristotle and connect reason and free will with the "image" of God. Before looking at the actual text, it is good to keep in mind Lawson's comment that "the terms 'image' and 'likeness' are somewhat fluid." Collver cites Lawson, above.

[57] Matthew Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009), p.38

[58] Ibid 2.7.2

[59] Ibid 2.7.3

[60] Ibid 2.15.3

[61] Ibid 2.23.1; the same appears to be true in 2.35.1

[62] Ibid 3.18.1; 3.22.1; 3.23.1; 3.23.2

> flesh, but that He might call man forth into His own *likeness*, assigning him as [His own] imitator to God, and imposing on him His Father's law, in order that he may see God, and granting him power to receive the Father...'[63]

When Irenaeus is speaking of the *intensified quality* of the resemblance/relation, and not simply the *fact* of a resemblance/relation however apparent, he uses the term 'likeness.' Irenaeus' logic, once again, is as follows: If Jesus calls us back to 'his own likeness,' considering that the moral axis of human life ('his Father's law') is under consideration here, then he must have been made in our likeness in his incarnation. That is, to intensify the quality of *our* moral and spiritual life to imitate *his*, Jesus had to intensify the quality of *his* relationship to *us*. His participation in our human nature, therefore, had the *real quality* of mature participation 'in sinful flesh,' that is, fallen human nature. He who wants full participation from sinful flesh in his life with the Father must have fully participated in our sinful flesh first. To call us into the fullness of our *likeness* to God, the Son of God came into the *likeness* of our sinful flesh.

In *Against Heresies* book 4, this usage of terms stays consistent. In his preface, Irenaeus refers to the text of Genesis 1:26, using the term 'likeness,' but *without* the word 'image.'[64] Can we account for this? The bishop is introducing *AH* book 4 and probably also book 5, warning against heresy, and lamenting it as a sort of 'disease.'[65] He compares the heretical Valentinians ('these men') to the serpent in the garden who beguiled Eve and offered what he did not have. He warns against their 'blasphemy against God our Maker and Supporter… the Creator,' because the flesh was created by the one true God, so there is salvation for it, contrary to what the Valentinians proclaim. Introducing book 4 this way, Irenaeus says:

> 'Now man is a mixed organization of soul and flesh, who was formed after the likeness of God, and moulded by His hands, that is, by the Son and Holy Spirit, to whom also He said, 'Let Us make man.' This, then, is the aim of him who envies our life, to render men disbelievers in their own salvation, and blasphemous against God the Creator.'[66]

To be formed 'after' or 'according to' (κατὰ) rather than 'in' the likeness of God speaks to God's intention for us from creation, which was never set aside, and resumed in full in the salvation Christ brings about. Irenaeus does not elaborate on the substance of the 'likeness' in his preface – he will expand on it throughout the work – but he does elaborate on the means by which that 'likeness' is formed. God made humanity in creation to be formed and moulded by His Son and Spirit, and this has significance for our bodies and souls. Irenaeus relishes the dynamic of recurring patterns in the biblical story Irenaeus' account of creation, with God using his 'two hands' of Son and Spirit, lays down the pattern for his account of salvation, where God re-forms us by Son and Spirit. His point in his preface is to encourage his readers to not view the path of salvation in Christ by the Spirit as a terrible detour which jeopardizes God's plan for humanity. God's Son and Spirit are with us now as they have ever been.

Because the Valentinians denigrated the Old Testament and the history of Israel as the machinations of an inferior god, the Demiurge, it behooves Irenaeus to devote enormous effort to explain Moses, the law, the prophets, David, Jerusalem, etc. Above all, in book 4, the bishop explores the unity of the story from Israel to Jesus Christ.[67] The Word sojourned with people of faith prior to Christ, especially Israel, and revealed God through the creation. The people of Israel, therefore, were both the carriers of God's revelation and also recipients of it, and some aspects of the revelation were divine accommodations for them. Who, then, bears the 'likeness' of the Father, if the people of Israel did it imperfectly? Of course, the Son. In *AH* 4.17.6, Irenaeus makes the following analogy:

> 'Just as a king, if he himself paints a *likeness* of his son, is right in calling this *likeness* his own, for both these reasons, because it is [the *likeness*] of his son, and because it is his own production; so also does the Father confess the name of Jesus Christ, which is throughout all the world glorified in the Church, to be His own, both because it is that of His Son, and because He who thus describes it gave Him for the salvation of men.'[68]

[63] Ibid 3.20.2
[64] Ibid 4.preface.4
[65] Ibid 4.preface.2
[66] Ibid 4.preface.4
[67] Ibid 4.6.2
[68] Ibid 4.17.6

The painting, or production, is the 'image.' The production is the 'likeness' of the king on two counts. First, the son is the subject of the painting, where the son's resemblance to his father is assumed to be quite strong. Second, the king himself produced the painting, where the king is assumed to be a good painter. Semantically, Irenaeus substitutes the word 'production' for 'image' and uses the word 'likeness' twice (the third is inferred by the translator) to make the point that the Son is the 'image' and 'likeness' of the Father. The 'likeness,' in this case, is doubly strong because of the quality of the resemblance and the ability of the king to produce the painting.[69]

In *AH* 4.20.1, Irenaeus' next use of 'likeness' occurs as he explains how we might know God. We know God not through His 'greatness' per se, but through His love for us as specially demonstrated in the creation.[70] Creation sets a pattern of how we know God through His Son and Spirit, which is of course the same in our redemption. Curiously, Irenaeus finds it appropriate to stress that God spoke to '*all things*, to whom also He speaks, saying, 'Let Us make man after Our image and likeness.'' God's choice to involve the 'all things' of creation is an expansive interpretation of God's audience, by any measure. Nevertheless, Irenaeus says twice in this passage that God involved the creation, as the pre-human material from which His Son and Spirit drew out humanity ('established'… 'taking from Himself the substance of the creatures'), the pattern of life containing and begetting life ('selected'… 'taking from Himself… the pattern of things made'), and the adornments He placed on things ('adorned'… 'taking from Himself… the type of all the adornments in the world'). Irenaeus seems to perceive a trinitarian pattern within God's activity in the creation. More work would need to be done to explain this further, but at minimum, I think this reinforces the sense that the relationship among the Father, Son, and Spirit somehow serve as pattern by which God creates all things, especially human beings. There is an implicit sharing of 'substance' between Father, Son, and Spirit; this seems to serve as a basis for why God drew on the 'substance' of the earth to create Adam, and probably why we depend on the 'substance' of the air, water, and land to nourish us and grow. There is a relationship within God – between the Son and the Father, by the Spirit – which God 'selects' and replicates when He makes human beings in the Son, so we can participate in the Son's relationship with the Father, by the Spirit, and grow in stature. There is an 'adornment' of the Spirit's blessing resting on the Son which seems to serve as the pattern of the 'adornment' on us, that we might grow in goodness and beauty. Irenaeus seems to mean something like this. And in this context, as God establishes human beings with 'growth' clearly in mind, he speaks of 'image' and 'likeness' perhaps to indicate that establishment and growth.

In *AH* 4.33.4, Irenaeus repeats that God 'formed' us 'after the likeness of God.' This growth into God's likeness was interrupted, however, because Satan 'subdued… conquered… overcame… [and] retained him under his power.' Fortunately, the Son was 'greater than man who had thus been vanquished.' For '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?'[71]

In *AH* 4.37.4, Irenaeus links free will to the 'likeness.' This passage demonstrates an important point about Irenaeus' usage of this key term. Since God has free will, and since God made us in His likeness, we share in that ability and quality, too:

> '…because man is possessed of free will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free will, in whose likeness man was created, advice is always given to him to keep fast the good, which thing is done by means of obedience to God.'[72]

This passage does not infer that the 'likeness' is reducible to 'free will.' Far from it. Exercising free will is similar to co-reigning with God in creation from Genesis 1:26 – 28.[73] To Irenaeus, it is simply an ability, quality, or role that is shared between God and us because God invested it into us. 'Free will' is a functional ability and/or moral quality that we participate in, with God, for the greater purpose of 'keep[ing] fast the good,' 'by… obedience to

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[69] In 4.20.10, Irenaeus recalls when God appeared in Old Testament epiphanies. He uses the term 'likeness' in the more generic sense of describing the quality of the resemblance.
[70] Ibid 4.20.1
[71] Ibid 4.33.4
[72] Ibid 4.38.3
[73] Thus, Collver III, p.29 citing Zeigler and Lawson, suggesting that the 'likeness of God' might be reducible to 'free will' in the mind of Irenaeus, is incorrect. These authors do not integrate their various observations of Irenaeus. Of course the 'likeness of God' includes, involves, and requires 'free will,' but is not reducible to it.

God.' Irenaeus moves on to explore the nature and result of us 'keep[ing] fast the good.'

In *AH* 4.38.3, Irenaeus provides the fullest statement of human spiritual growth, and how that relates to being in the 'image' and 'likeness' of God. He says that 'being in subjection to God is continuance in immortality, and immortality is the glory of the uncreated One.' He thereby unites, in principle and in categories, the immorality-morality axis with the mortality-immortality axis and the faithlessness-faithfulness axis. From there, the bishop explains beautifully:

> 'By this arrangement, therefore, and these harmonies, and a sequence of this nature, man, a created and organized being, is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God,--the Father planning everything well and giving His commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made], but man making progress day by day, and ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One. For the Uncreated is perfect, that is, God. Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord.'[74]

Irenaeus repeats an early Christian formulation of the Trinity from *AH* 4.6.2, which he said in that passage Justin Martyr shared. The Father plans, the Son executes, the Spirit nourishes and increases. This provides Irenaeus the occasion to use the 'image and likeness' phrasing. Simply referring to the 'image' alone would be insufficient. From creation, and in salvation, God intended to move at the pace of human beings, in a harmonious and organized fashion. Our spiritual ascent, in response to God's invitation and work, is both moral, physical, and relational. God's intention was that we would eventually participate in His immortality as created beings.[75] In that sense, Irenaeus finds it proper to speak of our 'likeness' to God, a likeness grounded in our real participation in God (and to remind my reader of the point, just as Jesus being 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' means his grounded, real participation in sinful flesh from conception to death). But also, our infinite growth and relational ascent is a point of 'likeness' to God because within the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, there is infinite love and relationship. For a finite, created being to relate eternally with the infinite, uncreated God of love, we must grow infinitely. In that sense, too, we become 'like' God.

In *AH* 4.41.3, Irenaeus closes book 4 by using a human analogy that recalls the 'image – likeness' categories from Genesis 1:26 – 28. On one side of Irenaeus' analogy is sons being biologically conceived by their fathers (and mothers), yet, over the course of their disobedient lives, losing their inheritance from their 'natural parents.'

> 'For as, among men, those sons who disobey their fathers, being disinherited, are still their sons in the course of nature, but by law are disinherited, for they do not become the heirs of their natural parents; so in the same way is it with God – those who do not obey Him being disinherited by Him, have ceased to be His sons. Wherefore they cannot receive His inheritance: as David says, 'Sinners are alienated from the womb; their anger is after the likeness of a serpent.'[76]

On the other side of the bishop's analogy is the theological possibility of disinheritance. 'So in the same way is it with God.' People who 'do not obey Him' are nevertheless His creations. That does not change. However, they 'have ceased to be His sons.' Since the Father intended for us to relate to him through and in the Son, in a relational, positional, and moral sense, we can abandon the calling God placed on us, and reject this 'sonship.' 'Obedience' and 'disobedience' describe a relation of 'son' and 'father,' which begins 'by nature' and is in the ideal case fulfilled 'by law,' so that the son receives 'inheritance' and not 'disinheritance.' The terms of this analogy show that Irenaeus is perfectly capable of discussing the relation of 'image' and 'likeness' without using those terms. For

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[74] Ibid 4.38.3

[75] Ibid 4.38.4; cf. Matthew Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009), p.32 notes that this is central to Irenaeus' critique of the gnostic systems. The biblical God's ability to create humanity *in the mode of his own life* is distinctive. 'In the recounting of the Nag Hammadi codex, the demiurge is ultimately powerless to create an image of God, and as such he produces only lifeless, material objectifications of his personal defect. We have already seen Irenaeus comment on this, stating in no uncertain terms that a demiurgic fashioning of the divine image is not a possibility, 'nor had angels power to make an image of God, nor any one else except the true God.''

[76] Ibid 4.41.3

Irenaeus, the distinction is not simply the terminological. Similarly, my argument about Irenaeus' thought about theological anthropology is not simply terminological. My argument that Irenaeus uses the terms 'image' and 'likeness' in this particular way – indicating 'being' and 'becoming,' 'ontology' and 'teleology' – finds support in the fact that Irenaeus can use other terms to describe the conceptual distinction between the two in his mind.

Irenaeus builds the analogy to the place where he uses the word 'likeness' to highlight that a human being can grow in the opposite direction from God's intent, in a rebellious betrayal of being made 'in the image' of God. Irenaeus' modified quotation of Psalm 58:3 – 4 (LXX Psalm 57:4 – 5) to conclude his point is poetically devastating. It is enlightening to see an English translation from the Hebrew Masoretic, the Greek Septuagint, and Irenaeus' modified quotation side by side.

> [3a] The wicked are estranged from the womb;
> [3b] These who speak lies go astray from birth.
> [4a] They have venom like the venom of a serpent (*Hebrew Masoretic, NASB)*
>
> [4a] ἀπηλλοτριώθησαν οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ ἀπὸ μήτρας,
> [4b] ἐπλανήθησαν ἀπὸ γαστρός, ἐλάλησαν ψευδῆ.
> [5a] θυμὸς αὐτοῖς κατὰ τὴν ὁμοίωσιν τοῦ ὄφεως (*LXX Psalm 57:4 – 5)*
>
> Sinners are alienated from the womb;
> their anger is after the likeness of a serpent. (Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* 4.41.3)

Irenaeus eliminates Psalm 58:3b (LXX Psalm 57:4b). He compresses the quotation to emphasize *conception* on the one hand, and *maturity* on the other. Those who are alienated/estranged are that way 'from the womb.' The intervening line Irenaeus does not quote, I suspect he takes for granted, for it is still very much implied: 'Those who speak lies go astray from birth.' In standard non-poetic speech, newborns do not speak lies about God; they do not speak words at all. Poetically speaking, however, those people who grow up to become adults who speak lies about God reveal that something was wrong with them from birth, which they then acted upon. Much like fetal alcohol syndrome, the ancestral sin – the corruption of sin we inherit from Adam and Eve – influences our behavior. In their mature adult lives, they have cultivated 'the likeness of a serpent,' the inferior archrival of God. Various English translations of the Psalm blunt the fact that the Greek word 'likeness' (ὁμοίωσιν) is present. This is the same Greek word for 'likeness' in LXX Genesis 1:26, when God created human beings 'according to Our image and likeness.' In Irenaeus' quotation, the phrase 'from the womb' corresponds with 'image,' but 'their anger' and other mature choices are according to another 'likeness.'

The decision for ESV, NASB, and NRSV (and others) to render θυμὸς as 'venom' instead of 'anger' is questionable. In Psalm 58, the opponents of God (and David the psalmist) are political rulers ('gods') who are entrusted with judgment (Ps.58:1), but instead use 'heart' and then 'hands' to first 'devise wrongs' and then 'deal out violence' (58:2). They are opposed to God, and to being held accountable by God against His truth. From that standpoint, there is some truth in saying their 'lies' are like 'venom' which courses in us and kills us slowly. However, it seems far more important to say that 'their anger is according to the likeness of the serpent' because 'anger' communicates the basic orientation of their whole being and the intensity of their resistance to God – their deliberated and cultivated posture of rebellion against Him.

Finally, the lack of a definite or indefinite article in Greek before the word for 'serpent,' which is in the possessive genitive case (τοῦ ὄφεως), means that we could translate the phrase, in the LXX and in Irenaeus, 'of *the* serpent' rather than 'of *a* serpent.' I suspect Psalm 58 intends to position human rulers who rebel against God against *the* ancient serpent of old. It is 'according to' (κατὰ) *that serpent's* 'likeness' into which those human rulers have grown. They have become, functionally, 'sons' of the ancient serpent. This rendering of Psalm 58:4 is corroborated by Jesus' rebuke to the Pharisees, 'You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires' (Jn.8:44), where by their own choices they 'are not from God' (Jn.8:47). This rendering is also corroborated by Revelation's devastating assessment, 'They are… a synagogue of Satan' (Rev.2:9). Neither Jesus nor David intend to say that some the human beings are not in fact created by God. They are using a figure of speech. In Psalm 58, these judges have not remained true to their deepest, truest point of origin as God's creation ('image'). Instead, they have lived *as if* their point of origin is in the lie of the ancient serpent, and they have matured and developed by cultivating untruth and anger against God. In their 'becoming,' they have betrayed their true 'being.' And so their

'likeness' is not 'of God,' but 'of *the* serpent,' God's enemy.

Looking once again to the question of whether Irenaeus consistently uses the term 'likeness of' to mean 'mature participation in,' or 'shared characteristics by participation in,' *AH* 4.41.3 adds one more data point which shows he does. He stated his concern in the preface of *AH* 4, to elucidate how we might realize our being formed 'according to' or 'after' (κατὰ) 'the likeness of God.' By the end of *AH* 4, including one of the fullest demonstrations of a theology of Israel and a theology of history in the patristic literature, over against the Valentinian claim that the God of the Old Testament is neither good nor continuous with the God revealed in Christ, Irenaeus reaches a very full treatment of how God in Christ was always – and is still – working to restore His 'likeness' in us.

In his formal preface to his fifth book of *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus reminds us of his purpose in writing. He desires to refute the heretics. But here, Irenaeus approaches these issues mainly by considering the Holy Spirit. This will correspond with an emphasis on human beings cultivating the 'image' into the 'likeness.' *AH* 5.1 functions as an introduction along with the preface. In 5.1.1, Irenaeus establishes confidence in the Christian revelation, on the basis of the Word, and now the 'Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and, on the other hand, attaching man to God by His own incarnation.' In 5.1.2, he criticizes the Valentinians for 'exclud[ing] the flesh from salvation, and cast[ing] aside what God has fashioned,'[77] for the reason that the Spirit truly rested on Jesus' humanity. In 5.1.3, the bishop criticizes the Ebionites for their denial of the union of God and man in Christ, and the virgin birth. But once again he views these truths through the lens of the Spirit. The Ebionites, he argues, 'do not choose to understand that the Holy Ghost came upon Mary' to conceive the God-man, the union of divinity and humanity. Irenaeus repeats mentions of 'birth' or 'generation,' contrasting the 'former generation' over against the 'new generation' by the work of the Son and Spirit. Talk of origins begs the question of *telos*, or growth towards a goal. What goal? To begin to answer that, Irenaeus quotes Genesis 1:26, 'Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness,' and says that God resumed that plan by His Son and Spirit. 'For never at any time did Adam escape the hands of God' – His hands being His Son and Spirit. God therefore 'formed a living man' who was Jesus, contrasted with fallen Adam 'who had been conquered, expelled from paradise… in [whom] we were all dead,' 'in order that Adam might be created [again] after the image and likeness of God.' He will expand on what that entails throughout the rest of *AH* 5.

In *AH* 5.6.1, Irenaeus provides his most expansive and clear understanding of the 'image' and 'likeness' in the original creation and now in salvation. He begins with a summary statement, saying that the Son served as a model or template of sorts for human beings, but since human beings were intended from growth with assistance from the Son and Holy Spirit, we were made 'in the likeness of God.'

> 'Now God shall be glorified in His handiwork, fitting it so as to be conformable to, and modelled after, His own Son. For by the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit, man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the *likeness* of God. Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a part of the man, but certainly not the man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God.'[78]

The 'image of God' here refers to the Son of God. Elsewhere, in the *Demonstration*, Irenaeus celebrates two aspects of humanity: (1) the physical form of the human as somehow mirroring the divine form, which seems to be Irenaeus' conception of the theophanic appearance taken by the Son in the creation prior to his incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth; (2) participation in the divine 'breath.'[79] When our 'fleshly nature' is considered, we resemble the Son, even pre-incarnate, and it can be said that we were 'moulded after the image of God.' This is not simply a crude physical resemblance alone. The Son glorifies, or reveals, the Father in a temple-like relationship where the

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[77] Ibid 5.preface
[78] Ibid 5.6.1
[79] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 11 says, 'But man He formed with His own hands [i.e. the Word and the Spirit], taking from the earth that which was purest and finest, and mingling in measure His own power with the earth. For He traced *His own form* on the formation, that that which should be seen should be *of divine form*: for (as) the image of God was man formed and set on the earth. And that he might become living, He breathed on his face the breath of life; that both for the breath and for the formation man should be like unto God. Moreover he was free and self-controlled, being made by God for this end, that he might rule all those things that were upon the earth. And this great created world, prepared by God before the formation of man, was given to man as his place, containing all things within itself.' Since our form is physical, it follows that the Son of God had a physical appearance prior to him becoming incarnate as human.

transcendent is made known in the immanent, which is the subject of 5.6.2 in its entirety.[80] The same principle of relation between humans and God is implied, where 'God shall be glorified in His handiwork,' as human beings grow and ascend in their life, since we were modelled after the Son, and made to be comformable to him.

This implies a relation by and in the Spirit. Notably, when considering our soul and spirit, which we have, but are not reducible to, Irenaeus says we are made 'in the likeness.' When humanity's intended growth is in view, where the Spirit's work is mentioned (and not just the Son's), Irenaeus uses the term 'likeness.' The consistency is striking. To grow in our 'likeness' to God involves the work of the Spirit and Son in us; hence the term 'likeness' has 'mature participation' in view as the central part of its lexical meaning. Here, Irenaeus demonstrates the same basic understanding as the Ebionites in their usage of the terms 'image' and 'likeness.' The 'image' of God cannot be lost, but the 'likeness' can be lost, underdeveloped, developed, or perfected.

Irenaeus goes on to denote our physical bodies as minimally constitutive of our 'form,' whereas our voluntary cooperation with the Spirit minimally constitutes our 'similitude,' presumably referring to our resemblance to, and participation in, the Son's relationship with the Father by the Spirit.

> 'For if any one take away the substance of flesh, that is, of the handiwork [of God], and understand that which is purely spiritual, such then would not be a spiritual man but would be the spirit of a man, or the Spirit of God. But when the spirit here blended with the soul is united to [God's] handiwork, the man is rendered spiritual and perfect because of the outpouring of the Spirit, and this is he who was made in the image and likeness of God. But if the Spirit be wanting to the soul, he who is such is indeed of an animal nature, and being left carnal, shall be an imperfect being, possessing indeed the image [of God] in his formation, but not receiving the similitude through the Spirit; and thus is this being imperfect.'[81]

This passage is decisive. If we conceptually remove 'flesh' from humanity, Irenaeus suggests as a hypothetical, with what would we be left? 'The spirit of a man, or the Spirit of God.' But the Spirit in fact is 'blended with the soul' (for Irenaeus seems to suggest that the 'soul' is the animating principle of life in the body) and 'united to God's handiwork,' which is the flesh, the corporeal body. If we go the other direction, conceptually, and remove or diminish the Spirit – 'if the Spirit be wanting to the soul' – then with what would we be left? A human being in 'an animal nature, and being left carnal.' That human being is clearly 'imperfect.' And 'imperfection' to Irenaeus means 'possessing indeed the image of God in his formation, but not receiving the similitude through the Spirit.'

Significantly, Irenaeus uses the terms 'image' and 'likeness' in the same way that the Ebionites do. This does not suggest borrowing or copying one way or the other. Rather, I suggest that both Irenaeus – representing the orthodox Christians – and the heretical Ebionites – share a common inheritance of terms which was already established before them. The 'image' is never lost. The 'likeness' – or 'similitude' – can be. Because 'likeness' depends on our voluntary participation 'through the Spirit,' the relationship intended by God for us can be obscured and damaged.

In 5.8.1, Irenaeus uses the term 'likeness' as a relation meant to be fulfilled. He says, 'But we do now receive a certain portion of His Spirit, tending towards perfection, and preparing us for incorruption, being little by little accustomed to receive and bear God.' The Spirit renders us a participant in immortality, helps us cry, 'Abba, Father,' and helps us yearn for that day when 'rising again, we behold him face to face.' Arguing from the principle of increased participation in the Spirit between present and future, Irenaeus says:

> 'For if the earnest, gathering man into itself, does even now cause him to cry, "Abba, Father," what shall the complete grace of the Spirit effect, which shall be given to men by God? It will render us like unto Him, and accomplish the will of the Father; for it shall make man after the image and likeness of God.'[82]

In 5.10.1, Irenaeus uses the term 'likeness' in the context of the agricultural metaphor of Scripture involving fruitbearing. We were 'grafted into the good olive tree, and been made a partaker of the fatness of the olive tree.' Thus we, if we 'take kindly to the graft,' are 'changed' and 'become a fruit-bearing olive,' even one 'planted in the

[80] Ibid 5.6.2 begins, 'Whence also he says, that this handiwork is 'the temple of God,'' and uses the term 'temple' twelve times, quoting the 'temple' passages 1 Corinthians 3:16, John 2:19 – 21, 1 Corinthians 3:17, and 1 Corinthians 6:13 – 14.
[81] Ibid 5.6.1
[82] Ibid 5.8.1

paradise of God.' The fruit of the flesh can be interrupted and pruned off, thankfully. 'And again, those persons who are not bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, and are, as it were, covered over and lost among brambles, if they use diligence, and receive the word of God as a graft, arrive at the pristine nature of man--that which was created after the image and likeness of God.'[83] The developmental paradigm is evident, and 'image' and 'likeness' are used to anchor the foundation for that development, and denote its glorious trajectory.

In 5.12.4, Irenaeus says that accurate knowledge of God helps us develop the likeness, because through it we know accurately God's intention for us, which is the complete salvation of humanity as God created us, including the fleshly body. 'For the knowledge of God renews man. And when he says, 'after the image of the Creator,' he sets forth the recapitulation of the same man, who was at the beginning made after the likeness of God.'[84] In 5.15.4, Irenaeus continues the theme of knowledge, and as our knowledge of God increases because of the incarnate Word's ministry, ties this to the full statement in Genesis 1:26 involving both 'image and likeness.'[85]

In 5.16.1 – 3, Irenaeus demonstrates his use of 'image' and 'likeness' (along with its synonym, 'similitude') in conjunction with Jesus' death on the cross. This is important for my larger point about the atonement. He encourages us to know the Father by knowing the creation and the activity of His Son to re-create us. Irenaeus uses 'image' and 'likeness' to keep the progression of biblical time before us. 'Adam was fashioned, and we too have been formed.' 'From the beginning even to the end.' What was mentioned beforehand, and shown forth by the Lord.' The Son is the 'hand of God' who 'from the beginning even to the end, forms us and prepares us for life, and is present with his handiwork, and perfects it after the image and likeness of God.'[86]

Human beings found it easy to 'lose the similitude,' that is, the 'likeness,' because the image of God was not yet shown. That is, the Son – who is the true image of God in the formal sense – had not yet become incarnate. But now that he has, 'assimilating Himself to man, and man to Himself, so that by means of his resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father.'[87] By becoming incarnate, the Son 'showed forth the image truly, since He became Himself what was the image, and re-established the similitude after a sure manner.'

To support that very point, Irenaeus immediately shines a spotlight on the cross as the reversal of the primal fall. Because the disobedience of man began on the occasion of a tree, the incarnate Son became obedient unto death upon the tree. We had offended God 'in the first Adam,' Irenaeus says, meaning that 'we' as in 'human nature' had become corrupted and offensive to God because we failed to develop God's intended beauty and goodness for ourselves. But 'in the second Adam,' 'we are reconciled,' because when Jesus went to his death on the cross, human nature was 'being made obedient unto death.'[88] Irenaeus says that Jesus completed the full restoration of the 'likeness' of God into human nature at the cross, not at the conception, through his human obedience, not simply his divine obedience to become incarnate. 'Atonement,' as we call it today, consisted of the lifelong obedience of the incarnate Son in his human journey. And it was only completed at his death. Irenaeus even goes so far as to say that 'we had offended' God 'in the first Adam,'[89] leading him to say in the very next chapter, 5.17.1, that Jesus 'propitiated the Father against who we had sinned.'[90] But far from being a 'penal substitution' appeasement of God's offended retributive justice, or offended honor, this is a 'medical substitution' rectification of human nature to its intended beauty and goodness, as I have already argued above. 'Image' and 'likeness' language is central to describing that. The offense against the Father is the marring of human nature and the detour we have taken away from God's likeness. The propitiation is the destruction of the disorder of sin which has now lodged in human nature.

In 5.21.1, the incarnate Son was born 'after the likeness of Adam' – since 'Adam' was led away as a captive to Satan, precisely because of the corruption of sin within human nature from Adam onwards[91] – thus adding yet another data point of support for the fallenness camp. This usage of the phrase 'after the likeness of Adam' is very

[83] Ibid 5.10.1
[84] Ibid 5.12.4
[85] Ibid 5.15.4
[86] Ibid 5.16.1
[87] Ibid 5.16.2
[88] Ibid 5.16.3
[89] Ibid 5.16.3
[90] Ibid 5.17.1
[91] Ibid 5.21.2 says, 'the corruption of man, therefore, which occurred in paradise by both [of our first parents] eating' which is notable

significant. This passage is worth examining closely:

> 'He has therefore, in His work of recapitulation, summed up all things, both waging war against our enemy, and crushing him who had at the beginning led us away captives in Adam, and trampled upon his head, as thou canst perceive in Genesis that God said to the serpent, 'And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; He shall be on the watch for thy head, and thou on the watch for His heel.' For from that time, He who should be born of a woman, [namely] from the Virgin, after the likeness of Adam, was preached as keeping watch for the head of the serpent. This is the seed of which the apostle says in the Epistle to the Galatians, 'that the law of works was established until the seed should come to whom the promise was made.' This fact is exhibited in a still clearer light in the same Epistle, where he thus speaks: 'But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman.' For indeed the enemy would not have been fairly vanquished, unless it had been a man [born] of a woman who conquered him. For it was by means of a woman that he got the advantage over man at first, setting himself up as man's opponent. And therefore does the Lord profess Himself to be the Son of man, comprising in Himself that original man out of whom the woman was fashioned, in order that, as our species went down to death through a vanquished man, so we may ascend to life again through a victorious one; and as through a man death received the palm [of victory] against us, so again by a man we may receive the palm against death.'[92]

While the unfallenness camp might read 'that original man out of whom the woman was fashioned' as an indication of pre-fallen Adamic humanity, it is quite clear that the passage in its entirety, as well as what follows, indicates a fallen Adamic humanity in the incarnation. For one, our human nature has been sin-bitten, and 'at the beginning [we were] led away captives in Adam.' As Catholic scholar Jean Daniélou indicates, 'This humanity which Christ takes upon himself as a concrete actuality in all its fullness, and which he unites in himself by a numerical summation, is also a humanity which has fallen into the power of the devil.'[93] When Irenaeus now speaks of 'the likeness of Adam,' it is captive Adamic flesh of which he speaks. Second, speaking of 'the original man' is indeed an echo of Adam, but an echo whose fulness had to be established *in reverse order of the normal human sequence*. Not Jesus' birth per se, but his *death*, gives us life, 'the palm against death.' Jesus had to restore 'that original man' not simply through his conception, but through his lifelong obedience, death, and resurrection, because God's intended trajectory for Adam in the garden was eternal life via the tree of life. When Jesus restores the 'original man,' in Irenaeus' vision, it is humanity not just in its pre-fallen state, but its perfected, post-tree of life state, bearing not only the 'image,' but also the 'likeness' of God.

Thirdly, the phrase from Galatians 4:4 – 5, 'born of woman,' or 'made of woman,' indicates a fallen humanity from conception in the womb of Mary. The phrase 'born of woman' is not merely an historical fact but a phrase from Job. To be 'born of woman' is to be 'short-lived and full of turmoil' (Job.14:1) because of the following question:

> 'You also open Your eyes on him, and bring him into judgment with Yourself.
> Who [among men] can make the clean out of the unclean? No one!' (Job 14:4).

It is to ask,

> 'How then can a man be just (righteous) with God?
> Or how can he be clean who is born of woman?' (Job 25:4).

I believe it is very significant that Job associates 'Hebrew legal courtroom' terminology like 'judgment' and being 'just/righteous with God' on the one hand with ontological terminology like 'uncleanness' on the other. It shows that the one is constitutive of the other. Specifically, the second stanza of the step parallelism of Hebrew poetry typically has the greater weight: The Hebrew (not Western, Latin) legal courtroom terminology is being enlisted to demarcate the *ontological*. Job does not envision a sequence of forensic justification which only later leads to a sanctification process of increasing cleanliness/holiness. Rather, the medical and ontological healing of human nature *is* the deeper, more robust explanation for any declaration of being 'just/righteous with God.' They may not

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[92] Ibid 5.21.1

[93] Jean Daniélou, *History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea, Volume 2: Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, translated and edited by John A. Baker (London: Dartman, Longman, and Todd, 1973), p.178

be chronologically separated, though they can be logically separated, with the ontological-medical reality being the logical foundation for the vindication in Hebraic, legal terminology. This is consistent with Paul's approach in Romans and Galatians.

The phrase 'born of woman' in Galatians and in Irenaeus, therefore, draws on Job to indicate that the human nature taken from Mary by the Son in his incarnation was initially *unclean*. To clean it, Jesus had to restore our intended 'perfection' from within the confines of our fallen condition. This leads Irenaeus to discuss next the temptation experience of Jesus in *AH* 5.21.2. From the angle of our captivity to Satan, Jesus had to liberate human nature. Thus, Jesus 'did perform His command,' and was obedient to the Father.[94] But from the angle of our sin-bitten human nature, Jesus had to assume a fallen human nature, endure temptations in order to offer his obedience to the Father and correct the flaw in human nature. Jesus was not simply obedient by becoming incarnate and being conceived as an embryo in Mary's womb. He was obedient throughout his life, all the way to the cross. For where Adam became the 'vanquished one' and 'went down to death' and gave us the inheritance of mortality, Jesus became the 'victorious one' when he went down to death but rose again, and gave us the inheritance of immortality, 'by both destroying our adversary, and perfecting man after the image and likeness of God'[95] in himself.

Significantly, Galatians 4:4 – 5 and Romans 8:3 – 4 are concerned with the following larger themes in common:

Galatians 4:4 – 5	*Romans 8:3 – 4*
The sending of God's Son	The sending of God's Son
Soteriological result: life by the Spirit	Soteriological result: life by the Spirit
Sons of God	Sons of God
Abba	Abba
Heirs	Heirs, fellow heirs with Christ

The two passages invite comparison, and Leander Keck offers one such analysis.[96] In the fullness of time, Paul says, God sent out His Son to be 'born of a woman, born under the Law, so that he might redeem those who are under the Law' (Gal.4:4). This is not coincidentally similar in structure and terminology to God sending His own Son 'in the likeness of sinful flesh,' as an offering for sin, to condemn sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law [that a human being fully condemn sin in the flesh] might be fulfilled in us (Rom.8:3 – 4). These are terms denoting the participation of the Son in our human condition, and additionally in the *Israelite* condition.

From this point in *AH* 5, Irenaeus uses the word 'likeness' to describe other facets of the character, purpose, and relationships which God's intended for humanity. In 5.28.4, Irenaeus considers human destiny and the divine fire of God. When he uses 'image and likeness of God' language here, Irenaeus again refers to the work of the 'hands of God… the Son and Spirit' in their work of 'moulding' us. 'Tribulation is necessary for those who are being saved,' he says, in the same way that good wheat (not chaff) is broken up, spread fine, sprinkled over by the Word, and rises in the fire. With this growth into the 'likeness,' we 'may be fitted for the royal banquet.'[97] Finally, in 5.36.3, Irenaeus rephrases the beautiful heights of human destiny. When we are 'confirmed and incorporated with His Son… brought to perfection,' we will 'ascend to Him, passing beyond the angels, and be made after the image and likeness of God.'[98] Since Irenaeus has already said that we do not lose the 'image of God' in spite of our disobedience, it can be settled that the 'likeness of God' refers to our growth and perfection, via our participation in God's work in the humanity of Christ, in which the Son and the Spirit worked to undo the primal fall into the corruption of sin. Irenaeus thus concludes book 5 and his entire five volumes in *Against Heresies*.

Irenaeus' Use of Romans 8:3

I return to my argument that when Irenaeus quoted Romans 8:3 and spoke of Jesus being 'in the likeness of sinful flesh,' he was using the word 'likeness' in a technical and specifically biblical sense, derived from Genesis 1:26. I have demonstrated above that Irenaeus' use of 'likeness' when Genesis 1:26 is in view ('likeness of God') refers to our mature participation in God. Moreover, I have argued that the second century Christian usage of the term

[94] Ibid 5.21.2
[95] Ibid 5.21.2
[96] Leander E. Keck, "The Law and "The Law of Sin and Death"," edited by James L. Crenshaw and Samuel Sandmel, *The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God's Control of Human Events Presented to Lou H. Silberman* (Ktav Pub Inc, May 1, 1980)
[97] Ibid 5.28.4
[98] Ibid 5.36.3

'likeness' seems fixed and established, especially in relationship to the term 'image.' If Irenaeus uses the word 'likeness' with this kind of regular precision when referring to the positive, does he not use it with the same precision when referring to the negative, and quoting the apostle at that? If the Word became flesh, was not the incarnate Word made 'in the likeness of sinful flesh'? Did he not render himself incarnate in a mode of full, mature participation in our fallen human nature, to press his Spirit-led faithfulness to the Father into human nature and carry the corruption of sin ensconced in fallen Adamic flesh all the way back to a tree, there to be undone?

Irenaeus quotes 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' on two occasions: *Against Heresies* 3.20.2 and 4.2.8. Here is the first quotation and its context:

> 'Just as the physician is proved by his patients, so is God also revealed through men. And therefore Paul declares, 'For God hath concluded all in unbelief, that He may have mercy upon all;' not saying this in reference to spiritual aeons, but to man, who had been disobedient to God, and being cast off from immortality, then obtained mercy, receiving through the Son of God that adoption which is [accomplished] by Himself. For he who holds, without pride and boasting, the true glory (opinion) regarding created things and the Creator, who is the Almighty God of all, and who has granted existence to all; [such an one,] continuing in His love and subjection, and giving of thanks, shall also receive from Him the greater glory of promotion, looking forward to the time when he shall become like Him who died for him, *for He, too, was made in the likeness of sinful flesh*, to condemn sin, and to cast it, as now a condemned thing, away beyond the flesh, but that He might call man forth into His own likeness, assigning him as [His own] imitator to God, and imposing on him His Father's law, in order that he may see God, and granting him power to receive the Father; [being] the Word of God who dwelt in man, and became the Son of man, that He might accustom man to receive God, and God to dwell in man, according to the good pleasure of the Father.'[99]

In this dense quotation, Irenaeus makes an explicitly medical statement about God being a physician and healer. We may therefore see the theme of healing running through the passage. When Irenaeus says, 'for He, too, was made in the likeness of sinful flesh,' he deliberately stresses the identification of the Son of God with our condition. The grammatical use of 'He too' makes Irenaeus' mind beyond dispute. For Irenaeus does not insert any distance between our current human condition and the human condition Jesus entered. Since we are made in the likeness of sinful flesh, so *He too*, was. Irenaeus also positions the significance of Jesus' taking sinful flesh between his death and the purpose of his death. The Son of God 'died for him [i.e. the human being] … to condemn sin, and to cast it, as now a condemned thing, away beyond the flesh.' For Tertullian, as we will see below, Jesus abolished sin at the moment of his conception. Not so for Irenaeus. Irenaeus believed that Jesus' decisive victory over sinful flesh – not just pre-fallen Adamic temptation – was at his death. By using death as the means of finally separating sin and human nature, he 'cast' sin 'away' from his humanity, which he brought up again through resurrection. By doing this, as Irenaeus explores, Jesus enabled a union between God and the human. Jesus shared the 'power to receive the Father' with his disciples only after his death and resurrection, especially in John's Gospel. Throughout the narrative of John, Jesus refers to 'the' Father, or 'my Father,' but only speaks of 'your Father' after his resurrection (Jn.20:17) and in connection with his sharing of the Spirit (Jn.20:22), which could not happen prior to his death and resurrection (Jn.7:37 – 39). Thus, God revealed Himself precisely as a physician and healer of human beings in connection with Jesus fully healing his own human nature.

Van Kuiken believes that in this passage, Irenaeus makes the case that we will 'become wholly like' Jesus on the grounds that Jesus came 'in the likeness of sinful flesh.' Jesus taking on our likeness causes us to become wholly like him, over time. But Van Kuiken reduces 'likeness' to Christ here down to 'immortality.'[100] I have a difficulty with Van Kuiken's reading of this passage because I am persuaded Irenaeus is also considering the immoral-moral axis of Christian life, and not simply the mortality-immortality axis. Irenaeus speaks of the human 'continuing in His love and *subjection*.' Shortly afterwards, he speaks of 'imposing on him His Father's *law*.' Sandwiched between those statements, Irenaeus uses Romans 8:3. When referring to Jesus' death, Irenaeus says that Jesus, through his manner of incarnation, life, and death 'condemned sin.' The moral-ethical meaning of Jesus' death is notable, since Irenaeus points out that Jesus is the one 'who died for' human beings. That was the climactic moment

[99] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.20.2
[100] Van Kuiken, p.101 says, 'Hence the 'likeness of sinful flesh' relates to Christ's sharing our experience of sin's consequence, death, and contrasts with 'His own [present] likeness' as immortal, which we shall experience with him.'

when Jesus did not simply resist sin, but 'cast it, as now a condemned thing, away beyond the flesh.' If Irenaeus believed that Jesus had cast sin away from the flesh at conception, and had assumed unfallen human nature, then this statement would make little sense.

Worse yet, if Irenaeus believed that our becoming 'like' Jesus is rooted in Jesus coming 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' but without its actual sinfulness, then his reasoning would be ambiguous and faulty. If Jesus took on unfallen flesh at his incarnation, then our growing moral-ethical 'likeness' to Jesus – which Irenaeus is quite interested in – would not be well-grounded. First, the simple lexical meaning of the words 'like' and 'likeness' would suddenly be made double-minded and dubious even within the narrow confines of Irenaeus' statement here. For if Jesus' 'likeness' to our 'sinful flesh' is not grounded in his actual, substantial, and mature participation in our fallen humanity, or 'sinful flesh' as stated, then the phrase 'in the likeness' in this case means 'in the superficial appearance' only. Can we, then, use that definition of 'likeness' in reverse? If we are called to be 'like' Jesus, that is, to bear the 'likeness' of his immortality and/or moral stature, then can that 'likeness,' too, be merely superficial and not substantive? Such a suggestion would be jarring and damage Irenaeus' meaning beyond repair. The phrase, 'in the likeness,' when it describes our movement towards Christ, cannot mean something different than *the very same phrase* when it describes Christ's movement towards us.

Moreover, if Jesus came in the 'appearance only' of 'sinful flesh,' it is far from clear how that fact confers encouragement to us who struggle with 'sinful flesh' not in appearance only, but in actuality. For it would mean that Jesus' experience of human life was critically different from ours that we would have to find emotional solidarity elsewhere – the saints, perhaps? Leander E. Keck's comments on this phrase are succinct:

> 'It is the sin domiciled in the flesh that is condemned. In order to make that possible, the Son was sent "in the likeness of sinful flesh" – *en homoiomati sarkos hamartias*, clearly meaning identification with the human condition, not mere similarity. Had the Son been only "like" flesh, he could not have condemned sin "in the flesh," precisely where Paul had located the problem. Had the Son not participated in this kind of flesh, the "condemnation" would not have been liberating; it could only have exposed even more powerfully the human dilemma, so that the net result of knowing about such a Son would, like hearing the law, have only made one conscious of sin (3:20). This formulation of the radical identification of the Son with the full depths of the human condition is similar to that of 2 Cor 5:21 – "him who knew no sin he made sin for our sakes… Christian theology, and especially Christian piety, has found it exceedingly difficult to follow Paul here because of the doctrine of Jesus' sinlessness. Whatever one may think about Jesus' sinlessness, Paul's formulations move on a different plane. They do not have in view the question of whether Jesus committed sins but whether the Son participated in the human condition sufficiently to achieve that which the human dilemma required.'[101]

That emotional disconnection from Jesus on the pastoral level is connected, at the very least, to speculations about a spiritual-theological disconnection as well. Why is it logically the case that Jesus' coming in our 'likeness' will make us 'like' him? Only if Jesus came in the substantial, mature form of our sinful flesh, and condemned sin in the flesh by never sinning, do we have a participationist grounding for our moral growth in Christ as well as our resurrection in him, as well. It is much more straightforward to say that Jesus shared in our fallen humanity, that we might share in his healed humanity.

Here is the second quotation of Romans 8:3 in Irenaeus:

> 'But as many as feared God, and were anxious about His law, these ran to Christ, and were all saved. For He said to His disciples: 'Go ye to the sheep of the house of Israel, which have perished.' And many more Samaritans, it is said, when the Lord had tarried among them, two days, 'believed because of His words, and said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we ourselves have heard [Him], and know that this man is truly the Savior of the world.'' And Paul likewise declares, 'And so all Israel shall be saved;' but he has also said, 'that the law was our pedagogue [to bring us] to Christ Jesus.' Let them not therefore ascribe to the law the unbelief of certain [among them]. For the law never hindered them from believing in the Son of God; nay, but it even exhorted them so to do, saying that men can be saved in

[101] Leander E. Keck, "The Law and "The Law of Sin and Death"," edited by James L. Crenshaw and Samuel Sandmel, *The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God's Control of Human Events Presented to Lou H. Silberman* (Ktav Pub Inc, May 1, 1980), p.49 – 50

> no other way from the old wound of the serpent than by believing in Him who, *in the likeness of sinful flesh*, is lifted up from the earth upon the tree of martyrdom, and draws all things to Himself, and vivifies the dead.'[102]

Although Irenaeus in book 4 of *Against Heresies* speaks extensively about the Sinai covenant and Israel's experience, he links that period of salvation history to God's saving purpose for *all humanity*. We see this here. Irenaeus quotes from Romans 11:26 ('all Israel will be saved') explaining not an 'ethnic Israel' theory but commending both Jews *and Samaritans* who 'were anxious about His law.' This concurs with Paul's usage of the phrase 'the Israel of God' in Galatians 6:16 as encompassing both Jews *and Gentiles* who profess faith in Christ.

If at this juncture, Irenaeus wanted to say that Jesus took on the likeness of Adam's pre-fallen humanity, how might he have communicated that? Irenaeus was perfectly capable of saying, 'In the likeness of Adam,' when he so desired, and he meant 'fallen Adamic humanity' when he did.[103] In addition, Irenaeus seems to have in mind John 12:32 ('is lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself') and John 3:14 – 15 ('is lifted up') and behind that, Numbers 21:4 – 7, which use the image of the bronze serpent being lifted up on a 'tree' to offer healing from the bites of serpents. In Numbers 21, what was cast in bronze and thus portrayed as judged is not *an Israelite*, as penal substitution would require, but rather *a serpent*. So what God judges and views as cursed is the source of the venom. For Jesus to occupy that place on the tree is to identify sinful human flesh as the proximate source of the venom. An already cleansed human nature would not supply that image. This point may not be decisive on its own, but the cumulative weight builds up.

The fact that Irenaeus perceives the linkage between John 3:14 – 15 and John 12:32 around the significant word 'lifted up' (ὑψόω) deserves careful consideration, because it bears on the topic of atonement. Compared with the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus in John never says that he will be 'killed' (e.g. Mt.16:21; 17:22 – 23; 21:37 – 39). Rather, Jesus uses this peculiar phrase: he will be 'lifted up.' John the narrator, however, explains Jesus' statement: 'But he was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which he was to die' (Jn.12:33). This phrasing is consistent with John's interpretation of Jesus' crucifixion as his enthronement and exaltation. John himself seems to use the term 'lifted up' (ὑψόω) to forge a link to Isaiah's Song of the Suffering Servant, where LXX Isaiah 52:13 introduces the Servant by saying, 'Behold, My Servant shall… be high and lifted up (ὑψωθήσεται).' This, despite God saying in Isaiah that He will share his exalted status with no others.[104] Yet in John 3:14 – 15, Jesus indicates that the earthly vertical movement of being 'lifted up' on the cross is an exaltation. While Luke-Acts sees Jesus' ascension to heaven as the movement of exaltation, in John, that vertical upward movement on the cross itself corresponds to Jesus' enthronement. It is an exaltation laced with irony but simultaneously transfigured with profound meaning. Irenaeus seems quite aware that John's Gospel operates in this way, and seems intent on expounding on that meaning by bringing the literary themes to the surface.

Referring to the 'old wound of the serpent' indicates that Irenaeus is thinking of all humanity in the biblical narrative, because both Jews and Gentiles find their common parentage and plight from Adam and Eve. Irenaeus links John 3:14 – 15 and Numbers 21:4 – 7 to Genesis 3:1 – 7, the old wound of the serpent and Jesus being in the likeness of sinful flesh. Why does he do this? Van Kuiken suggests that Irenaeus might be viewing the bronze serpent 'lifted up from the earth' as a sign of victory over the ancient serpent portrayed in the Adamic fall,[105] as Justin Martyr interpreted it this way.[106] I am happy to include that meaning. However, I perceive much more in Irenaeus' statement. The underlying logic in the bishop's mind is a parallel between Adam and Jesus where Jesus returned what Adam stole. Adam took from the tree in self-centered disobedience in a bid for 'life' apart from God, whereas Jesus came to a tree in martyrdom to give up his life for the Father and for us. Adam came to the tree and received the serpent's 'venom' into human nature, whereas Jesus returned sinful human flesh to a tree, healing the

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[102] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.2.8

[103] Ibid 5.21.1, 'For from that time, He who should be born of a woman, [namely] from the Virgin, after the likeness of Adam' refers to the fact that the enemy 'led us away captives in Adam'

[104] In Isaiah's prophecy, the phrase 'high and exalted' occurs with reference to God (2:17; 6:1; 33:5, 10; 57:15) and uniquely with the Servant (52:13). Negatively, God accuses human beings of pride and idolatry using the phrase 'proud and lofty…lifted up' (2:12, 13, 14; 10:33). So the phrase is a significant indication of the thematic unity of Isaiah's prophecy. Also, the phrase strikingly joins God and the Servant in terms of stature, position, and perhaps even identity. God guards that exaltation jealously. He says, 'the LORD alone will be exalted in that day' (Isa.2:17). Given Isaiah's use of terms, it must have surprised Jesus' contemporaries that he used this phrase for himself, and also that he would combine it with the image of the bronze serpent.

[105] Van Kuiken, p.101

[106] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 91, 94, 112, quoted by Van Kuiken, p.101

'old wound' of the serpent. The idea of 'venom' being in human nature is early. Jesus spoke of serpents and scorpions as figures for Satan and the demons in Luke 10:19. Serpents and scorpions are dangerous not because of their size or appetite, but their venom: they can inject something into us which harms and/or kills us slowly. This usage by Jesus reflects the imagery of the serpent in the Pentateuch: in the garden (Gen.3:1 – 7); in Egypt as the power of Pharaoh (Ex.7:8 – 13); in the wilderness as the lingering 'venom' of Pharaoh drawing the Israelites back to Egypt (Num.21:4 – 7), and indicating the primal venom of the ancient serpent was coursing through the veins of the Israelites, and all humanity.

If I am correct in seeing Irenaeus' penchant for seeing the return movement, or recirculating, in the biblical story, then this would again require that Jesus *not* have cleansed his human nature at conception. He would have resisted sin, to be sure, but he must have carried his sin-bitten human nature all the way back to the tree to fulfill the return movement of human sin beginning at a tree. Jesus is exalted as the Isaianic Servant-king, and as God, when he was lifted up, revealing himself as the one who was removing the venom of sin from human nature, condemning the poisonous corruption of sin through death, and raising his human nature purified in his resurrection.

If we take seriously the likelihood that Philippians 2:6 – 11 and Romans 8:3 – 4 (and Galatians 4:4 – 5, which mirrors Romans 8:3 – 4[107]) are pre-Pauline creedal material developed by the earliest Jewish Christian community,[108] as I argue below, then the significance of the phrase 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' means all the more, both in Paul, and in Irenaeus. Here, biblical scholarship makes a helpful contribution. It is even logically possible, and moreover likely, that the creedal material was developed by the apostles themselves, perhaps even with the resurrected Jesus in their midst. Regardless, it is exceedingly unlikely that Jewish Christians would use the Greek term for 'likeness' (ὁμοιώματι), which was used in LXX Genesis 1:26 for 'likeness' as well, in two different ways for the very same subject (the Son) and topic (his incarnation into human nature). They understood their context well enough: any terminological disagreement would have generated substantial confusion, pun intended.

[107] Leander E. Keck, "The Law and "The Law of Sin and Death"," edited by James L. Crenshaw and Samuel Sandmel, *The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God's Control of Human Events Presented to Lou H. Silberman* (Ktav Pub Inc, May 1, 1980). See below my examination of *AH* 5.21.1 and the phrase 'born of woman' in the context of 'the likeness of Adam.'
[108] E.g. Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians 2:5 – 11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997 2nd edition), p.vii–ix