

## Fallen or Unfallen: Studies in Athanasius' *Contra Apollinarium* and the Humanity of Jesus

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### *Introduction: The Debates About Jesus' Humanity in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries*

The heresy of Apollinarianism in the fourth century signaled a close to the debates about the Trinity and a new focus on christology. It is highly significant that the lines drawn up on either side of the Apollinarian conflict concerned not the Trinity, or the divinity of the Son, but *theological anthropology*. Not coincidentally, the lines drawn up on the fallenness and unfallenness debate about Jesus' humanity concerns *theological anthropology* as well, not least because Apollinaris was the first to name the stakes as the sinlessness of Jesus and because this is the period in which the supposed 'unfallenness' position became strongly articulated by some. My position in this latter, ongoing debate lies in the fallenness camp, as I have explained elsewhere, especially as I believe we find it in Scripture and Irenaeus of Lyons. But I navigate my way through the patristic material in a fairly specific way. I foreground this material before I write my assessment of the theologies of Athanasius' *Contra Apollinarium*, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and subsequent patristic authors.

When we find the terms *body* and *soul* (and the related terms *flesh* and *mind*) they demonstrably mean different things across various patristic authors. It is hard enough to discern the meaning of these terms in New Testament – especially Pauline – scholarship. The challenge increases by another order of magnitude when we study early Christian literature in multiple languages (Syriac and Latin, and not just Greek) across multiple centuries.

In another paper,<sup>2</sup> I argue that Irenaeus bears witness to an older Christian understanding of the relationship between body and soul in the human, where the two are deeply intertwined ontologically and functionally, from creation and in redemption. This view was rooted in a non-allegorical reading of the Genesis account of creation, along with a strong commitment to salvation history and the body even when allegorical methods were employed. For example, Irenaeus used the parable of the Good Samaritan allegorically for Jesus as the good Samaritan who recovered the 'fallen man' of his own human nature.<sup>3</sup> Later Christians, however, elevated the soul above the body to such a degree that the separation between the two created lasting problems in the Christian appraisal of the human generally, and of Jesus in particular.<sup>4</sup> The influences were many. Syriac-speaking Christians and others centered at Antioch were influenced by eastern Manichaean dualism – beginning with Tatian the Assyrian and the second century 'gnostics' like Marcion.<sup>5</sup> The prestige of Plato and the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo influenced Greek-speaking Christians, especially Origen, who in turn, influenced many. The rigorous Christian monastics developed austere ways of treating the body, and rhetoric to match, sometimes drawing from eastern Syriac or Hellenistic sources as mediated by, for example, Origen's incorporation of Philo's allegorical method which turned away from salvation history and the body towards the eternal and the soul.

One set of questions that became difficult for Christian theologians to answer was: Where is the Adamic ancestral sin located? Is it found in the body or the soul? How exactly does it influence us? How do we assess Jesus' own human nature? And, as I have explored in the paper mentioned above, a second set of questions that arise from modern neuroscience is how to speak of the mind-brain relation when we find that the physical structure and health

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<sup>1</sup> This is part of a longer essay examining atonement theology in the early church; see Mako A. Nagasawa, *Penal Substitution vs. Medical-Ontological Substitution: A Historical Comparison*, found on this page: <https://www.anastasiscenter.org/atonement-sources-patristic>

<sup>2</sup> Mako A. Nagasawa, *Neuroscience and the Theological Anthropologies of Irenaeus and Origen*, found on this page: <https://www.anastasiscenter.org/atonement-sources-ec-irenaeus-of-lyons>

<sup>3</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.17.3

<sup>4</sup> Hannah Hunt, *Clothed in the Body: Asceticism, the Body, and the Spiritual in the Late Antique Era* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012) ch.11 provides a very helpful historical summary of heretical Christian movements, especially as it relates to understandings of the human. Robert (Robin) M. Orton, 'Garments of Light, Tunics of Skin and the Body of Christ: St Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrine of the Body' (PhD thesis, Kings College, University of London, 2009) also demonstrates how the 4<sup>th</sup> century Cappadocian luminary Gregory of Nyssa developed inconsistencies because of the (arguably) Origenist influence on his thinking about the body. I will highlight Orton's and Hunt's work in future sections.

<sup>5</sup> Second century Hellenistic 'gnostic' teachers, who saw the entire material world as evil, devised clever ways of misdirecting biblical texts about the body. Marcion (c.85 – 160), who was influential in both Mesopotamia and Rome, rejected marriage. Basilides, the earliest recorded of these (flourished in 120 – 140), asserted that Jesus 'the embodied mind (nous)' swapped places with Simon of Cyrene on the way to the cross, and presumably shed his body because only the soul could be saved. Valentinus of Alexandria, who also attempted to teach in Rome, believed that Jesus' body was physiologically different from ours, so much so that he did not urinate or defecate: 'Having endured everything he was continent; thus Jesus exercised his divinity. He ate and drank in a peculiar manner, not evacuating his food. So much power of continence was in food was not corrupted, since he himself had no corruptibility.' Mani, the third century bishop of Edessa, became the founder of the gnostic movement that bore his name ('Manichaeism'), and his influence spread in Syriac, Greek, and Latin speaking Christian circles. See Hunt, ch.11

of the brain impacts our memory, personality, and even moral character. For example, loving touch, nutrition, relational stability, and verbal communication contribute to maximum neurological development and emotional health, whereas physical deprivation of loving touch, poor nutrition, relational instability, and a paucity of words contribute to trauma in extreme cases and the underdevelopment of our brains in other cases. Epigenetic factors from previous generations also seem to affect us. If the mind is, at minimum, physically anchored in the brain but not reducible to it (non-reductive physicalism), then, how do we conceive of the broader relation, of not just the brain-mind connection, but the body-brain-mind-soul connection?

For Irenaeus, the soul was the animating principle of the body. Irenaeus included the human body as made in the image of God, where the soul was the energy provided to the body by God's breath of life. Irenaeus believed that the soul spatially overlapped with the body and grew with it. In Irenaeus' framework, it would appear that the body's health and growth have a direct effect on the soul's health and growth, and in many cases, vice versa. Questions raised by modern neuroscience can fit comfortably in Irenaeus' conception of the human body and soul because Irenaeus would ostensibly welcome the possibility of a strong intrinsic relationship (conceptually distinct, but ontologically and functionally unified) between the physical brain and the mind. It is also relatively straightforward to say that in Irenaeus' view, the Adamic ancestral sin resided somehow *in the human body*. We inherit some structural disorder from our primal forebears that is expressed in our physiology, which probably does include the physical brain. Irenaeus regarded human death and the dissolution of the human body into the ground as accomplishing something positive in a penultimate sense while we await the resurrection. For the Son of God to become incarnate in our humanity meant that he took on both body and soul, and carried a fallen human nature while being perfectly faithful to the Father by the Spirit, to heal that human nature ultimately through his own death and resurrection.

Tertullian incorporated into his theology the Stoic notion of traducianism, the idea that the human soul came from the souls of one's parents. The view was shared by Augustine of Hippo. Jerome, the Latin translator and contemporary of Augustine, admitted that most Western Christians held to it as well, even though he himself denied it and asserted that the Eastern, Greek-speaking churches believed in creationism. But it is significant that Apollinaris held to traducianism.<sup>6</sup> Gregory of Nyssa seems to have held it as well.<sup>7</sup> Traducianism combined with Christian theology made space for the notion that the ancestral sin resided in the human soul, at least in part, and was passed down from parents to children. Around the fourth century, Christian theologians began to associate Mary's virginal status with Jesus' supposed 'unfallenness' – accompanied by the view that the Virgin Mary did not pass down the corruption of sin to Jesus on the grounds that she had no sexual desire or pleasure when the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus in her womb.<sup>8</sup> This view directly implied that the desire to have children was the only acceptable reason for even a married couple to have intercourse, because sexual desire and perhaps sexual pleasure itself passed along the ancestral sin to children. Clearly, there was considerable conceptual pressure to explain how Jesus could be sinless and yet still human.

Origen drew upon, not Stoic anthropology, but Plato's hierarchy of soul over body. Origen drew upon the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, who had attempted his own version of making the biblical account more Platonic. Origen taught that the body was not made in the image of God, or even part of the image of

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<sup>6</sup> Robin Orton, *St. Gregory of Nyssa, Anti-Apollinarian Writings* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), p.29

<sup>7</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 29

<sup>8</sup> 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. Notable personalities on the edges of the Christian movement also held to arguably non-human views of Jesus' body. The second century gnostic Valentinus of Alexandria believed Jesus did not urinate or defecate: 'Having endured everything he was continent; thus Jesus exercised his divinity. He ate and drank in a peculiar manner, not evacuating his food. So much power of continence was in food was not corrupted, since he himself had no corruptibility' (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 3.7.59.3; cf. Hunt, p.168). The fourth century desert monastic Evagrius of Pontus believed that the 'true shape' of Jesus' resurrection body, and ours, were spheres, because spheres were 'the perfect shape' in Hellenistic thought.

God, on the grounds that both God and the soul are invisible and immaterial, whereas the body is visible and material. Along with this assessment, Origen divided properties between body and soul. The body had physical needs to breathe, eat, drink, and sleep, and urges like sexual lust, but was simply physical material, shared by the material world. The soul, however, came from God and is the location of free will, memory, rationality, morality, emotion, worship, etc. In Origen's framework, and in the framework of all who followed a similar line of thought, the question of inherited Adamic ancestral sin therefore emerged as a logical puzzle. If the soul comes directly from God, then how could it contain the corruption of sin within it? Would that not make God the author of each person's sinfulness? But if not the soul, then how might *the body* transmit the Adamic corruption of sinfulness, if in fact the soul contains our rationality and free will? Surely the body cannot transmit sinfulness if it was the mind (*nous*), the higher part of the soul (*psyche*), which fell away from God *prior to even being embodied*?

In fact, Origen undermined the idea of the unity of the human race in Adam by postulating that all beings existed as 'minds' prior to their embodiment. For Origen, embodiment happened after a cataclysmic, cosmic fall by all of these minds save one: the eternal Son of God. Origen then suggested, by allegorizing the text of Genesis, that embodiment was the result of various levels of the minds' intellectual neglect of God. Origen influenced subsequent theologians like Gregory of Nyssa to say that the 'coats of skin' were human bodies as we experience them today, but which are distinct in some way from the bodies (angelic, or 'heavenly') we had prior to the fall. This means that the human body that the incarnate Son took to himself is not ontologically intrinsic to true humanness: Jesus' body was not representative of the bodies we had (or not) prior to the fall; Jesus' physical body may not even be, in principle, a recapitulation of the unity that we purportedly share 'in Adam.'

Largely, Christians of late antiquity proposed a Neoplatonic Christian synthesis where the soul was to become impassible by governing the body under contemplation of the Word of God. This proposal rested on a distinction between the 'bodily passions,' especially sexual lust, and the intellectual ones like pride and anger. But problems with this synthesis of Christian faith and Neoplatonic hierarchy of soul over body would arise, as I discuss below. Not only do modern studies of the brain, human development, and trauma challenge this distinction, but the Christian Neoplatonic conception of the self did not fully answer the questions about the nature and location of ancestral sin, and the role of human desires prior to the faculty of the will and its exercise. This is what we must understand about the context of the debate between the orthodox and Apollinarian. Irenaeus' biblical-Jewish anthropology fully honoring the body and soul equally has been eclipsed in Christian discussions.<sup>9</sup> Origen's Platonic vision centered on the soul is ascendant. The upshot of this shift in conceiving of the body-soul relation is that all authors addressing the topic of the humanity of Jesus – including Athanasius, in his two books against Apollinarian, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and so on – face terminological challenges when they attempt to express the status of Jesus' humanity from conception, and his personal sinlessness in word, deed, thought, etc.

Glancing ahead beyond Athanasius, we know the Cappadocians had a cautious appreciation for Origen, not least because their grandparents had been converted and baptized by Origen's disciple Gregory Thaumaturgos, who proclaimed the gospel in the Cappadocian region in a ministry famous for miracles and wonders. Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil of Caesarea, aware of Origen's undue dependence on Platonic ideas inherited from Ammonius Saccas in Alexandria, extracted a collection of Origen's teachings into the first *Philokalia*. Gregory of Nyssa developed his own way of correcting Origen in his *Life of Moses*, but not without also maintaining some critical differences from Irenaeus on the nature of the human body. I believe this lingering Origenist (or Platonic) influence hindered the Cappadocians' response to Apollinarian. This weakness is present to a lesser degree in Athanasius' two books *Contra Apollinarianum*.

#### *Apollinarian of Laodicea and His Teaching*

Apollinarian the Younger (died 382) was bishop of Laodicea in Syria (not the Laodicea in Asia Minor which appears in Colossians and Philemon) during the latter half of the fourth century. His brilliance was well-known and appreciated before he developed or expressed views considered to be heretical. When in 362 Emperor Julian the Apostate forbade Christians from teaching classical Greek literature, Apollinarian and his father, Apollinarian the Elder, translated the Old Testament into Homeric and Pindaric poetic verse and the New Testament into the style of Platonic dialogues. He wrote letters, commentaries on Scripture, a thirty volume critique of the Neoplatonist

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<sup>9</sup> John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.218 says, 'Irenaeus's emphasis on the flesh and his teaching that the body was in the image of God were soon marginalized by the pervasive influence of Origen's theology, and were never retrieved thereafter.'

Porphry, and critiques of various heresies.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Apollinaris was a staunch and able supporter of the Nicene Creed and Athanasius, with whom he had an extensive correspondence including discussion regarding a draft of the latter's *Epistle to Epictetus of Corinth*. Epiphanius says that Apollinaris was 'dear to us, to Pope Athanasius, and to all orthodox men.'<sup>11</sup>

Although some uncertainties exist about the historical timeframe concerning Apollinaris, his teaching, and his movement, what seems clear is that in the year 376, Apollinaris sent his disciple Vitalis to Rome to appeal to Pope Damasus I for support. Apollinaris seems to have believed that sin was invariably linked to thoughts in the human mind (*nous*). Apollinaris took seriously the assertion that 'all sinned' (Rom.5:12), and the Pauline anthropology that used the terms 'flesh' (*sarx*) and 'mind' (*nous*) (Rom.7:14 – 8:11). Apollinaris was concerned with both divinity and humanity and the relation between them.

Apollinaris believed that the Logos was the archetypal 'mind' in whose image all other minds were created and served as secondary replicas.<sup>12</sup> The influence of Philo and Origen can be felt on this point, not least in the view that the fundamental ontological essence of a human being was her or his *mind*, not *body*. Apollinaris believed this model of Christ ensured a single subject in Jesus (no 'two sons' christology which tended towards adoptionism). To that end, he asserted that the human flesh was 'mixed' with the eternal Logos, and became 'one natural reality' (*mia physis*) with it. He regularly used the words 'mixture' (*mixis*) and 'fusion' (*synkrasis, synchysis*) to denote the union, assertions later denied by the Council of Chalcedon 451. He also believed his model ensured that passibility and suffering would be attributed to Jesus' physical body alone, not to the Son in himself, protecting the Son proper from change, and showing once again that notions of passibility and impassibility were driving christological concerns.<sup>13</sup> Apollinaris wished to narrowly interpret Athanasius' already abbreviated statement, 'the Word used the body as an instrument,' as the totality of what happened in the incarnation.<sup>14</sup>

Apollinaris was also concerned to answer what caused all human beings to be sinful, and simultaneously protect Jesus from it.<sup>15</sup> Not unreasonably, he answered the question by saying that all expressions of sin begin as thoughts; so the mental activity alone made one guilty in an active sense because he believed that thoughts move in more or less a linear movement into actions. What then of Jesus? Apollinaris implied that Jesus did not grow intellectually and emotionally as a human being, and that Jesus could not have been ignorant of anything at any point during his earthly life, which represented a docetic ('mere appearance without the substance') element as far as Jesus' inner life was concerned. This raised troubling moral questions about the origins of Christian faith. Had the authors of the four Gospel accounts been deceptive? Had Jesus been himself? Athanasius had wrestled with such exegetical questions in his *Third Discourse Against the Arians* and not fared much better, unfortunately.<sup>16</sup> While Athanasius was exploring these issues with the understanding that Jesus had a human mind, he nevertheless asserted that Jesus actually knew things when he professed ignorance or asked others for answers, etc. This was functionally identical to Apollinaris' exegetical conclusions. If we take Athanasius' opinions about Jesus' human growth and knowledge-ignorance as somewhat typical of Christian theologians in the fourth century, then we can understand why this weakness in the realm of biblical exegesis left an opening in the realm of formal dogmatic theology.

E. Jerome Van Kuiken asserts that Apollinaris made or sustained a two-fold argument about Jesus. 'Christ had heavenly flesh rather than flesh of Adamic descent and that, within that flesh, the divine Logos substituted for the human mind (or soul).'17 Van Kuiken is mistaken about the first point, and overly simplistic about the second. 'His argument is far more subtle than this and in no single passage early or late does Apollinaris say that Christ did not

<sup>10</sup> George Leonard Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics* (London: SPCK, 1968; originally published 1940), p.100; cf. Hunt, p.176

<sup>11</sup> Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* 77.2

<sup>12</sup> John A. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology, and Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), p.180

<sup>13</sup> McGuckin, p.180

<sup>14</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Apollinarium* 1.2 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius, Archbishop of Alexandria, with Notes, and an Appendix on S. Cyril of Alexandria and Theodoret* (translated by members of the English Church; Oxford: James Parker & Co., and London: Rivingtons, 1881), p.84 – 86 reports how the Apollinarians use this language

<sup>15</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Apollinarium* 2.6 *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.122 – 123 addresses the Apollinarian argument, 'But you say, 'If he assumed all, then assuredly he had human thoughts; but it is impossible that in human thoughts there should not be sin; and how then will Christ be without sin?''

<sup>16</sup> See Mako A. Nagasawa, *Athanasius as Nicene Interpreter of Jesus' Humanity: Third Discourse Against the Arians / Contra Arianos 3 (345 AD)*, found here: <https://www.anastasiscenter.org/atonement-sources-ec-athanasius-of-alexandria>

<sup>17</sup> E. Jerome Van Kuiken, *Christ's Humanity in Current and Ancient Controversy: Fallen or Not?* (London: T&T Clark, 2017), p.109

assume a human soul.<sup>18</sup> Apollinaris' agreement with Athanasius' *Letter to Epictetus of Corinth*<sup>19</sup> signals either that accounts to that effect are exaggerated by modern scholars, or that Apollinaris made a genuine shift in his terminology or thought. Regardless, in 376, Vitalis brought a creedal statement with him to Rome, hoping to win from Pope Damasus approval for his teacher Apollinaris. By that time, Apollinaris was willing to grant that Jesus had a real human body and an 'animal soul' (*psyche*). But Apollinaris asserted that the divine Logos replaced, or served as, the human mind (*nous*) in Jesus. Again, Apollinaris was motivated (among other things) by a concern to prevent the human Jesus from being described as 'sinful,' which is, notably, the same concern of the 'unfalleness' camp.

Complicating the situation was the crisis of church leadership occurring at Antioch. In 362, Athanasius wrote his *Tome to the Antiochenes* hoping to reconcile the two Nicene parties (led by Paulinus and Meletus, respectively) and uniting them against a third, an Arian, bishop. Athanasius was not successful. He did not mention Vitalis, so it stands to reason that sometime after 362, Vitalis broke away and formed a fourth group, an Apollinarian one.<sup>20</sup> In the judgment of Robin Orton, this move must have roughly coincided with Vitalis' trip to Rome in 376.<sup>21</sup> In 376, Damasus of Rome initially agreed to recognize Vitalis' orthodoxy on Nicene grounds, but upon receiving more information about his christology, wrote to Paulinus of Antioch (one of the Nicene bishops there) to require of Vitalis agreement with dogmatic statements about the humanity of Christ. This move furnishes us with the first unambiguous and datable appearance and condemnation of Apollinarian christology. Damasus demanded that Vitalis specifically renounce 'the doctrine that the Logos indwelt Christ's human body as a mind.'<sup>22</sup> Apollinaris' mature writings, set forth in a document called the *Apodeixis*, asserted exactly that. Yet Vitalis refused to yield.

Apollinaris remained active elsewhere trying to gather support from others, but without success. In Palestine, the scholar and translator Jerome rejected his overtures. So did a group of pro-Nicene bishops exiled from Egypt, relocated to the Galilee region and led by Peter of Alexandria, the successor of Athanasius. With this latter group, Apollinaris tried to argue that 'his Christology was identical with that of Athanasius.'<sup>23</sup> This is significant to a historical appraisal of Athanasius' own christology. The encounter suggests both how Athanasius might have been misrepresented by Apollinaris (probably Athanasius' earlier writings where he said the Word used the human body as an instrument), and how he was (more properly) understood by his successor and fellow bishops from Alexandria. Orton writes bluntly, 'But they were able to examine some of Apollinarius's writings, became suspicious of his teachings, and rejected his approaches.'<sup>24</sup> This strongly suggests that Athanasius had more developed views about the humanity of Christ than he left in, say, his writings against the Arians, where he was defending the divinity of Christ. Quite possibly, the two books which have been attributed to Athanasius were written by these Alexandrian bishops in exile.

Curiously, however, the response of the orthodox to Apollinaris was less than vigorous, even confused and self-sabotaging. Scholars cite church business, church politics, and imperial politics as factors. I suggest a theological reason, in addition. A retelling of the history will be helpful.

Shortly after Vitalis returned to Antioch from Rome, the heresy hunter Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis, visited Antioch. He identified Vitalis' teaching as heretical, and wrote in his *Panarion/Against Heresies* that Vitalis was teaching that Jesus had a human soul (*psyche*) but not a human mind (*nous*).<sup>25</sup> Epiphanius asked Basil of Caesarea to intervene in Antioch, but Basil declined, probably not wanting to muddy the waters at Antioch further, and immediately alienate the Vitalian contingent. Basil did accuse Apollinaris of abandoning the literal sense of Scripture and wholly embracing its allegorical sense only. Although we do not have extant writings of Apollinaris to substantiate Basil's accusation, assuming Basil's accuracy, this is a sign that Apollinaris was expressing one wing of theology plausibly influenced by Philo and Origen, in terms of his biblical methodology.

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<sup>18</sup> Hunt, p.180 quoting Charles E. Raven, *Apollinarianism: An Essay on the Christology of the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), p.173

<sup>19</sup> Robin Orton, *St. Gregory of Nyssa, Anti-Apollinarian Writings* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), p.10 notes that Apollinaris writes of his agreement with Athanasius on the human soul of Christ (in *Letter to Epictetus of Corinth 7*) in his own correspondence with Serapion of Thmuis. Scholars estimate the date of Apollinaris' letter to Serapion between 360 to 370.

<sup>20</sup> Orton, p.13 – 14

<sup>21</sup> Orton, p.15

<sup>22</sup> Orton, p.16

<sup>23</sup> Orton, p.17

<sup>24</sup> Orton, p.17

<sup>25</sup> Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion/Against Heresies 77.22 - 23*

The following year, in 377, Basil decided to seek Rome's support in condemning various heretical views in the Eastern church. A synod was convened in Rome, which condemned the substance of Apollinaris' teaching without naming him, along with the view of Sabellius (directed towards the followers of Marcellus of Ancyra with Paulinus of Antioch suspected) and the view of Eustathius of Sebaste that the Holy Spirit was not consubstantial with the Father and Son. Administratively, however, very little of this was carried out. Basil died in January of 379.

The second ecumenical council, Constantinople 381, equivocated on Apollinarian teaching. 'It may be, as Lietzmann suggests, that the message to the Apollinarians was that, provided they made no political trouble and did not set up their own bishops, a blind eye would be turned to their doctrinal peculiarities.'<sup>26</sup> Whatever added imperial pressure that Emperor Theodosius brought to bear may have been a factor in the background, perhaps in unwritten backroom conversation. Yet in 382, Ambrose of Milan wrote to Emperor Theodosius complaining that Apollinaris should be exiled from his bishopric (he was still presumably at Syrian Laodicea) and urging an explicit condemnation of his teaching. Later that year, Theodosius urged the Eastern bishops to hold a synod at Constantinople. But the bishops still allowed ambiguity to stand about Jesus' divine *and human* minds. They said, vaguely, that 'the dispensation of the flesh is neither soulless nor mindless nor imperfect' and that 'God's Word was perfect before the ages, and became perfect man in the last days for our salvation.'<sup>27</sup> Apollinaris and his followers could co-sign statements like that. No one doubted that Jesus Christ had a mind. The issue was whether he had both a divine mind and a human mind, or only a divine one. I also note here the use of the term 'perfect' for Jesus' humanity at conception, not the resurrection as the *Epistle to the Hebrews* declares (Heb.5:9), and will discuss it below. We are seeing here the redefining and redeployment of biblical terms about Jesus' humanity.

By the autumn of 382, the Apollinarians had set up a bishop in Nazianzus and were worrying Cleodnius the priest. Cleodnius was an ally of Gregory of Nazianzus, who had stationed Cleodnius there when he, being in poor health, took up residence in Xanxaris. Gregory wrote *Epistle* 101 to Cleodnius condemning Apollinarian teaching on Jesus' humanity. This letter is where Gregory famously says that if God had not taken all of our human nature to Himself in the incarnation, including the human mind (*nous*), then some part has been left behind, unsaved: 'That which is not assumed is not healed.' Soon afterwards, Gregory wrote *Epistle* 102 to Cleodnius dismantling the Apollinarians' common accusation against the orthodox that he and they believed in 'two Sons' – one divine and one human. In 383, Gregory had to return to Nazianzus to resume his ministry, preaching against the Apollinarians. Probably around this time, Gregory enlisted the help of his friend Gregory of Nyssa, the younger brother of Basil of Caesarea and the third of 'the Cappadocian fathers,' to take up the pen against the Apollinarian heresy.<sup>28</sup> The younger Gregory would write two such books, which I will explore later.

In July 383, Emperor Theodosius issued a decree outlawing the eucharists and ordinations of various heretical groups: the Eunomians, the Macedonians (or 'Pneumatomachoi,' those who did not accept the divinity of the Holy Spirit, against whom Athanasius had written his *Letters to Serapion* around 360), and the Arians.<sup>29</sup> Yet curiously again, the Apollinarians were not mentioned. In September, this 'oversight' was corrected to include the Apollinarians.<sup>30</sup> From this point in time onward, ostensibly church leaders and imperial decrees were aimed squarely at the Apollinarian movement. Yet in 387, Gregory of Nazianzus wrote a letter complaining about the Apollinarians' continued success. Gregory of Nazianzus' letter was addressed to Nectarius, bishop of Constantinople. Perhaps not coincidentally, in 388, Emperor Theodosius promulgated his most forceful decree against the Apollinarians, outlawing their eucharists and ordinations, deposing their bishops, and banning them from the imperial presence.<sup>31</sup>

Yet despite this ostensibly formidable opposition from both church and state hierarchies, only the death of Apollinaris himself in either 390 or 392 dealt the major setback to the movement.

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<sup>26</sup> Orton, p.23

<sup>27</sup> Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.9. See Robin Orton, p.26

<sup>28</sup> Starting in 380, Gregory of Nyssa became unusually productive in his literary output against heretical movements. This included his *Against Eunomius*, *To the Greeks – Common Notions*, and *To Ablabius – On Not Three Gods*. Orton suggests that during the period 380 – 385, Nyssen also wrote his two treatises against the Apollinarians: the *Answer Against Apollinaris* and the *Letter to Theophilus Against the Apollinarians*. See Orton, p.31.

<sup>29</sup> *Codex Theodosius* 16.5.11; see <http://ancientrome.ru/ius/library/codex/theod/liber16.htm#5>

<sup>30</sup> *Codex Theodosius* 16.5.12

<sup>31</sup> *Codex Theodosius* 16.5.14

‘The imperial decrees did not succeed, however, and the heresy was well received among many Orientals, but it did not long survive its originator.’<sup>32</sup>

The Catholic Encyclopedia offers:

‘His following, at one time considerable in Constantinople, Syria, and Phoenicia, hardly survived him. Some few disciples, like Vitalis, Valentinus, Polemon, and Timothy, tried to perpetuate the error of the master and probably are responsible for the forgeries noticed above. The sect itself soon became extinct. Towards 416, many returned to the mother-Church, while the rest drifted away into Monophysitism.’<sup>33</sup>

Robin Orton assesses the evidence as follows:

‘But even then, though Apollinarianism was at last clearly, definitively, and officially outlawed in both East and West, there is evidence for its survival into the fifth century— only in 425 were the Apollinarians at Antioch officially reconciled under Bishop Theodotus—and it seems certain that it provided fertile soil for the nurture of the monophysitism which was to trouble the church in that century.’<sup>34</sup>

Thus, one interpretation of Apollinarianism is that it did not, in fact, die out. It simply mutated. As the three way Nestorian-Chalcedonian-Monophysite debates on the humanity of Christ erupted in the fifth century, the concerns about the interaction between divine and human natures in Christ – whether expressed in Platonic notions of impassible divinity and passible humanity; in exegetical categories of Antiochene and Alexandrian approaches to Scripture; and with terminological confusion of how Jesus could be human (and ‘mortal,’ even ‘fallen’) and yet actively sinless – were absorbed and rearticulated along different lines. For example, Augustine said that his friend Alypius was confused when he came ‘towards the Christian faith, until he ascertained that it was the error of the Apollinarian heretics.’<sup>35</sup>

Seeking to explain the historical difficulties that the orthodox clergy had in mobilizing against Apollinarianism, Hans Lietzmann suggests that the Apollinarian movement must have had an advocate in the court of Constantinople.<sup>36</sup> Orton, by citing Lietzmann, seems to grant that as a possibility. It certainly may have been so. Yet the ‘court advocate’ theory explains neither the reticence among bishops to criticize Apollinarianism nor the ground-level support and even momentum enjoyed by his followers. The felt need to maintain a pro-Nicene alliance in the fight against the Arian camps might also explain much – yet, again, it does not explain everything. Orthodox leaders criticized Marcellus of Ancyra, so why not Apollinarianism? Perhaps his esteem and his friendship with Athanasius protected him. Yet the divided church leadership at Antioch was already an open wound which the bishops were trying to address at least since Athanasius’ intervention in 362.

One more factor seems necessary to posit: terminological and conceptual weakness in the church, broadly speaking, about the humanity of Jesus, and specifically the nature of body. Hannah Hunt, in her insightful study of the theological views of the body in early Christianity, points out, ‘It is sometimes said that Apollinarianism predated Apollinarianism.’<sup>37</sup> For example, Apollinarianism could appeal to the second century apologist Justin Martyr, who said, ‘Christ, who appeared for our sakes, became the whole rational being, both body, and reason (*logos*), and soul.’<sup>38</sup> Justin incorporated a Hellenistic understanding of the body-soul relation where the soul was divided into lower (animal) and higher (logical) functions. Not only does Justin’s deployment of these key terms correspond imprecisely with the apostle Paul’s, he demonstrates the Hellenistic Christian tendency to elevate reason (mind, *nous*) to the uppermost part of the human, even its most fundamental ontological portion, and left a terminological opening for Apollinarianism to claim that the Logos occupied that part.

Hence, I contend that the departure from Irenaeus of Lyons regarding the human body-soul unity, and the embrace

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<sup>32</sup> Encyclopedia.com, ‘Apollinarianism’; <https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion/christianity/christianity-general/apollinarianism>

<sup>33</sup> Catholic Encyclopedia, New Advent, ‘Apollinarianism’; <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01615b.htm>

<sup>34</sup> Orton, p.27

<sup>35</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* 7.19

<sup>36</sup> Hans Lietzmann, *Apollinarianism* (1904) cited by Orton, p.26 – 27

<sup>37</sup> Hunt, p.178

<sup>38</sup> Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 10; cf. Hunt, p.178

of other understandings of the body-soul relationship, especially that of Origen of Alexandria, led to confusion and vulnerability on the part of the pro-Nicenes. This is where the ‘unfallenness’ camp starts to take an identifiable shape, using key biblical terms but at the cost of fidelity to apostolic meanings of those terms, as I will demonstrate below. It contributed to the tension between the ‘school of Antioch’ and the ‘school of Alexandria’ especially over the use of allegory. It contributed to the eventual split between the Eastern Orthodox who defended Chalcedonian dyophysite christology and the Oriental Orthodox who were ‘monophysite’ or ‘miophysite.’ It led to an emotional (if not theological) opening for the cult of the saints, since Christians wondering who could understand the struggle of trying to be faithful from within a fallen human nature could no longer look to Jesus. It contributed to a lack of appreciation of the role of biblical Israel, and a tendency to underappreciate the Jewishness of Jesus, since Jesus was considered to have lived ‘under the law,’ but without the fallen human nature that Israelites actually had while ‘under the law.’ It led to theological and pastoral weaknesses which emerged in curious eccentric views like apthartodocetism, which I will explain below. It contributed to the growth of extreme monastic views critical of marriage and sexuality. And so on.



## Pseudo-Athanasius, *Contra Apollinarium* (4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> century)

### Introduction

Two books attributed to Athanasius take aim at the Apollinarian heresy. Even though church tradition ascribes them to the Alexandrian bishop who dominated the intellectual life of the church during the mid-fourth century, the writings themselves are anonymous. Modern scholars, perceiving some subtle but important differences between these two works and those uncontested in authorship, therefore call them ‘pseudo-Athanasius.’<sup>39</sup> The question of authorship is an interesting one. In 1985, George Dion. Dragas put forward the most recent argument in favor of these writings being genuinely from Athanasius, perhaps written shortly before his death in 373.<sup>40</sup> Dragas suggests that Athanasius refrained from naming both himself and Apollinaris in the text out of respect for their friendship and alliance under the Nicene banner. In 1988, however, R.P.C. Hanson maintained several meaningful objections to Dragas’ thesis, with some of which I concur.<sup>41</sup> For purposes of his own study, E. Jerome Van Kuiken takes them to be from Athanasius, and expresses confidence that the two books rest on the ‘unfallen’ view of Jesus’ humanity.<sup>42</sup> Van Kuiken believes the evidence contained within the two books *Contra Apollinaris* is sufficient to qualify and condition our understanding of Athanasius’ earlier writings. For purposes of my study, I am concerned about both the question of authorship and even more in the question of reception. Christians received these two letters as sufficiently Athanasian so as to pass them under his name. Although I am not persuaded that they are from Athanasius’ own hand, I regard them as reflecting many of Athanasius’ terminological and conceptual patterns. Hereafter, I refer to the author of the two books *Contra Apollinarium* as ‘Athanasius.’

The key sections in the two books where Athanasius explores the nature of Jesus’ humanity are *Contra Apollinarium* 1.6 – 8 and 2.5 – 11. Before and after those sections, Athanasius engages with Apollinarian ideas and rebuts them. I will focus my comments on *Contra Apollinarium* 1.6 – 8 and 2.5 – 11 since these two sections deal more positively with Scripture and logical points related to the incarnate Son’s human nature and his mission. Since 2.5 – 11 contains more material, I will address 2.5 – 11 before 1.6 – 8 and a few other sections. But before that, I address a major consideration about words and their definitions, a topic which must be regularly revisited in this study.

### A Caution: When the Meanings of Key Terms Change

I believe what we find in *Contra Apollinarium* is another instance of Christians, in the midst of theological debate and controversy, taking key biblical terms at times, and shifting their meaning, or range of meaning. This had already happened long before the fourth century with the terms ‘Son of God’ and ‘Son of Man.’ Starting from the second century, during the theological debates about the Son and the Trinity, ‘Son of God’ referred to Jesus’ divinity, and ‘Son of Man’ referred to his humanity. While this shorthand is perfectly understandable on one level, it is also an amusing, ironic, and potentially dangerous fact that Christians from the second century onwards swapped the underlying *meanings* of these biblical titles almost perfectly.

In biblical idiom, ‘Son of God’ was a title applied to Israel collectively (Ex.4:22; Hos.11:1; Ps.80:15; Rom.9:4) and especially to the Davidic kings (Ps.2:7; 89:27); thus Solomon was said to sit, not merely on the throne of David, but ‘the throne of the LORD’ (1 Chr.29:23). In the Bible, ‘Son of God’ referred to humans in our humanity, especially in the role as inheriting something from God, because ‘sonship’ invoked, among other things, ‘inheritance.’ Even

<sup>39</sup> See e.g. the note on p.143 – 147 in ET *Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*

<sup>40</sup> George Dion. Dragas, *St. Athanasius Contra Apollinarem* (Athens: Church and Theology, 1985)

<sup>41</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318 – 381 AD* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), p.645 – 651.

In my opinion, Hanson’s most significant objections are: (1) the Apollinarians have been attacking the doctrine of the author, but it is incongruous that the historical Apollinaris would have attacked Athanasius outright because other literature in this purported time frame demonstrates good relations between them (p.647 – 8); (2) a very unusual use of the term ‘homoousion’; and (3) Athanasius pre-362 demonstrated a reluctance to stabilize and use the term ‘hypostasis’ so it is a surprise to find the phrase ‘hypostatic union’ in these letters. Hanson’s skepticism that Athanasius did not believe Jesus had a human soul and mind is less compelling, and has been significantly answered by Khaled Anatolios. Athanasius’ description of the human soul and mind in his earliest work, *Contra Gentes*, is sufficient evidence that his theological anthropology included such. At the core, in my view, Athanasius struggles in his christological terminology with the question and terminology of divine passibility and impassibility, which then affects his understanding of Jesus’ human changes – emotional and intellectual – and limitations (such as ignorance and his motivation for asking questions), when placed against the backdrop of a divine nature which, in some sense, was asserted to not change. While I differ from Athanasius in his definition of passibility and impassibility, I nevertheless affirm with Anatolios, et.al. that his early articulation of the incarnation and soteriology is spacious enough to contain a human soul and mind in Christ. Also, that the exiled Alexandria bishops, led by Athanasius’ successor Peter, rejected Apollinaris’ claim to be the intellectual heir of Athanasius, is a major historical attestation that Athanasius did in fact teach about the humanity in Christ in more robust ways than his surviving literary corpus suggests.

<sup>42</sup> E. Jerome Van Kuiken, *Christ’s Humanity in Current and Ancient Controversy: Fallen or Not?* (London: T&T Clark, 2017), p.108 – 112

the phrase ‘son of’ did not necessarily imply physical descent but inheritance, including the inheritance of certain characteristics (e.g. ‘Barnabus’ was a nickname that meant ‘son of encouragement’). ‘Son of Man,’ however, referred to the ambiguous but possibly divine figure in the vision of Daniel the prophet, who *looked* human: he looked ‘*like* a Son of Man’ (Dan.7:13). That figure, in the context of Daniel, might even be connected to the angelic one who protected the three Hebrew young men in the fiery furnace: ‘the fourth is like a son of the gods!’ (Dan.3:25). In the Bible, ‘Son of God’ referred to humans, and ‘Son of Man’ referred to an ambiguous but possibly angelic, even divine, figure. Jesus seems to have enjoyed using the title ‘Son of Man’ for himself because of the ambiguity present in the title. Again, Christians redeployed these terms but outfitted them with almost perfectly exchanged meanings. Incidentally, this is one clue that the church as a whole was gradually losing the ability to interpret the Old Testament in a literary-historical way.

In theory, responsible and sensitive observers could separate the context of Scripture from the context of the theological debates of the early centuries. In practice, however, the discourse was undoubtedly confusing. For example, we find Athanasius himself expending a massive amount of energy arguing in what sense ‘Wisdom’ personified in Proverbs 8 was ‘begotten’ or ‘created,’ simply because he equated ‘Wisdom’ with the Son directly.<sup>43</sup> He therefore believed he needed to parse out when Proverbs 8:22 – 23 referred to the eternal, pre-incarnate Son (who was ‘begotten by the Father’ eternally) and when this passage referred to the incarnate Son in his humanity (and whose humanity was ‘created’). While Athanasius’ solution is ingenious, the fact remains that he could have simply argued that ‘Wisdom’ personified in Proverbs 8 does *not* refer straightaway to the Son, but simply a type of relationship that the Creator God had with His creation, and how Israel served as a locus of that relationship. Yet he accepted the basic proposition – shared by Arians and orthodox alike – that Proverbs 8 was ‘about’ the Son.

The typological-allegorical practices that permeated the early church, both on the orthodox side and the heretical side(s), along with the detailed intensity with which both camps sought to ground their positions in Scripture, led to Christians reading back into Scripture meanings that did not exist there before. While some interpretations were admirably perceptive, others were clever and appreciable, and still others were alarming. These practices might even have fueled the fire of the heretics, who noticed that a few orthodox practices of reading and interpreting Scripture were arbitrary to some degree, which is a much longer story. Thus, during the theological debates, both sides used key biblical terms, and they assumed that the meanings they attached to these terms were perfectly continuous with their meanings in Scripture, yet this was not always the case. Although Athanasius, at the close of these two books says that he is simply resting on Scripture alone and encourages Apollinaris to return to Scripture,<sup>44</sup> it is not exactly Scripture alone that he was deploying.

#### *The Redefining of Key Terms: ‘Perfect’*

Throughout *Contra Apollinarium*, the meanings of a few biblical terms are being subtly but significantly *shifted*, particularly the words ‘perfect,’ ‘flesh,’ and ‘likeness.’ I will first discuss the word ‘perfect’ in biblical usage and in the context of the Apollinarian controversy. In Hebrews, the word ‘perfect’ refers to Jesus’ human status *after he was raised from the dead*. In critical passages, Hebrews discusses the earthly faithfulness of Jesus, and moves to consider his suffering on the cross, to the perfection he obtained in his resurrection:

2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to *perfect* the author of their salvation through sufferings.

5:7 In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.<sup>8</sup> Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.<sup>9</sup> And *having been made perfect*, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation...

10:1 For the Law... can never... *make perfect* those who draw near.

<sup>43</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 2.18 – 82

<sup>44</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Apollinaris* 2.19 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.142 says, ‘And you, who employ the same sophisms [as earlier heretics], say what is not written in Scripture, and pervert the unstable. But it is enough to believe in what has been written, and what has taken place as Paul says, ‘Like to us in all things, without sin,’ and Peter, ‘Since Christ then suffered for us in flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind’, and not push speculations further, and so reject the truth.’

Jesus was not ‘immoral’ – that is, actively disobedient or unfaithful to the Father – before his resurrection. In that sense, he was ‘without sin’ (Heb.4:15). Yet in the language of Hebrews, there was something ‘incomplete’ and even ‘imperfect’ about Jesus’ human nature prior to his resurrection, at the very least because of the mortality that Jesus endured by virtue of partaking in a post-fall human nature and sharing in that baseline experience of all human beings (Heb.2:14 – 15).

I find it significant and concerning that Athanasius, in his earlier works, when describing the humanity of Christ, uses the term ‘perfect’ along the same lines as Hebrews – that is, ‘perfect’ refers to the resurrection and the quality or state of Jesus’ human nature being purified of mortality and sinfulness. Of course, Athanasius describes other things as ‘perfect,’ including the quality of arguments, the physical shape of objects, the nature of God, and so forth. But insofar as he describes the humanity of Jesus as ‘perfect,’ he restrains himself to the meaning already assigned to that word by Hebrews. In *On the Incarnation* (written ~328), he uses the word ‘perfect’ four times, each time referring to Jesus’ resurrected body, including the impact of his sacrifice on the cross to purify his human nature, and using the language of Hebrews 2:14.<sup>45</sup> In *Festal Letter* 11 (339), Athanasius refers to ‘all that is future and perfect,’<sup>46</sup> again demonstrating that ‘the perfect’ when denoting the human refers to that which is resurrected. In *Discourses Against the Arians 1 – 3* (342 – 3), he only refers to Jesus’ resurrected human nature as ‘perfect.’<sup>47</sup> In fact, in the *Second Discourse* 2.67, Athanasius states the logical complement to Hebrews about Jesus’ human nature being *imperfect* prior to his resurrection: ‘the *perfect* Word of God puts around Him an *imperfect body*, [that] He might, by Himself, *perfect* what was wanting to man. Now *immortality* was wanting to him, and the way to paradise...’ In his sermon *On Luke 10:22 and Matthew 11:27*, Athanasius refers to ‘all things’ being ‘set right and *perfected*’ because of Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>48</sup> In *Life of Antony* (362), Athanasius deploys the word ‘perfect’ to the desired outcome of moral-spiritual commitments Christians make – purification of the soul and martyrdom – which derive their meaning from Jesus’ own death and resurrection.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 2.10 (the incarnate Son was made ‘*perfect* through suffering,’ quoting Hebrews 2:14); 4.21 (‘He took the occasion of *perfecting* His sacrifice’ by dying on the cross); 4.21 (‘His body rose in *perfect* soundness’); 6.37 (‘by means of a cross [Jesus] *perfected* his sacrifice for the salvation of all’)

<sup>46</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letter* 11.1

<sup>47</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourse Against the Arians* 1.59 (‘The Law...*perfected* no one, needing the visitation of the Word, as Paul has said, but that visitation has *perfected* the work of the Father... [because] the presence of the Word *abolished death*’); 2.9 (‘...the Saviour’s sacrifice, taking place once, has *perfected* everything, and has become faithful as remaining *for ever*’); 2.56 (‘by His dwelling in the flesh, sin might *perfectly* be expelled from the flesh’); 2.66 – 67 (‘man, though created *perfect*, has become wanting through the transgression, and dead by sin, and it was unbecoming that the work of God should remain *imperfect*... therefore the *perfect* Word of God puts around Him an *imperfect* body, [that] He might, by Himself, *perfect* what was wanting to man. Now *immortality* was wanting to him, and the way to paradise... Therefore it remains for us to say that when He has become man, then He took the works. For then He *perfected* them, by healing our wounds and vouchsafing to us *the resurrection* from the dead... For then, because the works had become imperfect and mutilated from the transgression, He is said in respect to the body to be created; that by perfecting them and making them whole, He might present the Church unto the Father, as the Apostle says, ‘not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish’ Mankind then is *perfected* in Him and restored, as it was made at the beginning, nay, with greater grace. For, on *rising from the dead*, we shall no longer fear death, but shall ever reign in Christ in the heavens.’); 2.74 (‘For so He is founded for our sakes, taking on Him what is ours, that we, as incorporated and compacted and bound together in Him through the likeness of the flesh, may attain unto a perfect man, and abide immortal and incorruptible’); 3.22 (‘The Word then has the real and true identity of nature with the Father; but to us it is given to imitate it, as has been said; for He immediately adds, ‘I in them and You in Me; that they may be made *perfect* in one.’ Here at length the Lord asks something greater and more *perfect* for us; for it is plain that the Word has come to be in us, for He has put on our body. ‘And Thou Father in Me;’ ‘for I am Your Word, and since You are in Me, because I am Your Word, and I in them because of the body, and because of You the salvation of men is *perfected* in Me, therefore I ask that they also may become one, according to the body that is in Me and according to its *perfection*; that they too may become *perfect*, having oneness with It, and having become one in It; that, as if all were carried by Me, all may be one body and one spirit, and may grow up unto a *perfect* man.’); 3.23 (‘For whence is this their *perfecting*, but that I, Your Word, having borne their body, and become man, have *perfected* the work, which You gave Me, O Father? And the work is *perfected*, because men, redeemed from sin, *no longer remain dead*; but being deified, have in each other, by looking at Me, the bond of charity’); 3.51 (‘If He advanced when He became man, it is plain that, before He became man, He was *imperfect*; and rather the flesh became to Him a cause of *perfection*, than He to the flesh. And again, if, as being the Word, He advances, what has He more to become than Word and Wisdom and Son and God’s Power? For the Word is all these, of which if one can anyhow partake as it were one ray, such a man becomes all *perfect* among men, and equal to Angels. For Angels, and Archangels, and Dominions, and all the Powers, and Thrones, as partaking the Word, behold always the face of His Father. How then does He who to others supplies *perfection*, Himself advance later than they?’); 3.52 (‘To men then belongs advance; but the Son of God, since He could not advance, being *perfect* in the Father, humbled Himself for us, that in His humbling we on the other hand might be able to increase. And our increase is no other than the renouncing things sensible, and coming to the Word Himself; since His humbling is nothing else than His taking our flesh. It was not then the Word, considered as the Word, who advanced; who is *perfect* from the *perfect* Father, who needs nothing, nay brings forward others to an advance; but humanly is He here also said to advance, since advance belongs to man.’)

<sup>48</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *On Luke 10:22 and Matthew 11:27* chapter 2, says ‘Since then all things ‘were delivered’ to Him, and He is made Man, straightway all things were set right and *perfected*. Earth receives blessing instead of a curse, Paradise was opened to the robber, Hades cowered, the tombs were opened and the dead raised, the gates of Heaven were lifted up to await Him that ‘comes from Edom?’’

<sup>49</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony* 34, 46.

In the Apollinarian controversy, however, writers on both sides attribute the term ‘perfect’ to Jesus’ humanity in other ways. Apollinaris claimed that his opponents – though Nicene in their doctrine of the Trinity – made Jesus out to be two ‘persons.’ This was because he accused them of applying the term ‘perfect’ to Jesus’ humanity in the sense that Jesus’ humanity had a ‘personhood’ of its own. Athanasius and other orthodox writers denied that, and argued for the distinction between ‘human nature’ and ‘human personhood.’ They replied that they must use the term ‘perfect’ to refer to the ‘completeness’ of the human nature the Son assumed in the incarnation. A key passage demonstrating this definition of ‘perfect’ is *Contra Apollinarium* 1.14 and 15:

‘Christ set us free in His own form which was like to ours, *perfect* and most real; how can you go on saying this, as if God had not yet been reconciled to mankind? How then was it that the Savior came among us? Was it as if He were unable to set free the whole of man? Or as if He abhorred the mind which had once sinned, or feared that he Himself might become a partaker in sin, if He, being God, were to become *perfect* man?’<sup>50</sup>

The density of references to our human nature make clear what Athanasius means. Jesus’ form was ‘like to ours, perfect’ in the sense of having body and rational soul. Jesus set free ‘the whole of man’ because he assumed ‘perfect man.’ Athanasius argues that Jesus had a human mind as well as a divine mind, which made his human nature ‘perfect’ in the sense that he had all the constituent components of human nature, which we have also. Consequently, Jesus was able to carry ‘the whole of man’ into resurrection and thus, salvation:

‘Because after God had made a nature in a sinless state, the devil perverted it into transgressing His commandment, and finding out deadly sin, therefore did God the Word restore for himself this nature in a state which it was incapable of being perverted by the devil and of finding out sin: and therefore did the Lord say, ‘The prince of the world comes, and finds nothing in me.’ But if the ruler of the world found in Christ not a single thing that was his, much more did Christ abandon to the ruler of this world nothing of his own handywork. Or this was another reason for his finding nothing in him – because Christ exhibited the principle of newness in its *perfection*, that he might accomplish in *perfection* the salvation of the whole of man, of reasonable soul and body, that resurrection might be *perfect*.’<sup>51</sup>

Apollinaris seems to have co-opted the term ‘perfect’ from the orthodox, and perhaps even Hebrews, and distorted it. Apollinaris argued the word required the inclusion of ‘human personhood’ and balked therefore at the suggestion of Jesus being ‘perfect God and perfect man.’ He argued that such a statement entailed two subjects or subjectivities in Jesus – thus, ‘two sons,’ which he accused the orthodox of upholding. Apollinaris also argued that if Jesus had a human mind, then he would have necessarily sinned in thought; Jesus would not have been ‘perfect’ in a moral sense.

In *Contra Apollinarium*, Athanasius attempts to reclaim the term ‘perfect’ from Apollinaris, but uses the term in a confusing way. While Athanasius seems to sometimes use the word ‘perfect’ to describe the quality of Jesus’ resurrected humanity, much like Hebrews does,<sup>52</sup> at least on other occasions, he uses ‘perfect’ to describe the totality of the constituent parts of the human nature assumed by the Son at conception, without logically implying human personhood.<sup>53</sup> While this was an understandable move, and while Athanasius is still clearly maintaining the qualitative difference between Jesus’ human nature before and after his resurrection, we must also acknowledge that Athanasius’ usage of the word ‘perfect’ is, at times, critically *different* from that in Hebrews *and his earlier writings*. In Hebrews, Jesus’ humanity could only be spoken of as ‘perfect’ following his lifelong faithfulness, suffering, death, and resurrection. Jesus needed to ‘purify’ (Heb.1:3; 9:13; etc.) mortality – at the very least – out of his

<sup>50</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Apollinaris* 1.14 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.105

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid* 1.15 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.106

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid* 1.14 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.105 probably refers to the resurrection when he says, ‘But if you cannot point out another place, beside the sepulchre and Hades, from which places man has been perfectly set free, because Christ set us free in his own form which was like to ours, *perfect* and most real...’ See also 1.15 in *ET*, p.106, ‘that he might accomplish in *perfection* the salvation of the whole of man, of reasonable soul and body, that resurrection also might be *perfect*.’

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid* 1.7 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.93 says, ‘for he himself became man... he who is by nature God was born man, that these two might be one, *perfect* in all things, exhibiting his birth as natural and most true’. See also *ibid* 1.14 in *ET*, p.105, ‘How then was it that the Saviour came among us? Was it as if he were unable to set free the whole of man? Or as if he abhorred the mind which had once sinned, or if he, being God, were to become *perfect* man?’ See also *ibid* 1.20 in *ET*, p.113, ‘neither is an animated body in itself *perfect* man, nor is a “heavenly mind” in itself God’

humanity. One occurrence is quite critical: in *Contra Apollinaris* 1.21, Athanasius quotes Hebrews 10:1, ‘Why did the Law make nothing perfect?’ Did Jesus bypass life ‘under the Law’ by starting his human life already ‘perfect’? If he did that, could Jesus still be considered *Jewish*? Athanasius moves rather quickly onto other questions, leaving us to read the remainder of his two books very closely to understand his own answer.

The main problem associated with Athanasius’ language in *Contra Apollinarium* is that he encourages us to read back new content into a familiar word, even a biblical word. In Hebrews, the word ‘perfect’ is *eschatological*, refers to the *ultimate* plan of God for humans to make us immortal, and *includes* human volitional partnership and its reciprocal impact upon the human nature. In Athanasius’ *Contra Apollinarium*, by contrast, ‘perfect’ can sometimes be *creational*, refer to the *original* constitution of humans, and is *prior* to human volitional partnership. Athanasius quotes Hebrews straightforwardly and without exegetical qualification many times in *Contra Apollinarium*. This was sure to impact the reading and understanding of Scripture itself by others. The author of *Contra Apollinarium* gives the impression that his own understanding of when and how Jesus’ humanity became ‘perfect’ and in what sense it was ‘perfect’ is the same meaning Hebrews has about those matters. Yet it is not. And this tendency multiplies.

#### *The Redefining of Key Terms: ‘Without Sin’*

Another such phrase is also from Hebrews: the phrase ‘without sin.’ Both Apollinaris and Athanasius maintained that Jesus was ‘without sin,’ although how they envisioned Jesus doing that differed, of course. In *Contra Apollinarium*, Athanasius quotes the portion of Hebrews 4:15 that says ‘without sin’ in 2.5 and 2.19. The former serves as a kind of ‘thesis statement’ which Athanasius defends in 2.6ff., beginning with the central Apollinarian claim that having a human mind would have made Christ commit a sin. The latter occurs at the close of the second book. Its placement summarizes Athanasius’ case against Apollinaris.

The difference between how Hebrews describes Jesus as ‘without sin’ and how Athanasius does so is subtle but significant. Hebrews says this:

‘For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.’ (Hebrews 4:15)

When Hebrews declares that Jesus is ‘without sin,’ it does so to declare that he was victorious over every temptation. In other words, Hebrews uses the phrase to evaluate and celebrate Jesus’ spiritual and moral faithfulness as a human being. This was the journey Jesus took through the suffering, on his way to resurrection and to making his human nature ‘perfect.’ Hebrews argues that Jesus, as our true high priest, sympathizes with our weaknesses, and presumably even the time we capitulate to temptations.

By comparison, Athanasius deploys the same phrase but makes it, too, do double duty. In *Contra Apollinaris* 2.5, he argues that the manhood of the incarnate Son, and not his divinity, had a ‘beginning of existence from Nazareth.’ His humanity, which came through Mary, was from ‘David and Abraham, and of Adam.’ In other words, Athanasius is speaking here simply of Jesus’ authentic humanity. About this he says:

‘Having taken from the Virgin all that God originally fashioned and made in order to the constitution of man, yet without sin: as also the apostle says, ‘In all points like to us, yet without sin.’<sup>54</sup>

At the end of the two books, in 2.18 – 19, Athanasius summarizes his points and his terminology, saying:

‘But where there is the name of ‘flesh,’ there is the orderly form of our whole constitution, but without sin... And you, who employ the same sophisms [as earlier heretics], say what is not written in Scripture, and pervert the unstable. But it is enough to believe in what has been written, and what has taken place as Paul says, ‘Like to us in all things, without sin,’ and Peter, ‘Since Christ then suffered for us in flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind’, and not push speculations further, and so reject the truth.’<sup>55</sup>

These are not exact quotations of Hebrews 4:15. Athanasius has changed the context in which the phrase ‘without

<sup>54</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Apollinaris* 2.5 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.122.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid* 2.18 – 19 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.141 – 142.

sin' occurs. No longer does 'without sin' describe the faithfulness of Jesus to the Father, his victory over every kind of temptation, and his 'record,' so to speak, during and after his dynamic human life. Instead, Athanasius deploys the phrase *either* as a comment on the 'already purified' humanity of Jesus from the point of conception, *or* as a summary 'record' of Jesus' faithfulness and active obedience. The word 'sin' can legitimately refer to sin as a condition afflicting human nature, or sin as an action or activity. Thus, to repeat: Athanasius uses the phrase 'without sin' in a confusing way. It can be interpreted as a straightforward declaration of the 'unfallen' position, as Van Kuiken, for example, perceives it. Or, it can be interpreted as *not* declaring something about Jesus' ontological condition as human, either 'unfallen' or 'fallen,' but rather still as a record of his life activity, the telling of which is anticipated in 2.5, and summarized in 2.18 and 2.19.

This ambiguity exists because we are not absolutely sure how intertextual quotations work in this case. What was Athanasius' understanding of Hebrews 4:15 prior to writing *Contra Apollinaris*? Athanasius, curiously, does not quote Hebrews 4:15 in his earlier writings. James B. Ernest, in his thorough study of how Athanasius uses Scripture, finds it nowhere.<sup>56</sup> This is remarkable, given that Athanasius wrote fairly extensively on pastoral topics like temptation. It is possible, after all, that Athanasius was bringing forward the summary 'report card' view of Jesus' earthly life, declaring him to be 'without sin,' and declaring it in advance in 2.5 and in retrospect in 2.18 and 2.19. We must keep in mind how Athanasius narrates the entirety of the ministry of the Son, from birth all the way to resurrection, and the importance he attributes to the parting of Jesus' body and soul in death for the plan of salvation. Also in 2.18, in the midst of summarizing the entire human career of Jesus, Athanasius offers the phrase 'his participation in our infirmities' which has tremendous meaning elsewhere in his writings, and would support the 'fallen' position.

Examining Athanasius' defense of the humanity of Jesus in 2.6 onwards will bring more clarity. In 2.6, Athanasius rebuts Apollinaris' accusation that granting a human mind to Jesus would invalidate the statement that he is 'without sin.' In 2.7, he counters Apollinaris' notion that a part of the world cannot save the rest of the world. In 2.8, he addresses Apollinaris' teaching that 'the transmission of sin' from parent to child would invalidate Jesus' claim to be 'without sin.'

#### *Seed, Sowing, and the Human Mind*

We can make a few key points about the main contours and terms of the debate. Both Apollinaris and Athanasius wished to vindicate Jesus of ever having had a sinful *thought*. They went about it in very different ways, however. In reply to Apollinaris' assertions about sinfulness being indelibly part of the human mind, Athanasius asserts that Jesus indeed had/has not only a genuine humanity, but in particular, a human *mind*. He advances the discussion beyond mere assertion, though, by arguing that there was no 'seed' of sin 'sown' in Jesus.<sup>57</sup> By saying this, Athanasius is demonstrably referring to something happening *in Jesus' human mind*. The use of the terms 'seed' and 'sown' is very important. Throughout his writings, Athanasius consistently uses the image of the 'seed' being sown as an analogy for the reception of communication by the human mind. Naturally, he uses it while quoting straightforwardly from Jesus' parable of the four soils.<sup>58</sup> Because the 'seed' image in Jesus' parables represents *a word*, the 'seed' in Athanasius' usage stands for rational communication that is understandable by human beings and received by us into ourselves. However, since Jesus also used 'seed' in the parable of the wheat and tares, 'seed' can have either a positive or negative meaning, depending on its content and origin. Tares, Jesus said, are negative 'seed' sown by the devil. Correspondingly, Athanasius uses the image of 'seed' to describe both the devil's influence on the human mind from the primeval fall<sup>59</sup> and the activities of heretics, demons, and the devil in spreading heresies in the church presently.<sup>60</sup> At issue is a message communicated, received, and internalized.

<sup>56</sup> James B. Ernest, *The Bible in Athanasius of Alexandria* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004)

<sup>57</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Apollinarium* 1.15, 17; 2.6, 8, 10 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*

<sup>58</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letter* 3.4; *Festal Letter* 10.4; *Ad Episcopos Aegypti et Libyae* 1

<sup>59</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *First Letter to Virgins* 1.49 says, 'O virginity, you to whom many run, but who are not adorned by anyone as you are worthy! We are all far from you. The evil of the passions of destruction does not exist in us, for it is the snake, deceiving people with his teaching, who has cast it upon us. He has mixed the venom of the serpent with defilement for everyone. For he has sown within us like the serpent. He binds our inner thinking lest we be sober for him who is better and contemplate him who is higher, God.' This letter written in 337 might be his earliest known usage in this type. However, there is good reason to believe that the expansions that follow most of these apostrophes to virginity are not original. They were not known to Shenute, the Coptic archimandrite (c.350 – 466), whose quotation from this letter is one of its earliest testimonia, nor does their content reflect the distinctive themes of the letter. See David Brakke, 'The Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasiana', *Or.*63 (1994), 17 – 56, at 21.

<sup>60</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos* 1.1 ('this second sowing of their own mortal poison'); 1.8 ('the devil, the author of heresies, because of the ill savour which attaches to evil, borrows Scripture language, as a cloak wherewith to sow the ground with his own poison also, and to

As further evidence of this, I point to Athanasius' references to human decisions made *from youth*. These occur in two places. First, in 2.6, Athanasius refers to Jesus' own youth by quoting Isaiah 7:16, when Isaiah refers to the messianic child choosing good and refusing evil 'before the child shall know [i.e. experientially] good or evil.'<sup>61</sup> Athanasius immediately prefaces this remark by using the language of the seed 'sown in' to human nature, saying that the incarnate Son as a human child made choices, thereby 'contradicting that principle of contradiction which had been sown in with it.' Thus, for 'unfallenness' advocates to argue that Athanasius envisioned Jesus' human nature to be 'unfallen' or already 'purified' from conception, taking the Isaiah 7 quotation as evidence, goes beyond the text. Second, shortly thereafter in 2.8, Athanasius refers to the phase of youth for ordinary humans as the perilous time when the evil seed is sown into our minds. Apollinaris apparently quoted Genesis 8:21, which says, 'the mind of man is sedulously devoted to evil from youth.' The heretic used that as evidence that sinful activity commences from conception, inevitably, even in the case of Jesus. Athanasius retorts that Apollinaris is not 'understanding that by saying, 'from youth,' He [God] indicated what was 'sown in afterwards,' and perishable.'<sup>62</sup> Once again, if Athanasius believed that Jesus cleansed his human nature of fallenness from conception, he does not say it here. Curiously, he seems to maintain, consistent with his emphasis on exploring the human mind, that there is some early childhood phase that is ontologically important, of course, but not morally relevant in the sense of assigning blameworthiness for having sinful thoughts. Although Athanasius does not quote Romans 7:9, he seems to agree with Paul's own description of human development, specifically under the teaching of the Sinai covenant, when he says, 'I was once alive apart from the Law, but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died' (Rom.7:9).

Van Kuiken feels certain that Athanasius rests his argument against Apollinaris on the unfallenness position, and as evidence cites *Contra Apollinarium* 2.10, the pivotal section where Athanasius declares that the devil did not find 'in him a token of the old seed sown in man.' Van Kuiken takes this statement as referring to Jesus' entire human nature in a static sense from conception. I believe his conclusion outruns the data. It is precisely in this context that Athanasius demonstrates his concern about desires and thoughts in Jesus' mind, following the use of the 'seed' image I just discussed. Jesus had 'flesh without carnal desires and human thoughts.' If Jesus had had interior desires and thoughts of a sinful type, then he would have failed the temptations from the devil, which Athanasius had denied in *Contra Apollinarium* 2.9. Instead, Jesus was perfectly faithful to the Father. The devil, as a result, was defeated: 'For on this account did the devil draw near to Jesus, as to a man, but not finding in him a token of the old seed sown in man, nor any success of his immediately attempt, he was defeated.' Thus, Athanasius discusses the 'seed sown' and the 'law of sin' in a dynamic, not static sense. This discussion, then, describes Jesus' exercise of his mind and will dynamically throughout his life. The 'nothing' that 'the prince of this world' found in Jesus – Athanasius strategically deploys John 14:30 here and elsewhere – referred to any record of active sin, even if interior sins, like coveting or lusting. 'But he did not find in him the things which he himself had produced in the first Adam, and thus was sin destroyed by Christ. Therefore also the Scripture testifies, 'Who did no sin, neither was guilt found in his mouth.'"

Athanasius' quotation of Isaiah 53:9 at the end of 2.10 is well-chosen because it focuses our attention on sin as the *act*, not sin as the *condition*. Isaiah 53:9 sums up Jesus' record of active obedience by the time of his trial and crucifixion. The verse draws our attention to whether Jesus did any sinful *act*, and uses the Hebrew merism of deeds and words. The first line of the couplet is about deeds: he 'did no sin' in his deeds. The second line is about words:

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seduce the simple'); 1.10 ('they may be put to shame, when they see him without resource who sowed this heresy in them'); 1.53 ('instead of the true sense sowing upon it the poison of their own heresy'); 2.32 ('For what is sown in every soul from the beginning is that God has a Son, the Word... But when the man who is an enemy, while men slept, made a second sowing, of 'He is a creature,' and 'There was once when He was not'); 3.59 ('they invent a fresh word, and by such clever language and specious evasion, they sow again that irreligion of theirs in another way'); *De Decretis* 3 ('If, the devil having sowed their hearts with this perverseness, they feel confidence in their bad inventions, let them defend themselves against the proofs of heresy which have been advanced') and 27 ('Not one of the understanding and wise; for all abhor you, but the devil alone; none but he is your father in this apostasy, who both in the beginning sowed you with the seed of this irreligion'); *Ad Episcopos Aegypti et Libyae* 3 (regarding demons sowing lies), 4 ('And strange it is, that while all heresies are at variance with one another concerning the mischievous inventions which each has framed, they are united together only by the common purpose of lying. For they have one and the same father that has sown in them all the seeds, of falsehood'), 18 ('But they will not do this, I am sure, for they are not so ignorant of the evil nature of those notions which they have invented and are ambitious of sowing abroad'), 22 ('who sowed among them the seeds of this heresy')

<sup>61</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Apollinarium* 2.6 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.124. Significantly, earlier in this chapter, Athanasius discusses Adam and the fall. The parallel to Christ cannot be missed. Adam was 'without experience of evil, knowing only what was good... but when he disobeyed God's commandment, he became subject to thoughts leading to sin; not that God made the thoughts which were taking him captive, but that the devil by deceit sowed them...'

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid* 2.8 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.126.

he said nothing sinful, so ‘neither was guilt found in his mouth.’ Jesus did not have to even confess by ‘his mouth’ interior sinful thoughts and desires that the apostle Paul said plagues the mind of every human being, in Romans 7:14 – 25. As such, Athanasius signals his interest in Jesus’ active, dynamic obedience, and Jesus’ perfect record of complete faithfulness compared with zero active sins, and not Jesus’ human nature as a simple category considered prior to his life of active faithfulness. A reference to Romans 7:14 – 15 is not incidental, for Athanasius recognizes that the sinful act of the devil took a similar shape in the sinful acts of human beings. There is a ‘law of sin,’ Athanasius says, in every human being except Jesus. The ‘law of sin’ is a Pauline phrase found precisely in Romans 7:14 – 25 to describe coveting – that is, the sin of the mind that involves conscious lusting, jealousy, and envy. The devil deceived Adam and Eve ‘through envy,’ emphasizes Athanasius, a phrase which describes both the devil’s own envious disposition and the jealousy which he inspired in the minds and motivations of Adam and Eve. This is what gave rise to the ‘law of sin’ now present as a principle in the record of human life.

Athanasius’ quotation of Isaiah 53:9 aligns well with his earlier point in *Contra Apollinarium* 2.9. There, Athanasius argues that human nature was not originally created by God to be sinful, so it was not a categorical ‘necessity’ that by becoming human, the incarnate Son had to commit sins. Athanasius says earlier, when directly repudiating Apollinaris’ position, that sin is not the nature, as the latter held, but ‘the operation.’<sup>63</sup> In other words, sin is a mode of *activity*, at least when spoken of this way. Do these statements mean that Athanasius believed Jesus took on the equivalent of a pre-fallen human nature? Perhaps, but not necessarily, even taken by themselves. In *Contra Apollinarium* 2.9, we find a key phrase that may indicate the fallen human nature Jesus assumed: ‘Therefore also Jesus went completely through every form of temptation, because he assumed all those things that had had experience of temptation, and by them won the victory in men’s behalf.’ The footnotes added by the English translators say that the phrase ‘all those things’ refers to ‘both body and mind.’ If this is the correct way to understand the phrase, then all of the same human nature which we have, Jesus bore. The ‘temptation’ of Jesus spoken of is, at minimum, the wilderness temptation and the Gethsemane ordeal, considered as the beginning and ending brackets of Jesus’ public ministry and journey to his Davidic enthronement as king. Athanasius does not speak as if Jesus had assumed a pre-fallen human nature. Specifically, Athanasius does not say that Jesus ‘assumed all those things that had *never* experienced temptation.’ Technically, a pre-fall or ‘unfallen’ human nature would be a ‘reset’ of human nature, of sorts. Such a human nature, at the point of the Word assuming it, would have been the equivalent of Adam’s human nature prior to the serpent. But this, Athanasius does not say. Instead, he says the human nature which the Word assumed ‘had *had* experience of temptation’ – through Adam and Eve, of course, if not also the generations and generations of fallen human beings since them. What does it mean for Athanasius to say that the human nature the Word assumed ‘had had experience of temptation’ prior to being assumed by the Word?

#### *The Poverty of Human Nature in 2 Corinthians 8:9*

Another indication that Athanasius held to the ‘fallen’ view of Jesus’ human nature is in his deployment of 2 Corinthians 8:9 in *Contra Apollinarium* 2.11. The teaching of Apollinaris that brought about Athanasius’ statement is particularly relevant for the ‘fallenness’ position. According to Athanasius, Apollinaris argued, ‘It is impossible that man who has once been made captive should be set free from captivity.’<sup>64</sup> Athanasius chides Apollinaris for boxing himself into a corner along with ‘the rest of the heretics,’ for believing ‘that sin cannot be destroyed in the nature of men, and that therefore the Godhead, which was not made captive, came in the likeness of soul and flesh, that it might remain itself out of captivity, and so righteousness might be seen as clear?’<sup>65</sup> Athanasius is clear about where sin must be destroyed: ‘in the nature of men.’ Did the Son destroy it at the point of conception? Or death and resurrection?

Athanasius insists that Jesus’ resurrection, not simply conception, opened up an ‘identity of being and newness of nature.’<sup>66</sup> He quotes Hebrews 10:20, which refers to Jesus’ death and resurrection using the imagery of the high priest and the sacrifice of blood (Heb.10:19). He insists that Apollinaris is wrong for teaching ‘those who believe are saved by likeness [in a cheapened sense] and by imitation, and not by the renewal and the firstfruits.’<sup>67</sup> And in order to bring about the firstfruits of resurrection, Athanasius says:

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<sup>63</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Apollinarium* 1.12 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.102.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid* 2.11 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.130.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid* 2.11 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.130.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid* 2.11 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.130.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid* 2.11 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.130.



“He who was rich, became poor for our sakes, that we, through his poverty, might be rich.’ And how did God become poor? When He assumed to Himself the nature which had become poor, and, while retaining His own righteousness, put this nature forward to suffer for men while it was superior to men, and was manifested from among men, and had become wholly God’s.’<sup>68</sup>

If Athanasius had said that the Son of God ‘became poor’ simply by assuming human nature to Himself in the incarnation, he would have offered a perfectly valid interpretation of 2 Corinthians 8:9, since the apostle Paul did not further specify what he meant here. Yet, as Athanasius interprets this Pauline statement about the incarnation, he refers it to *the quality or state of human nature* which was available to the Son to assume. The human nature ‘He assumed to Himself,’ and through which He ‘manifested’ Himself, ‘had become poor.’ In short, human nature itself has become poor. It fell from a richer state or quality. Since all of human nature fell through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, and thenceforth became mortal, it would appear that Athanasius has this fallen human nature in view when he thinks of Jesus’ incarnation. Jesus shared in our mortality not just in the sense that he voluntarily chose when to die, but in the sense that his mortality was bound up with his body from conception. This assertion is consistent with Athanasius’ earlier writings about the mortality of the human Jesus – a mortality not simply chosen at a particular moment but a mortality woven into human nature itself because of the fall.

#### *The Old Self in Romans 6:6*

Athanasius’ argument about Jesus’ human nature continues from ‘the nature which had become poor’ in 2.11 to Jesus’ climactic victory at the cross in 2.13. Athanasius says that the cross was ‘his victory in that which had been tempted, his newness in that which had waxed old - because ‘our old man was crucified with him.’” This quotation of Romans 6:6 demonstrates Athanasius’ ongoing engagement with Romans throughout his two books. Athanasius appears to use the term ‘old man’ to indicate human nature in its fallen mode. He regularly uses the admonition about putting off the old man and putting on the new from Ephesians 4:21/Colossians 3:9 so as to link our imitation of Christ to what Christ has already done on our behalf.<sup>69</sup> Athanasius grounds our participation in Christ, and thus the viability and possibility of us being able to put off the old man and put on the new, in Christ’s prior human life of faithfulness in doing that very thing.

#### *Born of a Woman in Galatians 4:4*

Moreover, the phrase ‘born of a woman’ in *Contra Apollinarium* 2.8 and 2.10 (mentioned also in 1.5) is significant towards building the case that Athanasius did have in mind what we would today call the ‘fallen’ humanity of Jesus. This phrase is important because it is another terminological tool which Athanasius would have had available to him at the time to indicate such a thing. The phrase ‘born of a woman’ emphasizes the ordinary humanity of Mary of Nazareth, as opposed to the phrase ‘born of a virgin’ which emphasizes the supernatural activity of God and was, of course, available from LXX Isaiah, Matthew, and Luke. The English translators make an oversight by not writing in the margins of the text a reference to Job 14 and 25:4 in addition to Galatians 4:4.<sup>70</sup> The phrase ‘born of woman’ is not merely a historical fact about Mary but a phrase from Job brought into a christological context by early Christian creeds. 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).

As relates to christology, incarnation, and atonement, perceiving Paul’s intertextual reference to Job is important. I believe it is very significant that Job associates ‘Hebrew legal courtroom’ terminology like ‘judgment’ and ‘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. And specifically, the second stanza of the step parallelism of Hebrew poetry

<sup>68</sup> Ibid 2.11 in ET *Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.131.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid 1.5 in ET *Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.90; ibid 1.17 in ET, p.109

<sup>70</sup> Ibid 2.18 in ET *Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.120.

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.

Leander E. Keck argues that Galatians 4:4 – 5 and Romans 8:3 – 4 give evidence not only of being parallel statements to each other, but also of being early creedal statements which precede Paul’s apostolic ministry.<sup>71</sup> The following comparison is striking:

Galatians 4:4 – 5	Romans 8:3 – 4
When the fullness of time came Ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου	What the law was unable to do... τὸ γὰρ ἀδύνατον τοῦ νόμου
God sent out His Son ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν Υἱὸν αὐτοῦ	God having sent His Son ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ Υἱὸν πέμψας
born of woman γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός	in the likeness of sinful flesh ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας
born under the law γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον	and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας κατέκρινεν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐν τῇ σαρκί
in order that those under the law ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον	in order that the right requirement of the law ἵνα τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου
he might redeem ἐξαγοράσῃ	might be fulfilled in us... πληρωθῇ ἐν ἡμῖν..
in order that the divine adoption we might receive ἵνα τὴν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπολάβωμεν	who walk... according to the Spirit τοῖς... περιπατοῦσιν κατὰ πνεῦμα

‘Sending’ language applied to Jesus is more strongly associated with John than with Paul, who does not use the term anywhere else in his corpus. That is one factor supporting the contention that Paul was quoting material that existed before him. Another factor is that this highly dense material makes more points than is necessary for Paul’s argument in either Galatians 3 – 4 or Romans 7 – 8.

Keck also notes that Galatians 4 and Romans 8 are concerned with the following larger themes in common:

Galatians 4	Romans 8
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 above connections between the two texts supports the theory that they are pre-Pauline creedal material. Arguably, Galatians 4:4 – 5 and Romans 8:3 – 4 therefore join Philippians 2:6 – 11 as early creedal statements, all

<sup>71</sup> 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)

having to do with the incarnation and mission of Jesus, Son of the Father.

Whether the phrase ‘born of woman’ indicates that Jesus had a ‘fallen human nature’ in Paul is one question. Whether it means that in Athanasius is another. After the passage of over three hundred years, the phrase may very well have lost this particular meaning, if it ever had that meaning at all. To consider this question more carefully, I will examine below how Athanasius uses one of his hallmark passages, Romans 8:3 – 4, in *Contra Apollinarium* 1.7, but still more comments are necessary about *Contra Apollinarium* 2.

#### *The Redefining of Key Terms: ‘Flesh’*

Curiously, the Apollinarian controversy *narrowed* the lexical range of the term ‘flesh’ (*sarx*) from its *broader* meaning in Scripture. At the end of his second book, as we recall, Athanasius defines ‘flesh’ as ‘the orderly form of our whole constitution, but without sin.’<sup>72</sup> These are significant closing comments which Athanasius provides as a summary of his two books, including how to understand key terms. Van Kuiken recognizes that *Contra Apollinarium* 2.18 – 19 means that ‘flesh’ only carries neutral meaning, not negative ones. I agree with Van Kuiken’s judgment about how Athanasius appears to be using this term, but I disagree with him about its significance. Athanasius’ attempt to deploy these words – and the key, test-case verse where ‘flesh’ and ‘sin’ appear, Romans 8:3 – departs from how he did so *in his earlier writings*. In every instance in *Contra Apollinarium*, Athanasius *narrows* the lexical range of the word ‘flesh,’ while simultaneously using the word ‘perfect’ to refer to Jesus’ human nature in its creational components from conception, not its eschatological quality at his resurrection. This means Athanasius speaks of Jesus’ supposedly ‘perfect flesh’ from conception, even though Scripture never uses those terms in this way, and takes their intended meaning for granted.

Of course, there is a neutral, ‘ordinary’ sense in which biblical authors use the word ‘flesh’ to refer to the physical composition of the human body, as distinct from the rest of the material creation. If I eat a banana and digest it, that banana ceases to be potential food; at least some of it becomes part of my ‘flesh.’ But when the apostle Paul uses the term ‘flesh’ in the specific context of the ‘Spirit-flesh’ antithesis in key anthropological passages like Romans 7:1 – 8:13 and Galatians 5:13 – 6:13, he invests the word with strongly negative connotations. In Romans 7, Paul says that the Sinai covenant helped him, and other Israelites, accurately distinguish between the ‘I myself’ and the ‘flesh.’ So, far from saying that the human being is purely and wholly ‘evil’ because ‘nothing good dwells in me,’ Paul is actually clarifying that ‘nothing good dwells in me, *that is, in my flesh.*’ ‘Evil is present in me’ but that evil can be conceptually distinguished from the ‘me’ speaking. Of course, Paul feels like a prisoner in his own body, which he calls ‘the body of this death.’ This is why Paul believed he needs the Spirit of the victorious Messiah Jesus also in his own body. Paul seems to anchor his meaning not in any given Hellenistic usage of that term, but biblically, in the rite of circumcision (Rom.2:28 – 29; 6:6; Gal.6:12 – 16; Col.2:12). In the biblical presentation of Jewish circumcision, a bit of ‘flesh’ was cut away from the male body to represent God’s covenant cutting away uncleanness (Lev.12), which in turn memorialized God cutting away from Abraham sinful attitudes which – despite being culturally acceptable in the ancient world – detoured him and Sarah from being a renewed, faithful version of Adam and Eve, a ‘new creation’ of sorts (Gen.12 – 18). Surprisingly, then, from the story of Abraham and Sarah, circumcision symbolized ‘new creation.’

‘Circumcision of the heart’ became the biblical idiomatic expression for undoing the corruption of sin within Israel’s humanity, and the corresponding term to ‘circumcision of the heart’ is ‘flesh’ in a broader and deeper sense than simply the ‘flesh’ of the foreskin of a boy’s or man’s penis. Moses and Jeremiah associated the momentous ‘return from exile’ with ‘circumcision of the heart’ (Dt.30:6; Jer.4:4 anticipating 31:31 – 34). It would seem, then, that ‘flesh,’ when used by Scripture in this way, *cannot* simply refer to the human body in a neutral sense. Rather, it includes something we have internalized from the fall which needs to be cut away, and is cut away in Christ (Col.2:12). Athanasius, earlier in his career, had called it a ‘corruption’ or a ‘disorder.’ Nothing is physically *missing* from our humanity, but something might be spiritually, emotionally, and even physically *disordered*.

The apostle John also uses the term ‘flesh’ to signify human nature as affected by the fall. Jesus related the ‘Spirit-flesh’ antithesis (Jn.3:5 – 6) immediately to the image of the bronze serpent for himself (Jn.3:14 – 15). The fact that the Pentateuch narrative used the *source* of the venom (the serpent) rather than the *victim* of the venom (an Israelite), combined with the fact that Jesus used that image to interpret himself on the cross, strongly suggests that ‘the Word became flesh’ (Jn.1:14) to put to death the source of the venom, the ‘flesh,’ which is now bound up with human

<sup>72</sup> Ibid 2.18 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.141. Quoted by E. Jerome Van Kuiken, p.109

nature because of the fall. Jesus judged the venom within his own human nature, because human nature was now, in a proximate sense, the source of the venom. In other words, Jesus needed to destroy the ‘flesh’ to heal human nature itself, like how a doctor needs to destroy the cancer to heal us. The host must die, however, in order to also kill the disease, the corruption, the perversion, the intrusion. Since, after the Johannine prologue (Jn.1:1 – 18), the term ‘flesh’ is used precisely and in relatively rare fashion in John’s Gospel, occurring ten times in association with Jesus’ death (Jn.3:6; 6:51 – 63; 17:2) and once in association with a superficial and probably fallen way of perceiving (Jn.8:15), it is fair to ‘read back’ this meaning of ‘flesh’ into John 1:13 and 14 where the word first appears. John’s narrative expositis his prologue. Thus, when we read, ‘The Word became flesh,’ it is human nature in its corrupted aspect that is indicated by ‘flesh.’

Therefore, Paul and John use the term ‘flesh’ in these key contexts to mean the deeper, internal ‘flesh’ implied by the phrase ‘circumcision of the heart’ (Dt.10:16; 30:6). ‘Flesh’ in this more comprehensive, interior sense takes its meaning from the ‘flesh’ of the foreskin cut away by circumcision of the penis. The cutting away of ‘flesh’ is part and parcel of Israel’s ‘return from exile’ (Dt.30:6) back to ‘new creation’ in a fuller sense. Paul, as a Jewish theologian working with the biblical, covenantal, and eschatological framework, names ‘circumcision of the heart’ in Romans 2:28 – 29 to foreground his exposition in Romans. For in Romans, Paul explains how Jesus returned human nature itself from exile by cutting away that deeper ‘flesh’ (Rom.5:10; 6:6; 10:4), and now does so in us by his Spirit. Below, I will examine Athanasius’ use of Romans 8:3. But this discussion was necessary because the motif of ‘circumcision of the heart’ serves as the conceptual backdrop of Romans 7:14 – 25 – where Paul delineates what the ‘flesh’ is in himself as a fallen human being – and Romans 8:3 – where Paul says God sent His Son ‘in the likeness of sinful *flesh*, and condemned *sin* in the *flesh*’ of *Jesus*. It is critically important that we observe the overall meaning built up by these intertextual references, from the Pentateuch, through Paul’s writings, to Athanasius’ *Contra Apollinarium*.

Another biblical source must be considered. Luke uses the physical rite of Jewish circumcision to interpret Jesus’ death, signifying the nature of the atonement Jesus accomplished with respect to ‘flesh’ when the term ‘flesh’ is used in the context of the Spirit-flesh antithesis and the circumcision-flesh pairing. Perhaps the strongest and most obvious literary parallel is this symmetry:

Mary ‘wrapped him in cloths, and laid him in a manger’ (Lk.2:6, 12).

Joseph ‘wrapped [his body] in a linen cloth, and laid him in a tomb’ (Lk.23:53).

Luke parallels his death-resurrection narrative with the birth-infancy narrative. The repetition of key words ‘wrapped,’ ‘cloths,’ and ‘laid him in’ invite comparison. So do the parental figures for Jesus, who ‘wrapped’ him in ‘cloths’ for his brief stays in the Bethlehem manger and the Jerusalem tomb, respectively. While Joseph of Arimathea was not Joseph of Nazareth, he nevertheless bears the same name as Jesus’ stepfather, who was a descendant of King David. And Jesus’ journey from both those points – manger and tomb – bear out a symmetry which draw in the motifs of clothing and kingship. From the manger, Jesus embarks on a journey on earth as the anointed king claiming his earthly throne; from the tomb, Jesus embarks on a journey from earth to heaven as the anointed king claiming his heavenly throne. This parallel cannot be accidental or incidental to Luke’s story, and neither can the striking repetition of the name ‘Joseph.’ The Christian tradition knew of Nicodemus, who, in John’s Gospel, assisted Joseph of Arimathea in caring for the dead body of Jesus (Jn.19:38 – 40); Luke’s omission of Nicodemus from the narrative draws our attention to Joseph alone. In fact, Mary and Joseph seem to serve as the human, ‘parental’ counterparts to God the Father, who first clothes Jesus with the Spirit at his baptism, preparing him for his harrowing journey towards the earthly throne, and then clothes Jesus with a resurrected body for his ascension to his heavenly throne. The Lukan idiom for the Holy Spirit as ‘clothing’ lends literary support to this possibility, as when Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit, he told his disciples to await being ‘clothed with power from on high’ (Lk.24:49). The fact that Luke, alone among the Gospel writers, uses this metaphor for the Holy Spirit is surely significant.

Additionally, Luke invites us to parallel the circumcision of the infant Jesus and the death of the mature Jesus. The following inverted parallel (chiasm) can be discerned in comparing the birth and infancy of Jesus to his death and resurrection.

Two angel visits (1:18, 26)

Mary’s virgin birth: ‘How can this be, since I know no man?’ (1:34)

Mary 'wrapped him in cloths, and laid him in a manger' (2:6, 12)

Jesus' infant circumcision (2:21 – 24)

Witnesses: Simeon, Anna (2:25 – 38)

Jesus and God: growth in wisdom, 'in favor with God and men' (2:39 – 52)

Jesus and God: 'this is the Christ of God,' 'the king of the Jews' (23:33 – 43)

Witnesses: Jewish criminal, Roman centurion, 'all his acquaintances and the women' (23:40 – 50)

Jesus' death, veil of the temple was torn in two (23:44 – 46)

Joseph 'wrapped it [his body] in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock' (23:53a)

Tomb's virgin state: 'where no one had ever lain' (23:53b)

Two angels (24:4 – 7)

Jesus' death as a mature man mirrors his circumcision as an infant, deepening and fulfilling it. Circumcision, in its expression in the Torah, was understood not simply as a mark of being part of the covenant community of Israel, but as a physical representation of becoming a 'new creation.' That fact will surely surprise most readers, who tend to understand circumcision as a defunct ritual because the apostle Paul's comments about it in Romans and Galatians are negative and largely convey that meaning. Yet 'new creation' is the inner meaning upon which physical circumcision reposed. Later Christian tradition would place the Feast of the Circumcision on a Sunday to associate it with resurrection and 'new creation,' so the imagery was not lost upon Christians, even if they did not explicitly reason this out from Luke.

The most straightforward implication of Luke's narrative symmetry comparing Jesus' circumcision as an infant to his death as a mature man is that Luke presents Jesus' earthly life as follows: Jesus had assumed a fallen human nature, received the physical rite of bodily circumcision as the sign of God's covenant demand upon all Israelites to 'circumcise their hearts' by receiving God's commandments more deeply into themselves (Dt.10:16), fought successfully against the corruption of sin within his own humanity by refusing every temptation during the long years of his earthly life, and spiritually 'circumcised' his own 'heart' – or his own human nature – through his death and resurrection. He cut away the 'flesh' – that is, the corruption of sin – from within his human nature, not at his conception, but by his own human faithfulness all the way unto death, as every Jew was called by God to do. Physical circumcision represented God's desired outcome of spiritual circumcision of the 'flesh.' This reading of Luke on 'circumcision' affirms my exposition, above, of the Pauline and Johannine use of the word 'flesh.'

*The Redefining of Key Terms: 'In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh'*

As I said before, Athanasius in *Contra Apollinarium* restricts himself to the neutral, ordinary meaning of 'flesh.' He narrows the lexical range of this critical term, including in one key passage *where he seems to have done so but should not have*. That passage is *Contra Apollinarium* 1.7, where Athanasius quotes Romans 8:3 and involves Paul's reference to 'the likeness of sinful flesh.'

'How is it that you again say that the body was brought from heaven, and why did Christ do this? Tell us, was it that he might bring down a body from heaven upon earth, and make the invisible visible, and that which could not be outraged susceptible of outrage, and the impassible passible and mortal? And what benefit was involved in this, O thoughtless men, if you say that that took place in Christ which took place in the protoplast Adam, unless Christ, having appeared *in the likeness of sinful flesh, and condemned sin in the flesh* [Romans 8:3], had restored by an incomparable restoration that which fell in Adam: so that he both lived in flesh on earth, and exhibited the flesh as incapable of sin, that flesh which Adam had in a sinless state from his first creation, and by his transgression made capable of sin, and fell down into corruption and death? This flesh he raised up in a condition of being by nature sinless, that he might show that the Maker was not the cause of sin, and he established it in accordance with the original creation of its own nature, that he himself might be the exhibition of sinlessness. Vain, then, are their imaginations who go astray and say that the Lord's body was from heaven. Rather, what Adam brought down from heaven to earth, Christ carried up from earth to heaven: and what Adam brought down into corruption and condemnation to death, when it had been sinless and uncondemned, that did Christ show forth as incorruptible, and capable of delivering from death, so that he had authority on earth to forgive sins, to exhibit incorruption by rising out of the sepulchre, and by visiting Hades to destroy death, and to proclaim to all the good tidings of resurrection, because God created man to be immortal, and made him the image of His own eternity, but by the devil's envy, death came into the world, and when it was under the reign of death unto corruption, he

did not overlook it, for he himself became man; not that he was turned into the form of man, nor that, as if neglecting real human existence, he exhibited himself merely under a shadow, but he who is by nature God was born man, that these two might be one, perfect in all things, exhibiting his birth as natural and most true.<sup>73</sup>

In this section, Athanasius charges Apollinaris with denying the ‘benefits’ of Christ’s ‘incomparable restoration’ of human nature. ‘What benefit was involved in’ the movement of the Son from heaven to earth in the Apollinarian proposal? Here, Athanasius criticizes the Apollinarians for rhetorical flourishes which pushed the logic of *communicatio idiomatum* (communication of attributes) to a certain extreme. If it was an attribute of the human nature of Jesus to be without a human mind (because the Logos was the archetype for which all human minds served as images), then that human body became the body of the Logos in such a way that it was a mixture (*mixis*) with the Logos and formed one reality (*mia physis*) with him as regards his divinity. By association, Apollinaris pushed the attributes of human nature back upon the Logos retroactively; he mixed attributes that properly belonged to Jesus’ humanity as characteristic now of his person and his divinity. Although Jesus took a human body from the womb of Mary in an earthly sense, yet because this body did not have a human mind, according to Apollinaris, it could be said to ‘be’ a heavenly body.<sup>74</sup>

Athanasius objects to this. He says that such talk violates proper boundaries of speech that Christians must respect. Claiming that Jesus’ body was ‘brought from heaven’ because it is now ‘one reality’ with the eternal Son confuses the attributes proper to divinity and humanity. It means the invisible one must ‘be’ logically predicated as visible in himself and in his divinity, and not in a qualified sense because he assumed humanity. The impassible (unchangeable) one must ‘be’ logically predicated as passible (changeable) in himself and in his divinity. Apollinaris makes the eternal Son in himself and in his divinity variable in terms of human emotions (‘susceptible of outrage’) and even being ‘mortal.’ Athanasius finds this unacceptable, and then expands on how to properly understand the ‘mortality’ of Jesus.

Clearly, Athanasius refers in multiple ways to the resurrection of Christ as the antidote to the fall of Adam. For what happened to human nature at the fall? ‘That which fell in Adam’ needed to be ‘restored by an incomparable restoration.’ Adam made the flesh ‘capable of sin.’ Christ, by contrast, ‘exhibited the flesh’ – specifically his own flesh – as ‘incapable of sin.’ Those statements refer to the respective human activities of Adam and Christ, and the impact their choices had on the human nature they inhabited and share with others. Significantly, Christ’s movement of his human nature and impact upon it was completed at his resurrection. The flesh that Adam dragged down, Jesus ‘raised up in a condition of being by nature sinless.’ That statement refers to the resurrection, not the conception. Properly speaking, only Jesus’ resurrection overcame the mortality inflicted by Adam upon human nature at the fall. Jesus demonstrated ‘incorruption by rising out of the sepulchre’ via his human body, and ‘Hades’ via his human soul. His proclamation in Hades concerned ‘the good tidings of resurrection, because God created man to be immortal.’ Athanasius’ stress on the resurrection indicates that he does not regard Jesus’ conception as the moment when the Son decisively cleansed his human nature from sinfulness or mortality. The moment of conception did not make Jesus’ human nature ‘unfallen.’ His human nature, as Athanasius acknowledges, was yet mortal.

Assuredly, Jesus, during his earthly life and ministry, lived out what Athanasius elsewhere called ‘the principle of newness’ in anticipation of the resurrection,<sup>75</sup> but it was not until the resurrection per se when Jesus returned human nature into ‘a condition of being by nature sinless.’ Athanasius’ statement in *Contra Apollinarium* 1.7 suggests that *prior to Jesus’ resurrection*, Jesus’ human nature per se – that is, considered ‘in itself’ – was not ‘by nature sinless’ as it was also not ‘by nature immortal.’ Like ‘immortality,’ ‘sinlessness’ as a *condition* (not simply as a record of activity) is attributable to Jesus’ personhood and divinity on account of him being the Son who was ever faithful to the Father. However, Athanasius suggests that like ‘immortality,’ ‘sinlessness’ as a *condition* (not as a record of activity) could not be directly and unequivocally assigned to Jesus’ human nature until the resurrection.

Some might wish to use the ‘communication of attributes’ to insist that the incarnate Son’s impeccability (inability to sin) should be invoked to immediately describe the *human nature per se* which the Son assumed from the point of

<sup>73</sup> Ibid 1.17 in ET *Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.109 – 111

<sup>74</sup> Ibid 1.4 in ET *Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.87 – 88

<sup>75</sup> Ibid 1.15 in ET *Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.106

conception in the womb of Mary. Fair enough: that qualified logic has merit. It is noteworthy, though, that Athanasius still appears capable of considering, and *prefers* to consider, human nature by itself – even when assumed by the Son. Athanasius says carefully in *Contra Apollinaris* 1.17, which is perhaps the passage which can, on its own, be most easily read as representing the ‘unfallenness’ position, that

‘the Incarnation of the Lord, having taken place in connection with the nature of God, involved an incapacity for those ways of acting which go on in us in consequence of our ‘old man,’ and on this account we are taught to ‘put off the old man, and to put on the new’ [Ephesians 4:21]. And in this consists the marvel – that the Lord became man, and yet apart from sin: for he became wholly a new man to exhibit what he could do [that is, going through conception, birth, life, death, grave and Hades, and resurrection] that where corruption was sown, there incorruption might spring up, and where death reigned in the form of a human soul, the Immortal One might be present and exhibit immortality, and so make us partakers of His own incorruption and immortality, by the hope of resurrection from the dead.’<sup>76</sup>

Athanasius says that the Lord ‘became man,’ and then ‘became wholly a new man’ at the point of his resurrection, which is the formal source of power for us to ‘put on the new man.’ It is perfectly true that the human nature assumed by Jesus was incapable of sinning because of its ‘connection with the nature of God.’ But referring to the person is different than referring to the human nature – that is, saying that Jesus’ human nature was incapable of sinning from conception because it had been transformed or impacted immediately on account of its assumption by the Son, prior to the human choices Jesus made, is a different formulation than what Athanasius actually says. This may seem like hair-splitting. Nevertheless, it is important, for in this way, the eternal Son could maintain his faithfulness to the Father, and, consequently, keep his humanity ‘apart from sin,’ as Athanasius says. Importantly, however, this phrase refers not to Jesus’ conception but to his lifelong faithfulness; it summarizes his human nature not in advance, but retrospectively, in light of his resurrection.

A parallel passage, but focused on the human mind of Christ, is 1.19. Here, Athanasius explains the full, human soul of Christ over against Apollinaris’ claim that Jesus did not have a human mind, which was the uppermost part of the soul:

‘For how could his death have taken place, if the Word had not constituted for himself both our outward and inward man, that is, body and soul? And how then did he pay a ransom for all, or how was the loosening of the grasp of death completely effected, if Christ had not constituted for himself, in a sinless state, that which had sinned intellectually, the soul? In that case, death still ‘reigns’ over the inward man: for over what did it ever reign, if not over the soul which had sinned intellectually... on behalf of which Christ laid down his own soul, thus paying a ransom. But what was it that God originally condemned? That which the Fashioner fashioned, or the action of what was fashioned? (i.e. the fall) ... He annuls the action, and renews the thing fashioned.’

Athanasius describes Jesus constituting his human mind ‘in a sinless state.’ He positions this declaration against his exploration of the significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and this placement is significant. However much it is true that Jesus began his human life by keeping his human mind in a ‘sinless state,’ the potency and relevance of Jesus’ mental innocence is that he was able to escape the reign of death. So again, logic and literary placement place the emphasis on Jesus’ sinlessness after his lifelong faithfulness.

The above agrees with Athanasius’ other quotation of Romans 8:3, in *Contra Apollinaris* 2.6. In this chapter, Athanasius rebuts Apollinaris’ claim that Jesus ‘destroyed sin’ simply by assuming human flesh without a human mind and never sinning. Athanasius objects, ‘But that is not a destruction of sin.’ Because Adam had a human mind and received the devil’s ‘seed,’ or thought, by his fall ‘the devil established in man’s nature both a law of sin [Romans 7:23], and death as reigning through sinful action.’ This chapter discusses human ‘nature’ (the word occurs here ten times<sup>77</sup>) and human activity, especially thinking activity. Athanasius then addresses the thinking and intellectual activity implied by Romans 8:3. On the one hand, the Israelites could not fully align with the Law for

<sup>76</sup> Ibid 1.17 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.109 – 111

<sup>77</sup> Which is higher than any other chapter in the two books. The word ‘nature’ as referring to ‘human nature’ occurs once in 1.5, twice in 1.6, twice in 1.6, once in 1.12, eight times in 1.15, twice in 1.17, three times in 2.1, twice in 2.3, twice in 2.7, three times in 2.8, four times in 2.9, four times in 2.11, once in 2.16.

their spiritual freedom from sin and death. On the other hand, Jesus from youth ‘refuse[d] evil in order to choose good,’ says Athanasius, quoting Isaiah 7:16. From this point, Athanasius explains how Jesus ‘condemned sin in the flesh’ in the sense of his activity, especially his thinking activity. This defense stretches into 2.7 when he rebuts Apollinaris’ false idea that a part of this world could not save the rest of the world, 2.8 when he rebuts Apollinaris’ notion that the human mind/soul, including that of Jesus, by definition ‘is incapable of escaping sin,’ 2.9 when he rebuts Apollinaris’ notion of ‘necessity,’ 2.10 when he reminds Apollinaris that Jesus broke through the authority of Satan, 2.11 when he insists that the power of God is so great as to ‘destroy sin in the nature of men,’ even though human nature ‘had become poor’ from the fall, which is when he quotes 2 Corinthians 8:9, 2.12 when he refutes Apollinaris’ claim that the whole Godhead suffered when Jesus suffered, and 2.13 when he says that Jesus’ cross was a victory over temptation because there, ‘he crucified our old self,’ quoting Romans 6:6.

Thus, when examining Athanasius’ habits and patterns of speech in *Contra Apollinaris* 1.7, 17, 19 and 2.6 – 13, I reach the following conclusion: Athanasius speaks of Jesus’ human nature *prior* to his resurrection, he appears to consider it *as conceptually distinct from the Son’s divinity and personhood*, and therefore he keeps in view the qualities or condition of Jesus’ human nature: ‘mortal’ and ‘fallen.’ In other words, if we are looking for Athanasius to support the ‘unfallenness’ position in a formal sense, where the Son reverted the human nature to a pre-fallen state instantly when he assumed it, we do not find it here.

In the context of 1.7, Athanasius deploys Romans 8:3, but he unfortunately presses an ambiguity into the text. I have already argued, above, that the apostle Paul uses ‘circumcision’ and ‘circumcision of the heart’ as reference points for controlling what the term ‘flesh’ means in the Spirit-flesh antithesis in Romans 7:14 – 8:13. Given the focus of *Contra Apollinarium* 1.7 on resurrection and Jesus’ defeat of mortality, it is certainly possible, and in my judgment preferable, to read Paul’s original meaning into Athanasius’ use of that text here: Jesus bore a fallen human nature from conception to his death; Jesus not only defeated the mortality of post-fall human nature, but the underlying corruption of sinfulness that was lodged there; he held in check any impulse of the ‘flesh’ to fear death or covet, thereby conquering the temptations and defeating the devil. Maybe because of the need to be economical with time and space, and with his earlier writings available, Athanasius believed his earlier expositions of Romans 8:3 would suffice. Should we hear Paul’s originally negative meaning of ‘flesh’ in connection with ‘coveting’ and ‘sin’ in Romans 8:3 when Athanasius quotes the verse here? Perhaps.

However, because Athanasius seems to be encouraging us, throughout the rest of *Contra Apollinarium*, to define ‘flesh’ as the neutral, ordinary stuff of human materiality, he can also be interpreted as encouraging us to read this narrowed definition of ‘flesh’ back into *Contra Apollinarium* 1.7, and not only that text, but also Romans 8:3. In other words, there is a very significant ambiguity concerning this very significant word. Is the definition of ‘flesh’ dependent on whether or not the word is being used in the Spirit-flesh antithesis, as in Paul? Or does it have a one-dimensional meaning in Athanasius’ mind? This ambiguity becomes problematic for our understanding of Athanasius, Romans, and Paul. In effect, *Contra Apollinarium* starts to turn the apostle Paul into a spokesman for the ‘unfallenness’ camp. It also potentially turns Athanasius against his earlier writings, both of which I will now examine.

#### *‘In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh’ in Paul*

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, as if deception were involved. However, in Paul, the word ‘likeness’ cannot possibly mean that. For in Philippians 2:7, he says that Jesus was found ‘in human likeness,’ and, lest we accuse Paul himself of being a gnostic, he clearly does not mean ‘resemblance only’ or ‘the superficial appearance of.’

#### Philippians 2:6 – 7

Ὁς...ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν...	ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων	γενόμενος
Who...Himself emptied...	in the likeness of men	having been made

#### Romans 8:3

ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ Υἱὸν	πέμψας	ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας
God His own Son	having sent	in the likeness of sinful flesh



Other than the Son being spoken of as the active subject in Philippians 2:6 – 7 and the passive object in Romans 8:3, the two passages are strikingly similar. Paul’s choice of active subject corresponds to his pastoral purpose in each letter. In Philippians 2, he stresses the Son’s humbling himself and entering into the world of others because the Son’s mindset and activity is germane to the mindset Paul wants the Philippians to have (Phil.2:5). Therefore, Paul says in Philippians 2 that the Son is the active subject ‘who... emptied himself... in the likeness of men having been made...’ In Romans 8, Paul is supporting his overarching claim that *God* is righteous (Rom.1:16 – 17), that is, faithful to His promise to Abraham (Rom.4:1 – 25) and His covenant with Israel from Sinai (Rom.3:1 – 8, 21 – 26). Therefore, Paul emphasizes that *God* sent His Son: ‘having sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh...’

Paul uses ‘likeness’ in the more technical, theological sense of ‘image and likeness’ from Genesis 1:26 – 28. I have covered this ground in my earlier examination of Irenaeus of Lyons,<sup>78</sup> and also in more depth in a paper exploring whether Paul’s statement in Romans 8:3 – 4 can be considered to be a fair exegetical treatment of the Old Testament.<sup>79</sup> For God to make human beings in His ‘likeness’ means moral and spiritual growth akin to humanity at some point ‘participating in the substance or reality of’ God. That would seem to be confirmed in Genesis 2 when God breathed into Adam to make him a living being (Gen.2:7) and then called human beings to grow and mature in partnership with Him. Surely this included stewardship-dominion over the creation as God’s co-regents. Not least, though, among the aspects of the divine-human partnership was eating from the ‘tree of life.’ There was some way in which God offered a deeper participation in the divine life via the ‘tree of life,’ which by any account offered ‘immortality’ and was thus sacramental. In this regard, growth in the ‘likeness’ would have impacted each person’s human nature.

Mention of ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ in Genesis brings me to the historical data about the early Christian usage of these terms. I have explored major second-century Christian sources, both orthodox (Irenaeus) and heretical (the Ebionites and the Valentinians) and argued that ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ demonstrate a stability of meaning across this literature. The only plausible historical explanation for this literary data is that Christians in the first century exercised communal controls over these terms through literary and/or liturgical methods.<sup>80</sup> Thus, when Paul says in Romans 8:3 that Jesus shared ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh,’ he was not saying that Jesus was only human by appearance but not in substance, or that Jesus took human flesh but not sinful human flesh. He was saying that Jesus ‘participated in the substance or reality of’ our sinful flesh.

Significantly, Clement of Alexandria was the first major writer to not use ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ in biblically precise and theologically robust ways, as John Behr highlights.<sup>81</sup> Clement says simply that the human Christ fulfilled what God spoke.<sup>82</sup> While this is true and not contradictory with the earlier Christian usage of the Genesis language, it is also quite truncated. It does not connect the human vocation in creation, or human ontology and the God-intended relationships and development laid out before us, to the word ‘likeness.’ By the time of Athanasius’ *Contra Apollinarium*, the word ‘likeness’ is no longer the term that Christian theologians use to indicate ‘actual participation in.’

#### *‘In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh’ in Athanasius’ Earlier Writings*

In his earlier writings, Athanasius deployed Romans 8:3 very judiciously and in tandem with both touchstone biblical verses and logical assertions which complemented it. These quotations are found in *Discourses Against the Arians* 1.51, 1.60, 2.55 – 56, and *Life of Antony* 7. There are no quotations of Romans 8:3 – 4, in whole or in part, in *Against the Heathen* (328), *First Letter to Virgins* (337), *Discourses Against the Arians* 3 (345), *On the Decree of the Nicene Council / De Decretis* (350 – 356), *On the Opinion of Dionysius / De Sententia Dionysii* (354 – 359), *Letter to the Bishops of Egypt and Libya* (356), *Defense Against the Arians* (357), or the other *Festal Letters*. I will discuss *Life of Antony* first.

<sup>78</sup> See Mako A. Nagasawa, *Irenaeus on ‘Image and Likeness’ and ‘In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh’: An Argument for Jesus’ Incarnation into Fallen Human Nature*, available here: <https://www.anastasiscenter.org/atonement-sources-ec-irenaeus-of-lyons>

<sup>79</sup> See Mako A. Nagasawa, *God Condemned Sin in the Flesh of Christ: Romans 8:3 – 4 and Medical Substitutionary Atonement*, available here: <https://www.anastasiscenter.org/bible-messiah-paul-romans>

<sup>80</sup> See Mako A. Nagasawa, *Irenaeus on ‘Image and Likeness’ and ‘In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh’: An Argument for Jesus’ Incarnation into Fallen Human Nature*, available here: <https://www.anastasiscenter.org/atonement-sources-ec-irenaeus-of-lyons>

<sup>81</sup> John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.142 says, ‘Although Clement describes Adam as perfectly created for growth towards full perfection, as we have seen, he does not connect this dynamic to the process of developing the image into the likeness.’

<sup>82</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Instructor* 1.12.98.2 – 3; cited by Behr, above

In *Life of Antony*, Athanasius' influential biography of the desert father Antony of Egypt, the bishop of Alexandria introduces Antony's early life and entrance into the desert. Athanasius wrote this work sometime between 356 – 362, to memorialize Antony and to popularize monasticism beyond the Egyptian region where Antony was already well-known. As a literary work, Athanasius introduces Antony much like Luke introduces Jesus; I rather suspect that Athanasius used Luke's Gospel as a model.<sup>83</sup> After Antony successfully fights off the devil's temptations, much like Jesus did, Athanasius the narrator interprets Antony's victory using Romans 8:3 – 4.

'This [series of victories over temptation] was Antony's first struggle against the devil, or rather this victory was the Saviour's work in Antony, 'Who condemned sin in the flesh that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.'<sup>84</sup>

We are extremely fortunate to peer into Athanasius' mind as a pastoral theologian here. Compared to his dogmatic works, Athanasius quotes Scripture relatively sparsely in *Life of Antony*. Thus, this quotation of Romans 8:3 communicates volumes. Athanasius' language doubles the active agency and provides a dual lens on Christian growth and sanctification. On the one hand, this victory was Antony's agency. But at the same time, it was Christ's work in and through him. This is a good example of Athanasius' vision of *synergeia*; Augustine's later *monergeia* would be quite foreign here.

Athanasius refers Romans 8:3 to both Jesus and Antony. His use of Romans 8:3 as having a double reference is one piece of the cumulative case for the 'fallenness' position. What Jesus did in relation to *Antony's* human nature, Athanasius indicates, he did first in relation to *his own*. If Athanasius held to the 'unfallenness' position, he might still be able to interpret Romans 8:3 in relation to Jesus, as he would have to, since Jesus is the original and proper subject of Paul's discussion there. In my opinion, he would face exegetical difficulties if he held the 'unfallenness' perspective. But it would be more challenging to apply Romans 8:3 to Antony and Jesus *at the same time*. On what basis could Athanasius do this? If Jesus did not have to struggle against fallenness in his own human nature, could Athanasius legitimately suggest that Antony's struggle was a participation in Jesus' struggle?

What follows is Antony's intensification of his monastic practice. He 'repressed the body and kept it in subjection, lest haply having conquered on one side, he should be dragged down on the other.'<sup>85</sup> He bore the labor 'easily' because of his 'eagerness of soul' and 'great zeal.' Antony would 'often' go 'the whole night without sleep,' eat 'bread and salt and water' only once a day or two days, 'often even in four.' He slept on the bare ground, not a mat. Antony then speaks himself, commenting on the cultivation of 'virtue':

'Progress in virtue, and retirement from the world for the sake of it, ought not to be measured by time, but by desire and fixity of purpose.'<sup>86</sup>

Athanasius connects the cultivation of 'virtue' with Jesus' own victory over spiritual temptation as summarized in Romans 8:3 – 4. Athanasius uses the word 'virtue' twenty three times in *Life of Antony*. Athanasius writes in his prologue to the work as 'training in the way of virtue.' Athanasius then allows Antony to compare himself in his own voice to the apostle Paul and the prophet Elijah through biblical quotations.

For Athanasius, the logic of participation in Christ requires progress in 'virtue' in us. He uses Romans 8:3 to articulate what he understands as a life of partnership with Christ by the Spirit, participating in Christ in the life pursuing Christian *virtue*. In *Life of Antony*, then, Athanasius gives expression to his understanding and practical use of Romans 8:3, which he discusses in dogmatic terms in the *Discourses Against the Arians*.

Around 342 – 342, while in Rome on his second exile from Alexandria, Athanasius wrote his lengthy exegetical arguments against the Arians in *Discourses Against the Arians* 1 and 2. Since these works are focused on the divinity of the Son, especially in relation to the Father, statements about the human life, earthly mission, and human

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<sup>83</sup> For my exploration of *Life of Antony* and engagement with scholars of the work, as well as pastoral theologians on the topic of sanctification, see Mako A. Nagasawa, *Athanasius as Theologian of Sanctification: Life of Antony / Vita Antonii* (c.362 AD), available here: <https://www.anastasiscenter.org/atonement-sources-ec-athanasius-of-alexandria>

<sup>84</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony* 7

<sup>85</sup> Ibid 7

<sup>86</sup> Ibid 7

nature of Jesus are relatively rare. Nevertheless, when they appear, they are quite significant.

When Athanasius deploys Romans 8:3 – 4 in *Discourses* 1.51, he does so in order to discuss both Christ’s atoning work, and Christ’s ministry towards us by his Spirit to provide us with virtue:

‘For since of things originate the nature is alterable, and the one portion had transgressed and the other disobeyed, as has been said, and it is not certain how they will act, but it often happens that he who is now good afterwards alters and becomes different, so that one who was but now righteous, soon is found unrighteous, wherefore there was here also need of one unalterable, *that men might have the immutability of the righteousness of the Word as an image and type for virtue...* For since the first man Adam altered, and through sin death came into the world, therefore it became the second Adam to be unalterable; that, should the Serpent again assault, even the Serpent’s deceit might be baffled, and, the Lord being unalterable and unchangeable, the Serpent might become powerless in his assault against all. For as when Adam had transgressed, his sin reached unto all men, so, when the Lord had become man and had overthrown the Serpent, that so great strength of His is to extend through all men, so that each of us may say, ‘For we are not ignorant of his devices. [2 Corinthians 2:11]’ Good reason then that the Lord, who ever is in nature unalterable, loving righteousness and hating iniquity, should be anointed and Himself sent, that, He, being and remaining the same, by taking this alterable flesh, ‘might condemn sin in it [Romans 8:3],’ and might secure its freedom, and its ability henceforth ‘to fulfil the righteousness of the law [Romans 8:4]?’ in itself, so as to be able to say, ‘But we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in us [Romans 8:9].’<sup>87</sup>

By itself and taken alone, this passage does not decisively indicate how Athanasius understands Romans 8:3 – 4, whether he would fall into the ‘fallenness’ or ‘unfallenness’ camps. However, it serves a preliminary purpose: it links mortality and morality. Created things, most notably humans, have an ‘alterable nature.’ Athanasius is not saying that human beings can become non-human. Rather, human beings can make moral and spiritual choices that impact our own human nature, shown especially by the fall and subsequent sinful decisions on the part of people. This is why Athanasius compares the nature of God to the nature of human beings along the lines of *moral* alterability. God ‘is in nature unalterable, loving righteousness and hating iniquity.’ It is this unalterable moral nature of God that impacted ‘this alterable flesh’ when the Son of God assumed it.

Human beings, therefore, require ‘the immutability of the righteousness of the Word as an image and type for *virtue*.’ To make himself available for that purpose, the Word of God had to become incarnate in sinful flesh in order to ‘condemn sin in it,’ and, through his resurrection, to secure human nature’s ‘freedom’ from sin for us, who walk by the Spirit. This is what qualifies the Son, says Athanasius immediately afterwards, to be *the dispenser of virtue*: ‘as being God and the Father’s Word, He is a just judge and lover of virtue, or rather its dispenser.’<sup>88</sup> Jesus is not just the intellectual reference point for what virtue looks like, lived out in a human life from a distance. Rather, he is the dispenser of virtue into us as the Spirit of God dwells in us, which means, reciprocally, that we participate in him by his Spirit.

Athanasius often speaks of the mission of the incarnate Son in relation to human mortality; in that regard, he frames the resurrection of Jesus as the decisive victory. This might give us the impression that Athanasius had a merely ‘physical’ understanding of the human dilemma, as if resurrection into immortality provided a merely ‘physical’ solution to that. However, this passage establishes that there is a moral aspect to the fall and to resurrection as well – a moral dimension that is chronologically and logically *prior* to the mortality dimension. For Athanasius, like Irenaeus before him and many others after him, believes that mortality, though death be terrible, serves one beneficial purpose: it prevented human beings from immediately eating from the tree of life and immortalizing the corruption of sin within us.<sup>89</sup> If death serves but one beneficial purpose, then death per se cannot be the ultimate enemy. Death is the last enemy, but it is not the first enemy. The corruption of sinfulness is.

We are vulnerable to our own moral alterability as created beings, and especially so now because of the fall and our

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<sup>87</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 1.51

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid* 1.52

<sup>89</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 3.4 – 5 refers to the ‘corruption’ in connection with ‘death’ but also distinct from it. See also *Against the Heathen* 2 – 7 for his description of how sin as a disorder affects human beings. Thus, Athanasius *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...’

participation in ‘sinful flesh.’ Jesus condemned sin while in ‘alterable flesh,’ which was what the Sinai covenant called the Israelites to do. The paradigm of Jewish wisdom stands behind the meaning of virtue-acquisition: obeying God’s commandments produces a positive effect *in us*, *within* our human nature (Dt.10:16; Jer.4:4; Ps.119:32; Pr.1:8; 3:3 – 8; 6:21; 7:1 – 3; 8:22 – 36). We now participate in Jesus’ purified and unalterable human nature which he perfected through his earthly faithfulness culminating in his death and resurrection. Thus, by his Spirit, we are now able ‘to fulfill the righteousness of the law’ by his Spirit (Rom.8:4).

Athanasius makes the link between morality and mortality more explicit in a second passage. In *Discourses* 2.55 – 56, Athanasius links several passages of Scripture to describe the significance of Jesus taking ‘sinful’ and ‘cursed’ human flesh. He links ‘fear of death’ in Hebrews 2:14 – 15 and ‘sinful flesh’ in Romans 8:3 – 4 to the infirmity language of Isaiah 53:4/Matthew 8:17, the sin language of 2 Corinthians 5:21, and curse language of Galatians 3:13. All of them are biblical categories of human fallen experience. Athanasius coordinates all of them for one purpose: to indicate Jesus’ assumption of fallen human nature from conception. Athanasius moves from speaking of Jesus’ body as ‘mortal’ for the sake of sharing in our death (Heb.2:14 – 15) to emerge in his resurrection as the victor over death (1 Cor.15:21), to explaining that Jesus’ mortal body was composed of ‘sinful flesh’ so he could condemn the sin in his flesh (Rom.8:3 – 4) by never sinning. As in *Contra Apollinarium*, the link between mortality and morality under the umbrella condition of ‘fallen’ is present, and it appears that one implies the other. Here is the passage:

‘To give a witness then, and for our sakes to undergo death, to raise man up and destroy the works of the devil, the Savior came, and this is the reason of His incarnate presence. For otherwise a resurrection had not been, unless there had been death; and how had death been, unless He had had a mortal body? This the Apostle, learning from Him, thus sets forth, ‘Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage [Hebrews 2:14 – 15].’ And, ‘Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead [1 Corinthians 15:21].’ And again, ‘For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the ordinance of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit [Romans 8:3 – 4].’ And John says, ‘For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved [John 3:17].’ ... For as by receiving our infirmities [Isaiah 53:4/Matthew 8:17], He is said to be infirm Himself, though not Himself infirm, for He is the Power of God, and He became sin for us [2 Corinthians 5:21] and a curse [Galatians 3:13], though not having sinned Himself, but because He Himself bare our sins and our curse, so, by creating us in Him, let Him say, ‘He created me for the works,’ though not Himself a creature... When for our need He became man... that, by His dwelling in the flesh, sin might perfectly be expelled from the flesh [Romans 8:3], and we might have a free mind [Romans 8:5 – 8].’<sup>90</sup>

As in *Contra Apollinarium*, we find here Athanasius’ emphasis on Jesus’ resurrection as the antidote to the fall of Adam. Resurrection required death, and death required that ‘He had had a mortal body.’ If Jesus had a mortal body, because for our sake he ‘took part’ in ‘flesh and blood’ (Heb.2:14), then he had a fallen body. And if he had a fallen body, then did he also have ‘sinful flesh’? Or only the ‘appearance’ of ‘sinful flesh’?

Of particular interest in this regard is Athanasius’ use of the term ‘infirm.’ Athanasius assumes his audience, like he does, calls Jesus ‘infirm’: ‘He is said to be infirm Himself...’ This description, based on Isaiah 53:4, is fascinating and important. In his third *Discourse*, Athanasius quotes Isaiah 53:4 explicitly again, and does two very important things there. First, he interprets the term ‘infirmity’ by the term *sinfulness*. Second, he says that the Son ‘carried’ our infirmities-sins; he did not simply ‘remedy’ them from a distance by doing a miracle, or waving a wand, as it were. He ‘bore them’ and was personally involved and experienced at carrying ‘infirm,’ sinful flesh all the way to its death which was his death.

‘And the Word bore the *infirmities of the flesh*, as His own, for His was the flesh; and the flesh ministered to the works of the Godhead, because the Godhead was in it, for the body was God’s. And well has the Prophet said ‘carried [Isaiah 53:4];’ and has not said, ‘He remedied our infirmities,’ lest, as being external to the body, and only healing it, as He has always done, He should leave men subject still to death; but He

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<sup>90</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 2.55 – 56

carries our *infirmities*, and He Himself bears our *sins*, that it might be shown that He has become man for us, and that the body which in Him bore them, was His own body; and, while He received no hurt Himself by ‘bearing our sins in His body on the tree,’ as Peter speaks, we men were redeemed from our own affections, and were filled with the righteousness of the Word.’<sup>91</sup>

Athanasius uses Isaiah 53:4 to interpret Romans 8:3, which is rather compelling for the ‘fallenness’ position. He points out that Isaiah 53:4 means that Jesus ‘carried’ our infirmities and sins, which implies some length of time. Isaiah does not say, as Athanasius points out, that Jesus simply ‘remedied’ them, which could be instantaneous. In *Discourses* 2.55, therefore, Athanasius means this: Jesus bore ‘sinful flesh,’ which to him meant what we today would call a ‘fallen human nature.’

*Discourses* 2.55 also shows us how Athanasius handled the ‘communication of attributes’ (*communicatio idiomatum*). How do we properly discuss the properties of the incarnate Son when he is both divine and human? Athanasius says, ‘He is said to be infirm Himself, though not Himself infirm.’ Athanasius perceives the fundamental ‘subject’ or ‘person’ of Jesus, although still decades away were the Second Ecumenical Council of 381 which brought about a terminological agreement about the use of ‘hypostasis’ for ‘person,’ and the Third Ecumenical Council of 431 which affirmed that the eternal Son was the single subject or person (‘hypostasis’) in Jesus of Nazareth; the human nature of Jesus did not give rise to a second subject or human person.

In *Discourses* 1.60, Athanasius delineates between who ‘He is’ as ‘Son and Wisdom and Radiance and Image of the Father’ and what ‘He is become’ in ‘a second sense’ as ‘flesh’ and ‘man.’ Conveniently, yet not coincidentally, this passage also contains a quotation of Romans 8:3:

‘Moreover the words ‘He has become surety’ denote the pledge in our behalf which He has provided. For as, *being* the ‘Word,’ He ‘*became* flesh [John 1:14]’ and ‘*become*’ we ascribe to the flesh, for it is originated and created, so do we here the expression ‘He has *become*,’ expounding it according to a *second sense*, viz. because He has *become* man. And let these contentious men know, that they fail in this their perverse purpose; let them know that Paul does not signify that His essence has become, knowing, as he did, that He is Son and Wisdom and Radiance and Image of the Father; but here too he refers the word ‘become’ to the ministry of that covenant, in which *death which once ruled is abolished*. Since here also the ministry through Him has become better, in that ‘what the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh [Romans 8:3],’ ridding it of the trespass, in which, being continually held captive, it admitted not the Divine mind. And having rendered the flesh capable of the Word, He made us walk, no longer according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit [Romans 8:4], and say again and again, ‘But we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit [Romans 8:9]’ ...’<sup>92</sup>

The reason why Athanasius delineates who Jesus ‘is’ in ‘his essence’ in comparison with who he ‘has become’ seems to help his audience understand in what sense Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh. ‘In the likeness of’ for Athanasius did not mean a superficial resemblance, but the real substance. Jesus ‘is’ the Son of God who ‘became’ sinful flesh. He did not merely give ‘the appearance’ of becoming sinful flesh. He did become it in fact.

This disciplined structure of understanding and speaking of the divine and human attributes of Christ solves a central issue. In my examination of the undisputed writings of Athanasius,<sup>93</sup> I examined Emmanuel Hatzidakis’ assertion that Jesus must have cleansed his human nature from conception. One argument he advances is the objection that Jesus, during the years of his earthly ministry, cannot be described as ‘fallen’ and ‘sinful’ (in the sense of sinful as a condition, not a record of activity) on account of his human nature being in that condition. Hatzidakis asserts, ‘The exchange of properties [of the divine and human natures] takes place because the properties are always expressed through the person, not by themselves.’<sup>94</sup> Because Hatzidakis assumes the attribute of ‘fallen’ must be

<sup>91</sup> Ibid 3.31, emphasis mine

<sup>92</sup> Ibid 1.60, emphasis mine; cf. *Discourses* 2.47

<sup>93</sup> This section is included as part of another paper, and can be found separately in Mako A. Nagasawa, *Medical Substitutionary Atonement in Athanasius of Alexandria*, available here: <https://www.anastasiscenter.org/atonement-sources-ec-athanasius-of-alexandria>

<sup>94</sup> Emmanuel Hatzidakis, *Jesus: Fallen? The Human Nature of Christ Examined from an Eastern Orthodox Perspective* (Clearwater, FL: Orthodox Witness, 2013), p.249 and note on p.248 the significant difference between Hatzidakis’ interpretation of Athanasius’ *On the Incarnation* 9, 20, and 21, and mine

communicated upward from the nature to the person at all times in an unqualified sense, he therefore believes that logic requires us to say that if Jesus took to himself a fallen human nature, that we must also say that he ‘was’ himself fallen in the same sense that we human beings are fallen.<sup>95</sup>

This concern also undergirds David Bentley Hart’s interpretation of Jesus’ human nature and will, partly mediated by his interpretation of Maximus the Confessor. One plank of Hart’s argument for universalism is to reason out from Jesus’ human nature what ‘freedom’ and ‘freedom of choice’ mean – what these terms meant for Jesus, and what they mean for us:

‘If human nature required the real capacity freely to reject God, then Christ could not have been fully human... According to Maximus, however, Christ possesses no gnostic will at all, and this because his will was perfectly free... What distinguished Christ in this regard from the rest of humanity, if Christological orthodoxy is to be believed, is not that he lacked a kind of freedom that all others possess, but that he was not subject to the kinds of extrinsic constraints upon his freedom (ignorance, delusion, corruption of the will, and so forth) that enslave the rest of the race.’<sup>96</sup>

This is not the place to evaluate the merits of Hart’s defense of universalism in its entirety. I simply note here that Hart appeals to the same basic argument that Hatzidakis builds: Jesus’ human experience was qualitatively different from ours, not because he had a super-human nature, but because his human nature, he argues, was constituted such that Jesus did not live with the same ignorance and corruption of will (‘infirmity,’ or weakness?) we do. Interestingly, Hart asserts that throughout his earthly life, Jesus’ will ‘was perfectly free.’ In Hart’s view, Jesus did not take a human will weakened by the fall to overcome the weakness through the Spirit and his human choices, all the way through his death and resurrection. Instead, Jesus apparently eliminated the will’s weakness at the moment of conception. His use of the word ‘perfect’ is not, I suggest, accidental or avoidable. Nor is it coincidental that Hart’s statement resembles how Athanasius in *Contra Apollinaris* deploys the word ‘perfect’ in a manner *unlike* that of Hebrews. Only now, Hart applies the word ‘perfect’ to the human *will* of Jesus, not simply to his human *nature*.

Hart’s methodology differs from Athanasius, however, which becomes a curiosity because Hart claims to represent ‘Christological orthodoxy.’ Despite Athanasius’ sometime divergence from Hebrews in how he uses the word ‘perfect,’ he develops new ways of saying what Hebrews says. Athanasius still recognizes that Jesus had to draw his human nature into ‘unalterability’ simply by virtue of it being created, and additionally to overcome the ‘infirmity’ – a weakness and/or resistance – because Adam and Eve had introduced a disorder into human nature. Unlike Hatzidakis and Hart, Athanasius was not concerned to protect the *person* of the Son from the attributes of a fallen human nature. By saying, ‘He is said to be infirm Himself, though not Himself infirm’ in *Discourses* 2.55 – 56, for example, Athanasius indicates that the principle of the *communicatio idiomatum* does not require the ‘unfallenness’ position. He consistently says in his earlier writings, and he indicates in *Contra Apollinaris* 1.7, that the ‘infirm’ human nature of Christ *did not* transfer its property of being infirm ‘upwards’ to his person in an unqualified manner, for the simple reasons that the Son (1) could not sin, and (2) was not finished acting within human nature and upon it. He also maintains that the human nature of Christ during his earthly life could be conceptually considered in itself, even though it had become the possession of the Son when he assumed it. Thus, the attributes of Christ’s human nature which were *temporary* – infirm, corrupted by sin, mortal, cursed – can be discerned and can only be associated with his person in a qualified sense: i.e. in the sense that the Word ‘became’ these things in his incarnation. Of course, what the Son *became* in the economy of salvation did not change who and what He *is* as the divine Son of the Father. In effect, Athanasius structures the logic of the *communicatio idiomatum* to serve Jesus’ human agency, and requires our recognition that *Jesus had not yet brought his human nature to its full resting place*. Within the person of Jesus, Jesus was coordinating his human nature to carry out its human vocation of presenting itself cleansed and purified to God, circumcised of heart (Dt.10:16; 30:6) and receptive of the Spirit (Ps.51:9 – 11; Ezk.11:18; 36:26 – 36). Put another way, in *Discourses* 1.51 and *Life of Antony* 7, Athanasius could also say that Jesus had to establish his human will and human nature in virtue, in the Spirit, in a human way, through human choices.

Consequently, if we take *Life of Antony* and *Discourses Against the Arians* 1 and 2 as characteristic of Athanasius’ earlier thought, then how do we interpret the critical quotation ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ there? The weight of

<sup>95</sup> Hatzidakis, p.253 – 257

<sup>96</sup> David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019)

evidence in Athanasius' earlier writings points in the direction of the 'fallenness' camp. In fact, coordinated with other statements outside of his quotations of Romans 8:3, the evidence is fairly overwhelming. For example, in *Discourses* 1.43, the bishop of Alexandria said the incarnation involved 'putting on that flesh *which was enslaved to sin*.'<sup>97</sup> He says Jesus undid the sinfulness of the flesh gradually, throughout the course of his life and death:

'For the Word being clothed in the flesh, as has many times been explained, every bite of the serpent began to be utterly staunched from out it; and whatever evil sprung from the motions of the flesh, to be cut away, and with these death also was abolished, the companion of sin, as the Lord Himself says, 'The prince of this world comes, and finds nothing in Me' [John 14:30]; and 'For this end was He manifested,' as John has written, 'that He might destroy the works of the devil' [1 John 3:8].'<sup>98</sup>

By saying 'the motions of the flesh [began] to be cut away,' Athanasius suggests that 'circumcision' as an idea is present in his mind, which, if so, confirms my reading of Paul and 'circumcision of the heart.' Statements like these show that Athanasius was robustly capable of denoting the fallen humanity Jesus bore, which corroborates the strong impression that Athanasius' earlier writings connect Romans 8:3 with the 'fallenness' position.

Van Kuiken acknowledges that, taken on face value, there is a notable difference of opinion between the earlier and later works on this particular point. He says, '*Contra Apollinarium*'s insistence on the assumption of flesh renewed to Edenic purity (and in that sense unfallen) complements the statements in Athanasius' recognized writings regarding the assumption of enslaved, errant flesh.'<sup>99</sup> I will examine below what Van Kuiken means when he proposes that the later statement 'complements' the earlier, as well as where I believe he makes mistakes in his reading of *Contra Apollinarium*. I would approach the data less optimistically, however. Where Van Kuiken sees the possibility for the later writing to effectively *qualify* the earlier, I see more troubling relationships between them, and more difficulties concerning the possibilities for integration.

#### *'Likeness' and 'In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh' in Contra Apollinarium*

I have so far examined how Athanasius, in *Contra Apollinarium*, uses the key terms 'perfect,' 'without sin,' 'flesh,' and even 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' while stretching their meanings, or assigning them different meanings than those terms have, both in Scripture and in his own earlier writings. Does this reflect a change in how Athanasius understands and deploys these terms? I find the divergence significant enough that I conclude that Athanasius, if he was indeed the author of *Contra Apollinarium*, concedes significant ground to Apollinaris.

For Apollinaris, merely 'imitating' Christ is enough, because it was acceptable for Christ to merely 'imitate' us in our humanity. Van Kuiken aptly points out, 'Apollinarianism reduces soteriology to simulacra: Christ mimics human nature and we mimic his sinlessness.' Significant to my point, Apollinaris appears to use a watered-down version of the term 'likeness' to indicate behavioral copying or distant 'imitation.'<sup>100</sup> According to Athanasius, Apollinaris teaches, 'Wherefore Christ exhibited the flesh in a new condition, by way of *likeness*: and each man exhibits in himself the condition of the thinking element in us, by means of imitation, and *likeness*, and abstinence from sin. And in this way, Christ is understood to be 'without sin.'<sup>101</sup> Athanasius foregrounds this teaching in the opening pages of the first book. Later in the work, when Athanasius groups Apollinaris into the same category as Marcion, he chides, 'For wherein did Marcion's statement differ from yours? Did he not say that the body appeared from heaven, in *likeness* of man, but not in reality?'<sup>102</sup> Marcion was a second century figure. Although separated from Apollinaris by two hundred years, they demonstrate similar conceptual concerns and rhetorical techniques. Interestingly, they both distort the biblical word 'likeness.' 'Likeness' in Apollinaris' hands means 'superficial resemblance.'

For proposing a human nature without a genuine human mind in the incarnation, Apollinaris wins condemnation from Athanasius. Is imitating Christ even achievable in a moral sense, in Apollinaris' framework?<sup>103</sup> Logically, even 'imitation' is flatly impossible if Jesus was not fully human, because 'imitation is imitation of a preceding

<sup>97</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 1.43, emphasis mine

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid* 2.69

<sup>99</sup> Van Kuiken, p.112

<sup>100</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Apollinarium* 1.20 – 21 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.112 – 114 and 2.11 in *ET*, p.130

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid* 1.2 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.86, emphasis mine

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid* 1.12 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.101, emphasis mine

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid* 1.20 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.114 says, 'Vainly, then do you imagine that you can effect in yourselves the renewal...'

piece of work.’<sup>104</sup> If something so central to us as the human mind were missing in Jesus, we might as well try to imitate another higher species or life form. Moreover, ‘why did the Law make nothing perfect?’ asks Athanasius, raising multiple questions at once.<sup>105</sup> Why was no one able to perfect their own human nature under the Jewish Law? Doesn’t Christ as exemplar raise the bar even higher? Did Jesus bypass life under the Law by starting his human life already ‘perfect’? Did this functionally make him non-Jewish? As a behavioral model, if we are ‘external’ to Christ and he is ‘external’ to us, what makes Jesus actually ‘good news’ for us humans, and specifically ‘good news’ to Israel? Athanasius is very concerned to declare that ‘mere resemblance’ between Jesus’ human nature and ours is insufficient for salvation. If Jesus’ identification with our humanity is a ‘mere resemblance,’ then all is, in fact, lost. Apollinaris’ Christ possesses a human nature that bears only a ‘mere resemblance to ours, but was foreign to that human flesh of which he impiously asserts sin to be the nature, not the operation.’<sup>106</sup> By protecting Jesus from bearing a fallen human nature, and protecting him from what he thought to be the inevitability of human sinful actions, Apollinaris removes Jesus and makes him unavailable to us. Apollinaris shifts the focus away from ‘participation’<sup>107</sup> in Christ, because participation would only be possible if the Son first participated in our human nature *en toto*.

In *Contra Apollinarium*, Athanasius uses various biblical terms in different ways than he did previously. He therefore has to stake out new terminology and modes of argument. Critically, however, by not fighting for the original definitions of these biblical terms, Athanasius gives up ground. He legitimizes Apollinarian rhetoric about how biblical terms can and should be used, going forward. He contributes to the growing distance between Christian theological discourse and the Scriptures themselves. This was deeply consequential in the use of the terms ‘likeness’ and ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh.’ It is not that Athanasius’ orthodox christology, or even his earlier position in the ‘fallenness’ camp, is unrecognizable. We can still discern the structure of his argument, which I hope I have traced above sufficiently. Earlier in his life, Athanasius had already shown some principled flexibility about the use of key theological terms regarding the divine person of the Son – terms which were not used by Scripture on that particular subject, but nevertheless developed by the church because it was necessary to do so.<sup>108</sup> But would he go this far about the human nature assumed by the Son, when there was already so much biblical data and context on that very subject?

Van Kuiken suggests that *Contra Apollinarium* ‘complements’ the earlier writings of Athanasius. Van Kuiken’s solution is to assume genuine Athanasian authorship of *Contra Apollinarium* and to qualify and condition the earlier writings based on what he believes he has found in the *Contra Apollinarium*. Van Kuiken’s operating principle, here, is to assume that any perceived differences in concept or terminology is due to ‘development beyond the bishop’s own thought.’<sup>109</sup>

There are, however, other options. One option is to assert that the two books *Contra Apollinarium* do in fact teach the ‘fallenness’ position. My study of *Contra Apollinarium* finds that the author is using key terms in a subtly different way than he did before, which raises its own questions and problems, but that the conceptual architecture of the ‘fallenness’ position is still present. Hence, I disagree with Van Kuiken when he says:

‘The Son’s likeness to sinful flesh (Rom. 8.3) is an authentic participation in the Adamic substance of flesh, but not in its sinfulness, which Christ condemns by embodying flesh ‘unreceptive of sin.’’<sup>110</sup>

Here, Van Kuiken chooses to take the word ‘sin’ as the condition associated with conception and inherited Adamic sinfulness. He appears to allow the phrase ‘without sin’ found at the end of the two books to mean the same. However, in context, Athanasius indicates that he is using the word ‘sin’ to mean ‘sin as actions’ which, when undertaken by us, have a reciprocally damaging effect on our own human nature. This is what Athanasius rules out in the case of Jesus Christ. Athanasius punctuates his point by strategically quoting Isaiah 53:9 (referring to deeds

<sup>104</sup> Ibid 1.20 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.114

<sup>105</sup> Ibid 1.21 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.114 – 115

<sup>106</sup> Ibid 1.12 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.101 – 102

<sup>107</sup> Ibid 1.21 in *ET Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.114 says, ‘...we imitate and participate in the perfect newness of Christ’

<sup>108</sup> When in 362, Athanasius, *Tome to the Antiochians*, tried to reconcile two competing pro-Nicene parties over the two uses of the term *hypostasis*, he demonstrated a remarkable flexibility, paying attention to the underlying structure of thought and the intention behind both parties’ deployment of the term. It is notable, however, that the New Testament usage of *hypostasis* carried with it a different lexical valence (2 Cor.9:4; 11:17; Heb.1:3; 3:14; 11:1).

<sup>109</sup> Van Kuiken, p.112

<sup>110</sup> Van Kuiken, p.110. The translation ‘unreceptive of sin’ is Van Kuiken’s; see footnote 109.



and words), for example, following his use of the ‘seed’ image which refers to sinful actions taken in the mind. His point is that Jesus did not undertake sinful deeds or words, because he never let the ‘seed’ of Satan enter his mind. But Jesus nevertheless was ‘born of a woman’ to assume ‘the nature which had become poor’ so he – even from youth – could be victorious over the temptations common to all human beings and ‘crucify our old self,’ making available to us his ‘new self’ which we can put on.

Therefore, my conclusion differs from Van Kuiken in that I do not think *Contra Apollinarium* simply ‘complements’ the earlier writings of Athanasius. I have no doubt that they do provide genuine Athanasian teaching into the human mind and soul of Jesus, along with the salvific importance of Jesus’ body going into the earth while Jesus’ soul went to Hades. The difficulty I perceive has to do with how *Contra Apollinarium* deploys key biblical terms and quotations from Romans and Hebrews about the humanity of Jesus in subtly different ways from Athanasius’ undisputed writings, and from Romans and Hebrews themselves. This is not a trivial matter. What do we do with this disparity? Were the two books *Contra Apollinarium* written by (say) Peter II of Alexandria or some other student of Athanasius? Pursuing that possibility lies outside the scope of this paper.

Alternatively, is Athanasius (or a successor of his) deploying a rhetorical strategy where he uses terminology shared by the Apollinarians in order to share common ground with them, only to draw them into his own conceptual structure?<sup>111</sup> If so, then the *Contra Apollinarium* should not be treated as a *development* of the bishop’s thought, but as a particular *deployment* of it – in a strategy that captivates and captures the Apollinarians by initially conceding some ground to them, only to reel them back into the larger structure of Athanasius’ theological thought, and even his earlier writings and the original biblical meanings of ‘perfect,’ ‘without sin,’ ‘flesh,’ and ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh.’ If this more complex possibility is the case, then *Contra Apollinarium* cannot be treated as an evolution in Athanasius’ thought, and cannot be used, as Van Kuiken does, to qualify Athanasius’ earlier writings as placing him in the ‘unfallenness’ camp. Quite possibly, *Contra Apollinarium* should not be read as an exegetical commentary on Romans and Hebrews, strictly speaking, despite its value at times in that regard, but primarily as a polemic.

#### *Consequences of Terminological Confusion*

Regardless of what determinations one makes about the relationship between the *Contra Apollinarium* and the earlier writings of Athanasius, we must consider the impact these books had. What were the consequences? By largely accepting the way Apollinaris uses these key biblical terms related to the humanity and human experience of Jesus, as demonstrated by *Contra Apollinarium*, orthodox Christian leaders committed themselves to a path that contributes to troubles in the church, not merely the enduring debate about whether Jesus assumed a ‘fallen’ or ‘unfallen’ human nature.

Direct causation is hard to discern, but without a doubt, *Contra Apollinarium* contribute to various trends already happening in the church. He contributes to confusion in the reading of Scripture,<sup>112</sup> what T.F. Torrance considers to be problems posed by the apparently ‘static’ view of Jesus’ humanity presented by some theologians and even the Chalcedonian Definition of 451.<sup>113</sup> This trend raises the intriguing question of whether the ‘unfallenness’ camp is actually ‘semi-Apollinarian,’ although these views might also be credited to a strain of early Latin Christianity

<sup>111</sup> Dr. Bruce Beck, in conversation, alerted me to this possibility. Some scholars argue, for example, that the apostle Paul used a ‘Jewish midrashic’ rhetorical strategy at times, perhaps with the word ‘seed’ in Galatians 3:16 – 29 drawn from Genesis 15:1 – 6 (see N.A. Dahl, *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1977), although, see N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), p.157 – 159 for an argument exempting Paul from this style of rabbinic discourse.

<sup>112</sup> For example, John Cassian, *On the Incarnation (Against Nestorius)* 4.3 explains ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ as follows: ‘though the flesh was truly taken, yet there was no true sin, and that, as far as the body is concerned, we should understand that there was reality; as far as sin is concerned, only the likeness of sin. For though all flesh is sinful, yet He had flesh without sin, and had in Himself the likeness of sinful flesh, while He was in the flesh but He was free from what was truly sin, because He was without sin.’ Notice in 4.6, Cassian exposit Philippians 2:6 – 8 and renders ‘likeness of men’ to mean ‘actual substance of human nature.’ Compare with John Chrysostom, *Homily 13 on Romans*, who says, ‘He smote it with the blow of His death [*my note*: not his conception], but in this very act it was not the smitten flesh which was condemned and perished, but the sin which had been smiting. And this is the greatest possible marvel. For if it were not in the flesh that the victory took place, it would not be so astonishing, since this the Law also wrought. But the wonder is, that it was with the flesh (μετὰ σαρκός) that His trophy was raised, and that what had been overthrown numberless times by sin, did itself get a glorious victory over it.’

<sup>113</sup> T.F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), p.201 writes, ‘For many people the difficulty with Chalcedonian christology is this, that when it speaks of ‘the human nature’ of Christ, it seems to be speaking of some neutral human nature... even though we nowhere have any actual experience of such neutral human nature.’ Torrance’s discussion on p.198 – 206 is extremely valuable. However, I question Torrance’s unqualified endorsement of the doctrine of the incarnation put forward by Leo of Rome, on account of the latter’s sponsorship of John Cassian who argued for the ‘unfallen’ view.

represented by the Latin writers Tertullian of Carthage and Hilary of Poitiers, but here, I restrict myself to the terminological questions. It should be apparent that, although Apollinaris and his movement were ‘defeated,’ that Athanasius’ deployment of Apollinaris’ terminology represented a victory of sorts for Apollinaris. Apollinaris’ influence continued through the writings marshalled against him. The absorption of Apollinaris’ terms and need to refine them (e.g. *mia physis*) contributed to the church splits in the Third and Fourth Ecumenical Councils.

Moreover, on the pastoral level, continuing to distance Jesus’ human experience from our human experience has the consequence of contributing to what Peter Brown calls ‘the cult of the saints’ – a fascination with people and objects, which filled the vacuum that ordinary Christians felt, to mediate the growing distance they sensed between themselves and Jesus himself.<sup>114</sup> The growth of these beliefs and practices during late antiquity is surely not coincidental with the spread of the ‘unfallenness’ view. So too, the two books *Contra Apollinarium* reinforce tendencies (already existing in the church) to diminish the biblical and creational affirmation of marriage and marital sexuality, not least because Athanasius holds up celibacy even within marriage as an ideal: ‘It is well attested that they [i.e. Mary and Joseph] continued inviolate.’<sup>115</sup> This was not the first time Christian leaders would say this, but it is far from clear that the sources of the idea are reliable.

Earlier, I mentioned that the rise of apthartodocetism can be considered a weakness in the church’s teaching about the humanity the Son assumed in the incarnation. We are now in a position to appreciate why. Apthartodocetism was the view that Jesus’ physical body was always incorrupt, even from conception. Julian of Halicarnassus led an early sixth century sect which proposed it, and they won the support of Emperor Justinian (who was theologically trained and engaged) who almost declared it the official imperial Roman faith, but for Justinian’s death. The ‘unfallenness’ camp taught by many orthodox Christians left this logical opening. After all, if we say that the Son cleansed his human nature of fallenness at conception, and if death is the result of fallenness, then why would Jesus’ body still be mortal? Mortality and moral weakness were two intimately related qualities of fallen humanity bound up together, throughout Scripture and patristic literature. If the ‘unfallenness’ camp denied to Jesus any experience of fallenness in the dimension of moral strength, which also impacts our understanding of Jesus’ own dependence on the Holy Spirit, then perhaps it would make sense to assert that his mortality had been overcome earlier, too? Perhaps his human nature was actually incorrupt from conception? Apthartodocetism was declared a heresy, but the underlying logic still poses a problem. Apthartodocetism is a theological counterpart resulting from the growing sense of distance between Jesus’ humanity and ours.

What, in fact, was the ‘human nature’ (*physis*) in Jesus Christ? In what sense was Jesus’ humanity and earthly ministry anchored in the human nature that we have and experience as a result of the fall? Was his human nature ‘ignorant’ of some things? Did Jesus ‘learn’ things? If so, how? What does that mean for our human growth and development? And how do we coordinate the passible humanity of Jesus with his impassible divinity? In fact, how do we properly define the terms ‘passible’ and ‘impassible’? Are ‘emotions’ an aspect of ‘passibility’ straightaway? It is one thing to regard ‘divine emotions’ in the Old Testament as ‘anthropopathisms,’ which I question. It is quite another to regard Jesus’ human emotions and human word choices as merely related to his human nature, and not a revelation of the loving Father by the Spirit. These assertions require much more substantiation.

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<sup>114</sup> Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, enlarged edition, 2013), p.xviii – xxxi gives a respectful treatment of the ‘two-tier’ (learned/aristocratic and non-educated/popular) approach to understanding the archaeological and literary remains of Christian communities in the late antique period. Brown, p.xxvii writes, ‘We are listening to a dialogue between two constituencies within the same Christian congregation. Augustine insisted that the congregation had gathered so as to learn how to imitate the martyrs. But the congregation had often come for a very different, less easily verbalized but more potent reason. They had not come to imitate. They had come to participate. They wished to be touched, if only for a blessed moment, by the burst of glory associated with heroes and heroines, whose victory over unspeakable suffering and instant entry into heaven sent a shock wave of numinous energy through the gathering.’ It is worth very sober reflection on why, as Brown notes on p.xxv, Christians at the popular level experienced enormous energy and excitement when the relics of Saint Stephen arrived at Mahon in Minorca in 417, which resulted in an ‘ugly pogrom of the Jewish community.’

<sup>115</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Apollinarium* 1.4 in ET *Later Treatises of S. Athanasius*, p.88