Medical Substitutionary Atonement in Irenaeus of Lyons

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Introduction: Who is the Heir of the Ancients?

> 'When we ask what the precise nature of this vicarious activity of Christ was, we find Nicene theologians regularly falling back upon familiar biblical and liturgical terms like ransom, sacrifice, propitiation, expiation, reconciliation to describe it, but always with a deep sense of awe before the inexpressible mystery of atonement through the blood of Christ. They used these terms, however…to refer, to not any external transaction between God and mankind carried out by Christ, but to what took place *within the union of divine and human natures in the incarnate Son of God*.'[2]

> 'Atonement thus occurs for the Fathers through the dynamic of the incarnation itself, not by way of some extrinsic theory, i.e., satisfaction, penal substitution, and so on. Why, one wonders, did theology subsequently fail to reflect this? I am not sure. Part of the reason, I suspect, lies in how the incarnation came to be largely understood. With focus on the miracle of God becoming flesh in the birth of Jesus, the saving significance of the rest of Jesus' life was overshadowed. With focus returned, so to speak, on the Cross, the climactic end of Jesus' life, the impression de facto was that the real meaning of God's identification lay at the beginning and at the end, not in the entire range of Jesus' life.'[3]

Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, the authors of the recent book *Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution*, claim that penal substitutionary theory stretches back to the earliest fathers of the church.[4] Of these early theologians, they impressively cite Justin Martyr (c.100 – 165), Eusebius of Caesarea (275 – 339), Hilary of Poitiers (c.300 – 368), Athanasius of Alexandria (c.297 – 373), Gregory 'the Theologian' of Nazianzus (c.330 – 390), Ambrose of Milan (339 – 397), John Chrysostom (c.350 – 407), Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430), Cyril of Alexandria (375 – 444), Gelasius of Cyzicus (fifth century), Gregory the Great (c.540 – 604). They then proceed to quote Thomas Aquinas (c.1225 – 1274), John Calvin (1509 – 64), and then others from the Reformed tradition. My focus here involves correcting their misunderstanding about the early theologians. They express some nervousness about whether penal substitution is historically attested in early church history, and their reason for hoping it can be vindicated:

> 'The question of historical pedigree has acquired a further significance in recent years, for increasing numbers of people are suggesting penal substitution is a novel doctrine, invented around the time of the Reformation by a church that was (it is alleged) drifting ever further from the biblical faith of the early church Fathers. This is a serious challenge. To put the matter bluntly, we ought to be worried if what we believe to be a foundational biblical truth remained entirely undiscovered from the days of the apostles right up until the middle of the sixteenth century. At the very least, such a discovery would undermine the idea that penal substitution is clearly taught in the Bible. On the other hand, it would be immensely reassuring to find that our understanding of the Bible has indeed been the consensus of Christian orthodoxy for almost two millennia.'[5]

But scholarly opinion weighs against these authors. Most theologians and historians of the early church believe that the early church was united in upholding the broad Christus Victor theory for over a millennium. The varied language of Jesus as a healer, ransom, deliverer, and conqueror was used to denote Jesus being victorious over

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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] T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 1983), p.168. I am indebted to this work, especially p.161 – 168, and Thomas Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh: An Essay on the Humanity of Christ* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), for the citations in this section.
[3] Father Henry Charles, *The Eucharist as Sacrifice*, November 19, 2006; http://www.catholicnews-tt.net/v2005/series/euch_sacrifice191106.htm; Father Charles is a Roman Catholic parish priest in Trinidad and Tobego
[4] Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), p.14
[5] Ibid, p.162

human sinfulness, death, and the devil.[6] Substitution, but not penal substitution, was clearly taught, for Jesus was victorious on our behalf and for our salvation. I am calling this view 'ontological substitution,' or 'medical substitution,' although Eastern Orthodox theologian Stephen Freeman prefers 'therapeutic substitution', and Reformed theologian T.F. Torrance calls it 'total substitution.' It was only Anselm of Canterbury who first articulated an atonement theory that positioned Jesus as a 'satisfaction' of 'an attribute' of God. In Anselm's theory, Jesus satisfied God's *honor*, which contributed to the idea that Jesus stored up a 'treasury of merit' others could access. Anselm could therefore leave the question of the scope of the atonement open, and genuinely open to human free will to choose Jesus. However, Anselm paved the way for John Calvin and others to position Jesus as satisfying God's *retributive justice*, which became a broader category that was extended across people and across time, and which was understood in such a way that Jesus exhausted God's wrath at one time, upholding God's retributive justice on their behalf. Unlike Anselm's theology where Jesus satisfied God's honor in a personal way, giving others access, person by person, to his achievement, Calvin's theology positioned Jesus against God's justice in a categorical way, on behalf of the elect, all at once. This left no logical place for genuine human free will.

In this essay, I will shed light on why I believe these three authors misunderstand the theological thought of the earliest Christian theologians, especially those at the Council of Nicaea. They were not advocates of the penal substitutionary atonement theory. Instead, they held what I am calling 'medical substitution,' which is an aspect – and in my opinion, the *foundation* – of the christus victor understanding. This position is the view that Jesus had to physically assume fallen human nature, unite it to his divine nature, overcome temptation throughout his life in the power of the Holy Spirit, and defeat the corruption within his human nature at his death, in order to raise his human nature new, cleansed, and healed, so he could ascend to the Father as humanity's representative and share the Spirit of his new humanity with all who believe. That rather long-winded sentence can be boiled down to the saying that was popular with Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, and others: 'That which is not assumed is not healed.' God must assume to Himself what He intends to heal. Hence if God intends to heal the entire human being, He must assume the entire human being in Christ. My comparison of the two theological doctrines and their significance can be found in separate essays. This particular essay focuses on the atonement theology of the early church fathers.

[6] Gustav Aulen, *Christus Victor* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998, originally published 1930), chs.1 – 5

Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130 – 202 AD)

Historical Context and Significance
Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach neither cite nor mention Irenaeus. This omission is quite problematic for their argument because Irenaeus is enormously significant as the first major theologian outside the New Testament. I discuss him extensively following Ignatius and the other 'apostolic fathers' because he brings together theological statements in a coherent way, as the discipline of theology is much like solving a jigsaw puzzle, and it is easy to let Irenaeus speak for himself. Interestingly, Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach start with Justin Martyr and call him a theologian, when in fact he was less a systematic theologian like Irenaeus and more of a philosophical apologist answering particular questions put to him both Jew and Greek. Irenaeus is important as a historical witness to the thought of the earliest Christians, in his focus on writing on the atonement,[7] and as a source quoted by Athanasius and other orthodox defenders of the faith. And as I argue below, Irenaeus would not consider penal substitution to be correct.

Who was Irenaeus, and what role did he play in the early church? Irenaeus explicitly links the Greek East and the Latin West, although communication and ties between the two spheres were strong until the time of Augustine in the early fifth century. Irenaeus was born in Smyrna in Asia Minor, where he tells us, he learned of Jesus 'in his youth' through the impressive figure of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who reportedly had been a disciple of the apostle John.[8] Irenaeus continued to address concerns Polycarp did before him.

First, Polycarp had sent his pupil Pothinus as part of a significant Greek-speaking migration into Celtic Gaul to be the first Christian bishop in that region.[9] Irenaeus would later go to Lyons and serve as a priest under Pothinus. Church historian Philip Schaff notes, 'Between Marseilles and Smyrna there seems to have been a brisk trade.'[10] Christian mission followed. As was true during the New Testament time period (e.g. Rom.15:18 – 24; Col.1:1; 1 Peter 1:1; Rev.2 – 3), Greek-speaking Asia Minor would continue to be the launching point for mission to the Latin West throughout the second century.

Second, Polycarp himself already demonstrates the strong ties between East and West which Irenaeus would inherit. Polycarp visited Rome while his fellow Syrian, Anicetus, was bishop of Rome (155 – 166 AD) to discuss the differences that already existed between the churches of Asia Minor and Rome, especially the date of Easter.[11] This fact again reminds us that the Christian communities in the Greek East and Latin West were well aware of each other and their differences; news and material circulated quickly and broadly. Polycarp and Anicetus quickly came to agreement about everything except the dating of Easter. Polycarp maintained the eastern practice of placing Easter on the 14th of Nisan, the day of the Jewish Passover, which usually did not fall on a Sunday. This demonstrated a closer cultural proximity to a Jewish Christianity. Anicetus and the Roman Christians, however, followed the western practice of observing Easter on the first Sunday after the spring equinox. Happily, the two decided to maintain fellowship with each other. This communion and cordiality between Greek East and Latin West was reenacted by Irenaeus later in 190 or 191 AD, when he prevailed upon Victor, then bishop of Rome, to not excommunicate the Greek speaking Christians of Asia Minor for continuing the practice, despite Victor's wishes and, perhaps, growing ambitions.

Third, on Irenaeus' testimony, Polycarp's visit to Rome also won over disciples of the gnostic[12] teachers Marcion

[7] Aulen (1998) says, 'The idea of Atonement recurs continually in his writings, freshly treated from ever new points of view; his basic idea is in itself thoroughly clear and unmistakable, and also, as we shall see in the next chapter, marks out the track which succeeding generations were to follow.' (p.17) For an excellent treatment of Irenaeus, please see Aulen ch.2.
[8] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.3.4; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.14
[9] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.1 – 27 is noted by Philip Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume I: The Apostolic Fathers* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867), p.834 as an introduction to Irenaeus
[10] Schaff, p.834
[11] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.24 (also copied by Nicephorus, 4.39) includes this as Irenaeus' recollection to Victor, bishop of Rome
[12] The usefulness of the term 'gnostic' has been considerably questioned. For example, French Jesuit and former Catholic cardinal 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.3ff. explains that the first usage of 'gnosis' as a term comes not from Hellenism, but *Jewish Christianity*, where it was used to denote the 'gnosis of the mysteries,' for example in extra-canonical Jewish Christian material like the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Epistle of the Apostles*, and the *Apocalypse of Peter*. In its original Jewish Christian context, 'gnosis' referred to the knowledge which was for 'the mature' (e.g. Heb.5:14 – 6:1), such as the typological interpretation of Melchizedek in Hebrews 7. In other words, Jewish Christian 'gnosis' was a way of approaching the biblical texts, respecting their historicity but also their thematic, historical, and theological relation to Christ. Daniélou finds that in the extracanonical Jewish Christian literature, 'gnosis' is a style of reading consonant with Jewish apocalyptic, coming from heavily symbolic and literary works like Daniel and Zechariah. As such, they have much in common with

and Valentinus. This left quite an impression on Polycarp's protégé Irenaeus, whose task it was to write the most extensive critique of gnosticism ever produced. In 177 AD, while Irenaeus was serving under Pothinus, then bishop of Lyons, he was sent by Pothinus from Lyons to Rome. He:

> 'had the mortification of finding the Montanist heresy patronized by Eleutherus the Bishop of Rome; and there he met an old friend from the school of Polycarp, who had embraced the Valentinian heresy. We cannot doubt that to this visit we owe the lifelong struggle of Irenaeus against the heresies that now came in, like locusts, to devour the harvests of the Gospel. But let it be noted here, that, so far from being "the mother and mistress" of even the Western Churches, Rome herself is a mission of the Greeks; Southern Gaul is evangelized from Asia Minor, and Lyons checks the heretical tendencies of the Bishop at Rome. Ante-Nicene Christianity, and indeed the Church herself, appears in Greek costume which lasts through the synodical period; and Latin Christianity, when it begins to appear, is African, and not Roman. It is strange that those who have recorded this great historical fact have so little perceived its bearings upon Roman pretensions in the Middle Ages and modern times.'[13]

Fourth, and very relatedly, Irenaeus follows Polycarp's awareness of the four authoritative Gospels. The other specific differences discussed by Polycarp of Smyrna and Anicetus of Rome go unnamed, but historians infer that one of those differences was the relation between the Gospel accounts considered authoritative and apostolic. Matthew's Gospel had won early and widespread acceptance, and the Christians of Asia Minor had by this time developed a preference for John's Gospel, while the heretic Marcion in Rome held out his own edited version of Luke's Gospel as the one and only true account.[14] Irenaeus is the earliest writer to *explicitly* affirm Matthew, Mark, Luke (in its full version), and John as canonical, demonstrating an awareness of Christian discussions on this matter.[15] However, Polycarp, in his one brief but excellent letter to the Philippians, is *implicitly* the first to do so because of his Johannine language.[16]

At some point prior to his service as a priest in Lyons, Irenaeus left Smyrna and stayed in Rome where he joined the school of Justin Martyr (100 – 165 AD), whom I will consider below. Irenaeus echoes material in Justin,[17] but whether Irenaeus learned this from Justin or whether they drew from a common understanding cannot be ascertained. Of the two, Irenaeus had the more extensive training and scholarly temperament. When Irenaeus returned from Rome to Lyons in 178 AD, he discovered that Pothinus had been martyred by Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. He was elected bishop of Lyons. And he wrote in Greek an extremely well-researched critique of gnosticism, which ranged throughout the Mediterranean, and defense of Christian faith called *Against Heresies* sometime between 175 – 188 AD. At some unknown date, Irenaeus put in writing a guidebook, called the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*. As a church leader, he had probably used the contents of this book with

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Jesus' parables. However, heretics influenced by Hellenistic trends redefined the meaning of 'gnosis' and reoriented this 'knowledge.' They accepted the dualistic view of the cosmos (somewhat latent in Platonic thought) and assigned each 'sphere' different moral weight. So heaven and the soul were good; the earth and the body were evil. As such, history itself, which was a supremely Judaic and Hebraic category, tended to become denigrated, in favor of an ideal of timelessness and static changelessness. This Hellenistic, soul-body dualistic type of 'gnosticism' is what I refer to here.

[13] Schaff, p.834

[14] Stephen L. Harris, *Understanding the Bible* (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield, 1985)

[15] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.11.8; the *Didache* assumes readers know Matthew, and quotes from unique material in Matthew and material common to both Matthew and Luke; Clement of Rome quotes from material common to Matthew, Mark, and Luke; Ignatius of Antioch quotes from Matthew and Luke; the *Shepherd* of Hermas quotes from Matthew explicitly, quotes from material shared by Matthew and Mark, and contains allusions to unique material in Luke.

[16] Polycarp quotes from Matthew, Mark, and Luke; allusions to John's writings, including the Gospel, are present: 'he that hath love is far from all sin' (Phil.3; 1 Jn.3:5 – 6); 'lusts that are in the world' (Phil.5; 1 Jn.2:16 – 17); 'for whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist' (Phil.7; 1 Jn.4:3); 'the first-born of Satan' (Phil.7; Jn.8:44; Rev.3:9); 'that we might live in him' (Phil.8; Jn.5:25 – 26; 14:19 – 20; 1 Jn.4:9). While Ignatius' knowledge of John is sometimes conceded, e.g. J.N. Sanders, *The Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943) p.11 – 14, nevertheless Polycarp's intellectual superiority is acknowledged. J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers, Vol 1, Section 1: St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp* (1885), p.595 – 97 says, 'The divergence between the two writers as regards Scriptural quotations is equally remarkable. Though the seven Ignatian letters are many times longer than Polycarp's Epistle, the quotations in the latter are incomparably more numerous, as well as more precise, than in the former. The obligations to the New Testament are wholly different in character in the two cases. The Ignatian letters do, indeed, show a considerable knowledge of the writings included in our Canon of the New Testament; but this knowledge betrays itself in casual words and phrases, stray metaphors, epigrammatic adaptations, and isolated coincidences of thought ... On the other hand in Polycarp's Epistle sentence after sentence is frequently made up of passages from the Evangelical and Apostolic writings ... But this divergence forms only part of a broader and still more decisive contrast, affecting the whole style and character of the two writings. The profuseness of quotations in Polycarp's Epistle arises from a want of originality ... On the other hand the letters of Ignatius have a marked individuality. Of all early Christian writings they are pre-eminent in this respect.'

[17] J. Armitage Robinson, *St Irenaeus: The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (London: SPCK, 1920), p.10 – 44

Christian converts for many years. Eusebius attests to other works written by Irenaeus, but these are now lost to us. In *Against Heresies* and *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* he quotes from all four Gospels, all the letters of Paul except Philemon, Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude, 1 and 2 John, and Revelation; and possibly also James.[18] This would leave only Philemon and 3 John not explicitly mentioned.

By acquaintance with Polycarp, and having been nurtured in Christian faith in the community of Polycarp's town of Smyrna, there can be no doubt, therefore, that Irenaeus would have also been aware of the early shape of the New Testament, the writings of the 'apostolic fathers' including Ignatius' corpus and the letter to the Philippians from his mentor Polycarp,[19] all of Justin Martyr's writings, and probably others like Tatian the Assyrian (another student of Justin, who unfortunately became heretical), Athenagoras of Athens, and others. His keen interest in the church-wide observances of Easter must have made him aware of the fact that Christians in Palestine (following 70 AD) and Alexandria had shifted to the position of Rome, so he would have been aware of all the major centers of Christian faith, probably including Edessa in the Parthian Empire. He amassed incredible amounts of information about gnosticism and would surely have been aware of the pseudo-Christian literature that flowed in and out of that movement. Irenaeus sums up the whole of known Christian thought until that point.

Gnostic thought flowed out of the Greek philosophical dualism which opposed the world of intangible spirit against the world of physical matter. Gnostics believed that human beings were more fundamentally soul than body. In their ensuing belief system, they held various views of the body as inferior or irrelevant: the body would not be redeemed by God, therefore a person's body was ethically unimportant and/or its desires must be suppressed completely. This dualism stood in contradistinction from the Hebraic-Christian view which said that God in creation made physical things good, even the human body. The gnostics wanted to deny the supremacy of the God of the Old Testament for His creation of matter; they posited another God higher than the Old Testament God. They denied the relation between the Old Testament and the New for its continuity along these lines. They denied the Incarnation of Jesus into truly a human nature because of their disdain for the human body. And they also denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus, which completed the incorporation of humanity's physical nature into the very being of God.

Irenaeus understood that the entirety of biblical revelation, salvation, and the trustworthiness of God was at stake. Irenaeus knew that because of God's original commitment to the physical world, God has acted in Christ to redeem not only the souls of people but also their bodies, and furthermore the creation story itself.

God and Creation

First, Irenaeus asserted that God is the creator of all things. The gnostics, by contrast, wanted to keep God 'unsullied' by the material world, which they regarded as dreadful and impure. They attributed the creation to angelic beings, or intermediaries, who did the work of creation. In response, Irenaeus appears to take the biblical Hebraic language for creation as 'the work of His hands' (e.g. Isa.5:12; Ps.102:25), and He inserts the Son and the Spirit into the phrase as the two 'hands' of God:

> '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. For whatsoever all the heretics may have advanced with the utmost solemnity, they come to this at last, that they blaspheme the Creator, and disallow the salvation of God's workmanship, which the flesh truly is…'[20]
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> 'It was not angels, therefore, who made us, nor who formed us, neither had angels power to make an image of God, nor anyone else, except the Word of the Lord, nor any Power remotely distant from the Father of all things. For God did not stand in need of these [beings], in order to the accomplishing of what He had Himself determined with Himself beforehand should be done, as if He did not possess His own hands. For with Him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things, to whom also He speaks, saying, 'Let Us make man after Our

[18] Robinson, p.102; Robert M. Grant, *The Formation of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965)
[19] Irenaeus quotes Ignatius' *Epistle to the Romans* 4 in *Against Heresies* 5.28.4
[20] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4, preface, 4

> image and likeness;' He taking from Himself the substance of the creatures [formed], and the pattern of things made, and the type of all the adornments in the world.'[21]

Irenaeus is quite well known for this 'two hands' expression. He uses it in other places, always with regards to creation, pointedly including humanity, and often in contrast to the idea that angels were intermediaries in creation.[22] Irenaeus denies that idea, seeing in it a danger of separating God from His creation. Through his clever gloss on the Hebraic anthropomorphic phrase 'work of His hands,' Irenaeus makes the equally biblical assertion that the Word-Son and the Spirit were the means by which God was personally involved with the creation. He does not disdain it. God's involvement in the atonement is anchored and predicated on His involvement as creator.

God and Humanity

Second, Irenaeus refers to the 'ancient formation of man.' Irenaeus saw humanity as patterned after the Word-Son of God from the creation. That is, as the Son of God has always been the true image of God through whom the Father is made known (Col.1:15, Heb.1:3), human beings were formed in the image of the eternal Son of God to similarly make God known in the creation (Gen.1:26 – 27). That relation that human beings were intended to have with God external to God but by the Spirit, the Son of God originally and eternally has with the Father within the Godhead by the Spirit. This is why the Son of God inhabited human flesh, to remake the likeness of God in human nature.

> 'But who else is superior to, and more eminent than, that man who was formed after the likeness of God, except the Son of God, after whose image man was created? And for this reason He did in these last days exhibit the similitude; [for] the Son of God was made man, assuming the *ancient production* [of His hands] into His own nature.'[23]

> '…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.'[24]

Irenaeus' theology of atonement is therefore rooted in the goodness of God's physical creation of humanity, the creation story itself with humanity's original mandate to increase in stature and maturity, and behind that, an inner-trinitarian relationship between the Father and the Son in the Spirit. I will explore below Irenaeus' use of the terms 'image' and 'likeness.' Suffice to say, at present, because we have tarnished the image and/or likeness of God within ourselves, including damaging the *relation* between ourselves and God, Jesus came to restore it. So he exhibited the 'similitude,' that is, the similarity with us: 'the Son of God was made man, assuming the ancient production [of His hands] into His own nature.' Now, the 'ancient' pattern in which God created human beings is affirmed by the Son of God who served as the template for that pattern in the first place. In himself, Jesus has renewed the likeness and/or image of God in human nature back into its proper relationship with God, which involves reconciling human nature to God by removing the hostility from it, and reconciling the human person back into the correct relation and trajectory of growth which God originally intended.

In the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, dated circa 195 AD, meant to summarize Christian teaching for new converts, Irenaeus writes:

> 'But man He formed with His own hands [i.e. the Word and the Spirit as the 'hands of God'], 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

[21] Ibid 4.20.1
[22] Ibid 4.7.4; 4.20.4; 5.1.3; 5.5.1; 5.6.1; 5.28.4; cf.5.18; *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 10, 11, 26
[23] Ibid 4.33.4
[24] Ibid 4.38.3; John E. Toews, *The Story of Original Sin* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), p.50 is an example of a historian who credits Theophilus of Antioch (d.183 – 185 AD), *Letter to Autolycus* 25 with being the first to write that Adam had been *nepios*, 'a child,' and needing to properly mature. Irenaeus follows that view in *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 11, 14. But it is just as reasonable to suspect that prior to Theophilus, some kind of view of Adam as not being static, but needing to mature in some way, was present in Christian thought.

> 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.'[25]

In debating the gnostics with their low view of matter, Irenaeus seems to revel even in the physical earth from which God formed Adam. He does not elevate the interiority of human rationality to be 'the image of God' as would Augustine and others who compared the individual's psychological thought process (thought, word, and will) to the Trinity in what is now known as the 'psychological model' of the Trinity. Instead, Irenaeus celebrates the physical form of man as somehow mirroring the divine form, although he does not explain this. I rather suspect that Irenaeus was thinking of the Hebraic, physical understanding of the oneness of male and female in marriage as being in the image of God, since it is that oneness which is life-bearing and life-giving, as reflected in the grammar of Genesis 1:27 and also the literary concern of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 where God makes all living beings to be life-bearing 'after its kind.' Irenaeus seems to be thinking this way, because he happily commingles phrases from Genesis 2 ('from the earth'; 'breathed on his face') and Genesis 1 ('image of God'; 'be like unto God'; 'rule all those things that were upon the earth') in his explanation of human creation in the *Demonstration*. Hence, I think Irenaeus had a relational (in fact, marital, apparently) and physical (though not reducible to the physical) understanding for what it meant for human beings to be in 'the image of God.' To the extent that he set about to answer the question of how an individual human being – and not just a married couple – was in 'the image of God,' Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* appealed to the relational identity of the Word-Son as the image of God. Each human being was meant to be in relation to God by the Spirit, in some sense mirroring an internal relation of the Son to the Father in the Spirit. Irenaeus' theological anthropology was relational to its core.[26] For Irenaeus, there was no individualistic notion of human personhood. This sets Irenaeus up to explain the fall in terms of damaged ontology and relationship, and the atonement in terms of restored ontology and relationship.

The Fall into Corruption

Third, Irenaeus understood human sin as being a corruption within human nature, a defacing of the likeness and/or image of God in physical and personal form, and a breaking in the relationship between God and man internalized into human flesh and reproduced by the human mind. In a comment on Genesis 3, Irenaeus held that the physical corruption in humanity is an expression of, and perhaps synonymous with, sin in us:

> 'Wherefore also He drove him out of Paradise, and removed him far from the tree of life, not because He envied him the tree of life, as some venture to assert, but because He pitied him, [and did not desire] that he should continue a sinner for ever, nor that the sin which surrounded him should be immortal, and evil interminable and irremediable. But He set a bound to his [state of] sin, by interposing death, and thus causing sin to cease, putting an end to it by the dissolution of the flesh, which should take place in the earth, so that man, ceasing at length to live to sin, and dying to it, might begin to live to God.'[27]

This may be surprising for those accustomed to thinking that God imposed death as a retributive punishment in retaliation for sinning, much like sending children to their room as punishment for stealing cookies. In the human case, the punishment is *in its essence* disconnected from the crime. But in the story of the fall, the punishment *is* the crime: Eating from the Tree of Knowledge is taking into one's self the power to define good and evil from within one's own self. It is in its very essence a seizure of God's prerogative to define good and evil, rebellion from God's moral and kingly authority, displacement of God with the individual self in the moral sense, and a wounding of one's very self because it implants into the human being a desire to be a relativistic absolutist – that is, the desire to define good and evil (to be an absolutist) but from within one's own self (to be relativistic) by being the standard and measure of all things, rather than allowing God to define good and evil for us. So human death, to Irenaeus, was an ontological consequence that was *forced upon God*. Moreover, the other consequences of the fall – pain in childbearing and futility in gardening (Gen.3:16 – 19) – were ontological as well. They are not additional punishment or retribution from God. They are simply the outgrowth of Adam and Eve's choice to try to separate themselves from God, the source of life. Human beings are wholly dependent on God for life and the production of

[25] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 11
[26] For an excellent discussion of Irenaeus' theological anthropology, see Matthew Craig Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009), ch.1. In particular, Steenberg notes that Irenaeus and Tertullian shared the view that the human soul grows in some sense with the human body, and that the Spirit of God gives life to the soul which mediates life to the body.
[27] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.23.6

more life; we are unable to be bearers of life and caretakers of life without Him. Anything having to do with producing more life would be difficult and frustrating.

Irenaeus' interpretation of God preventing human beings from immortalizing our own sinfulness is maintained by representatives of the Greek-speaking East Methodius of Olympus,[28] Athanasius of Alexandria,[29] and Gregory of Nazianzus,[30] and the bilingual Ambrose of Milan.[31] Three hundred years later, well after the Nicene period, the Byzantine theologian Maximus the Confessor maintained this view.[32] Tellingly, however, this view would be lost upon Tertullian in Latin-speaking Roman North Africa (see below). It appears to disappear from the record in the extant writings of Cyprian and Augustine, who interprets death and exile as retributive punishment for eating from the tree of knowledge.[33]

Irenaeus' position might also be surprising to those who have come to see death as the only enemy, or the greatest enemy. The apostle Paul said that death is the 'last enemy' (1 Cor.15:26), but that does not mean that death is the *only* enemy, or the *first* enemy, or even the *greatest* enemy. To Irenaeus, and the very significant patristic writers who followed him, death – in the sense of mortality due to our exile from the garden – does serve one productive purpose: it prevents us from immortalizing evil within our human nature. Death is an enemy, to be sure. But *the corruption of sin* in us is a *greater* and *prior* enemy. Death is also the enemy of another, more subtle and sinister, enemy.

For Irenaeus, Adam and Eve *forced God* to close access to the Tree of Life. God, being love, and having love for Adam and Eve and all the children who would come from them, was confronted by two options. Would God allow the rather likely possibility that human beings would immortalize the corruption of their human nature within themselves? Or would God instead interpose death as an instrument by which this fate could not happen? God chose the latter, because death could be overcome later by resurrection, and human beings could choose to receive into themselves the healing in Christ for their corruption. So death, though tragically unpleasant, was a type of mercy and pity.

Israel and the Sinai Covenant

Fourth, Irenaeus' understanding of the role of Israel and the Sinai covenant is vital. Irenaeus is unusual among patristic writers for the sheer volume of material he dedicates to analyzing – not simply quoting (as Justin Martyr did) – the Old Testament, and for the direct and indirect material by which he answers the question, 'Why did God appoint an Israel in the first place?' This is related to Irenaeus' defense of the Old Testament against the gnostic

[28] Methodius of Olympus (died 311 AD), *From the Discourse on the Resurrection* 1.4 says, 'In order, then, that man might not be an undying or ever-living evil, as would have been the case if sin were dominant within him, as it had sprung up in an immortal body, and was provided with immortal sustenance, God for this cause pronounced him mortal, and clothed him with mortality...'

[29] Athanasius of Alexandria (298 – 373 AD), *On the Incarnation* 8.1 says, 'For the Word, perceiving that no otherwise could the corruption of men be undone save by death as a necessary condition…'

[30] Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 390 AD), *Oration* 45 says, 'Yet here too he makes a gain, namely death and the cutting off of sin, in order that evil may not be immortal. Thus, his punishment is changed into a mercy, for it is in mercy, I am persuaded, that God inflicts punishment.'

[31] Ambrose of Milan (340 – 397 AD), *On the Psalms* 48 says, 'And if one consider accurately, it is not the death of our being, but of evil, for being continues, it is evil that perishes. That which has been rises again; would that as it is now free from sinning, so it were without former guilt! But this very thing is a proof that it is not the death of being, that we shall be the same persons as we were. And so we shall either pay the penalty of our sins, or attain to the reward of our good deeds.'

[32] Maximus the Confessor (580 – 662 AD), *Ad Thalassios* 44.5 says, 'The phrase, 'And now, lest he put forth his hand and take from the Tree of Life and live forever,' providentially produces, I think, the separation of things that cannot be mixed together, so that evil might not be immortal, being maintained in existence by participation in the good.'

[33] Augustine of Hippo (347 – 430 AD), *On Christian Doctrine* 1.14 says, 'We used our immortality so badly as to incur the penalty of death: Christ used His mortality so well as to restore us to life.' He speaks of 'penalty' without a qualified view that death served a constructive purpose. God imposed the first death – that of the body – upon us, to straightforwardly anticipate the second death, the eternal death, on the principle of divine retribution. In *On the Trinity* 4.12 he says, 'We desired therefore the one [the tree of knowledge] through wicked persuasion, the other [death] followed us by a *just condemnation*; and therefore it is written, 'God made not death,' since He was not Himself the cause of death; but yet death was inflicted on the sinner, *through His most just retribution. Just as the judge inflicts punishment on the guilty; yet it is not the justice of the judge, but the desert of the crime, which is the cause of the punishment*.' Whether Augustine's meaning holds together logically is another matter. Augustine's forensic and retributive orientation is particularly evident in *On the Trinity* 13.16, when he comments on Romans 5:1 – 10, uses the word 'death' more densely than any other place in the work, and says, 'a temporal death, which was not due, was rendered by the eternal Son of God, who was also the Son of man, whereby He might free them from an eternal death which was due... Therefore we shall be saved from wrath through Him; from the wrath certainly of God, which is nothing else but just retribution.' See also Augustine, *Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love* 25 – 27. While it may be true that Augustine recognized divine justice as operating restoratively in other ways (see Adonis Vidu, *Atonement, Law, and Justice: The Cross in Historical and Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), p.23 – 43), nevertheless regarding these two 'moments' of salvation history, Augustine saw a simple relation of demerit and divine retribution.

heresies. Our interest today is different. Because of Jewish suffering in history, especially due to medieval Christian persecution, and because of post-World War II regrets about anti-semitism within so-called 'Enlightenment' nation-states, Christian theologians must develop an adequate answer to this question, 'Why did God need, or appoint, an Israel in the first place?' To this, Christian theology – resting especially on the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Ecumenical Councils – can answer that Jesus needed to be truly human, which means that he needed to have a community of people who would physically protect and nurture him, and also spiritually and intellectually help him develop.

Therefore, God needed to protect and purify Israel. That explains on the one hand, to some degree, why God protected Noah from the violence of his peers, Abraham and Sarah from the predations of Sodom and Gomorrah, etc. It also explains on the other hand why God purified Israel from those within Israel who would subvert God's purpose, from the first generation of Israelites to false prophets and faithless kings. God needed a focus group – Israel – who would partner with Him to struggle against the corruption within human nature, produce a canonical written diagnosis of the problem, and hope for the cure in the Messiah. Given the human (Adamic) tendency to blame sinful choices on other people, circumstances, and God Himself, this was no small achievement. Thus, in order to produce the incarnation for humanity universally, God needed Jewish particularity. Irenaeus addresses this topic with more clarity than anyone else.

Irenaeus starts book 4 of *Against Heresies* with what sounds like a medical anthropology and medical diagnosis:

> 'For it is impossible for any one to heal the sick, if he has no knowledge of the disease of the patients.'[34]

God is like a good doctor who lays a challenging health regimen on His focus group, Israel. The first reason God appointed Israel, Irenaeus says, was because to demonstrate that sin was a terrible disease, and death was a terrible symptom.

> 'But the law coming, which was given by Moses, and testifying of sin that it is a sinner, did truly take away his (death's) kingdom, showing that he was no king, but a robber; and it revealed him as a murderer.'[35]

Irenaeus argues that the moral clarity expressed in the commandments of the Sinai covenant aimed at revealing the nature of sin and death. Both sin and death are unnatural, and not part of God's original good design. This produced hope in Israel, and not fatalism. Ultimately, God in Christ rejects both sin and death as foreign intruders.

The second reason why God appointed Israel, correspondingly, was to call for Israel's partnership in battling the corruption of sin within themselves. In the same passage, Irenaeus says:

> 'It [the Sinai covenant] laid, however, a weighty burden upon *man, who had sin in himself*, showing that he was liable to death. For as the law was spiritual, it merely made sin to stand out in relief, but did not destroy it.'[36]

God's aim was to get rid of the disease in His patients. Irenaeus recognizes that one of the biblical idioms for this was 'circumcision of the heart.' Physical 'circumcision' was an act, or a type, of healing.[37] It was then taken to represent the spiritual 'surgery' that people needed, which God called for with Israel's partnership, as they were meant to fully internalize God's commandments.[38] None of them were able to live up to it, however.

The third reason why God appointed Israel was to enlist them to document their self-diagnosis, and hope for God's cure in the messianic God-man. Irenaeus writes:

> '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 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

[34] Ibid 4.preface.2
[35] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.18.7, emphasis mine; see also 2.12.4; 3.18.1; 5.1.3
[36] Ibid 3.18.7, emphasis mine; see also 2.12.4; 3.18.1; 5.1.3
[37] Ibid 4.12.1
[38] Ibid 4.16.1 and note that in 4.16.5, Irenaeus speaks of the laws of Jesus (e.g. Mt.5:21 – 26 and 27 – 30, etc.) that addressed the human heart

> all things to Himself, and vivifies the dead.'[39]

'The law,' in Irenaeus' mind, wound up being impossible to fully uphold, as the Israelites would have stumbled over the tenth commandment, as the apostle Paul had discussed in Romans 7:14 – 25. But the law 'exhorted them' to believe in the Son of God. 'In the likeness of sinful flesh' here comes directly from Romans 8:3, which is how the apostle Paul saw the vexing problem of 'the flesh' to be resolved: through the agency of the Son healing his own human nature via internalizing God's commandments whereas the Israelites could not. Irenaeus also links John 3:14 – 15, John 12:32, Numbers 21:4 – 7, and Genesis 3:1 – 7 to this statement, showing that, in narrative form, a 'medical diagnosis' of sorts was written in 'the law,' which also prescribed a cure for the venom in the humanity of the Son of God.

The fourth reason why God appointed Israel was to prepare Israel and the Gentiles for the coming of the messiah. Irenaeus, again unusually among the fathers, addresses Jewish or Jewish-oriented questions like, 'Why did Jerusalem fall?' He replies, in 4.4.1 – 2, that there was appropriate fruit-bearing for a time and for a particular purpose. Irenaeus does not elaborate as much as he could, but presumably he would say that the temple arrangement, the sacrificial calendar cycle, and the Davidic monarchy served a purpose to foreshadow Jesus.[40] Irenaeus says that the Word

> 'at that time, indeed, by means of His patriarchs and prophets, was prefiguring and declaring beforehand future things, fulfilling His part by anticipation in the dispensations of God, and accustoming His inheritance to obey God, and to pass through the world as in a state of pilgrimage, to follow His word, and to indicate beforehand things to come. For with God there is nothing without purpose or due signification.'[41]

The law also trained Israelites in the virtues and ethical life, which is the fifth reason Irenaeus articulates.[42] The Sinai covenant, therefore, was not simply a legal backdrop against which God proved a supposed principle that He could punish people infinitely, as the Lutheran-Calvinist traditions would argue. Rather, God's revelation to Israel constituted real progress for humanity.[43] Irenaeus' language of 'becoming accustomed' is vital. With Abraham, God 'accustomed' man to follow His Word.[44] Because humanity had become 'accustomed' to the bonds of sin, God gave the law.[45] God was 'accustoming man to bear His Spirit.'[46]

Irenaeus may not have answered every question surrounding God's historical relationship with Israel. Our present day sensibilities prompt us to ask more of the biblical text than Irenaeus sought to answer in *Against Heresies* and *Demonstration*. For example, he does not seek to explain *why* God drowned human life in the flood of Noah, rained fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, or took the Egyptian firstborn in the Exodus, etc. But, one might wonder whether in his lost work, Irenaeus explicitly said that God needed to preserve both the safety of Israel (thus, hostile Gentiles) and the integrity of Israel (thus, opponents of Moses' leadership in Numbers, or Uzzah touching the ark in 2 Samuel 5, etc.) prior to Jesus' incarnation for the sake of Jesus' authentic humanity. Jesus had to be an infant and child raised by faithful Jewish parents, protected in a certain type of Jewish community, and presented to Jewish followers who were already sufficiently persuaded of God's goodness that they would follow an itinerant rabbi into the hostile Gentile world. Irenaeus would have surely said that after his crucifixion, Jesus descended to the realm of dead souls

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[39] Ibid 4.2.8
[40] Ibid 4.7 addresses the Old Testament theophanies of the Son appearing to Abraham, Moses, and others.
[41] Ibid 4.21.3
[42] Ibid 4.8.2, 'For the law commanded them to abstain from every servile work, that is, from all grasping after wealth which is procured by trading and by other worldly business; but it exhorted them to attend to the exercises of the soul, which consist in reflection, and to addresses of a beneficial kind for their neighbours' benefit.' In 4.8.3, Irenaeus extends the purpose of the law to educate God's people about general priestly roles and responsibilities: 'For David had been appointed a priest by God, although Saul persecuted him. For all the righteous possess the sacerdotal rank.'
[43] Ibid 4.9.3, 'For the new covenant having been known and preached by the prophets, He who was to carry it out according to the good pleasure of the Father was also preached, having been revealed to men as God pleased; that they might always make progress through believing in Him, and by means of the [successive] covenants, should gradually attain to perfect salvation.'
[44] Ibid 4.5.4
[45] Ibid 4.13.2
[46] Ibid 4.14.2, 'Thus it was, too, that God formed man at the first, because of His munificence; but chose the patriarchs for the sake of their salvation; and prepared a people beforehand, teaching the headstrong to follow God; and raised up prophets upon earth, accustoming man to bear His Spirit [within him], and to hold communion with God: He Himself, indeed, having need of nothing, but granting communion with Himself to those who stood in need of it, and sketching out, like an architect, the plan of salvation to those that pleased Him.'

(1 Pet.3:18; 4:6; Eph.4:11) to present himself to all who died before him, offering them salvation and deliverance from Hades.[47] Thus, God was doing good by preserving Israel, by preventing the opponents of Israel from menacing the humanity of Jesus and therefore their own salvation from sinfulness, and also from damaging their human nature further in the moment.

The Incarnation of the Son, by the Spirit
Fifth, Jesus' incarnation and bodily resurrection is God's affirmation of His commitment to physical matter in general, human bodies in particular, and the creation story as a whole. After he demonstrates from Scripture that the Word of God himself took human flesh in Jesus,[48] Irenaeus says that Jesus saves human nature in himself by destroying the sin in himself.

> Therefore, as I have already said, He caused man (human nature) to cleave to and to become, one with God. For unless man had overcome the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been legitimately vanquished… But the law coming, which was given by Moses, and testifying of sin that it is a sinner, did truly take away his (death's) kingdom, showing that he was no king, but a robber; and it revealed him as a murderer. It laid, however, a weighty burden upon *man, who had sin in himself*, showing that he was liable to death. For as the law was spiritual, it merely made sin to stand out in relief, but did not destroy it. For sin had no dominion over the spirit, but over man. For it behooved *Him who was to destroy sin*, and redeem man under the power of death, that *He should Himself be made that very same thing which he was, that is, man*; who had been drawn by sin into bondage, but was held by death, so that *sin should be destroyed by man*, and man should go forth from death. For as by the disobedience of the one man who was originally moulded from virgin soil, the many were made sinners, and forfeited life; so was it necessary that, by the obedience of one man, who was originally born from a virgin, many should be justified and receive salvation. Thus, then, was the Word of God made man, as also Moses says: 'God, true are His works.' But if, not having been made flesh, He did appear as if flesh, His work was not a true one. But what He did appear, that He also was: God recapitulated *in Himself* the ancient formation of man, that *He might kill sin*, deprive death of its power, and vivify man; and therefore His works are true.[49]

This is a very significant passage in Irenaeus. In it, he insists that Jesus came to resolve a problem within human nature itself, and offer back to us his renewed humanity. Irenaeus says this in three ways. First, he says here and elsewhere that Jesus took his humanity not from some other substance, like the virgin soil from which Adam was first taken, but from the virgin womb of Mary.[50] The Word of God did this to partake of the same human nature that we all share, to renew it and save it. He did not start a different type of human being, because that would have been of no help to us! This is why Irenaeus constantly referred to Jesus' person and work as the 'recapitulation' – or the summing up, or literally, the re-heading up – of all humanity. Taking this concept from Paul (Eph.1:10), Irenaeus says that Jesus is the 'second Adam' (Rom.5:12 – 21; 1 Cor.15:21 – 22; 45 – 49) the one from whom a new life passes into all other human beings.

In Irenaeus' teaching, human life itself is considered to have an intended, developmental shape, quite naturally from creation, regardless of the fall and notwithstanding it. So Jesus 'passed through every age' because he needed to 'fill' not just human nature as an abstract thing, but human nature in a developmental paradigm. Here is Irenaeus' famous statement:

> 'Being a Master, therefore, He also possessed the age of a Master [i.e. thirty years at least], not despising or evading any condition of humanity, nor setting aside in Himself that law which He had appointed for the human race, but sanctifying every age, by that period corresponding to it which belonged to Himself. For He came to save all through means of Himself – all, I say, who through Him are born again to God – infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission; a youth for

[47] Ibid 4.22.1
[48] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.18.7
[49] Ibid 3.18.7, emphasis mine; see also 2.12.4; 3.18.1; 5.1.3
[50] Ibid 3.21.10 says, 'Why, then, did not God again take dust, but wrought so that the formation should be made of Mary? It was that there might not be another formation called into being, nor any other which should [require to] be saved, but that the very same formation should be summed up [in Christ as had existed in Adam], the analogy having been preserved.' Cf.3.22.1 – 2

> youths, becoming an example to youths, and thus sanctifying them for the Lord. So likewise He was an old man for old men, that He might be a perfect Master for all, not merely as respects the setting forth of the truth, but also as regards age, sanctifying at the same time the aged also, and becoming an example to them likewise. Then, at last, He came on to death itself, that He might be 'the first-born from the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence,' the Prince of life, existing before all, and going before all.'[51]

The natural course of a human life is such that it needs to be filled by God in time, at each stage of life, in the mode of a personal biography. This Jesus did in his own human life, which is part of God saving every aspect of human life in Jesus of Nazareth. Hence, Irenaeus asserted that Jesus 'passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God.'[52]

God was always prepared to heal and redeem human nature, and recover human relational personhood for Himself. That is why, for Irenaeus, Jesus needed to save and redeem his own humanity first, for it was a fallen humanity which he took to himself. In the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, Irenaeus writes:

> 'Because death reigned over the flesh, it was right that through the flesh it should lose its force and let man go free from its oppression. *So the Word was made flesh, that, through that very flesh which sin had ruled and dominated, it should lose its force and be no longer in us*. And therefore our Lord took that same original formation as (His) entry into flesh, so that He might draw near and contend on behalf of the fathers, and conquer by Adam that which by Adam had stricken us down.'
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> 'And the trespass which came by the tree was undone by the tree of obedience, when, hearkening unto God, the Son of man was nailed to the tree; thereby putting away the knowledge of evil and bringing in and establishing the knowledge of good: now evil it is to disobey God, even as hearkening unto God is good… So then by the obedience wherewith He obeyed even unto death, hanging on the tree, He put away the old disobedience which was wrought in the tree.'
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> 'Thus then He gloriously achieved our redemption, and fulfilled the promise of the fathers, and *abolished the old disobedience*. The Son of God became Son of David and Son of Abraham; perfecting and summing up this in Himself, that He might make us to possess life. The Word of God was made flesh by the dispensation of the Virgin, to abolish death and make man live. For we were imprisoned by sin, being *born in sinfulness* and living under death. But God the Father was very merciful: He sent His creative Word, who in coming to deliver us came to *the very place and spot in which we had lost life, and brake the bonds of our fetters*. And His light appeared and made the darkness of the prison disappear, and hallowed our birth and destroyed death, loosing those same fetters in which we were enchained. And He manifested the resurrection, Himself becoming the first begotten of the dead, and *in Himself raising up man that was fallen*, lifting him up far above the heaven to the right hand of the glory of the Father: even as God promised by the prophet, saying: And I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen; that is, *the flesh* that was from David. And this our Lord Jesus Christ truly fulfilled, when He gloriously achieved our redemption, that He might truly raise us up, setting us free unto the Father.'[53]

The 'fallen tabernacle of David,' Jesus has raised up 'in himself': i.e. the sinful 'flesh' of David which he inherited from Adam and passed down to everyone in his royal line, including Jesus. Jesus, at his death, did not take some kind of retributive punishment saved up by God for man. Instead, he finally set human nature free from 'the bonds of our fetters' by 'in himself raising up man that was fallen.' Entering into death as a judgment upon his own fallen humanity, says Irenaeus, Jesus brought the exile sequence in Genesis full circle to its reversal. The disobedience by the tree by which Adam and Eve corrupted human nature, Jesus reversed on another tree by his final step of obedience, which consisted of 'putting away the knowledge of evil,' where 'evil' Irenaeus defines as 'to disobey God.' Jesus did away with the last possibility for his human nature to do evil, by dying, and then raising it anew. Redemption, Irenaeus therefore defines, is the setting free of our human nature from our imprisonment to 'sinfulness,' the sinfulness into which we were born.

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[51] Ibid 2.22.4; cf. 4.38.2
[52] Ibid 3.18.7
[53] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 32, 34, 37 – 38

This is the medical substitution atonement theory. It is a subset of the christus victor category, and arguably its only possible foundation, because it understands Christ as victorious over the internal enemy we face: sin indwelling us. Whereas other facets of the christus victor theory can emphasize the devil, or death, or some enemy external to us, the medical substitution atonement theory highlights the internal contradiction within our ontological and relational being: we are corrupted (ontology) and alienated and hostile (relational) to God. Those who mischaracterize the patristic atonement theology as merely Jesus paying a 'ransom' to the devil are grossly misunderstanding the mind of the early church, and misunderstanding the mechanism by which 'the flesh' (as Paul and John used that term in a technical sense to refer to the corruption in our nature) served as the point of influence by which the devil had access to us. The patristic and Nicene theologians were working in ontological and relational categories, and medical substitution was clearly their atonement theory. Already in Irenaeus we see a fine exposition of it, and this emphasis continued for centuries.

The Spirit's Work with the Son

Sixth, Irenaeus also incorporates the Holy Spirit along with the Son into the work of atonement. Interestingly, Irenaeus says that the Holy Spirit needed to become 'accustomed' to dwelling in humanity, first in Jesus, to therefore dwell in believers. As the Spirit's indwelling of believers is part and parcel of the reconciliation and communion Jesus brought about between humanity and God, the interrelation between the Son and the Spirit over the course of Jesus' life is very significant. Irenaeus takes the Spirit's descent upon Jesus in the Jordan baptism as a key milestone in becoming accustomed to ministering in and through human nature in principle, through the person of the Son:

> '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.'[54]

Scholar Anthony Briggman, in his exceptional 2012 work *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit*, says aptly:

> 'Irenaeus believes that the Spirit became accustomed (*adsuesco*) to dwell, rest, and work among human beings as Christ's Unction. Irenaeus considers the anointing of Jesus to involve not only the Spirit acting on Jesus but also the Spirit as acted upon. He does not say here that the Spirit created an environment within the humanity of Jesus suitable to his presence and work. Instead, he says the Spirit himself had to become accustomed to dwelling, resting, and working in the human environment. The need for the Holy Spirit to become accustomed… entails the presupposition that the Spirit was not prepared to perform and so could not have performed such works prior to the period of accustomization.'[55]

I believe Briggman goes a bit too far in leaving us with the impression from 3.17.1 alone that Irenaeus 'does not say here that the Spirit created an environment within the humanity of Jesus suitable to his presence and work.' For Irenaeus says that God 'accustomed' Abraham 'to follow the Word of God'[56] and 'accustomed' Israel and her prophets to 'bear His Spirit,'[57] 'accustoming His inheritance to obey God,'[58] because human beings have become 'accustomed' to our enslavement to sin after the fall,[59] and even 'accustomed to condemn the innocent, and to let the guilty go free.'[60] Moreover, Irenaeus says immediately after the passage Briggman quotes, in the very next chapter, 3.18.7, that the eternal Son of God corrected something within his human nature. He became 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.' It seems that the effects on the Spirit and on humanity – including Jesus' humanity – are *reciprocal*.[61]

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[54] Ibid 3.17.1
[55] Anthony Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.72
[56] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.5.4
[57] Ibid 4.14.2
[58] Ibid 4.21.3
[59] Ibid 4.13.2
[60] Ibid 4.26.3
[61] John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Origen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.109 recognizes the accustomization as reciprocal. Behr says, 'The whole process, the movement of the economy itself, is one of God and man becoming accustomed to each other: of man learning, throughout the unfolding of the Old Testament, to acknowledge and follow God; of the Spirit, in Christ, becoming

On the one hand, the Son, by the power of the Spirit, *accustomed his humanity* to the presence of the Spirit by cleansing his humanity of the corruption of sin through his life, death, and resurrection. On the other hand, the Son *accustomed the Spirit* to indwelling humanity, through his incarnation into flesh by the Spirit, reception of the Spirit at the Jordan-event baptism, triumph over sin by the Spirit especially at his death and resurrection, and eventual communication of the Spirit after his resurrection. But otherwise, I heartedly welcome Briggman's remarks about Irenaeus' linkage of the Spirit to the overall work of atonement.

In fact, Irenaeus says that Jesus' response to the accusations of the enemy is to commend his own human nature to the Holy Spirit to share with believers. Irenaeus creatively deploys the parable of the good Samaritan to refer to the fallen humanity of Jesus. Jesus' human nature is the man fallen among thieves, restored by the activity of the Son and Spirit:

> 'Wherefore we have need of the dew [i.e. Spirit] of God, that we be not consumed by fire, nor be rendered unfruitful, and that where we have an accuser there we may have also an Advocate, 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.'[62]

In this passage, Irenaeus would seem to agree that the healing of human nature in and through Jesus involved, or consisted in, accustomizing his humanity to the Spirit. This would suggest that the work of atonement can be stated in terms which refer to the Spirit and the intended intrinsic relation between the Spirit and humanity. This is very different from the penal substitutionary atonement theory, which offers no explanation for the Holy Spirit's role in the atonement per se, because it only envisions the Son absorbing some punitive divine wrath at his death.

Two last points remain to be considered: Sixth, Irenaeus' doctrine of hell and, seventh, his doctrine of human free will. Like a jigsaw puzzle, various pieces of theology have to fit with one another in a way that makes sense. These two pieces sit very close to the doctrine of the atonement and must be made to fit. Unfortunately, Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach do not attempt to understand the integrative aspect of theology in this way. If they had, they would see that they were misinterpreting the passages they cull from the patristic writers.

The Fire of Hell and Human Becoming

Seventh, Irenaeus' definition of hell illustrates the patristic teaching that would follow after him. It set the stage for the entire Eastern Orthodox Church, along with some Catholics and Protestants who, like me, are persuaded by the historical pedigree and trinitarian theological reasoning of the early Christians. This definition is very different from that held by penal substitution advocates. For penal substitution adherents, hell is God's prison system. In it, God keeps those who have rejected Christ in their earthly life, even though they almost certainly can be understood as wanting to get out of hell in eternity. This is simply in keeping with their doctrine of God's holiness-justice-wrath. If Jesus absorbed a certain amount of God's wrath on behalf of the elect, to uphold God's justice, then what remains for the non-elect is the proportion of God's wrath that did not fall on Christ. This effectively means that God has two main attributes: love (manifested towards the elect as mercy and grace) and wrath (manifested towards the non-elect as retributive justice). When we try to integrate these two divine attributes, it is unclear what we have. Most would simply say that at the core, then, God is simply arbitrary. This is difficult to integrate into the conviction that God is Triune, which means that love is God's primary attribute.

Irenaeus understood hell in a framework where God's love was the constant. He said that God is like the sun, with one attribute, not two. Therefore, when it comes to passages involving God 'causing' blindness or hardening Pharaoh's heart, etc., Irenaeus says that we must interpret that without making God arbitrary and dualistic in his fundamental character:

> 'For one and the same God [that blesses others] inflicts blindness upon those who do not believe, but who set Him at naught; just as the sun, which is a creature of His, [acts with regard] to those who, by reason of

accustomed to dwell in and to vivify man…' Behr seems to studiously avoid the question of the fallenness or unfallenness of Jesus' human nature. So he does not quite describe Jesus' human life as Jesus accustoming his humanity to bear the Spirit.

[62] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.17.3

> any weakness of the eyes cannot behold his light; but to those who believe in Him and follow Him, He grants a fuller and greater illumination of mind.'[63]
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> 'But God, foreknowing all things, prepared fit habitations for both, kindly conferring that light which they desire on those who seek after the light of incorruption, and resort to it; but for the despisers and mockers who avoid and turn themselves away from this light, and who do, as it were, *blind themselves*, He has prepared darkness suitable to persons who oppose the light, and He has inflicted an appropriate punishment upon those who try to avoid being subject to Him.'[64]

Hell, therefore, is not another attribute or face of God. Like the sun, God has a singular nature – love – and is not reducible to dueling attributes, which would ultimately make Him arbitrary. Hell is, in fact, the love of God: the love of God which is seeking to purify the person who happens to be resisting. But in this case, just as the person with weak or diseased eyes is pained by the light of the sun, so the person with a weakened or diseased nature is pained by the presence of God. Therefore, that person experiences the wrath of God against the corruption in their nature because the wrath of God is simply the love of God trying to burn away the impurity and sin and resistance which they do not want to give up, which they have chosen to identify with for all eternity precisely because they have rejected Jesus, the cleansed, purified, God-soaked new human being.[65] Other theologians, like fourth century theologian Gregory of Nyssa and the entire Eastern Orthodox communion, who Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach also do not examine, followed Irenaeus in this line of thinking. What explanation these authors might offer as to how the Eastern Orthodox tradition got it so wrong, in their opinion, is a matter on which they have remained silent thus far.

Human Free Will

The eighth piece of the theological puzzle that I want to examine is Irenaeus' understanding of human free will. The most vigorous defenders of penal substitution couple this doctrine with the doctrine of the omni-causal sovereign will of God. Their idea is that God is the immediate cause of everything, both good and evil, both belief and unbelief. He is involved in all secondary causes, like human decision-making, which calls human free will into question and makes God's character both good and evil. For if God Himself is really the one causing belief and unbelief, good and evil, predestining some for eternal bliss and others for eternal damnation, then God *is* both good and evil. According to penal substitution, human free will is difficult to uphold because logically, if Jesus absorbed a finite amount of God's wrath on the cross, then God Himself has limited the effects of the atonement to the elect, and has excluded the non-elect from the benefits of the atonement. This is why penal substitution and the omni-causal sovereignty of God go so well together. And this theological system has many defenders, not least the high federal Calvinists who believe in double predestination, and the Dutch Reformed who believe in single predestination.

Various supporters of penal substitution have tried to distance themselves from this straightforward, logical implication by holding onto contradictory assertions here and there – that human free will is still nevertheless real; that God can look ahead in time and see who would accept Jesus; that God is responding to human free choice in the future; etc. – but this can be shown to make one's systematic theology to be illogical and unclear. For example, why would God keep in hell those who want to get out and be with Him in eternity? Why not extend the scope of His own self-appeasement of His retributive justice (supposedly) to those who reject Him, at some point in time? If Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, why doesn't God do His own moral will and carry out the very commands He gives to us?

As is clear throughout Irenaeus' thought, human free will is vital to being made in the image of God. Therefore human free will is not an assertion to be slipped in around discussions of the atonement in order to preserve God's character from the stain of arbitrariness and evil. Rather, human free will finds deep theological ground from the

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[63] Ibid 4.29.1

[64] Ibid 4.39.4. Irenaeus, like Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 43 before him, understood God's foreknowledge as intuitive, not actual, and is caused by man's choices. Thus, God's foreknowledge is His understanding of all possible futures, not simply one future. If there are many possible futures, at least from important junctures in human life, then correspondingly, human free will is real. If there is only one future, it is not.

[65] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 69 seems to reiterate the same basic thought, but is a difficult passage. He produces a questionable translation and exegesis of Isaiah 53:8, but appears to say that the judgment of Jesus is upon the sinfulness he bore in himself, to bear away from humanity (68). That very 'judgment is for some unto salvation, and to some unto the torments of perdition… Now those [who crucified him] took away to themselves the judgment… And the judgment is that which by fire will be the destruction of the unbelievers at the end of the world.'

creation in the character of God. Irenaeus notes that God Himself guarantees human freedom:

> 'God has always preserved freedom and self-government in man.'[66]

He does not see human beings as individualistic, autonomous agents operating with their own battery packs, as it were. Rather, he sees God as the one who sustains our being and our free will in relation to Him. God's providential care and grace precede human freedom and cause human choices to be genuinely free and personal. Hence, Irenaeus articulates the same view of relational humanity and freedom upheld by God's providential care that John Cassian[67] and John of Damascus[68] would later teach. Here is a substantial passage from Irenaeus:

> '…God made man a free [agent] from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, to obey the behests (*ad utendum sententia*) of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will [towards us] is present with Him continually. And therefore does He give good counsel to all. And in man, as well as in angels, He has placed the power of choice (for angels are rational beings), so that those who had yielded obedience might justly possess what is good, given indeed by God, but preserved by themselves. On the other hand, they who have not obeyed shall, with justice, be not found in possession of the good, and shall receive condign punishment: for God did kindly bestow on them what was good; but they themselves did not diligently keep it, nor deem it something precious, but poured contempt upon His super-eminent goodness. Rejecting therefore the good, and as it were spewing it out, they shall all deservedly incur the just judgment of God, which also the Apostle Paul testifies in his Epistle to the Romans, where he says, 'But dost thou despise the riches of His goodness, and patience, and long-suffering, being ignorant that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.' 'But glory and honour,' he says, 'to every one that doeth good.' God therefore has given that which is good, as the apostle tells us in this Epistle, and they who work it shall receive glory and honour, because they have done that which is good when they had it in their power not to do it; but those who do it not shall receive the just judgment of God, because they did not work good when they had it in their power so to do.
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> 'But if some had been made by nature bad, and others good, these latter would not be deserving of praise for being good, for such were they created; nor would the former be reprehensible, for thus they were made [originally]. But since all men are of the same nature, able both to hold fast and to do what is good; and, on the other hand, having also the power to cast it from them and not to do it – some do justly receive praise even among men who are under the control of good laws (and much more from God), and obtain deserved testimony of their choice of good in general, and of persevering therein; but the others are blamed, and receive a just condemnation, because of their rejection of what is fair and good…'
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> 'For it is in man's power to disobey God, and to forfeit what is good… If then it were not in our power to do or not to do these things, what reason had the apostle, and much more the Lord Himself, to give us counsel to do some things, and to abstain from others? But 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.'[69]

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[66] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.15.2

[67] John Cassian, *Conferences* 13.12, says, 'It cannot then be doubted that there are by nature some seeds of goodness in every soul implanted by the kindness of the Creator: but unless these are quickened by the assistance of God, they will not be able to attain to an increase of perfection… And therefore the will always remains free in man, and can either neglect or delight in the grace of God. For the Apostle would not have commanded saying: 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling' [Philippians 2:13] had he not known that it could be advanced or neglected by us. But that men might not fancy that they had no need of Divine aid for the work of Salvation, he subjoins: 'For it is God that works in you both to will and to do, of His good pleasure.' And therefore he warns Timothy and says: 'Neglect not the grace of God which is in Thee,' [1 Timothy 4:14] and again: 'For which cause I exhort thee to stir up the grace of God which is in thee…' [2 Timothy 1:6]'

[68] John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book 2, chapter 30, says, ''Bear in mind, too, that virtue is a gift from God implanted in our nature, and that He Himself is the source and cause of all good, and without His co-operation and help we cannot will or do any good thing. But we have it in our power either to abide in virtue and follow God, Who calls us into ways of virtue, or to stray from paths of virtue, which is to dwell in wickedness, and to follow the devil who summons but cannot compel us. For wickedness is nothing else than the withdrawal of goodness, just as darkness is nothing else than the withdrawal of light. While then we abide in the natural state we abide in virtue, but when we deviate from the natural state, that is, from virtue, we come into an unnatural state and dwell in wickedness.'

[69] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.37.1 – 2, see the whole chapter; cf. 4.4.3; 4.39; 5:37

Irenaeus' teaching on the soul being the 'location' of human free will may also prove useful in the face of strict materialistic atheists who argue against free will. It is unclear to me whether neuroscience and quantum mechanics alone will decisively leave 'room' for human free will. Irenaeus is a helpful starting place for discussion on this subject. He simply summarizes the wide-ranging terms used in Scripture for different aspects of the human being, and relies on the concept of the incorporeal and immortal soul to ground his teaching on human freedom. In Irenaeus' usage, the soul is the conduit of the divine life of God into the physical body.[70] We might also find Irenaeus helpful to 'locate' self-consciousness in the soul, perhaps in a manner that is shared with the body and impacts, say, our brain development.

Irenaeus' quotation of Paul from Romans 2 would be worth an expanded discussion, because his logic argues against the popular Calvinist interpretation of the 'potter and clay' passage of Romans 9. Irenaeus says of Romans 9 and the potter-clay analogy:

> 'If, then, thou art God's workmanship, await the hand of thy Maker which creates everything in due time; in due time as far as thou art concerned, whose creation is being carried out. Offer to Him thy heart in a soft and tractable state, and preserve the form in which the Creator has fashioned thee, having moisture in thyself, lest, by becoming hardened, thou lose the impressions of His fingers. But by preserving the framework thou shalt ascend to that which is perfect, for the moist clay which is in thee is hidden [there] by the workmanship of God. His hand fashioned thy substance; He will cover thee over [too] within and without with pure gold and silver, and He will adorn thee to such a degree, that even 'the King Himself shall have pleasure in thy beauty.' But if thou, being obstinately hardened, dost reject the operation of His skill, and show thyself ungrateful towards Him, because thou wert created a [mere] man, by becoming thus ungrateful to God, thou hast at once lost both His workmanship and life. For creation is an attribute of the goodness of God but to be created is that of human nature. If then, thou shalt deliver up to Him what is thine, that is, faith towards Him and subjection, thou shalt receive His handiwork, and shall be a perfect work of God.'[71]

In Irenaeus, human free will is connected to why the ontological-medical substitution atonement theory works the way it does. God has worked out a way to purify human beings in a loving way consistent with His own loving nature. God had to personally acquire a human body in the person of His Son and by His Spirit. He had to heal human nature of the sinful corruption that stained it – the true object of His wrath – through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. And God offers the new humanity of Jesus back to us by the Spirit in order to purify us. For Irenaeus, the atonement's purpose is to cleanse and purify us of our corruption. Thus does God remain committed to human free will from start to finish because of His love for us and because He will not damage His own image in us by overriding our freedom: 'that the Church may be fashioned after the image of His Son, and that man may finally be brought to maturity at some future time, becoming ripe through such privileges to see and comprehend God.'[72] I find it very significant that the early Christian writers uniformly believed in human free will for the same reasons Irenaeus did.[73] Not until Augustine would controversy erupt about it.[74]

Making Sense of Creation and Fall: Theology and Theodicy Retrospectively

One small correction I would make in Irenaeus' articulation is when he considers the question, 'Could not God have exhibited man as perfect from beginning?' and answers with, 'It was possible for God Himself to have made man perfect from the first, but man could not receive this [perfection], being as yet an infant.'[75] Immediately afterwards, he says again, 'God had power at the beginning to grant perfection to man; but as the latter was only recently created, he could not possibly have received it, or even if he had received it, could he have contained it, or containing it, could he have retained it.'[76] Irenaeus uses the term 'perfect' in two different ways here, which makes

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[70] Ibid 2.33.4; 2.34.4; 5.7.1. Irenaeus even had a spatial conception of the soul: 'Souls themselves possess the figure of the body in which they dwell, for they have been adapted to the vessel in which they exist' (2.19.6). Steenberg, p.39 – 40, notes that Irenaeus agreed with Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum* 1.5; Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 18, 20 and *Dialogue with Trypho* 5; and Tertullian of Carthage, *DA* 5 – 9, especially 7.1 and 9.4.

[71] Ibid 4.39.2, see the whole chapter

[72] Ibid 4.37.7

[73] See my collection of citations, *Free Will and God's Grace in the Early Church Fathers*, available here: https://www.anastasiscenter.org/gods-goodness-jesus

[74] Seraphim Rose, *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church* (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2017)

[75] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.38.1

[76] Ibid 4.38.2.

his answer a bit elusive and self-contradictory. Is 'perfection' something that is a given condition in one's self? Or is 'perfection' something that is conferred from outside one's self? Irenaeus uses the term in both ways.

I believe Irenaeus relies overly much on the analogy of infancy for Adam, using physical infancy as an analogy for experiential and spiritual infancy. For the question can still be asked, 'So if God could have created Adam as 'an adult,' with already perfected love for God based on perfect knowledge of God, why did He not do so?'[77] To this Irenaeus has no answer. This silence is strange, because Irenaeus himself says, 'With God there is nothing without purpose or due signification.'[78] If God *could* have done something better *but did not*, what explanation can be offered for that? On this detail, Irenaeus might not be able to uphold his own stated conviction. Others fault Irenaeus for his theodicy, because he allows for an arbitrariness in God which resulted in suffering and evil.

I would have preferred, and I think it would have been even more consistent of him, if Irenaeus had answered, 'It was not possible for God to do so.' Irenaeus already had the framework for saying that. If God has a non-coercive love towards humanity, as Irenaeus has already said,[79] and even *is* non-coercive love in God's own being, as I would say, then He *could not possibly* create Adam and Eve with an already perfected love for Him, for that would not be a love they had personally chosen. Nor could God create them with an already perfect knowledge of Himself, for that would entail them somehow sharing the mind of God directly, and it is doubtful that the finite could comprehend the infinite in such a way. So God had to create them with the desire to receive from Him and an inclination to love Him, but yet at one small step removed from Himself.

If this is so, then God actually *had* to create the tree of life in the garden. He *had* to *invite* without coercion Adam, Eve, and their descendants to participate more deeply in His own divine life in a physically immortal and spiritually ever-increasing mode, which Irenaeus had already deduced of the tree of life, as I quoted earlier.[80] To an unfallen human being, the tree of life would have had the effect of sealing our will for God and uncorrupted human nature with divine life and the orientation of our personhood as directed outwards towards God, such that we would perfect our ontological freedom as relational creatures designed to depend on God and to constantly ascend intellectually and spiritually towards Him. In other words, under the necessity of authentic love, God *had* to create humanity so they might *freely* choose to *always* choose Him forever. It could not be automatic.

God also *had* to create the tree of knowledge of good and evil to invite us to leave the defining of good and evil with Him, and not take that power into ourselves. The second tree would have given human beings the knowledge of good, as we grew in relationship, love, and goodness. It would have also yielded human beings the knowledge of evil, as we imagined what it might mean to usurp God's place, or take up a posture to harm or alienate others, and experience the loss of the relationship, love, and goodness that we had gained. Adam experientially knew what being 'alone' had been like, after seeing all the animals parade by him in male-female pairs: 'not good,' by God's own assessment (Gen.2:18). Eve could imagine the aloneness even if she had never experienced it personally herself. If unfallen, they had had a child, and felt the joy of parenthood, they could *imagine* losing that child and the impoverishment of loss, Irenaeus says. The bishop maintains that through 'mental power man knew both the good of obedience and the evil of disobedience.'[81] But they did not have to actually abandon, harm, or alienate that child in reality. They could simply imagine reversing their growth in relationship, love, and goodness. Irenaeus does not believe in a dualistic pedagogy where human beings must do and experience evil personally in order to appreciate goodness. God is good and wise enough to design a world and human nature so that evil is never logically necessary.

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[77] Steenberg, p.41, offers an answer which does not fully suffice, nor does he answer the objection I raise here.
[78] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.21.3
[79] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.4.3; 4.37; 4.39; 5:37
[80] Ibid 3.23.6
[81] Ibid 4.39.1 stresses the role of the mind to think through the options of good and evil. But Irenaeus does not mean that we must *do* evil in order to know it. Irenaeus refers to 'the eye of the mind, receiving experience of both, may with judgment make choice of the better things…' But again, Irenaeus is referring to the activity of 'the mind.' The mind receives experience of both, by revelation and by growth in goodness, as I have suggested above. This is why Irenaeus can also say of the 'evil thing which deprives him of life, that is disobedience to God, [he] *may never attempt it at all*.' (italics mine) Irenaeus then says that the tongue tastes sweet and bitter, the eye sees black and white, the ear hears different sounds, and 'so also does the mind, receiving through the experience of both the knowledge of what is good, become more tenacious of its preservation, by acting in obedience to God: in the first place, casting away, by means of [mental, intellectual] repentance, disobedience, as being something disagreeable and nauseous; and afterwards coming to understand what it really is, that it is contrary to goodness and sweetness, *so that the mind may never even attempt to taste disobedience to God.*' (italics mine) The intellectual, reflective, and imaginative activities of the mind are evident.

In effect, God did design the second tree to produce in us the knowledge of good and evil, but through the experience of growing in goodness and rejecting the evil, while we left its fruit alone, and its power in God's domain. Leaving the fruit uneaten would have been an act of trust and love. The one heinous act by which all of God's loving order and good authority could be rejected was taking the fruit from the tree of knowledge. And that, too, God had to offer as a non-coerced choice. It was bound up in His love for us.

Hence, the garden in Genesis was the *only possible world* God could have made for humanity. It flowed from His commitments and His character. This necessity removes all accusations against God of being arbitrary or of taking an unnecessary risk of letting suffering and evil materialize. Irenaeus himself was not far from offering this answer: 'It was *not even possible* for God to create man perfect from the beginning, because the definition of perfection itself involves an active choice.' All the elements were actually there in his biblical exposition and theology. Irenaeus' conviction can be maintained with this understanding: 'With God there is nothing without purpose or due signification.'[82]

Irenaeus' written statements about the positive purpose of the tree of knowledge correspond to another second century work, the *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*. Taken together, Irenaeus and the *Epistle to Diognetus* indicate that the Christian community in the second century believed that God had an original, positive purpose for the tree of knowledge:

> "For in this place the tree of knowledge and the tree of life have been planted; but it is not the tree of knowledge that destroys — it is disobedience that proves destructive. Nor truly are those words without significance which are written, how God from the beginning planted the tree of life in the midst of paradise, revealing through knowledge the way to life, and when those who were first formed did not use this [knowledge] properly, they were, through the fraud of the Serpent, stripped naked. For neither can life exist without knowledge, nor is knowledge secure without life. Wherefore both were planted close together."[83]

Although *Diognetus* does not explain how the tree granted true knowledge of good and evil, the letter nevertheless affirms points that corroborate my interpretation of both Irenaeus and Genesis itself. God intended human beings to grow in both life and knowledge together. God intended the tree of life and the tree of knowledge to reflect complementary principles from creation, not merely from the fall. Hence, God expected human beings to grow in the knowledge of both good and evil, through the direct participatory experience of goodness and life, and the knowledge of evil by imagining undoing one's own growth in goodness and life. Disobedience, not the tree of knowledge per se, was destructive for humanity and God's original purpose. Once again, the garden in Genesis was the only possible world God could have made for humanity, because God made human beings to grow. Both life and knowledge of good and evil are only possible through growth.

Shifting gears from the biblical narrative to the language of the creeds and councils of the church leads me to the following technical discussion of personhood, nature, freedom, and love in the cases of both God and humanity. In the case of the Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cannot choose to turn away from each other. Why not? Because their divine persons are relationally fixed in love towards one another harmoniously.[84] Their love is unbreakable. Now is that a lack of freedom on God's part? Absolutely not. For this is an aspect of the divine nature and the eternal triune relations. God's constant choices to love flow from His nature. And 'freedom,' describing God's uncoerced choice, must be defined as 'free according to one's nature.' Freedom in theological

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[82] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.21.3

[83] *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus* ch.12

[84] Greek Orthodox theologian and philosopher Christos Yannaras, *Person and Eros* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007), p.5 reminds us that the term for *person* is 'a referential reality. The referential character of the term is revealed fundamentally by its primitive use, that is, by its grammatical construction and etymology. The preposition *pros* ("towards") together with the noun *ops* (*opos* in the genitive), which means "eye," "face," "countenance," form the composite word *pros-opon*: I have my face turned towards someone or something; I am opposite someone or something. The word thus functioned initially as a term indicating an immediate reference, a relationship.' It is vital to recall that the Greek term for person (*prosopon*), as well as the Latin term (*persona*), were used in the Greek and Roman theater to indicate the 'masks' or 'faces' that the actors wore. When Christians brought this term into settled formal theological discourse by the time of Nicea (325 AD), the divine 'persons' were understood to be intrinsically and eternally persons-in-relation, 'facing' one another as it were. And we as human persons are always persons-in-relation as well, although our orientation in relationship, and experience of our relationship with God, is shaped by our nature and determined by our choices. See below.

discourse cannot be defined as 'freedom *from* one's own nature,' as if one's own nature can be rendered moot or considered plastic, which tends to be how postmoderns or technological optimists define it as they seek to 'transcend' the human. God cannot 'transcend' His own nature; that is a logical impossibility. This God who is Triune in His very being always loves, unhindered and unobstructed, because to not love would be a lapse into evil – that would be a betrayal of God's own divine nature, an impossibility for God whose very nature is love.

What about in the case of humanity? This formal language of the great church councils can be deployed to answer Irenaeus' own question in a way better than Irenaeus did. Why could God not create human beings to love Him irrevocably and perfectly from the start? Because to do so would render human beings into static robots and automatons. But that is not possible, both from the standpoint of God's character and from the definition of the human, for the two things are linked. Finite beings in conscious relation with the infinite God of love requires ever-deepening growth and awareness of that growth. What energy provides the movement? Since God is uncoerced by any force outside Himself, human beings made in God's image must be uncoerced from any force outside themselves, including God Himself. But there must be some inner inclination towards God which comes from within: that is our own human nature, desiring union with our Creator. This is evidenced by: our desire for love, belonging, and connection; our desire for beauty; our desire to anchor our definition of good and evil in something rational, even if we must surrender our desire to define it for ourselves; our desire to live in a metanarrative where good triumphs over evil; our desire for meaning and significance; etc. All these desires point to God, the source and author of love, beauty, goodness, etc. In order for human love to be genuine, human beings would have to choose to love God in an uncoerced manner, *to perfect our natures and our freedom in love for God*, to be united with Him. In other words, God *had* to create human beings as human *becomings*, called to be lovingly united with Himself, so that in that union, we could henceforth be ever-deepening as finite creatures experiencing infinite love. For God to do the impossible, and create human nature already fixed from the start, and human personhood as already determined in an orientation of other-love, would mean that human love would not be a true choice. In such a situation, human love would be something less than love. And human beings would be something less than human. If we are ultimately only acted upon, and not actors ourselves, then we would ultimately be indistinct from the rocks and grass of the created universe – a mirror passively reflecting objects, but not the image of God.

So God had to create human beings one very short step removed from having their human nature fixed in loving union with Him, and personhood ('face') fixed in an outward and not self-oriented direction, so we might freely choose to always choose God forever. God might have freely chosen to never create. Nothing was externally coercing God to do so, and contrary to process theologians, God had no internal need to create in order to become more fulfilled or complete as a being. But given that God did choose to create, God's loving, triune nature itself made logically necessary the original conditions of the garden for Adam and Eve. God's character of love, given His free decision to create, required human development to happen in a narrative mode, human nature to be just one small step away from permanent union with God, human personhood to be one small step away from a being relationality fixed in facing God and beholding God, and human freedom to be perfected by love and through love, to always love God. And thus, the garden of Eden, the two trees, and the necessity of a personal narrative of development are all *logical necessities resulting from* God's free, spontaneous, and unconditioned choice to create us. If the Son's *eternal*, relational choice to be loved and love the Father in the Spirit *reflects and constitutes* His very nature and personhood, then this impacts how we define human beings. We are also beings who are becoming, where our *temporal*, relational choice to be loved and love God will reflect and constitute our nature and personhood.

Objection 1: A Penal Substitutionary Interpretation of Irenaeus

I will now evaluate two scholars who disagree with this assessment of Irenaeus' understanding of atonement. The outstanding Australian Patristics scholar Eric Osborn maintains that Irenaeus believed that we inherit the *guilt* of Adam and Eve. If that is true, then some doctrine of penal substitution built on God's retributive justice is not too far away. So Osborn's claim bears thorough investigation. Quoting two passages from Irenaeus, Osborn says, 'In the beginning we were led captive in Adam (5.21.1) and *we committed the sin* in the garden against Christ himself (5.17.1). Therefore Irenaeus understands original sin at least in the limited sense of *inherited guilt*.'[85] In the first of those quotations, Irenaeus says:

> '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.'

I find it unlikely that Irenaeus meant that we are captives to Adam's *guilt* when he writes, 'captives in Adam.' Most historians and theologians attribute the theory of 'inherited guilt' to Augustine (354 – 430 AD) who by their accounts was the first to teach this.[86] Augustine's corollary (or motivation?) was to strengthen infant baptism. He held that infants who died prior to baptism went to hell, albeit the least intense gradation of hell, which was envisioned as a shadowy existence without pain but without bliss. By contrast, the Eastern Greek-speaking theologians, exemplified by Gregory of Nyssa, who wrote on this very topic, believed that they had to stay silent when considering the question of infants who died prematurely.[87] Eastern Orthodox theologian and philosopher David Bentley Hart faults Augustine for not being conversant enough in Greek, and using a mistranslated Latin copy of Romans 5 to reach conclusions about what the meaning of the phrase 'in Adam.'[88] It is historically unlikely that Irenaeus made that mistake, or wanted to be read that way, as no one following him understood him to mean that, despite the very wide circulation of *Against Heresies* (see below).

Also, although Irenaeus does not quote Ezekiel 18 explicitly in *Against Heresies* and *Demonstration*, we are on safe ground to assume he knew it and considered it. In a very involved discussion, Ezekiel says that God will *not* attribute the sins of the father to the son as guilt, nor vice versa (Ezk.18:20). Ezekiel's statement refers especially to the new covenant in the Spirit, which Irenaeus understood well, as he quoted Ezekiel quite strategically to make his points.[89] The significance of this passage is well known, as the doctrine of original sin defined as heritable guilt poses a well-known problem in relation to it. Would God hold the guilt of Adam and Eve against all their descendants, in direct disagreement with Ezekiel 18? Would Irenaeus assert such a thing? I find it doubtful.

Any theory of inherited Adamic guilt must answer the question of how Jesus could be human and yet not guilty at conception of Adam's sin. It must therefore offer a correlate: something special but unwarranted about Mary of Nazareth. Because Osborn projects this problem onto Irenaeus, he seems to feel that he must rescue Irenaeus, too. Correspondingly, Osborn writes in a *footnote*, curiously, 'The purity of Christ and his mother is seen as the great exception within a fallen race.'[90] Exceptional in what sense? He seems to read Irenaeus' phrase, 'the pure One opening purely that pure womb which regenerates men unto God, and which He Himself made pure'[91] as meaning that Jesus at conception instantly purified his humanity from the fallenness of Adam's flesh, and the womb of his mother, as well as her personhood perhaps (?), from Adamic guilt. But if so, is this really a plausible reading of Irenaeus? Or plausible in general?

Contra Osborn, I maintain that Irenaeus is referring to Mary's *virginal* status, not an *unfallen* status. Another

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[85] Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.218 emphasis mine
[86] Myk Habets and Bobby Grow, *Evangelical Calvinism: Essays Resourcing the Continuing Reformation of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), ch.11
[87] Gregory of Nyssa, *On Infants' Early Deaths*; see Habets and Grow, ch.11
[88] David Bentley Hart, 'Traditio Deformis,' *First Things* (May 2015); https://www.firstthings.com/article/2015/05/traditio-deformis; last accessed June 16, 2015
[89] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.15.1 quotes Ezk.20:24 with reference to the limitations of the Sinai covenant with regard to the transformation of the human heart. On many occasions, Irenaeus quotes Ezekiel to discuss the new covenant, the new heart, the promised Holy Spirit, and resurrection: Ezk.36:26 in *AH* 3.33.14; Ezk.37 in *AH* 5.15.1 and 5.34.1; Ezk.28:25 – 26 in *AH* 5.34.1; Ezk.11:19 in *Demonstration* 93. Irenaeus is clear about Ezekiel's subject matter.
[90] Osborn, p.218; footnote 24
[91] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.33.11

patristics scholar, John Behr, points out that in Irenaeus,[92] Mary serves as a 'recircling' [*recirculationem*] of Eve.[93] Given Irenaeus' fondness for pointing out the strategic repetition in the biblical story, he probably means this: the virgin Eve was disobedient while yet unfallen; but the virgin Mary was obedient while still being fallen. Mary retold Eve's story, not from within an unfallen human nature in the luxury of a garden, but from within the confines of her fallen humanity. She had to battle disbelief as part of her embattled people. This is similar to how Jesus retold Israel's story and Adam's story not from the ease of the garden but from the hard environs of the wilderness, Israel's captivity to the Gentiles, and the cross. The retelling, the *recircling*, is admirable as a victory precisely because our later protagonists had to make their faithful choices, and did so. They proved more faithful than their predecessors who made *unfaithful* choices. What is more, they did so under the harder conditions of the fall, which were in fact *caused* by the former.

Moreover, Irenaeus also saw Mary as a fulfillment of the literary theme running through the Hebrew Scriptures concerning God giving the barren woman fruitfulness (Isa.54:1; Gal.4:27), Isaiah's prophecy in particular. Significantly, barrenness in women was a Hebrew idiom marking life in the condition of the fall, and Irenaeus demonstrates an understanding of this.[94] This understanding lends weight to the impression that Irenaeus believed that Mary, while making the great and admirable choice to become the mother of the Messiah, was by all accounts *fallen* in her own human nature. It must be admitted by all that viewing Mary as sharing in our common fallen humanity is the most logical position.

And if Mary shared in our fallen humanity, did she not provide the material humanity from which Jesus drew his own humanity? Osborn's otherwise careful handling of Irenaeus logically requires that Jesus struggle against fallen Adamic humanity (e.g. *AH* 3.19.3) to decisively and finally *correct* it in his death and resurrection. By contrast, Behr appropriately names a chapter in his book on Irenaeus, 'Recapitulation: Correction and Perfection.'[95] Osborn seems to retreat from seeing or stating this point clearly: He says, 'Christ shares our *mortal* nature'[96] all the while highlighting the theme of *participation* in Irenaeus. But what other humanity was available for Jesus to *participate in*? And how else can we, while fallen, *participate* in the Spirit if Jesus did not already *participate* in our fallen humanity first?

Osborn also believes that Irenaeus believed that all humanity actively sinned against God in Adam, by a second reference to this passage:

> 'Now this being is the Creator (Demiurgus), who is, in respect of His love, the Father; but in respect of His power, He is Lord; and in respect of His wisdom, our Maker and Fashioner; by transgressing whose commandment we became His enemies. And therefore in the last times the Lord has restored us into friendship through His incarnation, having become 'the Mediator between God and men;' [1 Tim.2:5] propitiating indeed for us the Father against whom we had sinned, and cancelling (*consolatus*) our disobedience by His own obedience; conferring also upon us the gift of communion with, and subjection to, our Maker. For this reason also He has taught us to say in prayer, 'And forgive us our debts;' [Mt.6:12] since indeed He is our Father, whose debtors we were, having transgressed His commandments. But who is this Being? Is He some unknown one, and a Father who gives no commandment to any one? Or is He the God who is proclaimed in the Scriptures, to whom we were debtors, having transgressed His commandment? Now the commandment was given to man by the Word. For Adam, it is said, 'heard the voice of the Lord God' [Gen.3:8]. Rightly then does His Word say to man, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee' [Mt.9:2; Lk.5:20]. He, the same against whom we had sinned in the beginning, grants forgiveness of sins in the end. But if indeed we had disobeyed the command of any other, while it was a different being who said, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee;' such a one is neither good, nor true, nor just. For how can he be good, who does not give from what belongs to himself? Or how can he be just, who snatches away the goods of another? And in what way can sins be truly remitted, unless that He against whom we have sinned has Himself granted remission 'through the bowels of mercy of our God,' in which 'He has visited us' [Lk.1:78] through His Son?[97]

[92] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.22.4
[93] John Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.173 – 5
[94] Behr, p.173, quoting 1.10.3
[95] Behr, p.97 – 104
[96] Osborn, p.259, emphasis mine
[97] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 5.17.1

Irenaeus says God is owed a 'debt' and had to be 'propitiated.' Does this not mean, as Osborn suggests, that a framework of guilt and retribution is in place in Irenaeus' mind? Now it is true that 'by transgressing [God's original] commandment we became His enemies.' But not in the sense that we became guilty parties pleading for mercy, deserving retributive justice and wrath from a God who pays out retribution in like manner. Rather, we became His enemies by wanting to define good and evil from within ourselves, and by asserting a desire to be our own gods. We became God's enemies, ontologically and relationally, expressed by our own resistance towards Him. This is why Irenaeus adds that Jesus through his incarnation 'conferr[ed] upon us the gift of communion with, *and subjection to*, our Maker.' *Subjection* to God is an inseparable part of the gift of communion that is conferred by Jesus. If this is so, then Irenaeus is not defining the problem of sin legally and penally, as if human beings who are otherwise cooperative with God might survive the divine wrath given our blemished track record. No: He is concerned about how the problem of the bent and weakened will of humanity might be brought back into alignment with God, that we might bear the image and likeness of our Creator once again, rather than resist Him. When Irenaeus speaks of Christ giving us the gift of communion with and *subjection to* our Maker, he is already anticipating in seminal form the insight of Maximus the Confessor about Jesus healing the human will in himself. The Father is 'propitiated' when that which is in us which resists God's commandments is abolished.

Similarly, Irenaeus speaks of God propitiating Himself in an ontological and relational sense: only when the corruption of sin died in Christ with him, when the object proper to God's wrath – the corruption of sin – was destroyed by death, that Christ in love and by his Spirit might share his new humanity with us to gradually displace the corruption of sin in us. The language of debt, both in Scripture and by extension in Irenaeus, is often mistakenly transported into the framework of a Latin satisfaction motif. Whenever Jesus used monetary figures as an analogy, he used it to illustrate the *ridiculousness* of comparing people's sinful actions as if they fell into low and high debt categories (e.g. Mt.18:23 – 35; Lk.7:36 – 50). That is, Jesus used financial debt as a figure for sin whenever his opponents were comparing 'levels of sinful actions,' to show that *human sinful actions measured against legal standards was not the appropriate way to understand our indebtedness to God*. Our debt is measured against the calling to be whole and healed image-bearers: 'It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick' (Mt.9:12; Lk.5:31). Equally problematic is what this model makes of God. When people take 'debt' as a penal or financial issue before God, this inappropriately turns God into a debt-collector who is concerned about something *external* to the human person or *extracted from* the person: God demands a payment from humanity to satisfy either His offended justice (as in Calvin) or honor (as in Anselm). In this model, God desires to collect on the debt; humanity is penniless and unable to render payment for what is required. Hence Jesus steps forward to do what humanity could not: either suffer an infinite punishment (as in Calvin) or render an appropriately full and honoring obedience (as in Anselm).

Irenaeus does not fall into that problem. When he uses the word 'debt' he is actually referring to the responsibility of each human person to undo the damage done to one's self – damage both from Adam and from one's own self. He uses the phrase 'remitting sins,' which means 'putting away sins' or 'delivering/releasing from sins' as it does in Scripture. It is not a change of mind in God, but a change of state in us. And correspondingly, in the same chapter, he links 'remitting sins' to *healing humanity*:

> 'Therefore, by remitting sins, He did indeed *heal* man, while He also manifested Himself who He was. For if no one can forgive sins but God alone, while the Lord remitted them and *healed* men, it is plain that He was Himself the Word of God made the Son of man, receiving from the Father the power of remission of sins; since He was man, and since He was God, in order that since as man He suffered for us, so as God He might have compassion on us, and forgive us our debts, in which we were made debtors to God our Creator. And therefore David said beforehand, 'Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord has not imputed sin' [Ps.32:1 – 2]; pointing out thus that remission of sins which follows upon His advent, by which 'He has destroyed the handwriting' of our debt, and 'fastened it to the cross' [Col.2:14]; so that as by means of a tree we were made debtors to God, [so also] by means of a tree we may obtain the remission of our debt.'[98]

Irenaeus produces a fascinating exegesis of Colossians 2:14. Whereas N.T. Wright views the 'handwriting' fastened

[98] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 5.17.3

to the cross as the Sinai Law,[99] Irenaeus equates it to *the corruption of sin in the human nature of Jesus*. It is not the Sinai covenant which made human beings 'debtors to God.' That happened, rather, 'by means of a tree.' The Sinai covenant was simply the chief means God used to identify and diagnose it. These views ultimately might not be mutually exclusive, as there may have been a poetic elision between the two concepts in Paul's mind, via Jeremiah's depiction of the human heart as a tablet with sin inscribed on it (Jer.17:1 – 10). Jeremiah indicates that the human heart was so deeply etched with the writing of sin that God would have to personally reinscribe His commandments upon it (Jer.31:31 – 34). Jeremiah drew out from the Pentateuchal narrative the parallelism between the damaged human heart residing in the human being, and the tablets of the law residing in the sanctuary in which God 'dressed' like the high priest – like the human being representing Israel's side of the covenant. The second copy of the tablets (Ex.34:18 – 35) surely carried with them the memory of the first copy being broken by Moses when Israel sinned with the golden calves and broke the covenant as soon as it had started (Ex.32:1 – 29). We owe a debt to God to return our human nature to God whole and intact, which is expressed *both* in our current, fallen human nature, and also by the stone tablets of the Sinai covenant. That is why I detect a legitimate elision of concepts in the minds of Jeremiah and Paul. But the fall preceded the Sinai covenant, of course. And thus, I favor Irenaeus' exegetical handling of Colossians 2:14.

Irenaeus' penchant for poetry and sensitivity to the repeated themes of the biblical story shines again. His phrase, 'As by means of a tree we were made debtors to God,' means that Adam corrupted human nature by eating from the Tree of Knowledge and inscribed that legacy onto all humanity, creating our obligation to overcome that corruption. The Sinai Law expressed that obligation within the covenant with Israel (Rom.7:7 – 8:4), as Irenaeus is well aware. Irenaeus ascribed very positive value to the law as a 'servant who escorts a child to school' (the original meaning of 'pedagogue' in Gal.3:24) and guide to Israel, pointing them to the Messiah for healing.[100] But 'by means of a tree we may obtain the remission of our debt' means that Jesus finally defeated within himself the corruption inscribed upon our humanity, erased that writing, and reinscribed the torah of God upon the human heart, as Jeremiah expressed in hope (Jer.31:31 – 34). By our spiritual participation with Jesus in his death 'on the tree' and in his resurrection as the source of God's renewed humanity, we participate in the remission of the debt we owe to God. Jesus makes humanity whole and healed, first in himself and then in us by the Spirit. I submit that Osborn's claim that Irenaeus believed in inherited Adamic guilt is an inappropriate reading.

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[99] N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), p.110 – 114
[100] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.2.8, 4.13.2 for a positive function of the Sinai covenant following Paul's argument in Romans 7:7 – 8:4: 'For the law, since it was laid down for those in bondage, used to instruct the soul… But the Word set free the soul, and taught that through it the body should be willingly purified.'

Objection 2: The Unfallen Humanity View of the Incarnation

Another movement among scholars who have taken issue with this reading of Irenaeus comes from a different direction. 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.[101] Wesleyan scholar E. Jerome Van Kuiken examines this question of whether Jesus assumed unfallen or fallen human nature from a historical, patristic standpoint, and leans towards the unfallenness camp.[102] This position is indirectly significant for my argument against penal substitution, but 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 '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,[103] 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

[101] Emmanuel Hatzidakis, *Jesus: Fallen? The Human Nature of Christ Examined from an Eastern Orthodox Perspective* (Clearwater, FL: Orthodox Witness, 2013), p.213 – 215
[102] E. Jerome Van Kuiken, *Christ's Humanity in Current and Ancient Controversy: Fallen or Not?* (London: T&T Clark, 2017)
[103] Paul Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

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.[104] 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.[105]

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.

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

[104] 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.

[105] For example, Tertullian is indeed noteworthy by virtue of being the first Latin theological writer, and because of his intellect and voluminous output, 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, because of exegetical considerations at the very least. 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. See Jean Daniélou, *History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea, Volume 3: The Origins of Latin Christianity*, translated and edited by David Smith and John Austin Baker (London: Dartman, Longman, and Todd, 1977), p.156 on what the second century Roman and North African churches regarded as Scripture, especially writings that devalued marriage; and p.163 – 167 regarding Tertullian's acceptance of *1 Enoch* and its theory that angels gave women secret desires of vanity and powers of seduction. 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. Ambrose had studied Alexandrian allegorists Philo, Origen, and Didymus the Blind, and J.W. Hanson (1899) argued Ambrose was influenced by them. By contrast, 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.

(Irenaeus says yes, Origen says no). Were the 'coats of skin' animal skins (Irenaeus[106]) or the human bodies we now experience (Origen[107])? 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.[108] 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.[109] Hatzidakis does not comment on Irenaeus' statement that '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...'[110] 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.'

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[106] 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.

[107] 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.

[108] Van Kuiken, p.7

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

[110] Ibid 3.18.7

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.[111] 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.[112] 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.'[113]

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.'[114] 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.''[115] 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.[116] 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.'[117] 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.'[118]

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,[119] they are also temptations Israel faced in the wilderness, as Irenaeus also recognized.[120] 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

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[111] Van Kuiken, p.99
[112] Ibid p.98
[113] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.22.1
[114] 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
[115] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstration* 1.3.31; Baker, p.22
[116] Van Kuiken, p.98
[117] Ibid p.98
[118] Ibid p.98
[119] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 5.21.2
[120] 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

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.'[121] 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'[122] 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.[123] 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,'[124] 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,[125] 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 which I noted before as part of my introduction to 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 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,

[121] 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.
[122] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.35.3
[123] Ibid 4.22.1
[124] Ibid 3.19.3
[125] Hatzidakis, p.422

> 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.'[126]

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,[127] and even 'accustomed to condemn the innocent, and to let the guilty go free.'[128] In response, God 'accustomed' Abraham 'to follow the Word of God'[129] and 'accustomed' Israel and her prophets to 'bear His Spirit,'[130] 'accustoming His inheritance to obey God.'[131] 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.'[132]

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.'[133] 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*.

Irenaeus' Use of 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 human nature can be 'corrupted' without that person being 'guilty' yet 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), although he was able to obey the other commandments. Furthermore, Paul asserts that Jesus did obey all the commandments, including 'do not covet' (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, must have 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 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,

[126] Ibid 3.17.3
[127] Ibid 4.13.2
[128] Ibid 4.26.3
[129] Ibid 4.5.4
[130] Ibid 4.14.2
[131] Ibid 4.21.3
[132] Ibid 3.17.1
[133] Ibid 3.18.7

where Irenaeus devotes considerable space 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). It is difficult to conceive of a major theological point like this being described with a key term meaning two different things.

Furthermore, Paul seems to use 'likeness' in a more technical biblical sense derived from, and governed by, 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.'[134] '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 in relationships: as a communal co-rulership over the creation as God's representatives. These meanings of 'image' and 'likeness' from Genesis 1:26 – 28 are reinforced by 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 ('image'), 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 ('likeness'). 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 took human flesh but not *sinful* human flesh, any more than he would say Jesus was human in appearance but not in substance. He was saying that Jesus 'shared in the mature substance of' our sinful flesh. Does Irenaeus' usage reflect this understanding?

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.'[135]

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

[134] 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).
[135] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.20.2

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.'[136] 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 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

[136] 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.'

> 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.'[137]

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 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.'[138]

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.[139] 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

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[137] 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
[138] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.2.8
[139] 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'

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.[140] 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,[141] as Justin Martyr interpreted it this way.[142] 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 '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[143]) are pre-Pauline creedal material developed by the earliest Jewish Christian community,[144] 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.

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[140] 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.

[141] Van Kuiken, p.101

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

[143] 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.'

[144] 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

The Meaning of 'Likeness' in Second Century Christianity: Ebionite Literature as Comparison
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.[145] 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.[146] 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 made after the image and likeness of God.'[147] Being made in the image of God has to do with our 'bodies,'[148] 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.'[149]

In *Homily* 11, which continues Peter's interest in discussing 'purity,'[150] 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

[145] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.33.4
[146] 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
[147] *Clementine Homilies*, Homily 10.3
[148] Ibid 10.6
[149] Ibid 10.6
[150] Ibid 11.1

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.

The Meaning of 'Likeness' in Second Century Christianity: The Valentinians as Comparison Point
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.[151] 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.[152]

Irenaeus recognizes that the Valentinians had subtle differences amongst themselves especially about the creation of humanity.[153] On Irenaeus' repOrtong of the Valentinians, 'image' and 'likeness' have the same basic meaning much of the time.[154] 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.'[155] While in this state of passion, she brought forth an 'amorphous substance,' without a corresponding 'form.'[156] 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.'[157]

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[151] 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
[152] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 1 and 2
[153] 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.'
[154] 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'
[155] Ibid 1.1; 1.2
[156] Ibid 1.2.3
[157] Ibid 1.4.1

Achamoth, desiring to return to the Father and the pleroma, produced the Demiurge,[158] 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.''[159] 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.'[160] 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.[161] 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.[162]

Left to their own devices, the Valentinians would have probably preferred to dispense with one or both of these 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.'[163]

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

[158] Ibid 1.5.1
[159] Ibid 1.5.4
[160] Ibid 1.5.5
[161] Ibid 1.5.6
[162] Ibid 1.6.1 – 4
[163] Ibid 1.5.2; italics mine

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' in Second Century Christianity: Irenaeus' View of Creation
In 1948, John Lawson asserted that Irenaeus is *not* consistent in his use of the terms 'image' and 'likeness.'[164] In 1999, Albert Collver III accepted Lawson's judgment.[165] More recent scholars have concluded otherwise – for example, John Behr in 2000. Behr finds that, in Irenaeus, 'likeness' for us means our never-ending, fully voluntary participation in the Holy Spirit, anchored in 'Christ's work of recapitulation.'[166] Matthew Steenberg in 2009 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.'[167] 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.'[168]

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.'[169] 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:

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[164] John Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus* (London: The Epworth Press, 1948), p.200.
[165] 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 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.
[166] John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.48, 99 – 100 says, 'But when this Spirit, commingled with the soul, is united to the handiwork, because of the outpouring of the Spirit man is rendered spiritual and perfect, and this is the one who was made in the image and likeness of God. But if the Spirit is lacking from the soul, such a one, remaining indeed animated and fleshly, will be imperfect, having the image, certainly, in the handiwork, but not receiving the likeness through the Spirit.' Cf. p.114 – 115
[167] Matthew Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009), p.38
[168] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 2.7.2
[169] Ibid 2.7.3

> '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.'[170]

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.'[171]

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.[172] 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 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...'[173]

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.'[174] 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.'[175] 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.'[176]

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

[170] Ibid 2.15.3
[171] Ibid 2.23.1; the same appears to be true in 2.35.1
[172] Ibid 3.18.1; 3.22.1; 3.23.1; 3.23.2
[173] Ibid 3.20.2
[174] Ibid 4.preface.4
[175] Ibid 4.preface.2
[176] Ibid 4.preface.4

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.[177] 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.'[178]

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.[179]

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.[180] 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.

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[177] Ibid 4.6.2
[178] Ibid 4.17.6
[179] 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.
[180] Ibid 4.20.1

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?'[181]

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.'[182]

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.[183] 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 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.'[184]

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.[185] 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

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[181] Ibid 4.33.4
[182] Ibid 4.38.3
[183] 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.
[184] Ibid 4.38.3
[185] 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.''

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.'[186]

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 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

[186] Ibid 4.41.3

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 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,'[187] 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

[187] Ibid 5.preface

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.'[188]

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.'[189] 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 transcendent is made known in the immanent, which is the subject of 5.6.2 in its entirety.[190] 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.'[191]

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

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[188] Ibid 5.6.1
[189] 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.
[190] 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.
[191] Ibid 5.6.1

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.'[192]

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 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.'[193] 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.'[194] 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.'[195]

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.'[196]

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.'[197] 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

[192] Ibid 5.8.1
[193] Ibid 5.10.1
[194] Ibid 5.12.4
[195] Ibid 5.15.4
[196] Ibid 5.16.1
[197] Ibid 5.16.2

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.'[198] 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,'[199] leading him to say in the very next chapter, 5.17.1, that Jesus 'propitiated the Father against who we had sinned.'[200] 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[201] – thus adding yet another data point of support for the fallenness camp. This usage of the phrase 'after the likeness of Adam' is very 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.'[202]

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.'[203] 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,

[198] Ibid 5.16.3
[199] Ibid 5.16.3
[200] Ibid 5.17.1
[201] Ibid 5.21.2 says, 'the corruption of man, therefore, which occurred in paradise by both [of our first parents] eating' which is notable
[202] Ibid 5.21.1
[203] 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

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 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.[204] 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'[205] 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.[206] 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

[204] Ibid 5.21.2
[205] Ibid 5.21.2
[206] 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)

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.'[207] 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.'[208] 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*.

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, in the Holy Spirit. Moreover, I have argued that the second century Christian usage of the term 'likeness' seems fixed and established, prior to Irenaeus and including him, especially in relationship to the term 'image.' Clement of Alexandria would make these terms 'somewhat unstable,'[209] and Tertullian of Carthage changed their meanings significantly.[210] 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 and Colossians 1

Van Kuiken, coming to the topic of the cross itself, also argues that Irenaeus' use of the phrase 'righteous flesh' in the midst of his exposition of Colossians 1 in *Against Heresies* 5.14 indicates that the bishop believed Jesus cleansed human nature at conception back to its prelapsarian state, i.e. took on an unfallen human nature.[211] He surmises that when Irenaeus speaks of 'sinful flesh' in contrast with 'righteous flesh,' he must mean that other human beings share with Jesus 'simply a common substance rather than a common condition of enmity towards God.'[212] I am puzzled by Van Kuiken's statements because the underlying Pauline material, Colossians 1, presents not the incarnation per se, but the *death and resurrection* of the fleshly body of Christ, as effecting reconciliation and peace (Col.1:20, 22). To be precise, Jesus' death reconciled fleshly human nature, 'alienated and hostile in mind' (Col.1:21), presumably because through his death, Jesus utterly exhausted and defeated the hostility to God within human nature, and burned into his human nature peace with God, which exists now in his resurrected body. Later visceral imagery of 'the circumcision of Christ' (Col.2:12) recalls the fact that Jesus' death is presented with the significance of a circumcision, with the cutting away of something impure, and the corresponding bloodshed: 'peace through the blood of the cross' (Col.1:20).

Irenaeus demonstrates this understanding of Colossians, for example when he makes a parallelism: Irenaeus says

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[207] Ibid 5.28.4
[208] Ibid 5.36.3
[209] John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch.4 begins on p.139, with, 'This chapter also points out how Clement uses 'image' and 'likeness' in different ways, making his vocabulary somewhat unstable.'
[210] Jean Daniélou, *History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea, Volume 3: The Origins of Latin Christianity*, translated and edited by David Smith and John Austin Baker (London: Dartman, Longman, and Todd, 1977), p.371 – 383. Tertullian used both terms – 'image' and 'likeness' – to denote the human soul and its freedom; he did not include the human body in his use of these terms. Daniélou, p.382 – 383, notes, 'The essential point, however, remains valid, namely that it is man's soul which is made in the likeness of God and above all reflects his freedom. In this, Tertullian's thought was profoundly original, and was to have a great influence on Latin theological thinking after his time.' Note Daniélou's recognition of Tertullian's originality. Tertullian's reduction of our 'likeness' to God to mere 'resemblance' of His free will absent 'participation' would influence his interpretation of Romans 8:3.
[211] Van Kuiken, p.99
[212] Ibid p.99

Jesus took on our flesh but 'laid aside' the lusts of the flesh, therefore we who receive the Holy Spirit of Christ must also 'lay aside' those lusts.[213] Therefore, when Irenaeus speaks of Jesus' 'righteous flesh,' while undertaking a long exposition of Colossians,[214] he is referring not to Jesus' body from conception, but his resurrected body which has passed through death: 'through his death… because the righteous flesh has reconciled that flesh which was being kept under bondage in sin, and brought it into friendship with God.'[215] Insisting that the eternal Son took our human flesh, and not any other type of human flesh, Irenaeus says, 'For that thing is reconciled which had formerly been in enmity.'[216] Irenaeus was speaking of us being reconciled in and through the death of Jesus, but by the logic of participation, what became true for us in our humanity must have once been true for Jesus in his.

Irenaeus and Galatians 3:13

Moreover, Irenaeus is the first Christian writer to ascribe the phrase, 'he became a curse for us' in Galatians 3:13, to include *Jesus' incarnation*, and not just his death.[217] The overwhelming number of Protestant evangelical commentators take 'became a curse for us' as referring to Jesus absorbing some judicial punishment at his death on the cross. But if I am understanding Irenaeus correctly, then the bishop of Lyons understood the phrase as referring to the incarnation. Human nature itself was under the 'curse' referred to in Galatians 3:13 and Deuteronomy 21:22 – 23, and Jesus shared in it all the way *from his incarnation* to death. Here is the passage in question:

> It is plain, then, that Paul knew no other Christ besides Him alone, who both suffered, and was buried, and rose gain, *who was also born, and whom he speaks of as man*. For after remarking, 'But if Christ be preached, that He rose from the dead' [1 Cor.15:12], he continues, rendering the reason of *His incarnation*, 'For since by man came death, by man [came] also the resurrection of the dead.' And everywhere, when [referring to] the passion of our Lord, and *to His human nature*, and His subjection to death, he employs the name of Christ, as in that passage: 'Destroy not him with your meat for whom Christ died' [Rom.14:15]. And again: 'But now, in Christ, you who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Christ' [Eph.2:13]. And again: 'Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, *being made a curse for us*: for it is written, 'Cursed is every one that hangs upon a tree'' [Gal.3:13; Dt.21:23]. And again: 'And through your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died' [1 Cor.8:11], indicating that the impassible Christ did not descend upon Jesus, but that He Himself, because He was Jesus Christ, suffered for us; He, who lay in the tomb, and rose again, who descended and ascended,— the Son of God having been made the Son *of man*, as the very name itself does declare.'[218]

This is the only place in *Against Heresies* and *Demonstration* where Irenaeus quotes Galatians 3:13. The significance of this quotation requires some background. Some gnostics argued that there was a spiritual being named 'Christ' who left the human being 'Jesus' before death. Irenaeus assures his audience that 'Jesus Christ' signifies one unified being, not two. The burden of Irenaeus' argument here is not the historical fact of Jesus' death, which the gnostics did not dispute, but whether there was an abiding union of divine (named 'Christ') and human (named 'Jesus') undertaken at his incarnation which carried through all the way to his death and resurrection. For good measure, Irenaeus quotes Scriptures where 'Christ' is explicitly named in connection with death on the cross. He begins with 1 Corinthians 15:12, connecting *Christ's* bodily death and resurrection to what must logically precede it: his incarnation into truly human nature. Irenaeus stresses that Paul refers to Christ as the one 'who was also born, and whom he speaks of as man.' Stressing the reality of Jesus' bodily death, Irenaeus enlists the help of four quotations from Paul.

Whether Irenaeus is exegetically accurate in perceiving Paul's true meaning in Galatians 3:13 is important but a bit secondary as far as my argument here is concerned. I do believe that Irenaeus was accurate about Paul, but that is another matter which must be explored elsewhere.[219] What is most significant here is what associations Irenaeus had with this verse. Taken on its own, Irenaeus' meaning might not be further developed with much confidence.

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[213] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 5.12.3
[214] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 5.14.2 explicitly names Colossians, as he did in 5.12.3. He quotes Col.1:14 (5.2.2), Col.3:5, 9, and 10 (5.12.3 – 4), Col.1:21 and 2:19 (5.14.2, 4), Col.2:12 (5.17.3), Col.2:18 (5.36), Col.2:16 (5.38), Col.1:20 – 22 (5.39).
[215] Ibid 5.14.2
[216] Ibid 5.14.3
[217] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 32, 89 – 96 ascribes the phrase to Jesus' death on a cross because Trypho the Jew connects it to the curse of being hanged on a tree (Dt.21:22 – 23)
[218] Ibid 3.18.3
[219] See Mako A. Nagasawa, *The Sacrificial System and Atonement in the Pentateuch* ch.1, 4, 8, found here: https://www.anastasiscenter.org/gods-goodness-israel

But when we widen the scope to include other patristic writers, I believe we can be confident that Irenaeus referred to the 'curse' of Galatians 3:13 as the fallen humanity that Jesus took *at his incarnation*.

Justin Martyr, the Christian evangelist-philosopher whom Irenaeus reports meeting in Rome, who was martyred around 165 AD, uses the language of the curse of Galatians 3:13 and Deuteronomy 21:22 – 23 to mark as sinful the lives of Jews and Gentiles alike.[220] This was one argument among many he employs with his Jewish interlocutor Trypho. Since both Jews and Gentiles sinned, with or without knowledge of the Sinaitic covenant and its commandments, every single person demonstrates that her or his existence is already cursed, according to Justin. Hanging on a tree is simply confirmation of that fact, not an additional punishment thrown on top of it. As far as Justin's writings are concerned, we find evidence that the early Christians held that despite Jesus being morally blameless, he nevertheless shared in the curse upon all humanity. The 'curse' was not a divine punishment absorbed by Jesus instead of human beings. See below for Justin's text and my treatment of it.

Athanasius of Alexandria, writing in 370 AD, roughly two hundred years after Justin and Irenaeus, would go one step further in his explicit written exposition and theological reasoning. For Athanasius, if Jesus shared in the curse upon all humanity, as designated clearly by the manner of death he endured, then his sharing in the curse must have begun prior to his death. But when? Athanasius answers that by explicitly uniting Galatians 3:13 with *John 1:14*. For Athanasius, 'becoming a curse' is a synonym for 'becoming flesh.'[221] Athanasius thus offers that the root cause of humanity's cursedness was the underlying corruption of human nature. I will discuss Athanasius below as well.

Ambrose of Milan (circa 340 – 397 AD), in his *Exposition on the Christian Faith*, explains Galatians 3:13 by referring to *Philippians 2:5 – 11*, which is also about Jesus' incarnation. Immediately after quoting Galatians, Ambrose writes of the incarnation, 'Cursed He was, for He bore our curses; in subjection, also, for He took upon Him our subjection, but in the assumption of the form of a servant, not in the glory of God; so that while he makes Himself a partaker of our weakness in the flesh, He makes us partakers of the divine Nature in His power.'[222] Among the curses we experience as fallen human beings is 'our weakness in the flesh,' which recalls Paul's assessment in Romans 8:3 that the Sinai Law could not accomplish its goal through Israel because it was weakened by the flesh. Weakened flesh is not simply mortal flesh, but morally rebellious flesh.

Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 389 AD), one of only three church leaders the Eastern Orthodox tradition labels 'the theologian,' also quotes Galatians 3:13 in reference to the incarnation. He does this in *Oration 2.55* and *Oration 30.5 – 6*. Most notably, however, in *Epistle 101.7*, titled 'to Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinaris,' Gregory rejects Apollinaris' attempt to replace Jesus' human mind with the Logos. Apollinaris made this theological move in order to avoid claiming Christ was sinful, since it was believed that sin resides in the mind or soul. Gregory, however, argued that such a move compromised Jesus' true humanity, thus making it impossible for him to secure redemption for the whole human being: 'For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole… Just as he was called a curse for the sake of our salvation, who cancels my curse, and was called sin, who takes away the sin of the world, and instead of the old Adam is made a new Adam – in the same way he makes my rebellion his own as Head of the whole Body.'[223]

John Chrysostom (circa 347 – 407 AD) in his *Commentary on Galatians* focuses on the death of Christ alone without discussion of the incarnation.[224] However, in his *Homilies on John's Gospel* 1:14, he immediately refers us to Galatians 3:13, saying, 'It was fallen indeed, our nature had fallen an incurable fall, and needed only that mighty Hand. There was no possibility of raising it again, had not He who fashioned it at first stretched forth to it His Hand, and stamped it anew with His Image, by the regeneration of water and the Spirit.'[225]

This appears to be the standard patristic and Nicene interpretation of Galatians 3:13. Van Kuiken does not discuss the patristic conflation of the 'he became' passages together. Considering this patterned usage, I believe we are on

[220] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* 94 – 96; see below
[221] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter 59 to Epictetus of Corinth* 8; see below
[222] Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 5.178
[223] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle 101*.7
[224] John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Galatians* 3.10 – 14
[225] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John's Gospel* 1:14; see also *Homily 13* from *Homilies on Romans* 8:3 – 4

fairly strong footing to see in Irenaeus an understanding continuous with Athanasius. Moreover, not only does this interpretation fit well with many other passages in Irenaeus, especially in the pivotal sections *AH* 3.18 and 3.19, but it logically fits the immediate context of 3.18.3. Irenaeus' main purpose was to prove that 'Jesus' and 'Christ' were not two separable beings, and he does so by tracing the union of Jesus' divinity and humanity all the way from conception to death and into resurrection. If Jesus' death finished unraveling our disobedience, then it can only mean that the quality of human nature which he took in his incarnation was in need of unraveling. This is why Irenaeus stressed that 'man, who had *sin in himself*, showing that he was liable to death' needed the eternal Son of God 'himself [to] be made that very same thing which he was, that is, *man*; who had been drawn by sin into bondage.' That is, the quality of 'man' assumed by the Son of God was the same quality of 'man' that we all share: the kind with 'sin in himself.' When God took human flesh to himself, He 'recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, *that He might kill sin*, deprive death of its power, and vivify man' in the physical body of Jesus. This, Irenaeus says, constitutes humanity's 'salvation' which many should receive and be justified by participating in Christ by his Spirit. 'Salvation' is not merely the turning aside of the wrath of God, as penal substitution advocates think of it, but the purging of the sinful corruption within us *by* the wrath of God, that God's life and power might be joined to the whole human person in the love of God.[226]

One supporter of Hatzidakis argued with me in person that for God to perfect human nature simply means to unite it with Himself, since that was its teleological end. Therefore, by that reasoning, the incarnation was the moment (or perhaps proto-moment?) of perfection since the human nature of Jesus was in fact united with the divine nature. However, if the patristic theologians uniformly connected Jesus taking a 'curse' (Gal.3:13) not to his death but to his incarnation into human 'flesh' (Jn.1:14), then what was so accursed about pre-fallen Adamic humanity? Nothing is cursed about that per se. One can argue that the 'curse' pertains to Jesus' death, but the early theologians deploy Galatians 3:13 with reference to Jesus' *incarnation* and the flesh he took on, not simply his death. The connection between Galatians 3:13 and John 1:14 in the minds of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Athanasius, Ambrose, and John Chrysostom seems to me to be an insurmountable problem for Van Kuiken's interpretation of Irenaeus, Hatzidakis in general, and others who argue that the earliest theologians held to an instantaneous cleansing of human nature at the moment of Jesus' conception.

Moreover, if God acts 'perfectly,' then it is with reference to His love, specifically for humanity. Irenaeus believed that God does not and cannot coerce human beings, as I cited above.[227] Admittedly, he did not explicitly say that God's 'Triune nature' logically makes 'non-coercive love' God's fundamental attribute – that language and those concerns were not foremost on Irenaeus' mind. But he is not far away from it either. In relation to humanity, for God to love perfectly is to always operate with human partnership. Human nature cannot be 'perfected' (brought into full union with himself) without human partnership. This is certainly true for Christians. Why would it not be true of Jesus himself? Does Jesus ask us to struggle against something that he did not? The pastoral implications of the unfallen view would be rather discouraging. It would render Hebrews 4:15 – he 'was tempted in all things as we are' – questionable and probably untrue. If Jesus did not struggle against temptation under the conditions of the same fallenness we experience, does he truly know our experience in a human way? How could Jesus serve as an encouragement to us in our temptations, if he did not experience them in the same basic way? Also, Hebrews 5:7 – 9 tells us that Jesus 'became perfect,' through his sufferings and obedience, at his *resurrection*. So, it would seem that God's requirement of covenant partnership with humanity from creation necessitates that God work *within and through* the lifelong obedience of the human Jesus as that perfecting process, from incarnation to resurrection.

This theological anthropology of human partnership with God, informed by trinitarian logic and a biblical exposition of covenantal partnership, lends weight to the assertion that we translate *pistis christou* as 'the faithfulness *of* Christ' to indicate precisely that lifelong obedience, but that is the subject of a much longer discussion.[228] In this very important passage from *Demonstration*, Irenaeus writes to indicate precisely that the lifelong 'obedience of him' within 'that very flesh which sin had ruled' sets human nature free from sin:

> 'And, because in the original formation of Adam all of us were tied and bound up with death through his

[226] Irenaeus later says, for example, that Jesus *saved* the physical material of human flesh and blood (*Against Heresies* 5.14.1 – 4). This theme runs throughout Irenaeus and demonstrates that he understood salvation as not merely a forensic forgiveness but an ontological union with the life of God through the person of Jesus and by the Spirit.
[227] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.37.1 – 2, see the whole chapter; cf. 4.4.3; 4.39; 5:37
[228] KJV Galatians 2:20 and Romans 3:22; cf. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle, *The Pistis Christou Debate: The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009)

> disobedience, it was right that through *the obedience of Him* who was made man for us we should be released from death: and because death reigned over the flesh, it was right that through the flesh it should lose its force and let man go free from its oppression. So the Word was made flesh, that, *through that very flesh which sin had ruled and dominated*, it should lose its force and be no longer in us. And therefore our Lord took that same original formation as (His) entry into flesh, so that He might draw near *and contend* [through his lifelong obedience and death] on behalf of the fathers, and conquer by Adam that which by Adam had stricken us down.'[229]

I believe that another scholar of Irenaeus, John Behr, is closer to Irenaeus' meaning: 'Christ, who, as human, fought the enemy and *untied the knot of disobedience through his obedience* [not simply his incarnation], and, as God, destroyed sin, set free the weak, giving salvation to his handiwork,' and, '*By his obedience unto death Christ undoes the slavery of sin* and the bondage in death, into which Adam, fashioned from the untilled soil, had drawn the human race, and in doing so Christ vivifies the human being.'[230] I argue therefore that Hatzidakis attributes to the incarnation (the cleansing of Jesus' humanity) what properly belongs to his death and resurrection. Catholic scholar Thomas Weinandy presses the issue, in his study of the early Christian theologians:

> 'Only if Jesus assumed a humanity at one with the fallen race of Adam could his death and resurrection heal and save that humanity. While the Fathers, as we will see shortly, protected Jesus from personal sin and from the morally debilitating consequences of Adam's sin, they nonetheless were adamant that his nature derived from Adam's sin-gnarled family tree. Irenaeus proclaimed a truth that would reverberate ever more loudly throughout patristic Christology: 'Our Lord Jesus Christ, the word of God, of his boundless love, became what we are that he might make us what he himself is.''[231]

In this reading of the Gospels, Jesus put the flesh to death through his moment-by-moment choices to always align himself with the love of the Father, never giving into temptation. And as Paul said, God personally condemned in this way, sin in the flesh of Jesus (Rom.8:3). Not instantaneously at his conception, but throughout his life and finally on the cross, Jesus put to death the old self, the body of sin (Rom.6:6), to raise his body into newness of life. This constitutes salvation of human nature for Irenaeus, even if it only happened in one particular individual, Jesus. For Jesus has become the source of that salvation (Heb.5:9) for the Spirit takes what is his – namely his renewed God-cleansed, God-soaked humanity – and discloses it to us (Jn.16:14).[232] And Jesus represents all other Israelites and all other human beings, and did this on our behalf, that he might share his Spirit with all who believe and trust in him. In the physical body of Jesus, through Jesus' human journey, human nature is in principle brought into full union with God by virtue of Jesus overcoming all sin and temptation in his personal choices. We become 'partakers' of the Spirit, the 'earnest of incorruption.'[233]

Irenaeus' Impact and Legacy

What do we make of Irenaeus' impact? He provides a trinitarian doctrine of creation with his designation of the Word and the Spirit as the 'two hands' of God. For Irenaeus, God is creator and sustainer, and is providentially involved with His creation. This served as a firm bulwark against 'gnosticism' of all forms, which wanted to divide God from the (sullied, in their opinion) creation, and even 'Arianism' (with all of its complexities) which made the Son into a created, temporal being separate from the truly divine. Interestingly, Irenaeus equates the Wisdom of God with *the eternal Spirit of God* rather than the Word of God.[234] I prefer to identify the Wisdom of God from Proverbs 8:22 with one of God's many activities towards the creation, rather than a person of the Trinity. Nevertheless, Irenaeus' formulation is superior to Tertullian's, since the North African equated Wisdom with 'the unuttered Word' which was in the mind of the Father prior to the Father bringing it forth as Word (see below), and far superior to Arius, who equated Wisdom with a temporally created and temporally begotten Word/Son of God which made the Son a creature. That was a fatal move.

Commentators on the early church regularly write to this effect: 'The wonder of Irenaeus is the largeness of his outlook. No theologian had arisen since St Paul and St John who had grasped so much of the purpose of God for His

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[229] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstration* 31 emphasis mine
[230] John Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.169, 170; emphasis mine
[231] Thomas Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh: An Essay on the Humanity of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), p.28
[232] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.20.3; 3.24.1; 5.6.1 – 2; 5.8.1 – 4
[233] Ibid 3.24.1
[234] Ibid 4.20.3

world.'[235] I find that the distinctive strength of Irenaeus is his comprehensive and integrated grasp of the entirety of the biblical story. And this strength is still formidable. Theologian Colin Gunton, for example, believed that Irenaeus and the Cappadocians provide better resources for our doctrine of the Trinity, in particular the Holy Spirit, than other places in Christian tradition, including Augustine.[236] Indeed, Irenaeus also provides an alternative to the individualistic, 'psychological model' of the Trinity located in the individual human person's thought process, which would become dominant among the patristic writers. The 'psychological model' of the Trinity would cause (or at least not prevent) the male theologians to explicitly or subtly denigrate women for being supposedly less rational than men, contributing to the view that women are not as made in the image of God as men. But Irenaeus' use of Genesis 1 and 2 in *Demonstration* 11 makes fairly certain that he believed human beings as male and female were in the image of God in a physical, embodied, relational, and explicitly marital way. If the image of God looked like a life-giving union of male and female in loving, lifelong marriage, what did that mean about God?

Given the above, I believe Irenaeus also provides better resources for Christian ethics, especially around issues of gender and sexuality. Irenaeus' theological anthropology would have led the church to uphold and celebrate sexual desire within marriage and for marriage. This probably would have let the church retain some much needed humor about sexual desire similar to the Hebraic humor in the biblical book *The Song of Songs*. In turn, Irenaeus' exposition of humanity, male and female, made in God's image would have had the effect of strengthening the case for women's leadership in the church. The fascinating fragment attributed to him about the serpent addressing Eve first because she was the stronger[237] is utterly unique in patristic literature, and entirely credible as originating from Irenaeus. It is also, in my opinion, a legitimate exposition of Genesis 2 and even 1 Timothy 2. Irenaeus could have immediately served as a resource to stop the anti-female prejudice which influenced Christians, shown for example in the Greek-speaking church when Clement of Alexandria argued for veiling women,[238] and in the Latin-speaking church when Tertullian did the same.[239] These theologians departed from Paul's encouragement to consider hair a sufficient covering for women while praying and prophesying, especially ex-prostitutes who had to refrain from wearing the Roman *palla* and wear ribbons in the hair instead, by Roman law.[240] Irenaeus, by comparison, criticized the gnostic Valentinus for apparently using the word *kalumma* (veil) in 1 Corinthians 11:10, instead of *exousian* (power), to veil women in the worship service. Irenaeus is to be esteemed as an earlier witness to a reading of Paul consistent with Jesus, as Jesus, in the presence of other men, received the provocative and typically bedroom gesture of women who let down their hair for him (Lk.7:36 – 50; Jn.12:1 – 8), and made lust entirely a problem in the eye of the (typically male) beholder, not the body of the beheld (Mt.5:27 – 30). Irenaeus would have anchored the Christian church more firmly upon its Hebraic roots, when Christian mission to the Gentiles encountered other patriarchal cultures, and also cultures where people went without much clothing.

Such is what could have been. But what did in fact happen? In the opinion of Eastern Orthodox scholar Matthew Craig Steenberg, Irenaeus' trinitarian vision is 'well developed.' His theological treatment of anthropology is 'extensive.'[241] And thus, Irenaeus has enjoyed interest among scholars since the 1940's. Yet despite this, Steenberg says, Irenaeus' writings seem to have not generated the kind of subsequent interest that we would expect:

> 'While he seems today a kind of principal voice from the late second century, Irenaeus appears to have been a voice familiar to few in the third, fourth and beyond. A Latin translation of the Refutation was read by Augustine, and there are continuing hypotheses as to whether Athanasius might at times have lifted axioms from the document in its original Greek; but rarely do we hear Irenaeus' name mentioned in the increasingly historically minded discourses of the fourth and fifth centuries. There is argument for an Irenaean influence on Tertullian put forward by such scholars as Tränkle, Quispel, Moreschini and Waszink, repeated more recently in the work of Bray and Osborn; yet again such influence, if it existed at all (and this cannot be proved, though it seems hard to deny) was fairly secondary. Others would see his

[235] J. Armitage Robinson, *St Irenaeus: The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (London: SPCK, 1920), p.4
[236] Although Joshua McNall, *A Free Corrector: Colin Gunton and the Legacy of Augustine* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015) asserts that Gunton really should have laid the blame, as it were, not on Augustine himself, but on some of his heirs. Regarding Irenaeus' teaching on the Holy Spirit, see especially Anthony Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) and Leopoldo A. Sanchez M., *Receiver, Bearer, and Giver of God's Spirit: Jesus' Life in the Spirit as a Lens for Theology and Life* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), ch.1
[237] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Fragment 14*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol.1, par.14; cf. http://newadvent.org/fathers/0134.htm
[238] Clement of Alexandria, *The Teacher* 3.1
[239] Tertullian of Carthage, *On the Veiling of Virgins* 7
[240] See my notes on 1 Corinthians 11:2 – 16, found here: https://www.anastasiscenter.org/bible-messiah-paul-corinthians
[241] Matthew Craig Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009), p.16

> influence in Origen, though this seems less likely. Despite this vague situation, however, we know his texts travelled, and travelled quickly. The Oxyrhynchus papyri locate a copy of at least a portion of the Refutation in Egypt during Irenaeus' own lifetime. Presumably his texts travelled because they were being read, but this only makes more intriguing the lack of reference and reflection evident in the later corpus. Epiphanius (d. 403) would prove happy to lift whole passages from the Refutation for insertion into his own heresiological Panarion, but this function as sourcebook for information on various sects and schools of thought seems to be his only use for Irenaeus. The closest we come to any considered reflection on his life and thought by a patristic source in the centuries immediately to follow is located in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius of Caesarea (d. c. 341), a critical document for our knowledge of Irenaeus, containing several of his letters and imparting nearly all our scant bibliographical data on the man. Yet even in Eusebius' sweeping survey of the Church before Constantine, Irenaeus holds no special pride of place. Eusebius seems to have admired him, but does not make any great deal of his theological articulation. Irenaeus is no giant in the eyes of his successors, no *sphragis pateron*, 'seal of the fathers', as Cyril of Alexandria would be remembered after his death.'[242]

Immediately following, Steenberg cautions us to not make too much of this, since one cannot entirely judge the impact of an author by the number of times his or her work is explicitly cited. However, it is concerning that our manuscripts of Irenaeus' writings are in Latin and Armenian, and not in Greek. While I want to provide my readers with Steenberg's considered opinion, I wish to offer a different interpretation of the reception of Irenaeus.

In the judgment of patristics scholar Johannes Quasten, Irenaeus' second century contemporaries Hippolytus of Rome and Tertullian of Carthage seem to quote liberally from Irenaeus' writings. Although once again, we cannot be absolutely certain that they also shared material in common which existed in the church's life prior to Irenaeus writing it down. I am doubtful that Irenaeus viewed himself as being original in any way; for example, Christian hymns like the *Odes of Solomon*, which I examine below, were almost certainly used in Syriac-speaking worship for the purpose of teaching the congregation and expressing the faith of the community. Regardless, Irenaeus' writings were spread broadly. Today, we possess a full copy of *Against Heresies* in Latin. Quasten points out, 'According to H. Koch, it must have originated before 250, because Cyprian made use of it. W. Sanday goes beyond this, and assigns it to the date 200.'[243] We have a complete Armenian version of books 4 and 5, twenty-three fragments of a Syrian version, and almost all of the complete book in Greek through copious quotations by Hippolytus of Rome (170 – 235), Eusebius of Caesarea (~260 – 339), and Epiphanius of Salamis (~320 – 403), the fourth century bishop in Cyprus, and additional fragments.[244]

Irenaeus' poetic sayings would become touchstones for Nicene and post-Nicene conciliar orthodoxy. Eusebius of Caesarea named Irenaeus as one of two writers whose theology was eminently reliable: 'Who does not know the books of Irenaeus and Melito which proclaim Christ as God and Man?'[245] Athanasius of Alexandria, for example, seems to repeat Irenaeus' pithy phrase, 'God made Himself man, that man might become god.'[246] Again, we cannot adduce the spread of Christian language from written sources alone, but many scholars of the Christian doctrine of deification credit Irenaeus with being the first written source for the divine-human union accomplished first in Christ and purposed for all humanity: The Alexandrians Clement, Origen, and Athanasius either echo Irenaeus' language or quote him directly, and the Cappadocian theologians Gregory Nazianzen, Basil of Caesarea, and Gregory of Nyssa do as well.[247] Also, it seems quite plausible, based on the circulation of Irenaeus' writings in Syriac, that the Nicene theologian Ephrem the Syrian in Mesopotamia was also familiar with Irenaeus, as Ephrem wrote poetically in various hymns and sermons the basic thought, 'He gave us divinity / we gave Him humanity.'[248] I wonder if

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[242] Steenberg, p.19
[243] Johannes Quasten, *Patrology Volume I: The Beginnings of Patristic Literature: From the Apostles Creed to Irenaeus* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics Inc., 6th printing 1992), p.291
[244] Richard A Norris, Jr, 'Irenaeus of Lyons', in Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth, editors, *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, third printing 2010), p.47; Schaff, p.511; Quasten p.291
[245] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.28.5, cited by Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p.75
[246] Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 54; *De Decretis* 14; *Apology Against Arians* 1:39, 2:70; 3:19, 3:33, 3:53; *Epistle to Serapion* 1:24; *De Synodis* 51; *Epistle to Adelphi* 4 quoting Irenaeus' preface to *Against Heresies* 5. Khaled Anatolios, 'The Influence of Irenaeus on Athanasius', *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001), p.463–76 considers the question of Athanasius' reliance on Irenaeus.
[247] J.A. McGuckin, 'The Strategic Adaptation of Deification,' edited by Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), p.96 – 97
[248] Thomas Buchan, 'Paradise as the Landscape of Salvation in Ephrem the Syrian,' edited by Christensen and Wittung, p.146 – 156

Ephrem felt he could be so bold and exuberant in poetic verse because there was a much more measured, precise account of Christian theology informing his community in Mesopotamia. Augustine quoted from Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.2.7 and 5.19.1 in his writings against Pelagius and Julian of Eclanum (*Contra Julian* 1.3.5), and mentions Irenaeus by name (1.7.32). He might also have quoted *Against Heresies* 4.30.1 in his *Christian Doctrine* 2.40.60.

It seems to me that the light sprinkling of Irenaeus' writings dusting later Christian thinkers can be explained differently. Steenberg himself notes that Tertullian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, and indeed the whole of conciliar orthodoxy stand upon the same theological architecture which Irenaeus first elaborated – that theology is connected to anthropology. Thus, we owe to Irenaeus the developmental view of the human person, theologically. Jesuit scholar Edward T. Oakes notes that Augustine was the first Christian theologian to believe in a static view of the human person, with very fateful consequences.[249] If the human person is static, then a fall into sin at any time is repeatable in principle, perhaps even in eternity. This seemed to drive Augustine's energy and anxiety on the question of God's grace and human free will. Oakes draws a line from Irenaeus to Maximus the Confessor (c.580 – 662 AD) in the Greek-speaking East, and Paul M. Blowers surveys the growing consensus of Maximus's debt to Irenaeus on creation theology.[250] Only a developmental view of the human person, where human nature and free will are being perfected in loving union with God, can sufficiently answer the questions of why God began creation in the way He did, and why human beings progress to the point of making their human nature eternally receptive to God, or eternally tormented by His command to be open to Him.

What explains, then, the absence of full Greek manuscripts of Irenaeus' writings? Some suspect that Irenaeus' more literal and Jewish-Christian view of the millennium of Revelation 20 became embarrassing for later Christians who interpreted more symbolically. Perhaps, although this does not seem to have spurred neglect for the *Ascension of Isaiah* or the writings of Methodius of Olympus, in which that view was also present.[251] I suspect that the disagreement over theological anthropology between Irenaeus and Origen played some role here. For example, the fact that Origen promoted the same view of the 'coats of skin' that Irenaeus condemned as part and parcel of the gnostic heretics' view must have surely been embarrassing.

Later Christians would turn their attention to two things: (1) presenting Christian faith in a more philosophical mode, especially as they engaged Neo-Platonic thought, most notably in Origen; and (2) defining the technical terminology in the debates about the Trinity. Irenaeus precedes these concerns, but would have recognized the significance of the later discussions. Irenaeus, while engaging with the fundamentally Hellenistic cosmology which produced gnosticism, still makes the effort to overwhelmingly use biblical and Hebrew idioms (e.g. God's 'two hands'), even treating at length the question of why God needed to precede Christ with Israel in *Against Heresies* book 4. This makes good historical sense, since Irenaeus hailed from Asia Minor. If their preference for celebrating Easter according to the Jewish calendar serves as an indication, the Christians of Asia Minor seem to have had the advantage of maintaining a stronger connection to the Jewish community than Alexandria, Rome, or North Africa.

Irenaeus precedes Origen of Alexandria as a historical witness to the church teaching a doctrine of 'deification.' He was probably a background influence on Athanasius and the Cappadocians. He greatly qualifies, if not negates, any attempt to see Origen as such. Evidence of Irenaeus in Athanasius and the Cappadocians arguably anchors them in the biblical narrative even as they tend to leave behind biblical language and instead deploy Hellenistic terms to both evangelize their neo-Platonic contemporaries and defend Nicene trinitarian theology against their Arian opponents. In other words, N.T. Wright's concern that the Nicene theologians, in their use of Greek Platonic language of deification and philosophical terms used in the Nicene Creed, may have lost the Hebraic, historical, Eden-exile-restoration categories of Second Temple Judaism[252] *is substantially answered by the presence of Irenaeus in the Nicene theologians*. So Nicene orthodoxy stands in the debt of Irenaeus in more ways than one. Thus, we must appreciate a sturdy bridge, especially if we stand on the other side of it.

In my opinion, Irenaeus' role in the development of Christian thought seems more firm than in Steenberg's

[249] Edward T. Oakes, S.J., *Infinity Dwindled to Infancy: A Catholic and Evangelical Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), p.162 – 164
[250] Paul M. Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.102 – 105
[251] See 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.382; also ch.14
[252] N.T. Wright, *How God Became King: Getting to the Heart of the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 2012)

assessment. As written material was becoming ever more important to the church, Irenaeus gave to the community a rich literary legacy. Not only did Irenaeus bear witness to the basic shape of the New Testament canon, his works *Against Heresies* and *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* became a touchstone of Christian orthodoxy against gnosticism and continued to shape Christians in the coming centuries. This figure who sums up all who went before him and put his stamp on all who came after him for centuries can be defined as holding to 'medical substitution' or 'ontological substitution' atonement, not penal substitution. In my assessment, Irenaeus is insurmountably devastating for Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach's attempt to project penal substitutionary atonement back into the early church.