The Journal of Theological Studies, 2025, **XX**, 1–22
https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/flaf005
Advance access publication 6 February 2025
Article

OXFORD

On the Hegemony of Ancestral Sin in Early Greek Thought: A Hesitation

Daniel H. Spencer

Church of Scotland, Edinburgh, UK

dspencer@churchofscotland.org.uk

ABSTRACT

This article aims to challenge the common view that virtually all early eastern thought on the doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin favours what has come to be called Ancestral Sin, or the 'eastern view'. To begin, Ancestral Sin is broadly outlined in conversation with several recent writers; it is noted in particular the ways in which this tradition has often been defined in opposition to quintessentially 'western' emphases *vis-à-vis* the origin of sin. This serves as a foundation for the remainder of the article, where the hamartiological thought of Tatian, Melito, Theophilus, and Irenaeus is considered against the backdrop of Ancestral Sin as previously demarcated. It is concluded that though each thinker no doubt shares important affinities with Ancestral Sin, the discordances evidenced are both too plentiful and too substantial to overlook, so much so as to cause appreciable hesitancy about a straightforward 'eastern' ascription. A fundamental east/west divide on original sin is, in the earliest years at least, not so certain as is sometimes assumed.

1. INTRODUCTION

Understood broadly, the doctrine of Original Sin maintains that both the introduction and profusion of sin, suffering, death, and corruption in the world are in some way directly and robustly attributable to a fall from innocence, uprightness, or perfection at the font of the human race. There are, of course, many different ways of putting flesh on these bare bones: according to the admirable catalogue set forth by Thomas McCall, there are no fewer than four (or five) historically prominent *general* ways of doing so.[1] But most Christians across history agree that some version of this basic story is correct. Despite this consensus at the most rudimentary level, however, a good number of contemporary writers have presented the eastern notion of Ancestral Sin as an alternative to Original Sin, stressing a fundamental antagonism with western, 'Latin'

[1] Thomas C. McCall, *Against God and Nature: The Doctrine of Sin* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), pp. 153–76.

© The Author(s) 2025. Published by Oxford University Press. All rights reserved. For commercial re-use, please contact reprints@oup.com for reprints and translation rights for reprints. All other permissions can be obtained through our RightsLink service via the Permissions link on the article page on our site—for further information please contact journals.permissions@oup.com.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

approaches to the origin and spread of evil.[2] Demarcations of Ancestral Sin commonly proceed by way of contrast with purportedly western ideas: it rejects original guilt; it denies that fallen human beings sin of necessity; it focuses on the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit as the passive source of the fall's consequences. And so on. In the end, the impression is that east and west are irremediably at odds on Original Sin, such that the designation might not even properly apply to Ancestral Sin.

I question this apparent consensus. In the first place, I wonder whether there is enough consistency and precision across modern writers even to say what exactly Ancestral Sin is. But much more importantly, I am inclined to doubt that various alleged classical exponents (or forefathers) of Ancestral Sin really count as such. Now, I openly confess a lack of expertise when it comes to later Greek thinkers such as Chrysostom, Maximus, John Damascene, and Symeon—and it may be that a true doctrine of Ancestral Sin draws its inspiration primarily from these. But what I seriously question is the assumption, all too often encountered, that the earliest stratum of significant theological reflection on the questions of present interest uniquely suggests the so-called 'eastern' doctrine.[3] In various ways, I shall argue, the thought of important, early Greek-speaking Christians not only doesn't always agree with the loose consensus on Ancestral Sin, but sometimes *positively endorses* (or at least foreshadows) quintessentially 'western' ideas that Ancestral Sin is meant to reject. In the formative years, I suggest, things are not so simple as the easy east–west dichotomy would have it.

To stress an item of fundamental importance from the outset, I do not hold there is no such thing as Ancestral Sin. I think that there is, only that (a) it has been inadequately defined in recent scholarship (due in part, no doubt, to the east's less 'scholastic' way of doing things), and (b) that to claim key ancient sources as unambiguous proponents or forerunners of the doctrine can't bear the weight of careful scrutiny. These two conclusions are all I intend to argue for here. If I am right, obviously the category of Ancestral Sin itself need not be doubted (only sharpened); the main thing that would follow is a critical historical point, namely that Ancestral Sin, or the 'eastern view', is not necessarily the early view but a later development—much like the Augustinian view which many contemporary admirers of Ancestral Sin disdain in part for its relative novelty. This point bears underscoring, as it would, moreover, serve to problematize any genealogy of the Ancestral Sin tradition which locates the origins of its development in early Greek thought *per se*.

The first item of business will be to present the 'eastern doctrine' or Ancestral Sin as articulated in recent expositions. This will give us what I have called a loose consensus on the nature of Ancestral Sin—as we shall see, not all writers construe the doctrine in exactly the same way. From here we will turn to the more detailed (and exciting) work of determining just how comfortably the thought of several Greek Fathers sits within this construct, noting in particular

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

[2] For some examples see e.g. Andrew Louth, 'An Eastern Orthodox View', in J. B. Stump and Chad Meister (eds.), *Original Sin and the Fall: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), pp. 128–67; John S. Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin*, trans. George S. Gabriel (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr, 2002); David Weaver, 'From Paul to Augustine: Romans 5:12 in Early Christian Exegesis', *SVTQ* 27 (1983), pp. 187–206, at p. 187; John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987), pp. 143–6; Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 45; Peter C. Bouteneff, *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), pp. 41–2; Parker Haratine, 'The Ancestral Sin is not Pelagian', *Journal of Analytical Theology* 11 (2023), pp. 1–13, at pp. 1–2; Mark S. Smith, *The Genesis of Good and Evil: The Fall(out) and Original Sin in the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), p. 4; Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), p. 88. It should be noted that not every writer gives it the name 'Ancestral Sin'; some simply label it 'eastern' or 'Orthodox' or 'pre-Augustinian Greek'.

[3] In addition to several of the authors cited in the preceding footnote and those mentioned below at the beginning of section 4, this claim can be found, in varying degrees of explicitness, in Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2002), pp. 40–42; John R. Schneider, 'Recent Genetic Science and Christian Theology on Human Origins: An "Aesthetic Supralapsarianism"', *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62 (2010), pp. 196–212, at pp. 202–3; Petru-Mihail Pruteanu, 'The Doctrine of Original Sin and its Influence on the Theology and Practice of Baptism', *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 15 (2023), pp. 81–104, at pp. 83–6; Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission of Sin: Augustine and the Pre-Augustinian Sources*, trans. Adam Kamesar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), *passim*.

major areas of both conflict and agreement, as well as points on which considerable ambiguity remains. My ancient interlocutors will all come from the second century: Tatian, Melito of Sardis, Theophilus, and Irenaeus.[4] The reasons for this choice are straightforward. In addition to these thinkers sometimes being represented as forerunners, or, in the case of the latter two, exponents *par excellence*, of Ancestral Sin, in them we also see some of the earliest post-biblical examples of meaningful reflection (and speculation) on the genesis of sin and its spread. In short, investigating these four in particular provides us with convenient and unrivalled access to an important stream of early Greek thinking about Original Sin, which, of course, we need in order to determine where it might sit in relation to Ancestral Sin more specifically.

2. DEMARCATING ANCESTRAL SIN

As mentioned above, Ancestral Sin has often been articulated by way of contrast with western versions of Original Sin. Consulting some of this recent literature, several elements recur as particularly important for the demarcation of the doctrine. To be found at the centre of virtually every discussion stands the concept of original guilt, the view that Adam's descendants in some sense share in the liability for his primal sin.[5] That is, we are not merely guilty for what we do or for what we are, but guilty for what *Adam* did, in one way or another. We will not here go into the problems associated with original guilt and their potential solutions; for now, it is only needful to indicate that most contemporary writers that touch on Ancestral Sin agree with John Toews that 'the most critical point of difference between the East and the West is the absence among the Greek-speaking theologians of the concept of inherited guilt'.[6] So heavy is the emphasis sometimes laid on the absence of original guilt it would be striking indeed if it turned out to be an inessential feature of Ancestral Sin, at least as construed by western theologians. But writers from the Orthodox world concur as well: John Meyendorff, for instance, writes that Greek patristic thought has 'no place … for the concept of inherited guilt',[7] and Andrew Louth is careful to showcase the presuppositional distance between an Orthodox theology of the fall and one which might afford Augustinian original guilt pride of place.[8]

We have, then, our first contour line: the absence of original guilt. But, clearly, this one feature alone is not enough to give us Ancestral Sin, central though it may be. Another important element pertains to the freedom of the will. Famously, many writers in the Latin tradition have insisted that the fallen will is totally impotent with regard to doing the good—there is, in effect, no longer the choice between good and evil, the will utterly enslaved by the power of sin to carry out its tyrannical wishes. Calvin's colourful words in his *Institutes* are always worth revisiting in this connection,[9] but Luther is hardly less forceful on this point in the conclusion to his polemic

[4] Unfortunately, space will not permit engagement with the apostolic fathers, other apologists, or other early Christian literature. Happily, though (until Origen!), most of these thinkers involved themselves only minimally with the doctrine of Original Sin, and so this lack of engagement will, I think, be no serious omission.

[5] Under a Federalist way of understanding this, we would be held guilty *as if* we committed Adam's sin, since though he represents the whole human family under his headship, we are not Adam. On realist lines, the identification is literal: our sin is Adam's sin because we *are* (in some sense) Adam. It is Thomas McCall again who gives an especially useful overview of this (*Against God and Nature*, pp. 161–70).

[6] John E. Toews, *The Story of Original Sin* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), p. 60. He continues, 'which [inherited guilt] is the central point of the Latin doctrine of sin'. This final assertion strikes me as very unlikely to say the least.

[7] Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 143.

[8] Louth, 'An Eastern Orthodox View', pp. 142–8. For Louth, it is largely the case that Original Sin just *is* original guilt, though it is not true that Ancestral Sin is then simply its absence: (Augustinian) original sin, he says, is 'the sin of Adam passed on to all his descendants or heirs by some kind of inheritance—not just of frailty or some taint of disease but the inheritance by which we are born guilty before God, deserving punishment' (p. 145).

[9] He says, 'Let it stand, therefore, as an indubitable truth, which no engines can shake, that the mind of man is so entirely alienated from the righteousness of God that he cannot conceive, desire, or design anything but what is wicked, distorted, foul, impure, and iniquitous; that his heart is so thoroughly envenomed by sin that it can breathe out nothing but corruption and rottenness; that if some men occasionally make a show of goodness, their mind is ever interwoven with hypocrisy and deceit, their soul inwardly bound with the fetters of wickedness' (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 2.5.19 [p. 291]).

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

against Erasmus: 'If we believe original sin to have so ruined us as to make most troublesome work even for those who are led by the Spirit ... [then] it is clear that nothing is left in man as devoid of the Spirit which can turn itself to good, but only what turns itself to evil.'[10] By way of sharp contrast, mainstream eastern writers tend to affirm the continued human capacity for genuine moral choice absent the operation of grace. While Ancestral Sin maintains that we are all 'caught in a web of sin' stretching back to the first pair that is compounded and expanded in each generation,[11] there is nothing that makes it metaphysically *necessary* that every human being succumb to actual sin. For Augustine and his theological heirs, there is now in the corrupted human nature a *necessitas peccandi*, which requires grace to overcome; for the proponent of Ancestral Sin, however, it is at least theoretically possible that an individual refrain from sinning all his life.[12]

We can say, then, that Ancestral Sin denies original guilt and the absolute bondage of the will or, positively, that it affirms the basic efficacy of the will with regard to the good, even if, due to the sickness of sin and the power of *epithymia*, it is heavily biased in the wrong direction. But what other things have writers pointed to as hallmarks of the doctrine? This is where uncertainty and imprecision begin to creep in, though there is still perhaps agreement enough to proceed tentatively. On all hands, there is the affirmation that, guilt having been deemphasized, the focus now shifts to the corruption and death unleashed by Adam's sin.[13] But, quite apart from the fact that virtually every western doctrine also places great weight on these, this affirmation tends to follow on the heels of the rejection of original guilt as its substitute: something in the familiar hamartiological scheme has been displaced and now needs replacing. Hence, it isn't immediately clear what the emphasis on corruption and death is actually meant to be doing in terms of defining Ancestral Sin over against Original Sin. On a similar note, it is sometimes said that where western versions speak of a positive corruption or distortion of a true human nature, the east tends to speak rather in terms of a wound, sickness, or disease that merely poisons—but does not abolish—that same nature.[14] But others seem to omit this element—and for good reason: not every western view features a corrupted human nature and many do employ similar pathological language and images. Perhaps, then, we can only say that Ancestral Sin tends to *highlight* corruptibility and death, and is *fond* of likening sin to a disease by which 'human nature fell ill in Adam.'[15]

A few other components deserve mention. First, it is frequently claimed that, unlike its western counterparts, Ancestral Sin firmly rejects the notion that sinfulness, death, or corruption are in any sense to be understood as *punishments* inflicted by God for the first sin. Dumitru Staniloae and John Romanides are both insistent on this point.[16] I struggle to take them at their word given clear statements to the contrary in many Greek Fathers,[17] but it has to be conceded

[10] Martin Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will*, trans. Edward Thomas Vaughan (London: A. Applegath, 1823), 2.5.34 (p. 467).

[11] Louth, 'An Eastern Orthodox View', p. 141.

[12] So Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979), pp. 61–2.

[13] E.g. Andrew Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology* (London: SPCK, 2013), p. 184; Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 145; Smith, *Genesis of Good and Evil*, p. 4.

[14] Romanides, *Ancestral Sin*, pp. 34, 86; Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, pp. 144–5.

[15] Cyril of Alexandria, quoted in Romanides, *Ancestral Sin*, p. 168.

[16] Dimitru Staniloae, *The World: Creation and Deification*, vol. 2 of *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, ed. and trans. Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), p. 187: '*In no way*, therefore, is this state of suffering and death to be deemed a punishment imposed by God upon Adam' (emphasis mine). See also Romanides, *Ancestral Sin*, pp. 156–7. Louth, however, seems more comfortable speaking of death as a punishment in some capacity (*Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*, p. 184), as does Bouteneff (*Beginnings*, pp. 71–2).

[17] As we shall soon see, Tatian, Theophilus, Melito, and Irenaeus all affirm that some of the fall's effects are to be understood as punishments, as does, for instance, Gregory Nazianzus (*Orations* 38.12 and 45.8, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 7, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow [Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894]). Even Chrysostom agrees there is *some respect* in which death is a punishment, even if it turns out to be inflicted for the benefit of humanity (or just philosophically inclined Christians?) in the end (*Hom. Rom.* 10, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 11, trans. J. B. Morris and W. H. Simcox, revised by George B. Stevens [Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1889], pp. 401–8, esp. pp. 403–4). Cf. Fr. Panayiotis Papageorgiou, 'Chrysostom and Augustine on the Sin of Adam and Its Consequences', *SVTQ* 39 (1995), pp. 361–78.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

there is a definite tendency in the relevant writers to minimize the severity of judgement, as well as to underline elements of divine mercy. Sometimes, for instance, the expulsion from the garden is understood as an act of compassion to keep Adam and Eve from living eternally in sin or toil,[18] and the propensity to conceive of the first humans as immature, or only 'relatively' perfect inasmuch as they were not originally righteous,[19] lends itself nicely to less severe censure (though we should not forget that other Greek writers like Chrysostom and Gregory of Nyssa assigned to Adam superhuman wisdom, passionlessness, and generally angelic attributes—including immortality in the case of the former).[20] This point about the lack of punishment can then be seen to dovetail well with the great stress often laid on the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit as the efficient cause of our inheritance of sinfulness, corruptibility, and death.[21]

3. SUMMARY OF ELEMENTS

As far as I can tell, then, these are the elements that are often said to mark out the rough precincts of Ancestral Sin, even if contemporary authors are not always agreed on the specifics: (1) the absence of original guilt; (2) retention of a will free to choose the good without an infusion of grace; (3) the emphasis on corruptibility and death; (4) the likening of sin to a disease infecting our nature; (5) the denial that the effects of the fall are a punishment; (6) the preference against original righteousness; (7) the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit. One final comment must be made, however. Having conceptual lines is all well and good, but we need to know the shape they form, too. It is of paramount importance to note that the conjunction of (1)–(7) will only make Ancestral Sin if they are placed in the correct theological context. Theoretically, a western version of Original Sin might meet most or even all of these elements,[22] but that wouldn't quite make it a case of Ancestral Sin. For, as Louth has recently argued, Ancestral Sin as understood in the east has a much wider cosmic scope than western versions of Original Sin usually care to display. The general eastern version of the fall story implicit in (1)–(7) finds its proper residence in what Louth terms the 'greater theological arc' spanning from creation to deification, absolute beginning to final end.[23] By contrast, western doctrines of Original Sin have tended to focus on the 'lesser theological arc' spanning from fall to redemption, and consequently lack something of this cosmic scope:

> Another way of putting this contrast between East and West would be to say that the West comes to see the engagement between God and the human as concerned with sin and its consequences: original sin expresses the consequences of the fall, which renders humanity guilty before God and subject to a just punishment. In contrast, the East sees sin in a cosmic light: sin has disordered God's creation and through this disorder or disharmony introduced

[18] E.g. Ware, *Orthodox Way*, p. 60; Irenaeus, *AH* 3.23.6. English language references to *Against Heresies* are taken from *Irenaeus of Lyons: Against Heresies*, translated by Alexander Roberts and William H. Rambaut, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885). Greek and Latin references are from *Sancti Irenaei episcopi Lugdunensis Libros Quinque Adversus Haereses*, ed. W. Wigan Harvey (Cambridge: Typis Academicis, 1857).

[19] See Haratine, 'Ancestral Sin', p. 2; Swinburne, *Providence*, p. 45.

[20] John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen.* 14.18–21, 15.15, 16.2–3, 16 (in *Homilies on Genesis, 1–17*, trans. Robert C. Hill [The Fathers of the Church, 74; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1986]); Gregory of Nyssa, *Op. Hom.* 5.1, 17.2, 17.4 (in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 5, trans. Henry Austin Wilson [Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893]). The idea sometimes encountered that the east exclusively believes that the fall 'is not about a descent from a pristine, untainted original state' is shown by these two influential thinkers alone to be little more than a pious (or not so pious) fiction (Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, p. 88). Consider, again, Staniloae's approximation to 'absolute' perfection: 'Given that the state of sinlessness in which the human person existed at the beginning implied unhindered communion with God … the fathers are correct when they attribute to man before the fall the condition of one who was incorruptible, immortal, and radiant in God's light' (*The World*, p. 108; but cf. pp. 103–4 for the modulation of this statement back towards 'relative' perfection).

[21] As in Staniloae, *The World*, pp. 173–6.

[22] E.g., possibly, Duns Scotus (see below, n. 93).

[23] Louth, 'An Eastern Orthodox View', p. 134; cf. Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*, p. 182.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

> corruption and death. Fallen humanity is seen not primarily as guilty, bound up in Adam's sin, but rather subject to death and to the corruption or decay, of which death is consequence and seal. Death rather than guilt haunts fallen humankind: it threatens with meaninglessness all human endeavor and is an aspect of, and a symbol of, the way in which the fallen world—and not just fallen humanity—is out of joint, shot through with shafts of unmeaning.[24]

Oliver Crisp is swift (and right) to observe that western thinkers have in fact taken seriously this greater theological arc at least to some extent.[25] What I wish to highlight at present, though, is the more robustly and consistently cosmic magnitude of Ancestral Sin (as elucidated by Louth and others).[26] It fits into a broader, unmistakably patristic narrative of creation and deification in a way western doctrines standardly need not, and it points to one further marker to add to our list above: (8) creation itself is brought into disharmony through the fall, largely on account of the dereliction of duty on the part of God's representatives. As Staniloae puts it following Maximus the Confessor, humans were created to be the '"link" joining God and the whole of nature';[27] instead, the fruitless world now but dimly reveals God's glory, and 'creation grows weak in its vital resources'.[28] How precisely this all works we are not given to understand, but it will somehow join together with (7) to bring about a whole cosmos enmeshed in the nexus of sin, death, corruption, and captivity to the evil one.

There is, I think, some discernible and distinct theological story being told in (1)–(8).[29] It might go something like this: the first humans were placed in paradise, happy, free of pain and sorrow along with all other creatures, commissioned in the presence of God to be his representatives in ruling the earth and bringing all creation into participation in the divine nature (deification) (8). They were given an opportunity to confirm their loyalty, then and there, and to grow in the knowledge and likeness of God. But because they were not yet wise and confirmed in virtue, they were overcome when tempted and disobeyed their Lord (6), aligning themselves with a darker power. As a natural, non-punitive (5) result, God withdrew his presence (7), as humans had now elected to live for themselves and for material things. Consequently, sin was unleashed, death and corruption overshadowed the human race in all their grisly inevitability (3), and human life became beset by the disease of sin, a festering wound (4) that further aided the maiming of creation (8) and debarred people from living as intended by the creator. However, although all subsequent human beings were born into this nexus of sin and death, they were culpable only for the evil they themselves contributed (1) through the misuse of their essentially intact free will (2).

The story would, of course, go on to tell of how this unhappy situation is remedied. And you might think, as I do, that whatever spin a western version will put on this, substantially the same storyline will remain, with the main differences being found in the details, the more notable of which might involve the weight of inherited guilt needing expiation, the forfeiture of a truly human nature, or the introduction of a (wholly) depraved will. But in any case, we now have before us a very rough draft of the sort of tale Ancestral Sin wants to tell, so long as, that is, the loose consensus featuring (1)–(8) gets things mostly right. Frankly, I am not sure how germane certain of these elements really are for a 'proper' definition of Ancestral Sin, and it is impossible

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

[24] Louth, 'An Eastern Orthodox View', pp. 134–5.

[25] Oliver Crisp, 'A Moderate Reformed Response', in J. B. Stump and Chad Meister (eds.), *Original Sin and the Fall: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), pp. 230–48, at pp. 242–3.

[26] E.g., Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), p. 84; Ware, *Orthodox Way*, pp. 59, 71.

[27] Staniloae, *The World*, p. 112.

[28] Ibid. p. 178.

[29] Cf. Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*, p. 179, where he observes that the thought of the Fathers on the fall is largely 'a matter of telling stories … that help to explain where we are now'.

for me to surmise what the necessary and sufficient elements for the doctrine might prove to be: (1)–(4) seem almost always to be mentioned, while the others are sometimes omitted; (3), (4), and (7) are also central components of many western views, and, for that matter, (1) and (8) may be found commonly enough there as well.

So what makes for Ancestral Sin? Is it the creation–deification arc alone? Surely not alone, for then various western views, some of which affirm original guilt and total depravity, might well count as instances (or near-instances) of Ancestral Sin.[30] In the end, if our loose consensus is anything to go by, it seems the doctrine of Ancestral Sin will involve a combination of most, but perhaps not all,[31] of (1)–(8), but likely only when consolidated within a generally eastern theological arc. Possibly, too, things might depend on which theological authorities or liturgical sources serve as inspiration, but of that I can say no more. We are at least armed with a *rough* idea as to what Ancestral Sin amounts to, and so we find ourselves in a good position to evaluate the extent to which the earliest Greek-speaking theologians share this hamartiological vision.

4. A COMMON VIEW

It is widely maintained that the second-century Greek-speaking apologists are not just proponents of Ancestral Sin (the 'eastern view'), but are actually commanding voices within this rival tradition to the Latin west. John Hick, for instance, who may be credited with popularizing this view in Anglo-American Christian philosophy, sees in Tatian and Theophilus important forerunners of Irenaeus whose approach to the fall (and theodicy) would effectively set the Hellenistic record for centuries to come.[32] In John Romanides' landmark study on the origins of the Ancestral Sin tradition, later Orthodox stalwarts like Cyril of Alexandria and John Chrysostom are said to 'wonderfully summarize' the thought of the second-century Fathers.[33] John E. Toews agrees: the trajectory initiated by these thinkers continues essentially unchanged to the time of Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and beyond.[34]

It would be a fool's errand, indeed, to argue that there are no distinctly and consistently eastern themes and emphases in the writings of Tatian, Melito, Theophilus, and Irenaeus, and I agree there is some rough cluster of ideas which can justifiably be termed the 'Greek view' of Original Sin into which their writings might comfortably fit.[35] But as for *Ancestral* Sin, the view broadly articulated in the previous section, I think things are slightly different. The assumption that our interlocutors instantiate, or even meaningfully anticipate, *this particular view* is, at best, seriously open to question. No doubt each will convey deep sympathies with one or more aspects of this position, including, significantly, its location within a theological arc stretching

[30] Augustine himself attests to this larger theological arc: see e.g. *Civ. Dei* 12.21, 13.1, 23 (*City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson [London: Penguin, 2003 (orig. publ. 1972)]).

[31] I say 'perhaps not all' because those who affirm all of these elements may actually be few and far between. For instance, it would be relatively uncontroversial to consider Chrysostom a proponent of Ancestral Sin, but, as we have seen, he seems to be much closer to 'absolute' than to 'relative' perfection (see above, n. 20).

[32] See John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons, 1979), ch. 9. Richard Swinburne follows Hick in elaborating an Irenaeus-inspired theodicy in which 'sinfulness was part of Adam's created nature' (*Providence*, p. 45). In a more recent work, Swinburne represents Irenaeus as teaching that 'God made a world containing both good and evil' ('An Irenaean Approach to Evil', in Stanley P. Rosenberg [ed.], *Finding Ourselves after Darwin: Conversations on the Image of God, Original Sin, and the Problem of Evil* [Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2018], pp. 280–92, at p. 280). Both assertions are false, or at least highly misleading: Irenaeus emphasizes at best only the *probability* of Adam succumbing to sin and the world being infected with evil, given the relative immaturity of humanity (more on this below). For a nice response to recent distortions of Irenaeus' thinking on Original Sin, see Andrew M. McCoy, 'The Irenaean Approach to Original Sin through Christ's Redemption', in Stanley P. Rosenberg [ed.], *Finding Ourselves after Darwin: Conversations on the Image of God, Original Sin, and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), pp. 160–72.

[33] Romanides, *Ancestral Sin*, pp. 167–9.

[34] Toews, *Story of Original Sin*, ch. 4. See also Weaver, 'From Paul to Augustine', pp. 187–92.

[35] See Daniel H. Spencer, *Forsaking the Fall: Original Sin and the Possibility of a Nonlapsarian Christianity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023), pp. 14–23.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

from creation to deification, but the discordances evidenced are both too plentiful and too substantial to overlook, so much so, I argue, as to cause appreciable hesitancy about a straightforward 'eastern' ascription (in our sense of the word). What is more, it is tempting to call certain components of their thought conventionally 'western', that is, as long as we insist on upholding a basic east–west dichotomy.

We will proceed by taking each element, rather than each thinker, in turn. There are, however, two broad classes of these elements: those which can be dealt with pithily across the four thinkers and those which will require a good deal more attention. We will begin with the former class which comprises elements (2)–(6), after which we will turn to the rather thornier elements, (1), (7), and (8).

5. ELEMENTS 2–6

Element (2), the retention of a will free to do the good, is fairly strongly represented among our thinkers. It must be stressed, though, that this freedom is heavily qualified (as it is for Ancestral Sin generally): while no strict *necessitas peccandi* applies, the weight of sin and the might of the passions nevertheless deeply prejudice human action towards wickedness.[36] For Tatian, postlapsarian humanity is 'drawn down' by the world: 'through weakness I incline towards matter', he says (*Ad Graecos* 20; cf. 16).[37] But though slaves 'sold through sin', in the end, those who have manifested wickedness 'are able again to reject it' (11). 'For every one who has been conquered, it is possible again to conquer, if he rejects the condition which brings death' (15). Irenaeus, following St Paul (as he so often does), agrees that human beings are morally and spiritually infirm when the Spirit is absent (e.g. *AH* 5.9.1–2). More, due to the fall, we formerly were found disciples of the apostasy (5.1.1) and the devil 'put us to whatever use he pleased' (3.8.2). Even in this infirmity and servitude, however, 'the ancient law of human liberty' continues to operate (4.37.1): 'God has always preserved freedom, and the power of self-government in man' (4.15.2; cf. 4.4.3, 5.27.1).

Theophilus is not quite so explicit, but his thinking clearly tends along the same basic lines. There is, first, the sense that the human race, or most of the members therein anyway, incline towards the earth, 'being pressed down with sins' on account of the fall (*Ad Autol.* 2.17).[38] Still, it is the very nature of man to have 'power over himself', that is, freedom of choice (2.27).[39] That this power is substantially retained after Adam's transgression makes best sense, I think, of Theophilus's rather breezy confidence about obeying the will and laws of God (ibid.), and in any case, we have no statement of a corruption of human nature or bondage of the will to throw this conclusion into serious doubt. Melito alone is silent here. Nowhere in *Peri Pascha* are we told of postlapsarian moral (in)capacities aside from the standard statements of sin having its way generally among humankind (49–54).[40] Human beings are 'led to the land of sensuality' (50), slaves to the tyranny of sin who has 'set his sign on every one' (54). But there is no statement

[36] And so we may be correct, I would submit, in understanding this view to be in the same family as views that do accept a *necessitas peccandi*. The difference may well be merely a matter of degree.

[37] English language references to Tatian's *Ad Graecos* are taken from *Tatian's Address to the Greeks*, trans. J. E. Ryland, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885); for the Greek, I use *Tatiani Oratio ad Graecos*, ed. Edvardus Schwartz (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1888).

[38] Though in this chapter the sinful tendency is not explicitly connected with the fall, this is something Theophilus would clearly affirm: man has 'destroy[ed] himself by sin' (2.24); the postlapsarian state is one of being 'in sin' out of which man must be disciplined (2.26). For English references to Theophilus, I have consulted *Theophilus to Autolycus*, trans. Marcus Dods, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885). For the Greek and Latin see *Theophili episcopi antiocheni Ad Autolycum libri tres*, ed. Johann Karl Theodor von Otto, in *Corpus Apologetarum Christianorum Saeculi Secundi*, vol. 8 (Wiesbaden: Dr Martin Sandig oHG, 1969 [orig. publ. 1861]).

[39] ἐλεύθερον γὰρ καὶ αὐτεξούσιον ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον.

[40] For both English and Greek references to Melito, I have used *On Pascha: With the Fragments of Melito and Other Material Related to the Quartodecimans*, trans. Alistair C. Stewart (2nd edn., Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016).

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

of the theoretical ability to cast off this yoke or to reject its demands; Christ, rather, is Melito's consistent answer to this problem. Doubtless the recovery of the rest of his corpus would help to clear things up, but at present we are, unfortunately, compelled to draw a question mark on this issue, however probable it may be he would ultimately agree with this dominant eastern trend. But on the whole, there is little doubt that element (2) finds reasonably strong support in the thought of our interlocutors.

Element (3), the emphasis on corruptibility and death as consequences of the fall, can be bypassed. This theme is such a commonplace of early Christian thought it would be virtually inconceivable not to find it at play in the writings under consideration. And of course, we do in plenty.[41] But on the opposite extreme, (4) is not nearly as common as we might expect. Indeed, *none* of our four thinkers regularly liken our fallen condition to an illness, disease, or wound to be healed, as much as they would agree it is so. No such references are to be found in Tatian, Theophilus, or Melito. Irenaeus at times employs such language, particularly when drawing on biblical texts of healing and relating them to the wider economy of salvation,[42] but he is a far cry from someone like Gregory of Nyssa for whose doctrine of Original Sin the diseased, sinful nature is a central emphasis.[43] When it is asked, therefore, if our thinkers evidence this criterion indicating the presence of Ancestral Sin, we are compelled to reply in the negative.

Relatively quick work can be made of element (5), too. Three of the four unambiguously *affirm* that at least some of the fall's effects are to be understood as divine punishment; only in the case of Tatian does any vagueness remain. In *Ad Autolycum* 2.25, Theophilus likens Adam and Eve to disobedient children (naturally, we might think):

> But if it is right that children be subject to parents how much more to the God and Father of all things? … A father sometimes enjoins on his own child abstinence from certain things, and when he does not obey the paternal order, he is flogged and punished on account of the disobedience (δέρεται καὶ ἐπιτιμίας τυγχάνει διὰ τὴν παρακοήν); and in this case the actions themselves are not the [cause of] stripes, but the disobedience procures punishment[44] for him who disobeys—so also for the first man, disobedience procured his expulsion from Paradise.

In case this wasn't explicit enough, in the next chapter he goes on to describe God's kindness in restoring the human race, with the period between the fall and final redemption acting as a time of punishment (ἐπιτιμίας) for the expiation of sin (2.26). Melito, having related how Adam transgressed the divine command, informs us 'for this was he thrown out into this world, condemned as though to prison' (ὡς εἰς δεσμωτήριον καταδίκων) (*Peri Pascha* 48). Nearer the end of the homily, Christ assumes human nature, 'judged on behalf of the one convicted [viz., humanity]' (κριθεὶς διὰ τὸν κατάδικον) (100). Irenaeus is no less clear on this score: 'man received, as the punishment (*condemnationem*) of his transgression, the toilsome task of tilling the earth, and to eat bread in the sweat of his face, and to return to the dust from whence he was taken'

[41] Tatian: *Ad Graecos* 7, 11, 13, 15; Theophilus: *Ad Autol.* 2.24–7, 29; Melito: *Peri Pascha* 49, 54–6, 99–105; Irenaeus, taken almost at random: *AH* 3.18.7, 3.23.1, 5.23.1; *Dem.* 29. For *Dem.* I use *St. Irenaeus: The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. J. Armitage Robinson (London: SPCK, 1920).

[42] E.g., *AH* 3.5.2, 3.17.3, 3.23.1–2, 4.12.4, 5.12.6, 5.13.1, 5.15.2.

[43] See e.g. *Catechetical Oration* 15, 16, 27; *Letter* 17 (both in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 5, trans. Henry Austin Wilson [Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893]). On the side, should talk of a diseased *nature* sound startlingly 'Latin', we can say it was not for nothing F. R. Tennant remarked that, with regard to Original Sin, Gregory is to be located conceptually 'at the threshold of the Augustinian era' (*The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903], pp. 323–4). We should probably not press this language too far, but it does at least seem fairly suggestive.

[44] Better, the disobedience procures *abuse* or *insults*: ἡ παρακοὴ τῷ ἀπειθοῦντι ὕβρεις περιποιεῖται. There are three different words that can be rendered 'punishment' in this passage: κόλασις [*supplicium*], ἐπιτιμία [*mulcto*], and ὕβρις [*contumelia*].

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

(*AH* 3.23.3; cf. *Dem*. 17).[45] We live in the 'times of [Adam's] condemnation, which had been incurred through disobedience' (*AH* 3.23.1). And so on.[46]

Tatian is by some distance the most ambiguous of the four. Nowhere does he explicitly say punishment follows the sin of the first man—nor does he deny it—but one more indirect remark seems to imply this would be his position if pressed. In chapter 7 of *Ad Graecos*, where the fall narrative in Genesis 3 is clearly in view, Tatian tells us that humans and angels are created in a state of moral indeterminacy, with the ability to use the gift of free will either for good or for ill, in obedience or disobedience to the will of God—in the former case so that the 'just man [may] be deservedly praised', and in the latter so that 'the bad man may be justly punished (ὁ φαῦλος δικαίως κολάζηται), having become depraved through his own fault'. Here, clearly, persons in the abstract are meant, but we can scarcely fail to associate this with a comment he makes a sentence or two later about 'men attach[ing] themselves to one who was more subtle than the rest'.[47] As a consequence of this primeval attachment, the instigator and his followers, both human and angelic, are removed by God from fellowship with himself (τῆς σὺν αὐτῷ διαίτης[48]), with the verb παρῃτήσατο (excluded/refused) doing the heavy lifting.[49] Given the immediately preceding musings, it seems only natural to read this as a prime instance of the misuse of free will and its punishment. In the absence of positive statements (or even insinuations) to the contrary, then, it is more likely on balance that Tatian, too, believes the first man is genuinely punished by God for his transgression, at least to some extent.

Now what of original righteousness (6)? It depends how we conceive of the doctrine. Typically, it seems to me, what is meant is simply that the first humans were not just free of sin but positively confirmed in virtue, with their wills initially fixed on the good.[50] If this is how we understand original righteousness, then we can summarily grant its rejection in each of our thinkers. All are agreed: the first human beings were indeed innocent and without sin, but not morally good. They were given a choice either to grow in virtue and likeness to God, or else to reject the divine intention and sink into moral chaos, slavery to the devil, and finally death. Tatian puts it succinctly: created persons do not possess 'the nature of good, which again is with God alone, but is brought to perfection in men through their freedom of choice' (*Ad Graecos* 7). Theophilus concurs: Adam was 'simple and sincere', 'an infant in age' apparently without the knowledge of good and evil (*Ad Autol*. 2.25). He was, in fact, created 'in the middle' between mortality and immortality (2.24), capable of either depending on his response to the commandments of God (2.27). Melito envisions Adam as 'susceptible by nature of good and evil, as a clod of earth may receive seed of either kind' (*Peri Pascha* 48). Finally, the Adam and Eve of Irenaeus are repeatedly likened to children: not being adults, they had a 'child-like mind' (*AH* 3.23.5) and no knowledge of procreation (3.22.4; cf. *Dem*. 14). In the course of his rickety argument in *AH* 4.38.1 as to why humans were not created perfect from the start, he speaks of

[45] He goes on to imply—if not flatly declare—that Adam and Eve are both cursed and reprimanded by God (*AH* 3.23.5).

[46] E.g. *AH*, 3.19.3, 4.8.2, and, we might think, 4.40.1. In 3.23.5, as we have said (n. 45), Irenaeus confirms God *actively curses* man, though with the primary rebuke falling on the serpent: *sed maledictum primo immisit in* [*serpenti*], *uti secunda increpatione veniret in hominem*. A more general point: we should hardly expect a leading opponent of Marcionism to deny that God is both a loving saviour *and* punisher of transgression. On the other side, though, we should note Irenaeus' attempt to soften scriptural language surrounding punishment in 5.27.2.

[47] Here Tatian's καὶ ἐπειδή τινι φρονιμωτέρῳ παρὰ τοὺς λοιποὺς echoes Gen. 3:2, LXX: ὁ δὲ ὄφις ἦν φρονιμώτατος πάντων τῶν θηρίων.

[48] Though διαίτης is difficult to translate precisely, 'fellowship' does seem to be the sense here; cf. Josephus' use of the same phrase in *Antiquities* 7.115 (7.5.5) to mean 'eating at table with him' (with 2 Samuel 9 in view). See *Jewish Antiquities, Books V–VIII*, trans. H. St. J Thackeray and Ralph Marcus (London: William Heinemann, 1950).

[49] At the end of the chapter, we are told the demonic followers 'were given up' (παρεδόθησαν) to their own devices, which may distantly evoke Rom. 1:24–8. The same passive verb is used again for both humans and demons in chapter 20.

[50] Of course this makes it quite difficult to explain the first transgression. For more on this 'problem of paradisiacal motivation', see e.g. John R. Schneider, *Animal Suffering and the Darwinian Problem of Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), ch. 5; Robert F. Brown, 'The First Evil Will Must Be Incomprehensible: A Critique of Augustine', *JAAR* 46 (1978), pp. 315–29.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

them as being 'unaccustomed to, and unexercised in, perfect discipline'. Hence, in large measure, the transgression: 'man was a child, not yet having his understanding perfected; wherefore also he was easily led astray by the deceiver' (*Dem.* 12). While more nuance would be required when we consider other aspects of humanity's initial estate,[51] with regard to righteousness, our thinkers are unanimous: the first human beings were neither good nor evil, but capable of both; for Theophilus and Irenaeus in particular, their immaturity meant that virtue needed to be learned.

6. ELEMENTS 1, 7, AND 8

Having surveyed the more uncomplicated elements, the impression so far is that, with the possible exception of Tatian, our second-century apologists are at best only lukewarm proponents of the 'eastern doctrine' of Original Sin. But what about the remaining elements? Might our investigation of these turn the taxonomical tide back towards Ancestral Sin? We shall now consider in a bit more depth (1), the rejection of original guilt, (7), the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit, and (8), the disharmony of the cosmos, along with a word on the overall theological shape which might give all the elements together their basic coherence.

6.1 Original guilt

(1) That original guilt is entirely absent not just in its early streams but in *all* eastern thought on the fall is taken for granted by a wide range of contemporary thinkers.[52] 'Without exception', David Weaver asserts, Greek writers understood our Adamic bequest to consist of 'mortality and corruption only, without an inheritance of guilt'.[53] But what is needed for one to count as a believer in original guilt? Must we go the whole nine yards of Augustinian realism and maintain that we are fully liable for Adam's transgression because, in some metaphysically robust sense, *we were* Adam when he sinned?[54] I see no reason to suppose so. After all, there are other ways one might be said to have participated in Adam's sin without strictly being him—for instance, one might opt for the Federalist view whereby Adam's sin is imputed to his descendants in virtue of their being represented by him at the head of the human race. What seems most essential to original guilt is just the general idea that Adam's descendants are, in some way and in however slight a degree, considered culpable or held to account for Adam's own transgression.[55] The question before us, then, is this: do the thinkers we are considering here evidence this view, and if so, to what extent?

It is clear that not a trace of original guilt is to be found in Tatian or Melito. The inheritance of moral corruption and death on the part of Adam's descendants may be found readily enough, but never do we sense that they share in the primal sin in any way. The closest we get to any sort of corporate solidarity with Adam works precisely the other way around, if we concede it

[51] Should we focus on absolute versus relative perfection, things would be less clear. What constitutes 'perfection', and why? Could any person capable of falling into sin ever be *absolutely* perfect?

[52] Peter Bouteneff, for instance, seems convinced that Jerome and Augustine are uniquely to blame for this predominantly western 'distortion' of Paul (*Beginnings*, pp. 41–2).

[53] Weaver, 'From Paul to Augustine', p. 188.

[54] E.g. *Mar. Conc.* 2.13.27: 'By the evil will of that one man all sinned in him, since all were that one man, from whom, therefore, they individually derived original sin' (cf. *Civ. Dei* 13.14.2). For *Mar. Conc.* I use *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis, revised by Benjamin B. Warfield, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 5 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887).

[55] We will not here enter the discussion as to whether 'mediate' views might count as holding to original guilt; much will come down to definitional preference. On mediate views, while Adam's sin is neither strictly ours nor treated *as if* it were ours (as in Federalism), still all people are guilty from the womb for the corrupt *condition* inherited from Adam's sin (see McCall, *Against God and Nature*, pp. 170–75). There is clearly some 'original guiltiness' here; in any case, I am not so sure good sense can be made of this view without it collapsing into either realism or Federalism. On account of what should people be bound to inherit a corrupt condition for which they are guilty? Surely only on account of actual transgression, but on mediate views guilt precedes any actual sin. So whence the guilt?

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

is even there at all: there is the faintest of hints in Melito that contemporary unbelievers may be understood typologically as Adam, with those who have slain the lamb of God dishonouring the one who formed them from the earth (*Peri Pascha* 79) and gave them life (73). But, even if there is some sense in which Adam (now Israel writ large) has put God to death,[56] this is purely metaphorical; Adam is not literally Israel, and so neither can his historical sin be hers. When we turn to Theophilus and Irenaeus, however, a rather different picture is painted. We shall begin with the former.

There are a number of considerations which, to my mind, show rather decisively that Theophilus understands all of humanity (and beyond) to have participated in Adam's sin and borne his guilt. The most obvious place to start is his remark in *Ad Autolycum* 2.17 where we are informed that *all animals* sinned with Adam (τοῦ γὰρ ἀνθρώπου παραβάντος καὶ αὐτὰ [τὰ θηρία] συμπαρέβη). Theophilus here finds himself at pains to explain the existence of carnivorous and venomous animals: in 2.16, he tells us that some fish and fowls 'transgress the law of God, and eat flesh, and injure those weaker than themselves', and then follows up by reminding the reader in no uncertain terms that predation is not part of God's plan (2.17). Where did these animals come from, then, if not from the hand of God? Theophilus has a ready answer:

> But the sin in which man was concerned brought evil upon them. For when man transgressed, they also transgressed with him. For as, if the master of the house himself acts rightly, the domestics also of necessity conduct themselves well; but if the master sins, the servants also sin with him; so in like manner it came to pass, that in the case of man's sin, he being master, all that was subject to him sinned with him.[57] When, therefore, man again shall have made his way back to his natural condition, and no longer does evil, those also shall be restored to their original gentleness. (2.17)

At this early stage, it would not be correct to conclude that Adam's human descendants, too, share in his sin—this will come later. But what we cannot fail to notice is the Federalism implicit here *vis-à-vis* 'man' and beast: ὁ ἄνθρωπος is to the animals as master to servant, such that whatever the former does, the latter is said to do as well. If the first man transgressed the divine command and brought destruction upon himself, Theophilus reasons, those under his headship *ipso facto* must have done likewise. His sin is theirs—or at least *as if* theirs.[58]

But who is 'man'? It is noteworthy that when speaking of the fall of the animals, the intended referent of ὁ ἄνθρωπος seems to change: while it is abundantly clear he has the individual human being Adam in his sights with regard to the initial transgression, Theophilus' final comment in 2.17 about the return of this same ἄνθρωπος to his natural condition can only refer to *all* humanity; already there is the suspicion that Adam and humankind are intimately related. This suspicion is then confirmed in 2.25–6 where a similar phenomenon occurs. In 2.25, Adam is named as the one who disobeys and is punished, but in 2.26, it is ὁ ἄνθρωπος who, having been cast out of paradise, stands in need of restoration through a curriculum of discipline and sin expiation spanning all of salvation history (ὅπως διὰ τῆς ἐπιτιμίας τακτῷ ἀποτίσας χρόνῳ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν καὶ παιδευθεὶς ἐξ ὑστέρου ἀνακληθῇ). The reader now understands repentance and confession to be the responsible course of action to be taken by *all* postlapsarian human beings, in consequence

[56] Genesis 1–3 is clearly in the background here (see 82–3), and that Melito is thinking typologically can be seen from chapters 59–69. But the Adam allusion is, at best, severely muffled, and in any case would have to reckon with Melito's explicit statement that Christ is typologically represented by Abel, and so, by insinuation, is killed by *Cain* (69).

[57] ἐὰν δὲ ὁ κύριος ἁμαρτάνῃ, καὶ οἱ δοῦλοι συναμαρτάνουσιν, τῷ αὐτῷ τρόπῳ γέγονεν καὶ τὰ περὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον κύριον ὄντα ἁμαρτῆσαι, καὶ τὰ δοῦλα συνήμαρτεν.

[58] In case it is unclear, it should be said explicitly that a more or less 'Pelagian' interpretation of this passage, whereby the servants merely imitate the master, is impossible. Theophilus does not say the animals followed in man's sin (say, καὶ αὐτά ἥμαρτον), but that they *sinned with him* (συνήμαρτεν).

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

of which ὁ ἄνθρωπος will be refashioned in the resurrection of the just. But then (at the end of 2.26) attention immediately shifts back to the individual where this curriculum is reified in Adam's converse with God.

What seems to be occurring, then, is that at times Theophilus uses ὁ ἄνθρωπος and Adam both interchangeably *and* with dual reference: either can, in certain instances, denote both Adam the individual and humanity as a whole, with no apparent hint of conflict, incommensurability, or even distinction between the two. The sin of ὁ ἄνθρωπος in 2.17 seems to be both Adam's and, in some sense, all humanity's; the banishment and punishment of Adam in 2.25 becomes the corporate banishment and punishment of ὁ ἄνθρωπος in 2.26. The first man sins, but all people must now have this sin expiated by punishment, and through the course of history work out their salvation in repentance and confession (μετάνοια καὶ ἐξομολόγησις).

Does this Adam/ἄνθρωπος interplay imply a realist understanding of original guilt? Not necessarily—it is perfectly consistent with Federalism, too. And, since it is clear from 2.17 that Theophilus is already thinking in terms of corporate personality, we would be forgiven for thinking this the most likely interpretation. But we cannot be certain. What is certain, however, is that Theophilus' logic demands at the very least a rough approximation to later notions of original guilt, giving the lie to the popular assumption the doctrine is nowhere to be found in the east.[59]

There is much in the writings of Irenaeus, too, which, taken cumulatively, strongly suggests humanity's participation in Adam's sin. We can begin with several remarks the bishop makes in *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* which, though highly ambiguous, make excellent sense when original guilt is granted. In chapter 16, we read of Satan begrudging 'man',[60] on account of which the latter is misled into transgression. As a result of this misleading, Satan 'both brought himself to nought and made [the?] man sinful'; shortly thereafter, 'man' is removed from the presence of God because 'paradise receiveth not the sinful'. Now it is probable that the individual Adam alone is intended in this retelling of the transgression narrative, but the reader can't help but wonder about Irenaeus' final comment: why should all human beings be denied paradise if the condition of its enjoyment is simply a lack of sinfulness? The answer is surely that they, too, have become sinful, the whole human race somehow blemished by Adam's sin. This line of thought is confirmed by Irenaeus in chapter 37: 'we were imprisoned by sin, being born in sinfulness and living under death'.

So, even in the *Demonstration*, one senses that all human beings after Adam are understood to be sinful by default: sinfulness is, as it were, simply a matter of (postlapsarian) nature. It must be admitted, though, that all this requires some filling in of gaps, and that without access to the Greek original, we are largely left guessing with regard to where the individual 'man' ends and the collective 'man' begins. Furthermore, even if this analysis is on target, humanity's inborn sinfulness can be understood in a way that denies direct participation in Adam's sin: perhaps Adam's transgression simply vitiates human nature, which, when inherited, then renders each member human being guilty for that *nature*. This is the sort of view to which 'mediate' accounts of Original Sin typically subscribe.[61] More is needed, then, to find original guilt in the thought of Irenaeus.

And we do indeed find more in *Against Heresies*. There is, to begin, confirmation of the same basic lines we have explored in the *Demonstration*. In 3.10.2., for instance, it is plain that Irenaeus understands not just Adam's imitators but human nature itself to have apostasized. There is

[59] Against the judgment of J. N. D. Kelly, for instance (*Early Christian Doctrines* [5th edn., London: A. and C. Black, 1977], p. 168).

[60] The Armenian (upon which all translations are based) can evidently refer either to the individual or the collective. But it is surely of some consequence that both the Robinson and Karapet/Wilson translations omit the definite article when it would have made good sense to include it. For the latter see *The Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. Bishop Karapet Ter Mekerttschian and S. G. Wilson, in *Patrologia Orientalis*, vol. 12 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1919).

[61] See again McCall, *Against God and Nature*, pp. 170–75.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

also the unmistakable blurring of lines between Adam and humanity writ large in 3.18.1–2: in Adam, all forfeit the image and likeness of God, having been conquered, destroyed, and overcome by the power of sin; here appeal is eventually made to Rom. 5:19 where Adam's sin seems to be a perfectly direct cause of the many becoming sinners (3.18.7). We are informed further that Christ came and healed '[so] that exiled man might go forth from condemnation' (4.8.2), and that the apostasy, having 'alienated us contrary to nature', has rendered all human beings its disciples (5.1.1). The whole human race has perished in Adam and been brought into the bondage of sin, death, and enmity with God (5.14.1–3). We should keep in mind, too, that Irenaeus is very explicit that the curse in Gen. 3:17–19 is in some sense a punishment (which we all, of course, inherit) (3.23.3), and that all live equally in the 'times of condemnation' (3.23.1; cf. 3.19.3). But condemnation, it might be supposed, implies some degree of fault.[62]

Still, we are only in the ballpark of original guilt. While it is clear, I think, that Irenaeus is no proponent of a 'corruption only' doctrine of Original Sin, there is no reason in theory why all this couldn't be interpreted along mediate lines. Things change later on in the fifth book of *Against Heresies*, however. No longer does Irenaeus speak of humanity merely 'in Adam'[63] but quite openly *as* Adam. By the first tree, *we* 'disobeyed God (*non obedivimus Deo*) and did not give credit to his word' (5.16.3). He continues,

> [The Word] clearly shows forth God Himself, whom indeed *we* had offended in the first Adam, when *he* did not perform His commandment. In the second Adam, however, we are reconciled, being made obedient even unto death. For we were debtors to none other but to Him whose commandment we had transgressed at the beginning. (5.16.3 [emphasis mine])

Again, the enmity that Irenaeus has already declared obtains between God and all human beings is said to have originated when *we* sinned by transgressing God's commandment (5.17.1). Indeed, this is why Jesus taught his disciples to pray as he did, 'forgive us our debts'. Yes, there is a personal sin to repent of, but more important still is our corporate sin in Adam: 'the same against whom we had sinned in the beginning grants forgiveness of sins in the end' (ibid.);[64] 'by means of a tree we were made debtors to God' (5.17.3).[65] And once more, in the beginning, Satan 'led us away captives in Adam' (5.21.1; cf. 5.34.2).

It is, indeed, in the 21st chapter of book 5 that Irenaeus' full theory emerges (along with 5.1.1)—at least full enough to sum up the disconnected fragments scattered throughout *Against Heresies* and to reduce them to some sort of coherence. When Adam and Eve capitulated to the serpent's temptation, ownership of the *whole human race* shifted hands. But servants (apparently) take on the properties of their master. Created to be the image and likeness of God, through Adam's fall, humanity became instead the image of the usurper whose property they now were: disciples of the apostasy, powerful in transgression, bound with the fetters of sin (5.21.3; cf. 3.23.6)—condemned enemies of God. But intriguingly, though humanity does share in guilt for the transgression that rendered them such, there is a significant twist. For it is, Irenaeus recognizes, *unjust* that the human race be so tyrannized over and made liable to condemnation, however true it is (5.1.1). The bulk of God's wrath is therefore turned against Satan (4.40.3), and a plan is hatched to recover God's purloined (though still, curiously, guilty) possession.

[62] Aquinas reasons along these lines in *SCG* 4.50.3 (ed. Joseph Kenny, OP; trans. Charles J. O'Neil, *Contra Gentiles: On the Truth of the Catholic Faith* [New York, Hanover House, 1955–7]). Romanides joins him, but studiously ignores the evidence which suggests some early Greek writers *do* consider corruptibility and death a punishment in some sense (*Ancestral Sin*, p. 156).

[63] E.g. 3.18.1, 5.1.3, 5.14.1.

[64] *idem ille, in quem peccaveramus in initio, remissionem peccatorum in fine donans.*

[65] *per lignum facti sumus debitores Deo.*

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

Now, are we all captives in Adam because he represented the whole human race, or are we so because he in some sense *was* the whole human race? Irenaeus does not say, though the idea of Federal headship seems the more natural accompaniment to this kind of story.[66] But what is not at this stage open to serious doubt is that the human race participates in Adam's transgression and shares in his guilt, *at least to some degree*. To suggest otherwise would be to neglect the unity of the human race required for both sides of the recapitulation doctrine to hold water: just as the whole of human nature is wrested out of God's possession and condemned in Adam, so is the same spoil plundered, won back, and restored in Christ (3.8.2). As with Theophilus, then, in Irenaeus, too, we have an early witness to a primitive form of original guilt.

6.2 Withdrawal of the Holy Spirit

Perhaps equally surprisingly, element (7), the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit as the primary cause of the fall's consequences, is to be found unambiguously only in Tatian where it features quite centrally. For Tatian, human beings were originally created as a harmonious combination of flesh, soul, and spirit, with the latter being the image and likeness of God (*Ad Graecos* 12) and, indeed, the 'immortal principle' whereby humans '[share] in a part of God' (7). When they fell, however, this higher spirit departed, leaving both body and soul to their natural fate of ultimate dissolution (13). What becomes increasingly clear, however, is that this now-departed immortal principle *just is* the Holy Spirit: as Tatian says in chapter 15, it behoves us 'to seek for what we once had, but have lost, to unite the soul with the Holy Spirit, and to strive after union with God'. This identification is further confirmed in chapter 13 where spirit qua companion of the soul is casually conflated with the Divine Spirit. So, while there is, as we have seen, at least some suggestion of punishment, for Tatian the proximate cause of corruption and even the sinful inclination is emphatically the withdrawal of the divine, immortal principle (see also 20).[67]

Beyond Tatian, however, it is unclear how far our thinkers attest to (7). Theophilus is content to leave matters unexplained: that ὁ ἄνθρωπος destroyed himself through sin (*Ad Autol.* 2.24), and that 'from his disobedience … [he drew] labour, pain, grief, and … death' (2.25), is simply accepted as revealed truth in need of no further defence or elaboration.[68] Neither does Melito raise the question; the first man simply disobeyed and was cast out of paradise, destroying himself and all his descendants to come (*Peri Pascha* 48–9).

Irenaeus deserves more careful consideration. He of course has much to say about the Holy Spirit, but there are only a handful of occasions where its discussion has substantial import for his fall doctrine.[69] The first thing to say is that, with only a few exceptions, Irenaeus does not explicitly consider the Spirit's role in the life or lapse of the first man. This is already a significant divergence from the likes of Tatian, for whom the withdrawal of the immortal principle is central and unmissable. In one place, Irenaeus has Adam pronounce, 'I have by disobedience lost that robe of sanctity which I had from the Spirit' (*AH* 3.23.5); later paradise is said to have been

[66] Cf. 3.23.2: 'we are all from [Adam]: and as we are from him, therefore have we all inherited his title' (*proptera quoque ipsius haereditavimus apellationem*). While John Behr does not explicitly commit himself on this point, he seems partial to the Federalist view. He says, 'In the head of the human race, Adam, the human being, turned from God and so lost contact with the source of life, becoming "dead in Adam"' (where the comma after 'human being' should be removed). See *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 171. F. R. Tennant dismisses the realist interpretation and opts instead for a 'mystical' understanding which, unfortunately, he does not explain. But this is partly intentional, for though he affirms the fall is, for Irenaeus, 'the collective deed of the race', still 'the mode in which Adam and his posterity are actually connected together in the first sin [is] entirely undefined' (*The Sources*, pp. 289–90).

[67] This is not quite the whole story, however. While the soul now 'hankers after communion with inferior things', the spirit itself was initially 'cast off through sin' (20). Sin is therefore the prime mover: it occasions the departure of the spirit, which in turn ensnares human beings in ever deeper levels of sin.

[68] To the extent any explanation is given at all, we would have to say these things are the *punishment* for disobedience, as we had occasion to sketch above.

[69] For a sharp and comprehensive treatment of Irenaeus' pneumatology, see Anthony Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012).

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

'prepared for righteous men, such as have the Spirit' (δικαίοις γὰρ ανθρώποις καὶ πνευματοφόροις ἡτοιμάσθε ὁ παράδεισος) (5.5.1). Lastly, 5.10.1 might seem at least to imply that the first human beings participated in the Spirit; after all, those who do so now will soon be '[as] planted in the paradise of God' (*tanquam in paradiso Dei plantati*) and 'arrive at the pristine nature of man—that which was created after the image and likeness of God'.[70]

It is not clear, however, how much weight should be attached to these remarks. First, regarding the 'robe of sanctity', it is plain that this refers to a gift *from* the Spirit (perhaps a holy innocence) and not the Spirit's possession.[71] Whatever Irenaeus has in mind with this robe, it is decidedly something other than the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit, which comes with Christ (more on this below). Next, it is clear that in the comment about paradise in 5.5.1, Irenaeus is thinking primarily of those after Adam who, like Enoch and Paul, were 'translated' (μετατεθέντας/*translati*) to paradise, and so by 'righteous' we should understand those who follow God and respond appropriately to the economy of salvation (cf. 4.33.1, 7). Moreover, if this is meant to apply equally to Adam, it would follow that he, too, is *righteous*—in other words, Irenaeus would be shown to endorse the doctrine of original righteousness, which he does not.[72]

Irenaeus' comments in 5.10.1 open up a wider area of exploration, for, it might be suggested, the sturdiest case for the presence of (7) will come not from a collection of isolated remarks, but by way of inference from Irenaeus' thinking about the image and likeness of God. In 5.6.1, Irenaeus associates the image of God with man's fleshly nature and the likeness with the whole or 'perfect' man, the union of flesh, soul, and Holy Spirit. This complete man is made perfect 'because of the outpouring of the Spirit, and this is he who was made in the image and likeness of God'.[73] He continues,

> but if the Spirit be wanting to the soul, he who is such is indeed of an animal nature, and being left carnal, shall be an imperfect being, possessing indeed the image in his formation but not receiving the similitude through the Spirit.

If Adam was thus created in both the image and likeness of God, it would follow that he possessed the Holy Spirit, the condition of its actualization. But it seems he *was* created in both the image and likeness of God: 5.6.1 and 3.23.1–2 seem to establish this, 5.16.2 contains at least one reasonably clear affirmation that the likeness was formerly possessed,[74] and 3.18.1 states that we *forfeited* both in Adam.[75] So, it seems, Adam was formerly the image and likeness of God in virtue of his possession of the Holy Spirit, but then lost both by losing the Spirit.

[70] *in pristinam veniunt hominis naturam, eam quae secundum imaginem et similitudinem facta est Dei.*

[71] Cf. Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, pp. 161–2.

[72] Perhaps Adam succumbs to the temptation *precisely because* he is wanting in righteousness and the Spirit. But then again, couldn't original righteousness find a place in Irenaeus' thought on the basis of this remark and the preceding one about Adam losing the robe of sanctity? I am inclined to doubt it, given the clear evidence to the contrary we have reviewed above. There is doubtless *something* fundamentally 'right' and unimpaired about Adam's initial formation, but this has nothing to do with an Augustinian inclination towards the good.

[73] He is not always this tidy. In 4.Pref.4, the soul and flesh (but not spirit!) are formed after the likeness of God; in 5.12.4, the image alone is discussed and connected to the flesh. Then again, if, as also in 5.6.1, the fleshly nature is made after the image of God, the image cannot have been lost as he says in 3.18.1. Though the discrepancy may come down in part to a lack of complete self-consistency, it might also be that the lost Greek original gives us something we don't have in the Latin. Behr approvingly cites Jacques Fantino's argument to the effect that *similitudo* translates both ὁμοιότης and ὁμοίωσις, the former referring to free will, an inabrogable anthropological given, and the latter to the eschatological likeness of the human being regenerated by the Spirit. See John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 [digital version]), pp. 90–91 with nn. 19 and 20.

[74] Though a question should be asked about the choice to translate τὴν ὁιμοίωσιν βεβαίως κατέστησε as *similitudinem firmans restituit*, upon which is based the English 'He reestablished the similitude after a sure manner'. καθίστημι carries no connotations of *re*-making/establishing/appointing, just making/establishing/appointing. The Vulgate, for instance, renders the New Testament's καθίστημι *constituo* (21/22 times), never *restituo* (e.g. Luke 12:14, Rom. 5:19, Heb. 2:7, 2 Peter 1:8). The only other New Testament occurrence carries the sense of 'escort', rendered *deduco* (Acts 17:15). It seems Irenaeus' Latin translator is indulging in an (understandable) inference based on the previous sentence, τὴν ὁιμοίωσιν ῥᾳδίως ἀπέβαλεν.

[75] In 5.2.1, we read of God restoring (*restaurans*) 'what was said in the beginning, that man was made after the image and likeness of God'. But we should be careful here, for, as we will see (below, at n. 80), there is reason to think emphasis should fall on *said*—i.e. 'it was *said* that man was made …'. Compare with a nearly identical remark from *Dem*. 32: 'there should be that which was *written* in the beginning, man after the image and likeness of God' (emphasis mine).

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

Or perhaps not. In the first place, it should be pointed out that most of these references to Adam being made after the image and likeness are theoretically consistent with their being merely potential: for instance, the comment regarding their forfeiture in 3.18.1[76] *could* be interpreted as meaning 'because of Adam we lost the (easier) *opportunity* to be the image and likeness of God'. To be sure, this strikes me as a somewhat unlikely interpretation, but it is worth putting on the table in view of other things Irenaeus has to say. For there are several occasions where Irenaeus effectively *denies*—or at least radically qualifies—the operation of the Holy Spirit in the first man.[77] Taking his inspiration from Genesis 2 and 1 Corinthians 15, Irenaeus in 5.12.2 distinguishes the divine breath given to Adam from that bequeathed to the renewed people of God in Christ: 'the breath of life (πνοὴ ζωῆς), which also rendered man an animated being, is one thing, and the vivifying Spirit (πνεῦμα ζωοποιοῦν) another';[78] in the beginning, Adam was animated and endowed with reason, but

> In the end, the Word of the Father and the Spirit of God, having become united with the ancient substance of Adam's formation, rendered man living and perfect, receptive of the perfect Father, in order that as in the natural we all were dead, so in the spiritual we may all be made alive. (5.1.3)

That the 'natural' was the *sole* lot of the first Adam is clearly affirmed at the end of 5.12.2: it was 'necessary' (*oportuerat*) that the human being receive first a soul and *afterwards* (*deinde*) 'receive the communion of the Spirit'. After all, he explains, the first man became merely a living soul (εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν), not a life-giving spirit (εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιοῦν). Then comes the clincher: the Spiritless 'animal nature' (*animale*) is what Christ came to quicken by the Spirit (5.12.3). But, he has already said quoting Paul in 1 Cor. 15:46, it is not the spiritual which is first but the animal (*animale* [ψυχικόν]) (5.12.2)—the spiritual only comes with Christ.[79]

What is going on here? A comment Irenaeus makes in 5.16.1 gives an initial hint: God 'forms [both Adam and ourselves] and prepares us for life, and is present with His handiwork, and *perfects it after the image and likeness of God*' (my emphasis). The creation of Adam the life-giving spirit, it seems, was not complete in the first man but involved an ongoing process; he was never *truly* the image and likeness of God. As Irenaeus goes on to say, 'in times long past, it was *said*

[76] 'What we had lost in Adam—namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God'.

[77] There is no doubt the Spirit is present and active to some degree, helping to form, with the Word, Adam from the mud (5.28.4). But the Spirit remains so even in the apostasy (4.33.1) and indeed 'contains' or 'holds together' (συνέχω/*contineo*) all things (5.2.3)—even if, as Briggman has argued, this should not be pressed too far so as to suggest that the Spirit is indiscriminately present with all human beings at all times (see *Irenaeus of Lyons*, pp. 151–64). On the whole, the prelapsarian role of the Spirit is fairly unimportant for Irenaeus, and certainly relative to the central place it occupies in his soteriology.

[78] Happily the Greek is preserved here; note how Irenaeus' ἑτερόν έστι πνοὴ ζωῆς, ἡ καὶ ψυχικὸν ἀπεργαζομένη τον ἄνθρωπον closely reflects Gen. 2:7 (LXX), ἐνεφύσησεν … πνοὴν ζωῆς καὶ ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν, and 1 Cor. 15:45, ἐγένετο ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος Ἀδὰμ εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν. Similarly his πνεῦμα ζωοποιοῦν, τὸ καὶ πνευματικὸν αυτὸν ἀποτελοῦν tracks 1 Cor. 15:45, ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ εἰς πνεῦμα ζῳοποιοῦν, and, we might think, other texts like John 6:68, τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστι τὸ ζῳοποιοῦν.

[79] Romanides' attempt to dismiss this evidence on the grounds that Irenaeus 'is not speaking of the original state but of [humanity's] present condition' is farfetched to say the very least (*Ancestral Sin*, p. 150). There is no question he is: who but Adam would be the 'living soul [who] forfeited life when he turned aside to what was evil'? (*AH* 5.12.2). Who else was made εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν in Genesis 2? Realizing his position might be in some trouble, Romanides next resorts to the argument from God's non-causing of death: if Adam did not have the Holy Spirit, this would be tantamount to asserting God 'made man for death' (p. 150). Not at all. (Relative) non-possession of the Spirit is perfectly consistent with Adam occasioning his own separation—in fact, it's what the 'carnal' (σαρκικοί) do every day. Romanides' positive case for Adam's possession of the Spirit is little better: he begins by uncritically citing *AH* 5.5.1 and 5.6.1, and then points to 4.38.3 where the Spirit is said to 'nourish and increase' man. But this is misleading, for the trinitarian formula here would seem to apply equally to all created things (cf. *Dem.* 5). Of course the Holy Spirit is in some sense instrumental in strengthening Adam, but not in a capacity that is obviously different from how the Spirit still operates in the lives of fallen human beings for their restoration. Finally, Romanides is inconsistent on the image and likeness of God. He appeals to the possession of both as key evidence for Adam's possession of the Spirit (pp. 151–2), but shortly thereafter affirms both are something that are to be acquired through spiritual labour (p. 153). Drawing a distinction between a potential and actual *imago Dei* would be appropriate here (as he does on p. 158), but then his argument for Adam's possession of the Spirit would be severely undercut. All in all, Romanides' treatment of Irenaeus on this point is one-sided and rather lacking in nuance; the pains taken to establish Irenaeus' parity with Tatian bespeak only the substantial distance between the two.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

that man was created after the image of God, but it was not *shown*; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created' (5.16.2). Yes, it was *written* that human beings should be the image and likeness of God (*Dem*. 32) but in Christ, it *really* is so for the first time (*Dem*. 97).[80]

This understanding of the as-yet unfulfilled vocation[81] to bear God's likeness helps to make sense of some of Irenaeus' famous comments at the end of book 4 of *Against Heresies*. Despite what a cursory reading of 5.6.1 might seem to imply, Irenaeus is firmly of the persuasion that the first Adam was decidedly not what he calls 'perfect' (τέλειος/*perfectum*); the perfection of the uncreated God is something he must grow into gradually (see e.g. 4.38). Just as an infant requires milk before solids may be introduced, so must human beings become disciplined 'in the practice of things pertaining to God' before they are fit to receive the Holy Spirit (4.38.2).

> For it was necessary, at first, that nature should be exhibited; then, after that, that what was mortal should be conquered and swallowed up by immortality, and the corruptible by incorruptibility, and that man should be made after the image and likeness of God, having received the knowledge of good and evil. (4.38.4)

First the natural, then the spiritual: first the imperfect man of flesh and soul only, and then the perfect man when he is mingled with the Spirit of God. As John Behr summarizes, 'For Irenaeus the human being is precisely the one created by God, flesh fashioned from mud by his Hands, animated by a breath of life to be vivified by the Spirit through their death in conformity with Christ, thus becoming *at the end* "in the image and likeness of God."'[82]

All things considered, then, it seems the great bishop of Lyons, too, might largely fail to meet criterion (7) for Ancestral Sin: if Adam was not relevantly filled with the Holy Spirit to begin with, the consequences of the fall can hardly stem primarily from its retreat.[83] Perhaps some wrinkles still need to be ironed out here, and so I would hesitate to call this a certain conclusion.[84] But at the very least we can say we have strong reason to doubt the centrality of the revocation of the Holy Spirit for Irenaeus' fall doctrine.

6.3 Cosmic disharmony and the greater theological arc

We will now conclude our survey with a brief comment on our final element and the creation–deification arc Louth has pointed to as the basic theological framework giving shape to all the elements together. In one respect, the cosmic disharmony unleashed by the first sin (8) and the wider context of creation–deification coincide. After all, the emphasis here rests squarely on

[80] Cf. *AH* 5.8.1: if even now the Spirit makes us cry 'Abba, Father' (Rom. 8:15), 'what shall the complete grace of the Spirit effect, which shall be given to man by God? It will render us like Him, and accomplish the will of the Father; for it shall make man after the image and likeness of God'. See also the final line of *Against Heresies* (5.36.3).

[81] This analysis is further confirmed by a point well made by Bouteneff: for Irenaeus, having the divine likeness necessarily involves the knowledge of good and evil, which Adam originally *lacks* (*Beginnings*, pp. 79–81).

[82] Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, pp. 119–20 (emphasis mine).

[83] Both Behr and Briggman, each in their own way, confirm this point. For Behr, the breath of life given to Adam still falls decidedly on the 'creature' side of the creature/creator distinction. It is both temporal and mortal (*Asceticism and Anthropology*, p. 106; cf. pp. 58–60), and it is for this reason that it succumbs to death when it loses its strength (*Irenaeus of Lyons*, pp. 155–6). Briggman is blunt: while Ireaneus' very occasional comments (e.g. about the 'robe of sanctity') point to some form of prelapsarian 'communion' with the Spirit, still the '"possession" or "indwelling" of the Holy Spirit by Adam and Eve … has no supporting texts' (*Irenaeus of Lyons*, p. 162). Again, Irenaeus' interest in the Spirit is, to put it mildly, predominantly eschatological.

[84] I am far more optimistic than someone like Tennant about the *general* consistency of Irenaeus' thought. Tennant follows Harnack and Wendt in supposing there to be two dominant elements to Irenaean thought on the fall, which are utterly irreconcilable: (a) one which sees Adam as imperfect and without the likeness, and (b) the other which sees Adam as enjoying an initial estate which is to be restored in Christ (see *The Sources*, pp. 284–8). I am sceptical (b) is represented beyond, at best, a few casual remarks, most of which may be interpreted within the framework of (a) (but not the other way around). Tennant's case for this general inconsistency of thought hinges largely on the putative discrepancies *vis-à-vis* the image and likeness of God we have reviewed above, and so it should be clear why I am not keen to follow his lead. Moreover, I fail to see why Tennant thinks (a) cannot accommodate the recapitulation doctrine or collective participation in Adam's sin (again, Federal headship will do).

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

universal reach—of creation, of salvation, and of sin—with the first sin interrupting and then spoiling the divinely intended march from *fiat lux* to the final divinization of all things. Sin is not, as it were, the starting point of salvation understood as deification—this was always the as-yet unrealized goal. Sin merely diverts the proper channel, forcing the process of deification to run a course it was never meant to follow. As a result, the stream which previously yielded fertile land now scrapes its way through rocky terrain, even as God gently encourages it to return to its proper course and bear its intended fruit.[85]

This creation–deification arc is well-represented in two of our thinkers, but questions ought to be asked of Tatian and especially Melito. To take the latter first, the lack of this framework may simply stem from the narrower focus of *Peri Pascha* or, indeed, the dearth of other surviving material, but in the work we have, the first sin and its consequences certainly feel as though they are being understood largely along the lines of Louth's 'lesser theological arc'. There is the lone comment, noted above, pertaining to the open-endedness of moral decision in the first man (*Peri Pascha* 48), but this strikes the reader as mainly a rationalization for the inexplicable slip into sin, and beyond this there is no note of gradual development in sanctification or abetting the cosmos' participation in the divine nature, but only the relinquishment of a purity, honour, and incorruption evidently already enjoyed (49). Neither do we witness in Melito the idea that all of nature was adversely affected by the fall. He is clear about sin's sometimes ghastly outworking in the human race (50–53), but this never extends beyond humanity: even his comment that 'all flesh' (πᾶσα σὰρξ) and 'every body' (πᾶν σῶμα) have fallen under sin and death (55) visibly refers to humans only (see 54–6).[86] Overall, the impression is that Christ has come to remedy human sin and thereby to restore humankind to its original paradisiacal estate. If Louth is right that 'the West comes to see the engagement between God and the human as concerned with sin and its consequences', we have in Melito a distinctly western view of Original Sin.[87]

Seen in this light, some similar remarks may be made of Tatian. It is true he makes much of 'union with God' (*Ad Graecos* 15, 13; cf. 7), but never do we read this is something human beings were always intended to grow into, apart from coming to reflect more fully the goodness inherent to the divine nature. From the very beginning, they appear to enjoy union with God already: they are found 'sharing in a part of God' having been united to the 'immortal principle' (7), after losing which humans are enjoined to *return* to the union of 'the soul with the Holy Spirit, and to strive after union with God' (15). Tatian does make an interesting comment that humans, as the image and likeness of God, are to '[advance] far beyond mere humanity—to God himself' (15).[88] But, given he is here opposing the standard Greek philosophical view that human beings are to be categorized chiefly as *rational animals* (ζῷον λογικὸν), it seems safe to assume this 'advance beyond mere humanity' simply refers to the unity of flesh, soul, and Holy Spirit he has already spoken of several times before.

I am not convinced, then, that Tatian bears definite witness to our larger theological arc. We must, it is true, continually remind ourselves that the first human beings (and angels) were tasked with maturing in virtue (7), but besides this, the location of unfallen humanity in any narrative of creation and salvation is largely undetermined. There is no strong sense in Tatian that the first sin disrupts creation's march towards deification, and, if anything, the emphasis seems to fall on the restoration of what was already a predominantly completed work. Regarding element (8), he does seem to affirm a sort of ontological 'plane-shift' when humanity is cast out of paradise: while

[85] So Romanides: 'salvation in Christ is the restoration of man to the path of perfection' (*Ancestral Sin*, p. 152).

[86] We should note, though, his remark that Christ has the 'power to save all things' (ὁ ἔχων ἐξουσίαν πάντα σῴζειν) (104). I do not think too much weight should be attached to this, though it may show there is *some* cosmic component to Melito's thought.

[87] Cf. Pier Franco Beatrice, summing up Melito: 'The redeemer came to restore, by his incarnation, the original state of incorruption and immortality, and to bring liberation from enslavement to sin' (*Transmission of Sin*, p. 174).

[88] τὸν πόρρω μὲν τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος πρὸς αὐτὸν δὲ τὸν θεὸν κεχωρηκότα.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

there is no apparent objective change to the natural order, the dimension of earth formerly inhabited in paradise—where there is no cold, night, nor change of season—is forfeited for the dimension of that same earth with which we are amply familiar today (20). But creation is not disordered or infected by sin *per se*. Neither, of course, does sin merely distort our subjective experience of it; rather, we are objectively translated to an already existing but less ordered (and enjoyable) plane of existence. In the absence of any positive statement of the cosmic effects of sin, then, I do not think we can say that Tatian meets element (8). Nor can we, I believe, confidently situate his work broadly within the larger theological arc of creation and deification.

For Theophilus and Irenaeus, however, the creation–deification framework is unmistakable, though it is only the former that strikes a strong note of cosmic corruption. Theophilus, we have had occasion to mention, sees all animals sinning with Adam; when the master falls, all things under his dominion fall as well (*Ad Autol.* 2.17). Animals no longer 'abide in their natural [vegetarian] state' (2.16) but participate in the newly established order of sin and death, with the stronger preying on the weaker. Theophilus seems to think that physical mortality itself is a grave evil and no part of God's original creation (2.27). But if so, why did God not create human beings immortal from the beginning? Why 'neither mortal nor immortal' (2.27)? His answer is a textbook embodiment of the creation–deification arc:

> God transferred [the man] from the earth, out of which he had been produced, into Paradise, giving him means of advancement, in order that, maturing and becoming perfect, and being even declared a god, he might thus ascend into heaven in possession of immortality. (2.24; cf. 2.27)

The first sin, it is clear, arrests the seamless advance of an ongoing process of creation and deification. For Theophilus, then, while sin certainly plays a central role in the drama running from fall to redemption, it is more theological sideshow when considered *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Irenaeus concurs in this respect. While there is little one might point to as evidencing the cosmic effects of the fall,[89] he is a well-known champion of the creation–deification theological arc, understanding the first human beings as something of a work in progress. One quotation will suffice:

> It was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should [gain strength] (ἐνισχῦσαι/*convalescere*);[90] and having [gained strength], should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord. For God is He who is yet to be seen, and the beholding of God is productive of immortality, but immortality renders one near unto God. (*AH* 4.38.3)

7. CONCLUSION

We have dedicated no small amount of space to examining the work of our four thinkers *vis-à-vis* the loose consensus on Ancestral Sin. I will test the reader's patience no further and simply divulge the results. When we tally up each thinker's score, we find that our loose consensus is at

[89] Christ is said to have 'reclaimed the savage earth' (*AH* 4.34.4) and healed his 'impaired handiwork' (5.12.6), but these comments may well refer to the human race only. The clearest statement I find comes from 5.32.1 where Irenaeus speaks of creation being 'restored to its primeval condition'. Perhaps we may conclude Irenaeus *believed* the fall had cosmic effects, but it is manifestly no prominent feature of his doctrine of sin.

[90] Nothing in the Greek original implies recovery, much less recovery from sin, as the *ANF* translators have it. ἐνισχῦσαι simply means 'to strengthen'. See Robert F. Brown, 'On the Necessary Imperfection of Creation: Irenaeus' Adversus Haereses IV, 38', *SJT* 28 (1975), pp. 17–25, at p. 19, n. 1. Cf. e.g. 2 Sam. 22:40 LXX: καὶ ἐνισχύσεις με δυνάμει (lit. 'you will strengthen me with power').

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

best unenthusiastically matched. Beginning with Tatian, we find that elements (4) and (5) are certainly unmet, with (8), as well as the larger theological arc, likely absent as well. All the rest find at least some voice in Tatian's doctrine of sin. Out of nine points overall, then, we may say Tatian scores a 5/9. The thought of Theophilus and Irenaeus yields similar results to one another, being in agreement on all points save (8), where the latter is far more reticent about sin's effects beyond the human race. Both meet criteria (2), (3), and (6), and share kindred views regarding Louth's larger theological arc. The other elements, however, are absent, the most significant of which is their joint affirmation of humanity's participation in Adam's sin. Theophilus thus joins Tatian in finishing with a 5/9, and Irenaeus finishes with a 4/9. Finally, Melito scores a 3.5/9, with a half-point granted for element (2), which it is quite probable he would affirm. Apart from this, elements (1), (3), and (6) are the sole commonalities Melito shares with Ancestral Sin.

Do the leading, Greek-speaking Christian thinkers of the second century believe in Ancestral Sin, then? Perhaps—but perhaps not. Theophilus and Irenaeus, two thinkers very commonly presumed to stand as originators of this tradition, seem but half-hearted adherents at best. Furthermore, both in their own way oppose what appears to be *the* central component of Ancestral Sin, the rejection of original guilt. Melito, it is true, may not have bequeathed sufficient material to later generations to say for sure, but I believe we do have significant positive reason from *Peri Pascha* to think the score of 3.5 is more or less just. And while Tatian's concurrence with the important elements (1), (2), (6), and (7) may seem impressive, his apparent disinterest in the creation–deification arc must temper any strong feeling we have found our early proponent of Ancestral Sin. Finally, should a 5/9 seem a relatively high score, this should be put into perspective: stock western thinkers are not far off this number. By my count Augustine[91] and Aquinas[92] would both likely merit a 4, and, if N. P. Williams's summary is to be trusted, Duns Scotus may well score a 5.[93]

It will no doubt be objected that a straightforward scoring of these elements does not do sufficient justice to the emphasis which ought to be placed on *certain* ones. Ancestral Sin is not, it might be said, simply the conjunction of (1)–(8) within the creation–deification arc, but the conjunction of the *more important* of these elements, with the others being somewhat less essential, but nevertheless welcome, components. I have no misgivings about this objection. But then observe that (2) and (6) are the only two elements shared across all four thinkers: surely Ancestral Sin cannot consist of an intact postlapsarian free will and a denial of original righteousness alone. We might be inclined to add original guilt to this list of essentials, but of course that would disqualify Theophilus and Irenaeus. The trick would be to isolate those universally shared elements and declare these essential to Ancestral Sin, but only so long as they are not also instanced by typically western thinkers. This, of course, sounds conspicuously like gerrymandering, and it would result in a highly artificial classification of Christian thought on Original Sin—but it would at least help to keep our neat categories of east and west intact.

Again, it is no part of this article to explore what the necessary and sufficient conditions for a doctrine of Ancestral Sin might be. But if the doctrine is to be a real and definable entity—and if it is to be presented as a distinct alternative to 'Original Sin'—some more well-defined boundaries will need to be agreed upon. We have seen that there are at least some rough boundaries in

[91] Augustine: (1): no (e.g. *Civ. Dei* 13.3, 14; *Mar. Conc.* 2.15.5); (2) no (e.g. *Mar. Conc.* 2.8.3); (3) yes (e.g. *Civ. Dei* 13.1, 10–11); (4) yes (e.g. *Civ. Dei* 11.12, *Mar. Conc.* 1.9.8, 1.32.28); (5) no (e.g. *Civ. Dei* 13.3); (6) no (e.g. *Civ. Dei* 14.11); (7) yes (e.g. *Civ. Dei* 13.12–13, 14.15); (8) no (e.g. *Civ. Dei* 11.23). Does the thought of Augustine feature the larger creation–deification framework? Manifestly (e.g. *Civ. Dei* 12.21, 13.1, 23).

[92] Aquinas: (1) quite possibly; he seems to hold only to a *mediate* account of inherited guilt in *SCG* 4.50–52; (2) no (e.g. *ST* I, q. 83, a. 1, ad 2); (3) yes; (4) no; (5) no (e.g. *SCG* 4.50.3); (6) no (e.g. *ST* I, q. 95); (7) yes (e.g. *SCG* 4.52.6); (8); creation–deification framework: likely yes, even if it is not as strongly *emphasized* (e.g. *ST* I, q. 102, a. 4). I use *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920).

[93] See N. P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1938), pp. 408–19.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

place, what we have termed our loose consensus on Ancestral Sin, incorporating elements (1)–(8) within a theological framework spanning from creation to deification. But even still these boundaries are somewhat insubstantial. Moreover, granted this loose consensus, it is clear that several early, quintessentially 'eastern' thinkers do not count as sure-fire proponents of Ancestral Sin. Perhaps this is the case. If so, so be it: our lot would then be only to acknowledge this and henceforth refrain from citing them as such. It may simply be a fact of theological history that the development of the Ancestral Sin tradition postdates the thinkers surveyed here. On the other hand, if we desire to continue to utilize these (and other) thinkers in our elaboration of a decidedly non-western doctrine of Ancestral Sin, then the boundaries of the latter will need to be carefully reworked and certainly sharpened appreciably.

This is not, once more, to deny that there are 'eastern' emphases already on display in Tatian, Theophilus, Melito, and Irenaeus, such as the retention of a genuinely free will or the preference against original righteousness. We can add that, in general, it is clear their accounts of the origin of sin strike an altogether mild note compared with those of, say, Augustine, Luther, or Calvin. But granting these common accents does not mean their doctrines are all basically the same: as has been demonstrated at length, a nuanced consideration of our interlocutors yields four very distinct and sometimes incompatible approaches to the first sin and its consequences. More importantly, these commonalities do not change the fact that each of our thinkers contradicts certain key elements of Ancestral Sin, at least as it has been elaborated in recent scholarship.

Once this is recognized, however, and once it is accepted that our thinkers resist easy categorization in a simplistic opposition of east versus west, the possibility arises that, given the right theological context and motivations, their thought might increasingly come to resemble later, western views. As a particularly lurid example, Williams observes the drastic modifications Gregory of Nyssa makes to his doctrine of Original Sin when the threat of Manichaean dualism looms large,[94] but the shift in emphasis need not be so striking. Another decade in Gaul or an encounter with an opponent like Julian of Eclanum might have resulted in Irenaeus intensifying (and hopefully clarifying) his view on original guilt; the right sort of pressure might very well have forced each of our interlocutors to reconsider the extent to which the will remains free to do the good without the operation of grace. The lines that separate them from, say, Aquinas on this point are breathtakingly thin, especially insofar as they are happy to grant the difficulty of overcoming humanity's strong postlapsarian bias towards sin.[95]

Why the *differences* between east and west have so often been stressed is a worthy question which demands further investigation. Differences there are, but we should take care not to focus on them inordinately—to my mind, the basic points of agreement are by far the more arresting. But all that is another matter, and this article has run its course. I think we have seen more than enough to establish that our surveyed thinkers are not so easily pinned down within the Ancestral Sin construct as is oftentimes supposed. That they believe in Original Sin as defined at this paper's opening cannot earnestly be questioned. But that they believe in Ancestral Sin—or whether we even know with adequate precision what this doctrine might be—is certainly open to debate.[96]

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jts/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jts/flaf005/8003755 by guest on 07 February 2025

[94] Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, p. 274 ff.

[95] All told, it seems a fairly minor theological move to go from this to the view that God's grace technically, though imperceptibly, precedes all moral action untainted by sin.

[96] I am grateful to Parker Haratine for his incisive comments on an earlier draft of this paper.