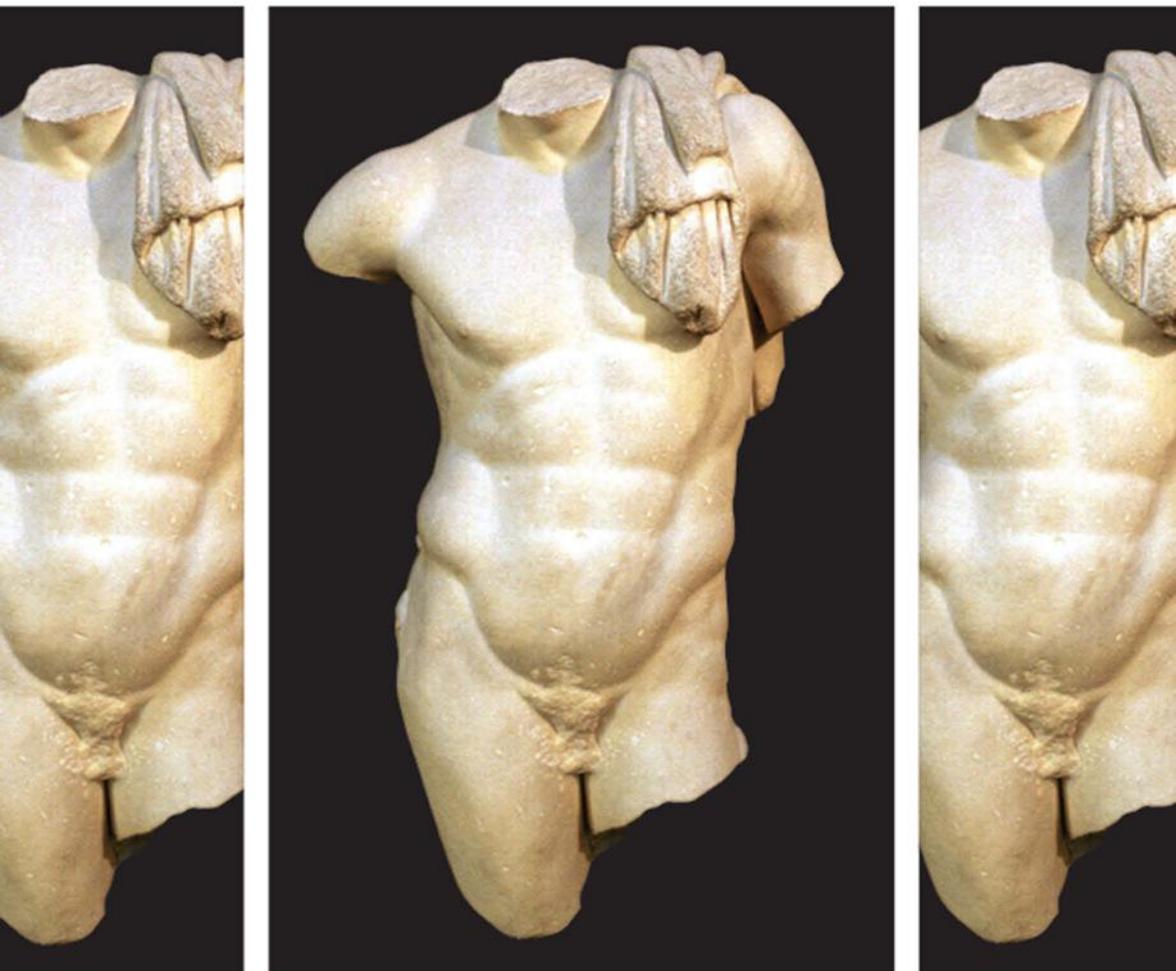


ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN WORLD



RESURRECTING PARTS

EARLY CHRISTIANS ON DESIRE, REPRODUCTION,
AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

TAYLOR G. PETREY



RESURRECTING PARTS

During the late second and early third centuries C.E. the resurrection became a central question for intellectual commentary, with increasingly tense divisions between those who interpreted the resurrection as a bodily experience and those who did not. The relationship between the resurrected person and their mortal flesh was also a key point of discussion, especially in regards to sexual desires, body parts, and practices. Early Christians struggled to articulate how and why these bodily features related to the imagined resurrected self. The problems posed by the resurrection thus provoked theological analysis of the mortal body, sexual desire and gender.

Resurrecting Parts is the first study to examine the place of gender and sexuality in early Christian debates on the nature of resurrection, investigating how the resurrected body has been interpreted by writers of this period in order to address the nature of sexuality and sexual difference. In particular, Petrey considers the instability of early Christian attempts to separate maleness and femaleness. Bodily parts commonly signified sexual difference, yet it was widely thought that future resurrected bodies would not experience desire or reproduction. In the absence of sexuality, this insistence on difference became difficult to maintain. To achieve a common, shared identity and status for the resurrected body that nevertheless preserved sexual difference, treatises on the resurrection found it necessary to explain how and in what way these parts would be transformed in the resurrection, shedding all associations with sexual desires, acts, and reproduction.

Exploring a range of early Christian sources, from the Greek and Latin fathers to the authors of the Nag Hammadi writings, *Resurrecting Parts* is a fascinating resource for scholars interested in gender and sexuality in classical antiquity, early Christianity, asceticism, and, of course, the resurrection and the body.

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RESURRECTING PARTS

Early Christians on Desire, Reproduction,
and Sexual Difference

Taylor G. Petrey

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INTRODUCTION

With What Kind of Body Do They Come?

How are the dead raised?

With what kind of body do they come?

(1 Corinthians 15:35)

Early Christians writing about the resurrection did so in an environment rife with controversy. Within Christianity, increasingly tense divisions split those who interpreted the resurrection as a bodily experience from those who did not. Non-Christians, for their part, scrutinized and ridiculed the peculiar idea that humans would rise from the dead. By the end of the second century C.E., differing beliefs about the nature of resurrection had come to define the boundaries between different religious groups.¹ The emergence of sustained treatises on resurrection in early Christianity dates to the late second and early third centuries, when the crisis over the resurrection became a central question of intellectual commentary. Five treatises on the resurrection from this period survive, offering a glimpse into what was at stake in this debate. Early Christian explicit reflection on the resurrected body represents a moment when new theories of the human body emerged.

These competing perspectives on the resurrection were hotly contested among Christians at a time when the discourses of orthodoxy and heresy were only beginning to materialize. The appearance of the discourse of orthodoxy and heresy in this period calcified emerging disagreements between Christians, especially over the evaluation of the flesh, both in this life and the resurrection. Early Christians increasingly emphasized the importance of the resurrection and reflected on its nature, and many of the surviving treatments of this topic part ways over the role of the flesh.² In the traditional understanding of this division, those who held to the resurrection of the flesh emphasized the goodness of human flesh and ensured its continuity, while advocates for the spiritual resurrection eschewed the flesh as a problematic, negative substance left behind when one was resurrected into a more refined spiritual substance. Such a framework, however, exaggerates the differences between these two options. Scholarly treatments of the resurrection in this period commonly reproduce a doctrinal paradigm concerning a dispute about which substance—flesh or spirit—is

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resurrected. This framework has caused scholars to suggest that unorthodox views on the resurrection are simplistic or confused compared to the unified concept of the resurrection of the flesh, or that one is more original than the other.³

This focus on either the resurrection of the flesh or the spiritual resurrection obscures key questions for early Christians: What exactly is the flesh? What kinds of bodily parts count as flesh and What do not? How is a resurrected person different from her mortal self? What is the same between a resurrected person and her mortal self? Nowhere is this problem more vexing than on the issue of sexual desires, body parts, and practices. Early Christians struggled to articulate how and why these bodily features related to the imagined resurrected self. The problems posed by the resurrection thus provoked theological analysis about the mortal body, sexual desire, and gender. As many have noted, early Christians invoked the past, in the form of the creation narrative of Adam and Eve, to think about sexual ethics and sexual difference.⁴ At the same time, early Christians thought with the resurrection to explain the nature of sexual difference and to place desire in relation to the self.

In the early Christian treatises explaining the nature of future resurrected bodies, reproduction does not occur, bodily fluids cease to flow, and bodies are not penetrated, nor do they penetrate. This curated body was presented as a solution to the mortal body's seeming incompatibility with the heavenly realm. The solution, however, created a new problem of its own. Without reproduction, sexual intercourse, and bodily fluids, how might male and female bodies be distinguished? Are these differences simply of shape (morphology) between beings that are otherwise the same and which share a common salvation, or do they involve the hierarchical differentiations between males and females? To achieve a common, shared identity and status for the resurrected body that nevertheless preserved sexual difference, early Christian treatises on the resurrection found it necessary to explain how and in what way the bodily parts would be transformed in the resurrection, and how they shed their associations with sexual desires, acts, and reproduction. The result of this reformation of the body through the resurrection was a theory that emphasized the morphology of the body and that downplayed the qualities, performances, and composition of bodies as the basis of sexual difference.

As a discursive production, the resurrected body does not have any recourse to "nature" as a way of identifying its key elements. Within the modest boundaries of the few authoritative writings on the resurrection, early Christians displayed a certain amount of freedom in creating a picture of a resurrected body that could conform to their social expectations. Because there is no "real" body to compare it to, a resurrected body therefore provides even more access than usual to early Christians' cultural frameworks on gender, sexual difference, and sexuality. Early Christians manufactured the resurrected body in a way that eliminated the problematic features of bodily existence. They separated sexual difference from abject sexual desires, acts, and reproduction. Situating these early Christians within second-century politics about sexual difference,

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the nature of maleness and femaleness, and movements seeking to transform or transcend sexual difference highlights the significance of early Christian discourse on the sexual parts as the basis of sexual difference.

Early Christians' attention to the resurrected body theorized a new kind of body. The resurrected body is both like and unlike the mortal body—it can exemplify the greatest ideals of human bodies without any of its drawbacks. The indeterminacy of exactly what this body may be like requires a new theory of the body, and of sexual difference. For early Christians, the resurrected body was a blank canvas for depicting what the body could and should be. Though the treatises on the resurrection differ on key details of the substance of the resurrected person and the bodily practices that the theorized resurrected body implied, what emerges from their competing accounts is a general consensus that bodily, including sexual, parts are central to both individual identity and bodily difference, including sexual difference. Collectively, the treatises produced more rigidity in differentiating males and females through their bodily parts. As we shall see, however, the resurrected body often subverted sexual difference, even while asserting it.

Early Christians largely imagined the resurrected body as more refined compared to mortal bodies, as more robust in some senses and more diminished in others. The resurrected state, for instance, offered more stability and less fluidity. In an attempt to slough off certain aspects of the mortal body that were secondary, accidental, or subordinate to ancient conceptions of sexual difference, early Christians naturalized and fixed other aspects of sexual difference as the true source of that difference. In part, the diversity of approaches resulted from the lack of fixity in the resurrected body itself, which eluded attempts to contain it and required ever-new solutions to the problems it presented.

From a contemporary perspective, what is astonishing is how this moment of fermentation on the resurrection mediates broader questions about sexual difference within early Christian communities and throughout the ancient world. This is the topic of the book that follows. The diverse thoughts written on the nature of the resurrection sought to solve a series of problems that the resurrected body posed, including the relationship between the mortal and resurrected self; the place of desires, sexual acts, and reproduction in the resurrection; the symbolic language for describing the relationship between body and soul; and the paradigms for imagining the relationship between the divine and the human. At stake were not only the markers of sexual differentiation and gender, but what these markers were thought to signify, how they were thought to do so, and the ways such significations were addressed and received. These questions have not disappeared: the topic of gender and the resurrection remains a point of debate in the present-day culture wars on gender identity.⁵

Early Christian treatises on the resurrection emphasized a new hegemony of the body parts as signifiers, separating the categories of maleness and femaleness from the foundations of sexual desires, acts, and reproductive roles. Each treatise reveals what its author counted as the core, essential aspect of human

existence that persists after death. All accounts of the resurrection omit qualities, practices, and conditions the authors considered to be too mortal, too low, or too corporeal. The prioritization of the body and its parts for thinking about sexual difference in this period undergirds a way of thinking about bodies as ordered between essential and contingent features. Those early Christians most often represented as “pro-body” or “pro-flesh” are, in actuality, advocating a particular kind of body and flesh that has been safely extricated from sexual desires and acts.

Approaching debates on the resurrection from the fate of the sexual parts challenges the ways in which modern historiography reproduces the discourse of orthodoxy and heresy by displacing the “flesh/not flesh” evaluation of the resurrected body—the central question of orthodoxy. Instead, by inquiring into the character and kind of flesh under discussion, with particular attention to sexual desires and practices, this book reveals a different landscape of early Christianity.

Constructed Bodies

Early Christian formations of the body provide ample ground for thinking about the variety of ways in which bodily existence mediates identity. Scholars, for instance, have considered how the resurrection provides a lens for thinking about the resurrection and disability in early Christianity.⁶ This study selects just one area for further examination. For early Christians, the space between the mortal and resurrected spheres produces a set of problems for thinking about and describing not only the relationship between resurrected bodies and sexuality, but also the place of sexuality in mortal life. What does it mean to speak of a flesh that does not desire and is incapable of any sexual desires and practices? How are sexuality and sexual difference related, if at all, in resurrected bodies? If there is no sexuality, on what basis is sexual difference established? Such questions bring the resurrected body, previously overlooked, into the history of sexuality.

By examining what early Christians meant when they invoked the terms “body” and the “flesh,” this investigation proceeds from the position that body and flesh are malleable concepts and that their definitions are contested. Present debates about the body tend to revolve around the value of the nature/culture division, which suggests the existence of a prediscursive body in nature onto which culture inscribes meaning. This is clear in the common distinction between sex as natural and gender as socially constructed. The poststructuralist challenge to this assumption informs my analysis.

Sexual difference always means something other than simply “sex” as a material, anatomical feature of bodies—as if these were self-evident categories. As Judith Butler has aptly shown, there is no recourse to the body that is not “a further formation of that body.”⁷ There is no prediscursive claim to “the body.” Butler’s attention to materiality and the ideologies of sexual difference

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presupposed by claims that root sex and/or gender in “the body” calls into question the binary between sex and gender. In her foundational work *Gender Trouble*, she articulated an understanding of identity as performative, consisting of signifying practices. Rather than seeing “sex” as a foundational category of identity, she argues that discursive structures generate sexual difference. Such a framework put the question of gender and sexual difference into an epistemological category rather than an ontological one. Furthermore, she explained, an ontology of gender is “a normative injunction that operates insidiously by installing itself into political discourse as a necessary ground.”⁸

Butler’s challenge to the ontological stability of sexual difference met some resistance as others appealed to the presumed obvious difference between males and females. Her book *Bodies That Matter* begins with a response to the charge that she ignored “real” bodies in her account of the performativity of gender in *Gender Trouble*. Critics of that work accused her of ignoring the realities of sex, of the real differences between males and females. In response, she argued, “‘sex’ not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs.”⁹ Sexual difference is not a biological question, but a social and historical one. One cannot determine sexual difference by simply comparing men and women in some objective fashion. That is, there is no *a priori* ontology of difference between men and women. Rather, the point of analysis is the condition or framework that makes difference matter, without requiring any single way to produce difference. Sexual difference is not reducible to “gender” or to biological or morphological “sex.” Sexual difference is a question of signification, of understanding the difference that difference makes.¹⁰

Anthropological and historical studies bear out the variation in ways that humans have conceived of sexual difference. Any appeal to “the body,” whether mortal or resurrected, thus is not an appeal to some stable, empirically verifiable entity, but is rooted in historically mediated understandings.¹¹ The kinds of questions Butler asks when examining the ideologies that inform claims to the materiality of the body are especially productive for analyzing early Christian claims about the nature of the resurrected body. What is at stake in the early Christian insistence that the “same” body/self/parts will rise in the resurrection? What work does the claim to the materiality of the resurrected body do?

This study picks up on the nexus between desire, sexual intercourse, and reproduction as a particular point of analysis in the early Christian exploration of sexual difference in resurrected bodies. My exploration of the early Christian debate over the resurrected body is thus rooted in contemporary scholars’ research into classical antiquity as a key point in the genealogy of sexuality. Such studies build on the modern Western notion that sexuality has a history, that it has been imagined and deployed in various ways. Ever since the publication of Foucault’s evaluation of classical antiquity in volumes II and III of *The History of Sexuality* in 1984, antiquity has been an important site for rethinking modern Western notions of gender, sexuality, and the body in relationship to the formation of the self. Foucault’s studies inaugurated a field of research that

looked to antiquity to destabilize contemporary conceptualizations of subjectivity that had themselves been based on a biologically durable body and a naturalized sexual hierarchy. As David Halperin put it, “Not only does this historical distance [between antiquity and modernity] permit us to view ancient social and sexual conventions with particular sharpness; it also enables us to bring more clearly into focus the purely conventional character of our own social and sexual experiences.”¹² This study of the early Christian reflection on the resurrected body disrupts the linearity of much of the history of sexuality in early Christianity by showing a great deal of ambivalence about desire and sexual practices already in the second century. Following Brooke Holmes’s discussion of the Greek and Roman sources, the approach offered here is less interested in showing how the past is radically different from our own, or alternatively the source of our modern categories, but rather is “a resource for thinking about gender in the twenty-first century.”¹³

Bodies, Their Parts, and Identity in Antiquity

The standard scholarly narrative about the early Jewish and Christian belief in the resurrection is one of exceptionalism. As N. T. Wright has suggested, in the ancient pagan imagination of life after death, the bodily resurrection “was simply ‘not an option’.”¹⁴ From a certain standpoint, this assertion is correct. At the same time, advocates of the resurrection did not put the resurrected body into discourse *ex nihilo*.¹⁵ The robust conversation about sexual difference and the resurrection in the second half of the second century emerged from a specific cultural context. As Christians articulated what kind of a body this resurrected body was, they drew on familiar cultural conventions about fluidity and fixity of sexual difference. Even when they offered distinctive solutions, the solutions remained within a particular historical context.

The relationship of the body and its parts to the essential nature of the human being was a matter of interest not only to early Christians (and ancient Jews). It was very much a live issue in the Greek-speaking milieu from which these five early Christian treatises on the resurrection emerged.¹⁶ Indeed, earlier generations of scholars decried this complex and contentious period as one of moral and intellectual decline precisely because of its notorious preoccupation with the body.¹⁷ While we might reject the view that concern for the body constitutes a cultural decline, the larger point is relevant: early Christians had a wide variety of resources available with which to explain bodily resurrection in a way that preserved the distinction between maleness and femaleness without sexualizing it. This early Christian shift to discerning and fixing the body and its parts drew upon broader Greek and Roman cultural discourse about the body, while simultaneously working against other early Christian theories of gender transformation. Early Christian discussions of the resurrection reveal a focus on the sexual body parts as the defining anchors of individual identity, marking an important reimagining of sexual difference in antiquity.

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Medical circles in the late second century theorized the purposes, functions, and workings of most bodily parts, including genitals, as well as bones, blood, and the particles that make up the body. In this context, the inspection of the bodily parts served the purpose of proper medical diagnosis and methods of treatment. These theories distinguished between males and females through an analysis of the bodily parts and developed several approaches that accounted for sexual difference, paying particular attention to female bodies.¹⁸ Thomas Laqueur has offered an extremely influential model of a premodern “one-sex” body, suggesting that in classical antiquity, “the boundaries between male and female are of degree and not of kind.”¹⁹ Such a view focused especially on theories of genital anatomy. The second-century physician Galen, for instance, claimed that male and female bodies are essentially the same because the female’s reproductive organs are an inverted version of a male’s. The difference between male and female was posited as an inflection of a common identity. Functionally, Galen frankly explained, “the female is less perfect than the male for one principle reason—because she is colder.”²⁰ Galen suggested that relative heat causes the male genitals to be externalized, while relative coolness causes those of the female to be internalized. The result was an ontological hierarchical differentiation between male and female organs.²¹

Other historians of antiquity have criticized Laqueur’s model of a one-sex body, not only challenging the linear, two-stage transition from a one-sex to a two-sex body in modernity, but also new readings of the texts that allegedly put forward the one-sex paradigm.²² For one thing, Laqueur omits other ancient theorists of the body who contested Galen’s one-sex model, instead positing more rigid boundaries between male and female bodies and parts. The Hippocratic tradition held women to be constructed in a fundamentally different way than men by virtue of their unique parts (the uterus) and experiences (menstruation and childbirth). The female body required a different kind of medicine, concentrated in the discipline of gynecology, with different practices and therapies.²³ In the Hippocratic text *Diseases of Women*, for instance, the author claimed that the reason why “the healing of the diseases of women differs greatly from the healing of men’s diseases” is because women’s bodies are wetter and spongier than men’s, and that the loose texture of the female flesh causes diseases to manifest differently.²⁴ In this model, sexual difference pervaded every aspect of the body, not just the generative parts.

The second-century physician Soranus charted a middle way between the Galenic and Hippocratic traditions, arguing that, except for the specific conditions of the womb, pregnancy, and lactation, men and women are not different.²⁵ Soranus compared the penis and vagina as complementary organs, but believed that the uterus had no corresponding part in males. Soranus’s writings have largely been lost, but his *Gynecology* is the only ancient medical book by that title that survives.²⁶ Soranus’s view located sexual difference at the level of reproduction and explained the different functions of the parts that constitute the difference between males and females.²⁷ This approach defined women’s

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teleological existence by reproduction.²⁸ Noting that, in all other respects, males and females are alike, Soranus suggested that, at least from a medical perspective, only sexual functions mark males and females differently.

These anthropologies are characterized by the variety and diversity of the ways in which the differences between males and females were determined—or elided—and the role that the body plays in these accounts. No doubt the medical questions being asked influenced the analysis of the parts and the meaning derived from their differences. The body was interpreted in certain ways for certain purposes. When other purposes for interpreting the body arose, we see other ways of making and marking sexual difference. In a surprising number of non-medical accounts of gender, such differences are not attributed principally to differences in body parts, but to differences in signifying practices. The difference could easily seem a matter not of ontological essence, but of cultural signification. Indeed, for a certain segment of second-century intellectuals, the difference between maleness and femaleness was surprisingly tricky to grasp, something determined not by bodily parts but instead in the performance of gender. Demonstrating one's "sex" depends on acting in male and female ways.

The second-century orator Favorinus offers a vivid example of the distinction between the manliness that one achieves through performance (through speech) and the maleness of one's body.²⁹ Favorinus was a "natural eunuch" who lacked the physical features of maleness but who achieved manliness through *paideia* and rhetorical force. Favorinus presented himself as a paradox, a Gaul who spoke Greek, a eunuch tried for adultery, as one who challenged the emperor and lived.³⁰ This paradox additionally marked his maleness. His philosophy, along with his body, emphasized indeterminacy. In this conceptualization, masculinity and femininity were independent of body parts, or at least the possession of such parts was not a prerequisite to achieve one identity or the other. Maleness and femaleness were instead products of the *techne* of gendered performance. Favorinus turned an ambiguous bodily maleness into a virtue.

Favorinus's notion of manliness as solely about performativity was not universally accepted. His rival, the physiognomist Polemo, rejected this division between masculine bodies and masculine comportment, arguing that it was impossible to achieve manliness without the male body. Polemo's objection to Favorinus rested not on his skills in the masculine arts of rhetoric or philosophy, but rather on the basis of his physical form (and not just his genitals). For Polemo, discerning whether the masculine or feminine prevails in a person required physiognomic methods precisely because the difference could be difficult to discern: "for in masculinity there is femininity, and in femininity there is masculinity, and the name (of male or female) falls to whichever has precedence."³¹ The physiognomist's suspicion of appearances and affirmation of sexual difference as grounded in nature and the parts of the body—the insistence that one must be on guard against those who seek to conceal their

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unmanliness by imitating masculine practices—is itself symptomatic of the difficulties of uncovering sexual differentiation.³²

Polemo's method of discernment involved examining exterior presentations to determine interior truth—always a problematic undertaking. In his understanding, the possession of a male body is a prerequisite to, though no guarantee of, maleness. Polemo explains:

The female is found to have a small head, a small mouth when measured next to the male, soft black hair, a thin face, with clear and luminous eyes, a thin neck, a small and depressed chest, weak ribs, large buttocks and thighs with much flesh, thin calves. They have beautiful knees, beautiful extremities, soft and slack limbs, are moist in the rest of the body, with soft tendons, the hands and feet are thin and broad, weak of voice, with a short stride, a fixed gait, soft members, slow movement, and quick to fall over. As for the male, he is the opposite of this description in every aspect.³³

It is likely that Polemo considered the reproductive bodily parts to be important too, but he makes no mention of the genitals or breasts as the key to distinguishing between male and female. Males are distinguished from females by hair, hands, ribs, calves, knees, voice, eyes, head, neck, and manner of walking. A clumsy step at the wrong moment could be disastrous to one's status as a male. Males and females are made through a combination of bodily practices and the form of the non-reproductive parts of the body. For Polemo, sex exists on a kind of sliding scale, and close observation is necessary to determine whether the male or female body comports itself in masculine or feminine ways. He denied the possibility of pure masculine or pure feminine forms, noting instead that all people have a bit of both. The skill is in determining which quality prevails.

The rivalry between Favorinus and Polemo reveals a broader tension in the late second century over the source and nature of sexual difference and the significance of the bodily parts. This period was filled with anxiety over identity and status that needed to be constantly affirmed by means of signs, practices, and deportment that demonstrated that one's identity was consistent with one's status.³⁴ Indeed, such teachers of rhetoric as Quintilian offered a series of instructions about how to avoid effeminate behavior and the appearance of an *androgynos*.³⁵ Not only could the masculine arts be taught, but the body could be shaped in ways that would serve as signifiers of gender: the physician Soranus explains that nurses should massage the buttocks, head, limbs, nose, and other parts of an infant boy's body to make the body's shape reflect an interior masculine "nature."³⁶ This curious idea of molding the body to reflect nature points to the conflicting notions in antiquity about the essence of maleness and femaleness as something both natural and artificial, with some confusion as to where one ends and the other begins.

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The attention to the parts in early Christian treatises on the resurrection no doubt belongs to this broader cultural preoccupation with the parts' proper interpretation, but it must also be understood as embedded in philosophical discussions about the nature of the self. In the traditional Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, there exists an essential self. In at least some of Plato's writings, this core of the self is the soul (*psyche*), which is distinguished from the inessential body, whether male or female.³⁷ For Aristotle, the mind (*nous*) is "our natural ruler and guide and seems to understand what is fine and divine, being itself either divine or the most divine element in us."³⁸ This tradition produces a particular problem for thinking about femaleness.³⁹ These philosophical circles did not wholly separate the body from the self. One may contrast this view of the human as divided into two distinct parts with the holistic psychophysical self in Stoic and Epicurean thought, in which there is no independence between the body and soul.⁴⁰ In this division, souls are neutral and bodies express sexual difference, but sexual difference is part of an overall identity irreducible to bodies alone.

For the most part, souls lack gender, though they take on both male and female signification.⁴¹ This philosophical problem between the pregendered soul and the gendered body played out in a variety of discourses. Indeed, the question of the role of sexual difference in human identity emerged as a contested one among Jews, as well. As Daniel Boyarin argues, some Jews, such as Paul, "could declare that there is no Greek or Jew, no male or female [Gal 3:28]. No rabbinic Jew could do so, because people are bodies, not spirits, and precisely bodies are marked as male or female."⁴² In part, the argument of this book is to show the ways in which second-century Christians too remained attached to the "the body" precisely because sexual difference was seen as an essential component of human identity.

In the second century, early Christians struggled to account for the differentiation of the sexes, the natural versus the artificial, and essential versus signified difference. For some early Christians, like some of their medical and philosophical contemporaries, the indeterminacy of sexual difference reflected the true nature of single-sex humanity, while for others sexual difference represented the divine order of creation. These views were based on different assumptions about the nature of the parts and of sexual difference, whether they could be transformed or whether they maintained continuity.

The second-century dispute over Paul the Apostle's teachings on women and sexual difference offers a useful initiation into the parameters of this topic. Paul makes a number of (apparently?) contradictory statements about sexual difference, and there is no final consensus about how these contradictions should be resolved. On the one hand, citing a baptismal formula that speaks of a new creation without ethnic or economic categories, Paul affirms that "there is no male and female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). This passage seems to eliminate any meaningful distinction between these categories and influenced second-century Christian ideas about gender.⁴³ On the other hand,

Paul seems to back away from this in 1 Corinthians 12:13 when he quotes the same formula, but omits the statement about “no male and female.” Paul even sets up a clear hierarchy between men and women, explaining that “a husband/man is the head of a wife/woman” (1 Cor 11:3). Women are instructed to maintain their bodily parts, such as their hair, in accordance with their natural femaleness, and males are to wear their hair so as to prevent confusing them with females.⁴⁴ The advice suggests that women and men have different parts that need to be treated differently.

Citing Galatians 3:28, “there is no male and female,” scholars have suggested that a primal or eschatological androgyny was one of the principal means of thinking about sexual difference in Christianity before the fourth century.⁴⁵ This primal androgyny was often identified with the “male and female” creature in Genesis 1:27. The creation of Eve, then, in Genesis 2 represents the moment of the formal division of the sexes. Before Adam’s “rib” or “side” was separated from him, the protological human being was both male and female.⁴⁶ Daniel Boyarin has argued, “the myth of the primal androgyne—that is, an anthropology whereby souls are engendered and only the fallen body is divided into sexes—is thus a dominant structuring metaphor of gender for the early church and for the Christian West as a whole.”⁴⁷

But how would such an ideal be imitated or achieved by Christians? Some communities admitted no differences between men and women in terms of leadership.⁴⁸ Origen’s school educated both men and women, suggesting that sexual difference was simply a material effect to be shed upon return to the spiritual reality.⁴⁹ The *Gospel of Mary* argues that sexual difference is an epiphenomenon of the body, and that what really matters are not the bodily differences, but the ungendered status of the soul.⁵⁰ Other Christians suggested that not only is the soul ungendered, but the body could be as well, often through ascetic practice.⁵¹ The view that second- and early third-century Christians accepted various forms of sexual transformation or transcendence of sexual difference has influenced research about gender in asceticism and martyrdom. Some scholars have seen the ideology of a primal androgyne as the *raison d’être* of sexual renunciation.⁵² Boyarin, in particular, has contrasted ancient Christianity’s urge to transcend gender with Rabbinic Judaism’s valorization of the body and bodily difference.⁵³

Other Christians envisioned other ways for male/female differences to disappear. For them, the human ideal was not a genderless androgyny, but a sexual metamorphosis from female to male: for women to achieve or receive holiness, they should become more like men. Many of the female ascetic practices in the third and fourth centuries attempted to transform the body into a more male form by obliterating the feminine through drying out the breasts and ceasing menstruation.⁵⁴ This kind of transformation, it should be noted, is not based on androgyny, because it entails shedding the feminine. The model for the “androgyne” is always already male, and the human being that is neither male nor female is really just not female.⁵⁵ In the *Gospel of Thomas*, Jesus says to

Mary, “I will make her male,” so that she may be given access to salvation.⁵⁶ From this perspective, maleness was the prerequisite to holiness and was obtainable to women who underwent this transformation.

Just as scholars have challenged Laqueur’s one-sex model as the reigning paradigm in antiquity, this study enriches the depiction of early Christianity that is not dependent on the paradigm of primal androgyny or gender transformation. These paradigms explain certain evidence, but they cannot account for the diverse and competing ways that early Christians imagined sexual differentiation and risk depicting a misleading uniformity. Early Christian treatises on the resurrection do not conform to this picture of early Christian acceptance of primal androgyny or gender transformation. The resurrection of bodies invoked the ascetic ideals of the obliteration of gendered qualities while continuing to emphasize male and female difference. This perspective also suggests some caution in asserting a clear dichotomy between a one-sex or androgynous model and a two-sex model, calling our attention instead to the particular ways in which sexual difference is produced. As a means of attaining this stability of sexual difference, many early Christians imagined that bodily parts would continue in the resurrection, but that they would do so free from sexual desires, acts, and reproduction.

Early Christian attempts to define sexual difference in the bodily parts, isolated from sexual practices, desires, and reproduction, took a variety of different forms, as we will see. This view did not always translate into either a valuation of virginity or sexual renunciation in mortality. Even so-called “orthodox” Christians lacked uniform views about the role of sexual desire and reproduction. What is clear, though, is that debates over the resurrection exhibit concerns over identifying and fixing sexual difference rather than the supposedly Christian attempts to transcend them. What is surprising, in fact, is the extent to which emerging reflections on the resurrection did not conform to this narrative of early Christian attempts to overcome gender by prioritizing the soul or sexual renunciation. The emphasis on the resurrection of the body, especially its parts, sought to make sense of bodily differences through eschatological dimorphism, not to transcend them in imitation of primal androgyny.

The Political Body

Scholarship on the body, gender, sex, and sexuality in early Christianity has focused on the representation of women, ascetics, martyrs, slaves, theological discourses, and teachers. The question of how the resurrected body retains its signifiers of sexual difference has received little attention.⁵⁷ Some scholars have seen Christians’ advocacy of the resurrection in politically positive, even progressive, terms an interpretation that draws an explicit contrast with Greek and Roman attitudes that denigrate the body.⁵⁸

The question of whether early Christian attitudes replicated or resisted, reproduced or challenged the prevailing social order represents a contemporary

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moral evaluation of the past. This kind of conscious reflection on issues of ethical importance, especially on issues relating to the body and gender, can be a critical tool for thinking about historical sources. At the same time, this framework can too easily collapse the multiplicity of ways in which early Christians conceptualized sexual difference into a predetermined moral framework. The singular, linear accounts of early Christian discourses on sexual difference and sexuality are more complicated and messy. In explaining the significance of the sexual organs in the resurrection of the body, early Christian treatises on bodily resurrection produced new and often problematic ways of thinking about sexual difference in antiquity, but these modes of thought were thoroughly embedded in their historical and conditioned capacities.

In what follows, I seek to account for how Christian discourse about the body and sexual difference operates *within* and *through* the limits and possibilities of the culture of early Christians while at the same time shifting the boundaries of that culture. This accounts for early Christian philosophical innovation concerning embodiment, at the same time that it shows how such innovation was embedded in the discourses of the body that they sought to overcome. Early Christians sought to capitalize on this new body in ways that both challenged and reaffirmed ancient cultural assumptions about the body. What is most significant here are the ways in which this new, resurrected body exceeds and is uncontained by its placement into discourse. No one masters this body, which is why commentators continue to write and interpret it to address its excesses and gaps. The multiple ways in which early Christians assigned significance to the bodily parts reveals both the instability of the discourse of sexual differentiation as well as the manner in which the resurrected body exceeds and subverts these attempts.

Plan of the Book

Each chapter discusses one of the five surviving extended treatises on the resurrection from the late second and early third centuries. This treatment covers the great majority of literature on the resurrection from this period. Many second-century Christian texts make short, stock references to the resurrection, or offer brief narrative mentions of a resurrected body. These statements, along with biblical references, have their value, but do not provide the same depth or insight into the kinds of questions about identity, sexual difference, and the essential self that appear in the longer treatises. Detailed attention to the full treatments on the resurrection gives us insight into a variety of early Christian voices and perspectives on this topic.

The first chapter discusses an anonymous treatise, *On the Resurrection*, traditionally but incorrectly attributed to Justin Martyr. The disagreement between the author and his opponents rests on the question of whether the genitals are appropriate parts for the resurrected body because of the connection they have to sin. The author draws a sharp distinction between the bodily

parts that function sexually and those same parts in a virginal state. The parts, he argues, are necessary for the continuity of identity between the mortal and resurrected self. They must not, however, signify sexuality, which the author argues is unnecessary to the identity of a person. The parts, not their functions, supply a person's stable, gendered identity.

Chapter 2 considers the *Epistle to Rheginos* from the Nag Hammadi codices, usually called the *Treatise on the Resurrection*. In contrast to the previous author, the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* distinguishes the bodily parts from their substance. He argues against the resurrection of the flesh, not because of a hatred or denigration of the flesh (as interpreters have often believed), but because the flesh is not an immortal substance. The flesh is not necessary to supply individual, sexed identity because the "invisible parts" continue after the "visible parts" are left behind. The parts again represent the human person, but this author is capable of imagining the parts apart from the flesh.

Chapter 3 examines Athenagoras's treatise *On the Resurrection*, which argues that the resurrection allows believers to cultivate virtue more effectively. He is especially interested in the final judgment as it relates to the teachings on the resurrection. As with other texts from this period, Athenagoras argues that the parts, including the genitals, are necessary to guarantee the continuity of identity. However, Athenagoras adds a significant feature to this claim. The parts, he suggests, are not simply for the continuity of identity or for the symbolic representation of virginity. Rather, they have some additional function in producing virtue. He suggests that one can develop virtue only by conceiving of the human as both body and soul. Without the bodily parts of male and female, the soul cannot attain virtue because it is only through the soul's mastery of the body that virtue is possible.

Chapter 4 discusses Irenaeus's considerable attention to the resurrection of the flesh, especially in the fifth book of *Against the Heresies*. Irenaeus makes similar moves to those in the previous chapters, including emphasizing the necessity of the parts of flesh for certain functions, such as the guarantee of identity. He also strips the parts of other features, such as sexuality and change. This chapter examines how the flesh and spirit are coded as masculine and feminine, male and female. Irenaeus draws on this imagery to describe the resurrection. The result is some interesting ways of thinking about sexual difference. While Irenaeus is ambivalent about sexual practices, both affirming procreation and praising the primal virginity of Adam and Eve and the eschatological virginity of the resurrection, he adopts sexual and procreative language to describe the divine-human relationship. Here, the language of desire and sexual intercourse disrupts the boundaries between male and female and destabilizes the role of the bodily parts in establishing hierarchical sexual difference.

Chapter 5 concludes with Tertullian of Carthage's analysis of the flesh in three texts, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, *On the Soul*, and *On the Flesh of Christ*. Like the previous chapter, this chapter looks at how Tertullian uses the flesh symbolically to talk about maleness and femaleness. Tertullian is

particularly interested in such body parts as the womb as signifiers of mortality and flesh. For Tertullian, the flesh itself occupies the site of female subordination, signifying inferiority to the masculine soul. The gendered aspects of the sexually differentiated body implicate male bodies into the problem of the feminine flesh.

In all surviving treatises on the resurrection from this period, the parts of the body, including the genitals, are affirmed as necessary elements of the resurrected self. Yet, in each case, the parts are protected from the aspects of the body that are too problematic, too mortal, or too infirm. The insistence that the resurrected body is the “same” in some way as the mortal body relies on a series of intentional exclusions. The precise subversive feature that is abject, whether sexual functions and desires, humors and change, mortality, and even the flesh itself, varies among early Christians. The diversity of solutions offered by early Christians reveals the instability of the resurrection to sustain identity with and to provide significant divergence from mortal bodies. The different solutions depend on how the problem of the mortal flesh is framed.

As early Christians sought to guarantee the continuity of identity, including sexual difference, in the resurrection, they rooted it in the parts of the resurrected body. The resurrected bodily parts are nevertheless a kind of imitation, perhaps even a parody, of the “original” parts. They are copies of the mortal parts that have lost something in translation. The various solutions the commentators offered often disordered the difference between male and female even as they asserted the fixity of the difference. The chapters that follow explore the ways in which these disordering solutions often failed. The multiple solutions offered by these treatises on the resurrection signal the degree to which no solution to the relationship between sexual difference and sexual desires and reproduction was entirely satisfactory to early Christians.

Notes

- 1 Claudia Setzer, *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Early Christianity: Doctrine, Community, and Self-definition* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), 125–155; Outi Lehtipuu, “Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God’: The Transformation of the Flesh in the Early Christian Debates Concerning Resurrection,” in *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity*, eds. Turid Karlsen Seim and Jorunn Økland (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 147–168.
- 2 Horacio E. Lona, *Über die Auferstehung des Fleisches: Studien zur frühchristlichen Eschatologie* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1993); Markus Vinzent, *Christ’s Resurrection in Early Christianity and the Making of the New Testament* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).
- 3 These two perspectives are found in, for instance, N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).
- 4 Elaine H. Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).
- 5 See, for instance, Joel Furches, “Gender Identity and Resurrection from the Dead,” *Jarrettsville Christianity Examiner* (August 23, 2013), <http://www.examiner.com/article/gender-identity-and-resurrection-from-the-dead> (accessed December 4, 2014).

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- 6 Candida R. Moss, "Heavenly Healing: Eschatological Cleansing and the Resurrection of the Dead in the Early Church," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79:4 (2011): 991–1017.
- 7 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 10.
- 8 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990, 1999), 189.
- 9 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 1.
- 10 This philosophical and psychoanalytic evaluation of sexual difference is frequently traced to Luce Irigaray. The debates over what she means, and whether she holds some sort of gender essentialism, have been a fruitful discussion point in feminist theory. See, for instance, Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 173–211.
- 11 Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 27–56.
- 12 David M. Halperin, "Introduction," in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, eds. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 7.
- 13 Brooke Holmes, *Gender: Antiquity and Its Legacy* (New York: Oxford, 2012), 3.
- 14 Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 60, 76, 83.
- 15 Dag Øistein Endsjø, *Greek Resurrection Beliefs and the Success of Early Christianity* (London: Palgrave, 2009).
- 16 Vigdis Songe-Møller, "'With What Kind of Body Will They Come?': Metamorphosis and the Concept of Change: From Platonic Thinking to Paul's Notion of the Resurrection of the Dead," in *Metamorphoses*, 109–122.
- 17 Maud W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), xvii. Others challenge this paradigm as well. Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Judith Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities in the Early Christian Era* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
- 18 Lesley Ann Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (New York: Oxford, 1998).
- 19 Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 25.
- 20 Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts* 14.6 (II, 296). Translation from Galen, *Galen on the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body. Peri Chreias Moriōn. De Usu Partium*, trans. Margaret Tallmadge May (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 628.
- 21 Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts* 14.6 (II, 296–297). Translation from May, *Galen on the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, 628–629.
- 22 Helen King, *The One-Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); Brooke Holmes, *Gender*, 52–53.
- 23 Helen King, *Hippocrates' Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 11.
- 24 *Diseases of Women* 1.62. Quoted in King, *Hippocrates' Woman*, 116.
- 25 Soranus, *Gynecology* 3.5.
- 26 Ann Ellis Hanson and Monica Green argue that the text we have is more "Soranian" than Soranus himself, making it difficult to categorize Soranus. Ann Ellis Hanson and Monica Green, "Soranus of Ephesus: *Methodicorum Princeps*," in *Augstiege und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, eds. Wolfgang Haase and Hildegard Temporini (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1994), 979. Flemming argues that the genre of *Gynecology* represents a "Rationalist" medical tradition, but is developed with the "Methodist" school. Rebecca Flemming, *Medicine and the Making of Roman*

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- Women: Gender, Nature, and Authority from Celsus to Galen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 230–231.
- 27 King, *Hippocrates' Woman*, 245.
- 28 King, *Hippocrates' Woman*, 239–245.
- 29 Gleason, *Making Men*, 131–158.
- 30 Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists*, I, 8.
- 31 Polemo, *Physiognomy*, Leiden 2, B2. Translation from Robert Hoyland, “A New Edition and Translation of the Leiden Polemon,” in *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam*, ed. Simon Swain (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 393.
- 32 Gleason, *Making Men*, 70–81.
- 33 Polemo, *Physiognomy*. Leiden 2, B2. Translation from Hoyland, “A New Edition and Translation of the Leiden Polemon,” 393.
- 34 Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 85.
- 35 Gleason, *Making Men*, 62–67.
- 36 Soranus, *Gynecology* 2.32
- 37 Plato, *Alcibiades*, 128e–130c. T. M. Robinson, “The Defining Features of Mind-Body Dualism in the Writings of Plato,” in *Psyche and Soma: Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment*, eds. John P. Wright and Paul Potter (New York: Clarendon Press, 2000);
- 38 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177a12–18. Philip J. van der Eijk, “Aristotle's Psycho-physiological Account of the Soul-Body Relationship,” in *Psyche and Soma*, 57–78.
- 39 Giulia Sissa, “The Sexual Philosophies of Plato and Aristotle,” in *A History of Women in the West: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints*, eds. Georges Duby, Pauline Schmitt Pantel, Michelle Perrot (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 46–82. See also Elizabeth LaFray, “The Air She Breathes: The Female Soul from Homer to Plato” (PhD thesis, Central Michigan University, 2014).
- 40 Heinrich von Staden, “Body, Soul, and the Nerves: Epicurus, Herophilus, Erasistratus, the Stoics, and Galen,” in *Psyche and Soma*, 79–116. This is not to say that there are not significant exceptions in the works of Plato and Aristotle that do point to a more holistic view of the self. See Christopher Gill, *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 12–13.
- 41 Giulia Sissa, *L'âme est un corps du femme* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2000).
- 42 Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 10. Boyarin's candid confession of the temptation he faced in writing *Carnal Israel*, “toward a triumphalist comparison of Judaism with Christianity in which Judaism emerges as pro-body or pro-sex, and thus healthier,” serves as a caution about homogenizing both ancient Judaism and early Christianity with respect to the body and sex. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 22.
- 43 Elizabeth A. Castelli, “‘I Will Make Mary Male’: Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity,” in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, eds. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 29–49.
- 44 Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 242–249.
- 45 See for instance, Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 180–200; Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 77–90; Castelli, “‘I Will Make Mary Male.’”

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- 46 Wayne A. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *History of Religions* 13:3 (1974): 165–208.
- 47 Boyarin, *Radical Jew*, 196.
- 48 Epiphanius reports that Galatians 3:28 was given as a justification for female bishops, presbyters, and "everything else" among some early Christians. This group appealed to Eve, not the primal androgyne, as the basis for this authority. *Panarion* 48.5–6.
- 49 Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 160–177.
- 50 Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003), 89.
- 51 Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 161–254.
- 52 Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 40.
- 53 Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 239–240.
- 54 Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh*, 245; Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 378.
- 55 Boyarin, *Radical Jew*, 180–200.
- 56 *Gospel of Thomas*, 114. Marvin W. Meyer, "Making Mary Male: The Categories 'Male' and 'Female' in the Gospel of Thomas," *New Testament Studies* 31:4 (1985): 554–570; Frederik Wisse, "Flee Femininity: Antifemininity in Gnostic Texts and the Question of Social Milieu," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen L. King (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 297–307.
- 57 See, for example, Beth Felker Jones, *Marks of His Wounds: Gender Politics and Bodily Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Turid Karlsen Seim, "In Heaven as on Earth? Resurrection, Body, Gender and Heavenly Rehearsals in Luke-Acts," in *Christian and Islamic Gender Models in Formative Traditions*, ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen (Rome: Herder, 2004), 17–42; Emanuela Priiizivalli, "Early Christian Anthropology: Gender Models in Creation and Resurrection," in *Christian and Islamic Gender Models*, 43–66.
- 58 Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities*, 156.

ANGELS, VIRGINS, AND MULES

Pseudo-Justin Martyr, *On the Resurrection*

The anonymous text *On the Resurrection* bears witness to the fact that the resurrection was a flashpoint for early Christians over competing understandings of the nature of the human being.¹ This text goes right to the center of the debate over the resurrection of the body parts in the second century, particularly the question of the resurrection of the genitals. How and why could such problematic organs be raised in the resurrection? The text explains how it could be possible that the resurrection could include the genitals, and in so doing offers a theory of the body that separates these parts from their troubling sexual and reproductive functions. By parsing the body in this way, the text situates desire, reproduction, and sexual intercourse as inessential to embodiment. These divisions and classifications are not neutral evaluations. Rather, what is at stake in this mapping of the body is a commitment to particular bodily practices of virginity.

Unfortunately for modern readers, a precise historical context for this text is not available. The manuscript tradition attributes the text to the mid-second-century Christian apologist and philosopher Justin Martyr, but modern scholars doubt this attribution. Nor is it known how early the traditional attribution was made. In the fourth century, Eusebius mentions a treatise on the resurrection by the second-century Christian philosopher Justin Martyr, but there is no way to know if this was the specific text that he had in mind.² Today it is scholarly convention to refer to the author as pseudo-Justin Martyr, though whether the manuscript's attribution is a case of genuine pseudepigraphy on the part of the author or mistaken identity by later scribes is open to debate.³ The similarities with Justin's genuine texts make it possible that the author was Justin's disciple. He may have written within a few decades of Justin's martyrdom, perhaps also within the Greek-speaking Christian communities of Rome. The text circulated widely and was influential on nearly contemporary writers such as Irenaeus, Athenagoras, and Tertullian, suggesting a date before these authors.⁴

The author writes within the context of increasing Christian attention to the resurrection and a growing awareness of why this teaching was so controversial for those who advanced it. Pseudo-Justin defends the resurrection of

the flesh from attacks by other Christians who advocated a “spiritual” resurrection.⁵ Invoking Jesus’s resurrection as an example, these Christians believed that a future resurrected body is only an “illusion of the flesh.”⁶ Pseudo-Justin uses the formula “resurrection of the flesh” as a fixed term, but he uses the terms “flesh” and “body” more or less interchangeably.⁷ His argument is not a technical disagreement about the material referents of these terms, but an ideological difference on the value of materiality itself, with the bodily parts functioning as the specific example for the problem of materiality and the body.

Pseudo-Justin’s writing has traditionally been understood in the context of proto-orthodox defenses of the flesh against gnostic spiritualizers of the resurrection. This familiar framing of the conflict between the resurrection of the flesh and spiritual resurrection tells only part of the story, however, because the debate about the flesh reveals a more specific concern about whether it is necessary or suitable for “the parts” to be resurrected. The use of the term “parts” refers at times euphemistically to the genitals, but at other times the parts refer to each of the bits of the body. Still, the genital parts are at times metonymic for the problems of the body, and at times synecdochic for the body/flesh itself. There is far more at stake in this debate than a dry dispute about the materiality of resurrected bodies.

In this contentious environment, pseudo-Justin argues for the resurrection of the flesh with all of its parts, specifically including the genitals, against his rivals, who imagined a resurrection *from* the flesh, explicitly without the genitals. What is most surprising about this argument is not their disagreement, but certain shared beliefs about the nature of virginity. Both pseudo-Justin and his opponents believe not only that resurrected bodies will be virginal, but that mortal bodies should also be virginal. Their theories about the substance of resurrected bodies, whether flesh or spirit, and the gender of resurrected bodies, whether male and female or angelic neuters, intersect with their shared desire to promote sexual renunciation. The resurrected body was a tool for thinking about virginity.

The Angelic Body and the Sexualized Flesh in Early Christianity

Pseudo-Justin’s treatise constructs an argument against an alternative Christian view of the resurrection that denies its fleshly character. He contrasts his own views with these opponents, real or imagined, in order to bring his argument about the resurrection into focus. The opponents of the resurrection of the flesh cited by pseudo-Justin are unnamed and are certainly rhetorically constructed, though the arguments attributed to them are familiar from other sources. I leave them unidentified because it is unclear that the overall views attributed to opponents—more than I can treat in this short chapter—form a coherent ideology, that they were held by Christians “outside” the author’s own community, or that they were even held by a particular group or individual.⁸ Pseudo-Justin offers a few quotations from his opponents, but does not identify them or his

source. Nevertheless, the mere existence of the treatise arguing against other options demonstrates that a conversation on the sexual nature of the flesh was underway.

The treatise reveals that the flesh was a highly controversial substance. According to pseudo-Justin, his opponents argue that the flesh is constitutionally incompatible with the resurrection. In his *narratio*, his opponents considered the resurrection of flesh to be impossible and unsuitable.⁹ Whether citing the specific terminology offered by his opponents or supplying it himself, pseudo-Justin addresses the flesh's "difficulties" and "defects," especially its supposedly inherent sinfulness. He explains: "We must speak concerning those who dishonor the flesh and say that it is not worthy of the resurrection, nor of heavenly citizenship, because first, the earth is its essence, and next that it is full of all sin, so that it necessitates the soul to sin along with it."¹⁰ For these reasons, whatever the resurrection is, the flesh cannot be a part of it.

For pseudo-Justin's opponents, "flesh" is simply one in a nexus of terms that necessarily signify humanity's mortal state of imperfection and sin. Almost by definition, flesh has no place in resurrection. Both the essential earthiness of the flesh and its status as the locus of "all sin" are necessary elements of mortal life and the sinful state into which flesh has fallen. The enfleshed soul places the soul within sin, for the flesh is "alone the cause of sins."¹¹ In the etiology of sin and evil in the world, the flesh is at the foundation. From this perspective, the flesh's inherent sinfulness presents an insurmountable obstacle to the sinless immortality of the afterlife. Those who reject a resurrection of the flesh, he claims, do so because flesh would only introduce sin to the soul.¹² Therefore, the flesh serves no purpose in the celestial realm.

The problematic nature of the flesh is closely connected to the genitals themselves, where desires and reproduction meet. The opponents argue that there would be no need for the genitals in the resurrection because there is no need for reproduction after death. Pseudo-Justin lays out just what he sees is at stake in this claim:

Thus they say, "If the body will rise whole and will have all of its parts, it is necessary that the functions of those parts will also exist; the womb to get pregnant, the male part to impregnate, and all the rest likewise." Now, let the entire argument stand on this one thing, for when this is demonstrated to be false, their entire argument will be ruined.¹³

In pseudo-Justin's view, the opponents present a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*. If the resurrection included the flesh, or the whole person as it is, the whole resurrected body would be raised with its genital parts and with their teleological functions. Just as an eye is for seeing and a nose for smelling, the genitals are for procreating. The genitals are associated with the whole terminology of the fallen state—with reproduction, sinful desire, and death.

Pseudo-Justin rests his opponents' entire argument on the claim that the genitals are part of a nexus of signifiers, all of which are related to humanity's sinful state rather than the state of redemption. He insists that if he can successfully defend the resurrection of the genitals, he will have disproven the most important point put forward by his opponents. For both pseudo-Justin and his opponents, the genital parts are synecdochic for the whole flesh. What follows in his analysis is an explanation of how the penis and womb are resurrected in their fleshy forms, but not subject to sin. By drawing on alternative conceptualizations of what bodies signify before and after resurrection, pseudo-Justin reformulates the nature and significance of the genitals so that they can be seen as fit to enter the redeemed state of salvation.

The argument for a non-fleshy resurrection is apparently rooted in scripture. Drawing upon negative views of the flesh and a saying of Jesus, pseudo-Justin quotes his opponents' claim before refuting it:

“Clearly if the body will have all the parts and portions, how is it not absurd to say these things exist after the resurrection from the dead, since the Savior said: *They will neither marry nor will be given in marriage, but they will be as angels in heaven*” [Mt 22:30/Mk 12:25].¹⁴ They say, “The angels do not have flesh, nor do they eat, nor do they have sexual intercourse. Just so, neither will there be a fleshy resurrection.”¹⁵

The resurrected body that possesses all the “parts and portions” is here seen as “absurd.” It is moreover contrary to Jesus’s teaching that describes the actions of the resurrected body and undermines the nature of the resurrected body “as angels.” The angelic resurrection entails not only an elimination of the flesh, but specifically the parts used in sexual activities. If marriage is eliminated, so also is sex.

The rising of the “whole” person would entail the rising of “the parts,” a term that can represent all of the bits and pieces of the body but also refers here to the genitals, the most problematic of the bodily parts and portions.¹⁶ The resurrected body, like the angelic body, must be free from the sexual organs, thereby eliminating not only the possibility of sexual desires and reproduction, but also any morphological signifiers of sexual difference. To be “like angels” is to transcend sex and gender and hence the gendered signifiers of mortal bodies. For these Christians, the end of marriage—and the sexual and reproductive functions that marriage implies—results in the end of sexual difference as well.

Pseudo-Justin’s opponents were not the only early Christians who believed that eliminating sexual practices meant the erasure of differences between males and females. This kind of eschatological gender transformation or transcendence was found in a variety of early Christian texts. In the late second century, Christians were actively debating the value of the sexual organs, often referring to the angelic body to mediate the conflicting options. Indeed, the interpretation

of Jesus's saying about marriage in the resurrection was central to these debates. Julius Cassianus interpreted Jesus's saying on the resurrection, "the children of the age to come neither marry nor are given in marriage," (Luke 20:35) as an argument for sexual renunciation and celibacy.¹⁷ Cassianus believed that the male and female forms would be united in the resurrection and pronounced, "let no one say that because we have these parts, that the female body is shaped this way and the male that way, the one to receive, the other to give seed, sexual intercourse is allowed by God."¹⁸ For Cassianus, one cannot appeal to God's created order to justify sexual intercourse. Like the opponents referenced by pseudo-Justin, Cassianus believed the lack of the sexual organs in the resurrection supported the requirement for celibacy.

The Christian author of the *Testimony of Truth* in the Nag Hammadi codices offered a similar view condemning the genitals in this life and in the next. The same saying of Jesus about the angels in resurrection may have influenced this author as well.¹⁹ A polemical homiletic tract against numerous rival Christian groups and teachings, this text may date to the end of the second century and bears some resemblance to the teachings of Julius Cassianus.²⁰ There are key differences between pseudo-Justin's opponents and the *Testimony of Truth*, however, such as the latter's polemic against bodily martyrdom, rejection of physical baptism, and denunciation of the God of the Jewish scriptures.²¹ Yet on the issue of sexual practices and sexual difference, the *Testimony of Truth* shares some important similarities with pseudo-Justin's opponents, as he depicts them. Its author, too, argues against the use of the genital parts:

[But] as for those who receive Him to themselves with [ignorance], the pleasures that defile prevail over them. It is [these] people who say, "God created the parts for our use, for us to [grow in] defilement in order to enjoy [ourselves]." So they cause God to participate with them [in] actions of this [kind]. They are [not] steady [upon] earth, [nor will they reach] heaven.²²

The euphemism of the parts to refer to the genitals and to problematize the flesh was apparently a well-established trope.

The rejection of the genitals and the flesh in *Testimony of Truth* also draws on the angelic body. The author advocates a strict renunciation of sexual intercourse and desire as the path to an angelic state:

But he who is the father of mammon is also the father of sexual intercourse. The person who is able to renounce these things [i.e., sexual intercourse] shows [that] he belongs to the generation of the [Son of Man] and has power to accuse [him (i.e., the father of mammon and intercourse)]. ... He is not] controlled [in these] parts by ... [from] wickedness, [and he makes the] outside like the [inside]. He is like] an angel that²³

Unfortunately, the line that explains the nature of the angelic person is missing, but the positive connection between sexual renunciation and being angelic is clear. The one who renounces sex is not controlled by the archon in his or her parts, making the outside of the body reflect the interior soul, like an angel. Though other mentions of angels in this text refer to the archontic angels who bring wickedness to humans, this passage compares the follower who renounces sexual activity and Mammon to an angel.²⁴ The parts, namely the genitals, do not have any control over this individual.

What does it mean when the *Testimony of Truth* says that the celibate individual makes “the outside like the inside”? There is good reason to suspect that this teaching, in conjunction with the comparison to an angel, invokes one early Christian view that sexual renunciation also problematized sexual difference, just as pseudo-Justin accuses his opponents of doing. In the *Gospel of Thomas*, Jesus shares a similar idea about connecting the “inner” and the “outer” to questions of sexual difference: “when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female ... then you will enter [the kingdom].”²⁵ Making the outer like the inner is here specifically connected to eliminating both sex and sexual difference as a category for evaluating persons. In a second case, the author of *2 Clement*, also a mid-second-century production, comments on this saying of Jesus, suggesting that the outer body becomes one with the inner soul, “in order that when a brother sees a sister he should have no thought of her as female, nor she of him as male.”²⁶ In this view, the soul is without sexual difference and the bodily signifiers of sexual difference become inconsequential.

The final transcendence of gender through sexual renunciation is the goal of these texts, but defenders of the resurrection of the flesh, like pseudo-Justin, offer an alternative. Pseudo-Justin’s treatise on the resurrection argues that the end of sexual desires and reproduction does not require the elimination of sexual difference or the absence of the genital parts.

Desexualized Flesh and the Virginal Life

The key question between pseudo-Justin and his opponents is not whether sexual desires and reproduction continue in the resurrected state (they both agree that they would not), but whether intercourse and reproduction were constitutive of sexual difference. His opponents argue that without such gendered performances, there is no longer any basis for sexual difference. Pseudo-Justin, in contrast, seeks to root sexual difference in the body itself, or more precisely, its sexually differentiated parts.

At stake in this argument is the definition of the human being. Are the body’s parts, including the markers of sexual difference, essential to an individual’s identity? What about the flesh? Pseudo-Justin’s opponents imagine that flesh signifies the weakness, imperfections, and desire of the mortal body. Such a

substance cannot be worthy of the heavenly realm. In this framing of resurrection, bodily sexual difference must be eliminated. In response, pseudo-Justin argues for a resurrection of the whole person, including male and female genitals. He imagines a flesh without desire that is not only characteristic of the resurrected body, but that also can be achieved “before the coming age” for both male and female bodies. He imagines a body in which the genital parts signify only sexual difference rather than the performance of sexual acts. The flesh can exist without sexual desires or acts, and therefore sexually differentiated flesh is compatible with the state of the resurrection. The parts signify only difference, pointing to a state in which bodies and flesh can exist as male and female apart from sexual desire and reproduction.

Pseudo-Justin defends the flesh as a signifier of sexual difference by pointing to celibacy as a life free from desires and reproduction. In this framework, virgins exemplify the highest achievement of human existence, foreshadowing the coming resurrection:

But even some women who are not barren abolish sexual intercourse, being virgins from the beginning; and others from a certain time. And we see also men being virgins from the beginning, and some from a certain time; so that through them unlawful marriage on account of desires is destroyed.²⁷

Here, pseudo-Justin praises those virgins “from the beginning” and those virgins who got started on their virginity a little later as destroying both marriage and desire.

Not all scholars have read this passage as a call for celibacy. Some have read it as evidence that pseudo-Justin considers there to be a category of “lawful” marriage based on something other than desire, thereby giving approval for certain kinds of sexual intercourse for the purposes of reproduction. The problem with this reading, however, is that it is unclear how virgins fit into the picture as a defense of procreationist marriage. It is more likely that the author means that marriage itself is unlawful, rather than that “unlawful marriage” constitutes a particular class of marriage. Pseudo-Justin sets virginity in opposition to marriage because marriage justifies the indulgence of sexual desires in intercourse, thereby preventing the human being from ridding itself of the wicked impulses that impede salvation. Most importantly, unlike many of his contemporaries, he does not see virginity as the erasure of male and female difference. Instead, he considers male and female virgins separately, as two different classes of virgins.

Pseudo-Justin carries the ideal of mortal male and female virginity further to oppose reproduction in general. Like marriage, reproduction is implicated in the problematics of desire. The existence of virgins demonstrates that flesh and genitals need not be used for reproduction. He offers an example from the animal world: “But we find that some animals do not give birth, indeed even those having wombs, as a mule; and the male mules do not beget, so that we

see that sexual intercourse is destroyed both through humans [i.e., virgins] and through irrational animals, even before the coming age.”²⁸ The mule posed a significant problem for Aristotle as the sole exception to his rules of reproduction.²⁹ For pseudo-Justin, in contrast, this exception points to the higher rule of the eternal ideal. The mule exemplifies God’s disapproval of sexual intercourse. Note, however, that the lack of reproductive sexual intercourse does not eliminate sexual difference between male and female. Instead, the existence of both male and female mules confirms the existence of both maleness and femaleness in virginity. Male and female virgins and mules are the divine archetypes of resurrected bodies, revealing in nature how it is possible to be male or female and yet free from the burdens of sexual desire and reproduction.

For pseudo-Justin, then, male and female virgins are exemplars of the resurrected body. This stance positions him in opposition to those who envisioned the resurrected body as asexual and without flesh, like angels. Pseudo-Justin offers an alternative interpretation of the saying of Jesus on this issue:

At the same time, [Jesus Christ] foretold that in the coming age the mixing through sexual intercourse is going to be destroyed, as he said: *The children belonging to this age marry and are given in marriage, yet the children belonging to the coming age neither marry nor are given in marriage, but they will be as angels in heaven.* Let not those who are outside of belief marvel, if the flesh abandons these functions even from now, that it will abandon them in the coming age.³⁰

This use of Jesus’s saying about marriage in the resurrection here differs from the citation he attributes to his opponents. While his opponents cited the version of this saying of Jesus about the resurrection that derives from Mark and Matthew, pseudo-Justin cites elements unique to the Lukan version about the “children of this age” and the “children of the coming age,” which was missing from his opponents’ proof text. The citation he provides is not an exact quotation from any known version of this saying, and appears to be a mash-up of Luke, Matthew, and Mark.³¹ He interprets the text about “children of the coming age” as referring to sexual renunciation in the same way that Cassianus does, as an argument against marriage, though pseudo-Justin disagrees with Cassianus that future bodies will be without sexual difference.³²

For pseudo-Justin, the key distinction between the “children of this age” and the “children of the coming age” is moral, not temporal. Insofar as they do not engage in sexual intercourse, those who do not marry belong to the coming age and are, therefore, like angels. The children of the coming age (i.e., virgins) have already “destroyed” marriage and desire. If God can enable these individuals to overcome such desires in this age, Christians should not be surprised that resurrected bodies, with all their parts, will also be free from these desires. Virgins show that sexual practice is already being set aside and that even now bodies can live in accordance with the values of the resurrection through sexual renunciation.

As the final bit of evidence in favor of sexual renunciation, pseudo-Justin points to Jesus Christ's virginal birth as an example of how sex and reproduction are destroyed before resurrection. As we will see in later chapters, Irenaeus and Tertullian also invoke the virgin birth in the service of the resurrection. What is distinctive in pseudo-Justin's account is the use of the virgin birth to emphasize the possibility of eliminating sex and reproduction in mortal life. Pseudo-Justin explains that Jesus was born from a virgin, "for no other reason except in order that he might destroy reproduction by unlawful desire and that he might show the Archon that even without human intercourse, God is able to form a human."³³ The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is not simply a miracle that demonstrates God's creative power, but also indicates that God sees reproduction through sexual intercourse as problematic, something to be destroyed.³⁴ Pseudo-Justin recalls Genesis 2:7 here with the verb "to form" to show that God's method of creation produces human bodies without recourse to sexual desires or reproduction.³⁵ Pseudo-Justin contrasts human reproduction and generation with God's powers to create. God shows the Archon that sexual desires and reproductive acts are not necessary.

Necessary and Unnecessary Desire

Pseudo-Justin's evaluation of the flesh diverges from his opponents primarily at the question of what is, and what is not, necessary for the flesh. The question driving this disagreement is over the nature of the flesh, and whether it can be released from sexual desire. There is no necessary link, he argues, between desire and the flesh. Pseudo-Justin advances this claim in his *refutatio*, arguing that Jesus's birth is an example of God's disapproval of reproduction and that Jesus's life provides the model for sexual renunciation by demonstrating how unnecessary sexual desires and reproduction are to the flesh:

And when [Jesus Christ] was born and lived his life by the rest of the conduct of the flesh—I mean by food, drink, and clothing—this one thing alone, through sexual intercourse, he did not do. Yet he allowed those desires of the flesh that are necessary to exist, but those that are not necessary he did not submit to. For lacking food, drink, and clothing, the flesh would die, but deprived of unlawful sexual intercourse, it experiences no harm.³⁶

As in his use of the term "unlawful marriage" to denote that marriage itself is unlawful, here pseudo-Justin uses the term "unlawful desire" to refer to *all* sexual desire as unlawful. The life of Jesus Christ, like the lives of virgins, shows the possibility of rejecting desire for sexual intercourse even before resurrection. What is necessary is only that which is essential for survival.

Pseudo-Justin's distinction between necessary and unnecessary desires is part of a larger conversation on the topic within ancient philosophy. The distinction

between different kinds of desires, and the human responsibility to control or extirpate them, was a common theme in ancient moral discourse and the therapeutics of passion. For example, Epicurus defined three classes of desire: the natural and necessary, the natural and unnecessary, and the groundless.³⁷ For Epicurus, the natural and necessary desires include eating and sleeping, while the natural, but unnecessary, desires include sexual gratification.³⁸ While Epicurus considers sexual desire and gratification natural, but unnecessary, other philosophical traditions recognized sex as, in fact, a necessary desire. Plato, for example, included sexual desire along with hunger and thirst as necessary to human beings, with the additional qualification that they be satisfied in a “healthy” manner.³⁹ Thus, for Plato, sexual desire is natural and, as a result, it is also necessary.

Some medical writers from the second century confirmed the notion that sexual acts are unnecessary by demonstrating that abstinence has no negative impact upon individual health. In fact, they argued, sexual practices harm the individual. Soranus, for instance, takes the position that “intercourse is harmful in itself,” which he argued more fully in his (now lost) book *On Hygiene*.⁴⁰ In the sexual act, males lose some vital energy through the expelling of semen. Soranus notes, “intercourse causes weakness in everybody and is therefore not appropriate; for without giving any advantage it affects the body by making it weak.”⁴¹ Like pseudo-Justin, Soranus partially based this argument on evidence from animals. Those animals that are prevented from intercourse are stronger; the same benefits are visible in female virgins who have renounced intercourse in service of the gods.⁴² Galen argued along the same lines, but outlined the risks in even starker terms, suggesting that “pleasure itself can dissolve vital tension to such an extent that people have died from an excess of pleasure.”⁴³ In this perspective, the risks of sexual activity thus far outweigh any supposed benefits to health, rendering it unnecessary for individual health or survival.⁴⁴

For these physicians, the lack of a medical necessity for intercourse did not mean, however, that it was not necessary for other reasons. Soranus argued that procreation is both natural and necessary for society as a whole. As with the philosophers, “nature” here entails a certain kind of necessity with respect to sexual desires and practices. “Permanent virginity is healthful, in males and females alike; nevertheless, intercourse seems consistent with the general principle of nature according to which both sexes, [for the sake] of continuity, [have to ensure] the succession of living beings.”⁴⁵ In this view, the necessary obligations of nature to reproduce stand in tension with the risks to the health of an individual. Soranus resolves this tension by placing the social and natural necessity of procreation above the health of the individual. Procreation is necessary for society’s sake, not for individual needs.

Pseudo-Justin is not particularly concerned about the social necessity of procreation. In fact, his defense of the resurrection rests on the understanding of *both* sexual desire and reproduction as unnecessary. The children of the coming age understand the call to virginity and the end of reproduction.

What, then, is the use of the genital parts if there is no desire or reproduction? In arguing against a necessary link between the presence of genitals and the functions of sexual desire, pseudo-Justin rejects any essential teleological function for these organs. He insists that desire, sexual acts, and reproduction are not intrinsic to the genitals “according to principle”:

Now on [the] one hand it seems clear that the parts doing these things do them here, but on the other that it is not necessary to do these things according to principle. In order that this might be clear, let us consider thus: The function of the womb is to get pregnant and the male part to sow seed. But just as, if these parts are destined to do these functions, so it is not necessary for them to do them on principle (at least we see many women who do not get pregnant, such as the sterile, even though they have wombs), thus it is not immediately necessary to both have a womb and get pregnant.⁴⁶

In contrast to philosophical and medical accounts of necessary and unnecessary desires evaluated primarily through the lens of nature, pseudo-Justin deems such desires unnecessary without any recourse to nature. He goes even further by rejecting the unnecessary desires completely. He further attaches moral significance to the distinction between the necessary and the unnecessary. Since it is permissible to only satisfy necessary desires, and since sexual desire is not necessary for individual survival, the genitals can be resurrected without being subjected to the desires that often accompany them. In this view, desire does not belong to the flesh necessarily. For pseudo-Justin, desire can be eliminated from the body, making it possible to resurrect the flesh without the risk of experiencing desire.

Virginité Is a Practice of *Enkrateia*

Pseudo-Justin’s distinction between necessary and unnecessary desires not only explains how it is that flesh may be resurrected without the feature of sexual desire, but also how flesh may live in the present life without this burden. Not only do male and female virgins foreshadow the character of resurrected bodies, but the promise of bodily resurrection also shows that virginité is possible for mortal, fleshy bodies.

What is revealed in this analysis of the resurrection is a philosophical debate about the nature of flesh and the source of sin and desire. But this debate about the resurrection is also about how the practice of sexual renunciation might best be theorized and achieved. For pseudo-Justin, male and female virgins occupy a position between this life and the next, exemplifying the ideal body. They point to the future state of the resurrected body, a state of being without desire or reproduction. The elimination of desire does not and should not take place only in the resurrection. If these desires are truly unnecessary, they

should be eliminated even before the resurrection. The whole hope of salvation rests on guarding the body from sin, but people cannot avoid sin unless they accept that flesh is capable of living again.

At the height of his argument, pseudo-Justin dramatically reverses the charges laid against the resurrection of the flesh. Rather than the flesh leading to the indulgence of sinful desires, as his opponents believed, he argues that those who do not properly respect the flesh's future are more likely to sin. The key to virginity is not the elimination of flesh and sexual difference. Rather, one's acceptance of the permanence of the parts of the flesh provides proper perspective about the use of the body.

To underline his point, pseudo-Justin draws an analogy in an exhortational epilogue between a heavily caricatured view of medical doctors and the message of Jesus Christ:⁴⁷

If the flesh does not rise, for what reason is it also guarded and why do we not assent even more to enjoy desires, and why do we not imitate the physicians, who, when they have a person who is hopeless and not able to be saved, they allow him to indulge in his desires? For they know that he is dying. This indeed is what those who hate the flesh do, casting it out of its inheritance as much as they can. For on account of this they dishonor the flesh, as it becomes a corpse. But our physician, Jesus Christ, tearing us away from our desires, regulates our flesh with his regimen by temperance and self-control. It is clear that having a hope of salvation, he guards it from sins, just as for those humans having a hope of salvation, the physicians do not allow them to indulge their pleasures.⁴⁸

Here, pseudo-Justin equates his opponents with bad physicians and Christ as the good physician, playing on the shared terminology for health and salvation (*sōteria*). The bad physicians hate the flesh and do not think it is capable of salvation. Therefore they are more likely to indulge in pleasure and desire. If the flesh is bound to desires and death and cannot avoid sinning, he wonders, then why not permit it to take part in sin? An anthropology that considers the self as an immortal soul, and the body as an impermanent appendage to that soul, fosters the temptation to allow the body to indulge its desires.

Christ, in contrast, is the true physician who teaches the proper relationship between body and soul. If the body is to be saved, it must avoid desire and pleasure through a regimen of temperance and self-control. Pseudo-Justin appeals to healing and physicians to make his case that not all that plagues the flesh is necessary to it. Picking up on his opponents' "sophistical" accusation that the whole self must include all the parts (and therefore all their problems), pseudo-Justin argues in return that the whole self is actually free from those difficulties and imperfections from which the present self suffers. He offers the healing miracles of the Savior as evidence of the perfected resurrected body,

“for if he healed these weaknesses and made the body whole on the earth, how much more will he do it in the resurrection, so that the flesh will rise pure and whole. The things that are considered by them to be difficulties will be healed in this way.”⁴⁹ This same term for “difficulties” used here also describes the opponents’ description of the reproductive functions of the genitals. Pseudo-Justin’s language of healing these difficulties suggests that he sees them as a disease afflicting the flesh, not something that healthy/saved flesh would experience. The future resurrection will overcome these so-called difficulties that prevent the suitability and possibility of the resurrection of the flesh, especially the genitals.

Both pseudo-Justin and his opponents agree on one critical issue: sexual desires and actions must be eliminated from the resurrected human being. The only question is what the body parts signify with respect to the abject qualities of sexual desire, sexual acts, and reproduction. Pseudo-Justin’s conception of the whole self, including the resurrection of the flesh, is carefully curated to exempt sexual desires and reproduction from what defines a body. While it may seem at first thought that those who rejected the resurrection of the flesh “hated” the flesh in some respects, as heresiologists have long charged, a closer examination reveals a more nuanced engagement with the flesh by some of these thinkers. The resurrected flesh cannot be sexual.

While pseudo-Justin makes sexual desires and reproduction a contingent feature of flesh and bodies, he is committed to sexual difference in eschatological dimorphism. As portrayed by pseudo-Justin, his opponents instead assume that the removal of sexual desires, sexual acts, and reproduction eliminates sexual difference, and with it, the parts that signify it. Without desires and reproduction, what need is there for the parts that mark bodies as male and female? For these Christians, sexual difference is so closely tied to sexual desire and reproduction that eliminating one eliminates the other.

Faced with a problem of sexual difference in either a resurrected body that experiences sexual desire and is capable of sexual intercourse or a resurrected body that is neither male nor female, pseudo-Justin forges a novel alternative. The flesh may receive salvation as male and female. With the elimination of desire, the parts no longer signify the desires of sexuality, only sexual difference. By distinguishing between body parts and their functions, pseudo-Justin is thus able to establish continuity between the mortal and resurrected bodies. For pseudo-Justin, the discontinuity between the mortal body and the resurrection is not in the material parts themselves, but in what they signify: not desire, but pure—or, rather, purified—difference. The elimination of desires from the flesh in virgins and resurrected bodies demonstrates how it is that the flesh may receive salvation, as male and female. Virgins and mules are still male and female, after all. For pseudo-Justin, the parts, even parts that do not function, signify sexual difference, and not sexual desires and reproductive roles. The apparent materiality of bodies, and the invisibility of desires, works to form normative values about the body as a morphological object.

Sexual difference and the relationship between desire and flesh are not the only thing that is going on in this debate. For pseudo-Justin, the resurrection of the genitals signals the possibility for sexual renunciation in this life. By ceasing to signify sexually, the parts point to virginity as a practice in mortality, where bodies and flesh can exist as male and female, but without sexual desire and reproduction. While his opponents see the elimination of sexual difference in virginity and ultimately in the shedding of the parts in the eschatological self, pseudo-Justin argues that without sexual difference in resurrected bodies, there is no model for mortal virgin bodies or any incentive to treat one's bodily parts with care.

In their search for continuity between the mortal and resurrected spheres, early Christians experimented with different ways of configuring this relationship. The dominant scholarly narrative, reflecting the ancient heresiologists, suggests that the defenders of the resurrection of the flesh and the defenders of the spiritual resurrection formed two more or less cohesive camps. It is easy to see how pseudo-Justin's text might reaffirm this narrative. However, attention to his reworking of the flesh, and his interest in virginity, tells a more complex story about so-called defenses of "the flesh." The resurrection of the flesh was far from a stable concept, with great divisions on the nature of the flesh and the relationship between the resurrected body and the mortal body. In the same way, as the next chapter shows, the so-called spiritual resurrection was not a single idea. The spiritual resurrection described in pseudo-Justin's treatise evaluates the flesh and sexual difference quite differently than others who advanced this teaching.

Notes

- 1 The numerous recent critical editions adopt standard chapter divisions, though they use different numbering systems for paragraphs. Martin Heimgartner's numbering system and critical edition are used for all citations of pseudo-Justin here. Heimgartner's critical edition has the advantage of incorporating a number of other manuscripts, including newly discovered excerpts. Heimgartner discovered another text fragment of *On the Res* 7.10 in "Against Those Who Say That the Soul Exists Apart From the Human Body" found in Codex Vatopedi 236. Martin Heimgartner, *Pseudojustin: Über Die Auferstehung: Text Und Studie*, Patristische Texte Und Studien, Bd. 54 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), 40–41, 101–102.
- 2 Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 4.18.4.
- 3 Some scholars have defended Justin Martyr as the authentic author of the text, while others have rejected it. Alberto D'Anna charts a middle way, arguing that the author of *On the Resurrection* was a student or close collaborator of Justin. Alberto D'Anna, *Pseudo-Giustino: Sulla Resurrezione: Discorso Cristiano del II Secolo*, 1, ed., Letteratura Cristiana Antica. Testi (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2001), 285–287. In a more bold identification, Heimgartner argues that the true author of the *On the Resurrection* is actually Athenagoras. Heimgartner, *Pseudojustin*, 203–232. This theory has found little support.
- 4 Scholars are somewhat divided on the question of dependency, a notoriously difficult argument to establish. The bulk of scholars argue that Irenaeus depends on

- pseudo-Justin. D'Anna, *Pseudo-Giustino*, 100–106; Theodor Zahn, “Studien zu Justinus Martyr,” *ZKG* 8 (1886): 31–34; Adolf von Harnack, *Die Überlieferung der griechischen Apologeten des zweiten Jahrhunderts in der alten Kirche und im Mittelalter* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1882), 163; Heimgartner, *Pseudojustin*, 82; Prigent, *Justin et l'Ancien Testament: L'argumentation scripturaire du Traité de Justin Contre Toutes Les Hérésies comme source principale du Dialogue avec Tryphon et de la Première Apologie* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1964), 43–50, 65–68. Meanwhile, Hitchcock believes that pseudo-Justin is dependent on Irenaeus. F. R. Montgomery Hitchcock, “Loofs' Asiatic Source (Iqa) and the Ps-Justin *De Resurrectione*,” *ZNW* 37 (1936). Loofs believes that they both depend on a common source, which explains why there are no shared phrases, only shared ideas. Friedrich Loofs, *Theophilus von Antiochien adversus Marcionem und die anderen theologischen Quellen bei Irenaeus*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, Bd. 46, Heft 2 (4. Reihe, Bd. 1, Hft. 2) (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1930), 211–232.
- 5 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 2.14; cf. 9.3.
 - 6 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 2.14.
 - 7 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 9.7.
 - 8 Pouderon reviews the various proposals and identifies the opponents as disciples of Simon Magus. Bernard Pouderon, “Le contexte polémique du *De Resurrectione* attribué à Justin: Destinataires et adversaires,” *Studia Patristica* 31 (1997): 144–145, 163–166. See also D'Anna, *Pseudo-Giustino*, 172.
 - 9 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 2.1–4, 14–15. D'Anna, *Pseudo-Giustino*, 62–63.
 - 10 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 7.1.
 - 11 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 2.3.
 - 12 D'Anna, *Pseudo-Giustino*, 144–147.
 - 13 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 3.1–2.
 - 14 There are mostly minor differences between the quoted version and the biblical versions, but pseudo-Justin's use of future tense of does seem to strengthen the future aspect of the angelic body.
 - 15 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 2.8–12.
 - 16 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 2.5.
 - 17 Clement, *Stromata* III, 87. For a fuller treatment of the relationship between Clement and pseudo-Justin, see Heimgartner, *Pseudojustin*, 83–86.
 - 18 Clement, *Stromata* III, 91.
 - 19 *Testimony of Truth*, NHC IX, 3:4,5–9. For a discussion of the relationship between these two texts, see Heimgartner, *Pseudojustin*, 134–138.
 - 20 Birger Pearson, “Introduction to the Testimony of Truth,” in *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices* 5, ed. James McConkey Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 120.
 - 21 *Testimony of Truth*, NHC IX, 3:45,1; 3:69,7–28; 3:45–49.
 - 22 *Testimony of Truth*, NHC IX, 3:38,27–39,12.
 - 23 *Testimony of Truth*, NHC IX, 3:68,8–18.
 - 24 “The error of the angels” is discussed in several places (*Testimony of Truth*, NHC IX, 3:41,2–4; cf. 29:16–18; 42:23–43,3). One passage rejects Paul's warning against angels bringing more teachings (*Testimony of Truth*, NHC IX, 3:73,18–30).
 - 25 *Gospel of Thomas* 22.4–7. Translation from Marvin W. Meyer and Wolf-Peter Funk, eds., *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 142–143.
 - 26 2 Clement 12.2–5. Other interpretations of this saying do not have to do explicitly with sexual difference. See *Gospel of Philip*, NHC II, 68,4–6.
 - 27 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 3.8–10.
 - 28 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 3.11–12.

- 29 Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, 728b10; 726b10f; 747a20–748b30.
- 30 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 3.17–18.
- 31 This rendering of the saying is a compilation of the different versions of Jesus’s saying on the resurrection and angels. The first clause comes from Luke 20:34, and the second clause is closely related to Luke 20:35. The third clause breaks off from the parallel to Luke and follows the word order from the parallel in Matthew 22:30 with the singular “heaven” and Mark 12:25 with the verbal order. The Lukan parallel is dramatically different (Lk 20:36). However, all three Synoptic Gospels use the present tense of “to be,” while this version of the saying uses the future. The future tense does not appear as a variant in biblical manuscripts.
- 32 Clement, *Stromata* 3.91.
- 33 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 3.13.
- 34 Other early Christians also cited the virgin birth as evidence against sexual intercourse and reproduction. Cf. *Testimony of Truth*, NHC IX, 3:30,18–31; 3:40,2–7.
- 35 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 7.2–5.
- 36 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 3.14–15.
- 37 Epicurus, *Letter to Menoecus*, 131–132.
- 38 Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 117.
- 39 Kathy L. Gaca, *The Making of Fornication: Eros, Ethics, and Political Reform in Greek Philosophy and Early Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 26–41.
- 40 Soranus, *Gynecology* 1.32. The note in Temkin’s translation of Soranus indicates, “A Latin text edited by V. Rose (*Anecdota* II, p. 163f.) under the title of ‘Caeli Aureliani De salutaribus praeceptis’ which is probably based on Soranus’ work ‘On Hygiene’ states (p. 201) that intercourse is necessary for conception but bad for the preservation of bodily health.” Oswei Temkin, trans. *Soranus’ Gynecology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 29, n55.
- 41 Soranus, *Gynecology* 3.29. Transl. modified.
- 42 Soranus, *Gynecology* 1.32.
- 43 Oribasius, *Collectionum Medicarum Reliquiae* 22.2.19–21. The English translation here is quoted in Aline Rousselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity, Family, Sexuality, and Social Relations in Past Times* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 14–15.
- 44 Rousselle, *Porneia*, 67–71.
- 45 Soranus, *Gynecology* 1.32. Translation from Temkin, *Soranus’ Gynecology*. Justin Martyr’s 2 *Apology* 4 argues against suicide for the same reasons.
- 46 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 3.3–7.
- 47 Previous generations of scholars have cast doubt on the passages that follow 10.1, but D’Anna provides compelling arguments to consider it “una consistente parte dell’epilogo” D’Anna, *Pseudo-Giustino*, 85–88.
- 48 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 10.13–17.
- 49 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 4.5–6.

SPIRITUAL RESURRECTION IN THE FLESH

The Nag Hammadi *Treatise on the Resurrection*

Scholarly treatments of the concept of a spiritual resurrection have often assumed a more or less stable concept that entailed a rejection of the flesh. Looking at the depictions of the arguments for the spiritual resurrection in pseudo-Justin's treatise and the Nag Hammadi *Testimony of Truth*, it is clear why this view has been so dominant. The discovery of the horde of texts near Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945, however, provides other possible interpretations of the so-called spiritual resurrection. Among these texts is a letter to an inquisitive disciple, Rheginos, from an unknown teacher. The sole manuscript of the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, also known as the *Epistle to Rheginos*, is a didactic letter that belongs to the milieu of late second-century debates about the resurrection.¹ Like pseudo-Justin's treatise, this text also begins with an explanation of why so many have misunderstood the teaching of resurrection, reflecting the contested intellectual landscape on this topic. The author and the provenance of the text are unknown, though its translation from Greek to Coptic and its preservation in the fourth-century Nag Hammadi codices suggest that it circulated widely long after its original composition. In the text, the author writes to Rheginos, an otherwise unknown figure from early Christianity, with the assumption that the text will be read and shared by others known to Rheginos.²

The author makes references to a previous communication in which Rheginos had asked about the nature of the resurrection; the teacher therefore responds with an exposition on the topic. Interestingly, however, the teacher's account of the spiritual resurrection is sharply at odds with other known accounts. Rather than offering a negative evaluation of sexualized flesh as the reason for the spiritual resurrection, the author actually is quite sympathetic toward the flesh, which has, he admits, important uses for salvation. What emerges is a view of the flesh that sees an ontological deficit in the temporality of the flesh, not its association with sin. Such a deficit in its temporality actually enables an instrumentalist flesh that is preparatory for the spiritual resurrection.

In part because this text does not easily fit into preconceived categories of the spiritual or fleshy resurrection, much of the existing scholarship on this text focuses on what kind of resurrected body it advocates. Part of the

problem is that the author works with multiple views of the resurrection, and the key terms of “spirit,” “flesh,” and “body” are not always used in the ways we have come to expect them from the other texts on resurrection from this period. The three main scholarly suggestions are: first, that the *Treatise on the Resurrection* advocates an “orthodox” resurrection of the flesh;³ second, that the text advocates a new, spiritual flesh;⁴ and, third, that the text rejects the resurrection of any kind of flesh in favor of a “spiritual resurrection” of the *nous* alone.⁵ I offer another alternative, that the *Treatise on the Resurrection* envisions a spiritual resurrection of the bodily parts, including the genitals, as the guarantor of individual identity. The author offers an explanation of the nature of the resurrection based on examples from the Savior, the teachings of Paul, and an exposition on the meaning of key terms such as “spiritual resurrection” and what exactly the parts have to do with it. The *Treatise on the Resurrection*’s version of the spiritual resurrection lacks a polemic against flesh as too sexual for salvation. This text reveals that early Christian belief in a spiritual resurrection was a far more complex phenomenon that previously imagined, and shares much more with the defenders of the resurrection of the flesh than previously given credit.

Like pseudo-Justin, the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* argues for the resurrection of the parts of the self and suggests that one’s overall morphological identity will continue in the resurrected body. In this treatise, however, the parts come to mean something slightly different from their usage in pseudo-Justin’s account. They still refer to fingers, genitals, and other pieces of the body that provide an individual’s continuity of identity, but they are not framed in terms of their substance. Because of the lack of polemic against sexuality in this text, the parts do not make the genitals synecdochic to the flesh itself. The *Treatise on the Resurrection* imagines the continuity of the parts in resurrection as a continuity of bodily shape, a formal continuity in which not just the function of the genital parts, as pseudo-Justin has parsed them, but also their fleshy substance drops away. For the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, the continuity between the mortal body and the resurrected body is not to be found in their material existence, which is illusory. The parts signify the identity of the person in resurrection because they signify it in mortal life, and only what is essential about a person’s identity is resurrected.

What Is the Flesh?

Initially, it might appear that the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* agreed with pseudo-Justin’s opponents on the problematics of the bodily resurrection of the genital parts. After all, the author advances a view of the “spiritual resurrection.” The overall philosophical framework of the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* is Platonic, and he suggests that the flesh is an “illusion” and not “real” in an ultimate sense. Consequently, some interpretations of this text have concluded that the author holds a negative evaluation of the flesh.⁶

However, the evidence that the author holds a negative evaluation of the flesh is thin. He does not view the flesh antagonistically as an evil, or as a prison that must be escaped, or as irredeemably bound up with sexual desire. What troubles the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* about the flesh is merely what the author calls its “lack”—its objective tendency to age. The problem of the body is the problem of death, which the author calls “the law of nature.”⁷ The *Treatise’s* supposed negative evaluation of the flesh consists of nothing more than the author’s observation that mortal flesh grows old and dies. Further, there are many instances in which the author holds positive evaluations of the flesh. In this case the author advocates spiritual resurrection because of the ontological impermanence of the material realm, not its sexual impurities as other advocates of the spiritual resurrection seem to have done.

When asked directly about why the flesh is not resurrected, the author provides a brief, but careful and qualified, assessment of the flesh as a substance. The text is arranged as a dialogue in which the author answers some questions, perhaps posed by Rheginos himself or perhaps simply to address common objections to his view:⁸

“Even though you did not exist in flesh, you took flesh when you entered this world. Why is it, then, that you will not take your flesh when you ascend into the eternal realm?”

That which is better than flesh is the cause of life for the flesh.

“*What came into being because of you, is it not yours? Does not what is yours exist with you?*”

But while you are here, what is it that are you lacking? (It is this that you have attempted to learn about.) The enclosure of the body, [namely,] old age, and you are perishable.⁹

Here, when the author is asked directly about the flesh and is thus given an opportunity to make his case against the resurrection of the flesh, one might expect that he would dismiss the flesh as a wicked substance, or as a prison, or in other derogatory, even sexualized, terms, as pseudo-Justin reports that his opponents had done in their opposition to the resurrection of the flesh. Instead, the author suggests that the flesh is simply lacking something.¹⁰

What is lacking in the flesh is “the enclosure of the body, [namely,] old age.” This sentence has long posed a problem for interpreters. It is true that this phrase does not form a complete sentence in the manuscript, and this reconstruction is certainly conjectural. If, however, this phrase is taken to be an answer to the question of what is lacking in the flesh, the interpretive difficulty is alleviated. The list explains what the flesh lacks in the mortal existence. The “enclosure” is an ancient medical term that refers to the enclosure around a fetus. The use of the term suggests that the body is a kind of placenta that initially nourished the true human, but is no longer necessary in the transition into the next life. Though the presence of a body indeed represents a gain over what the human

had before mortal life, in reality, the body suffers from a structural lack inherent in the flesh, namely, aging and death. The changeable nature of the fleshly substance excludes it from the more real stasis of being in the resurrection. Just as one leaves behind the placenta after one leaves the womb, so one will leave behind the elderly body in the transition into the resurrection.¹¹ The resurrection fills the lack that is marked by this flesh's aging and death.¹²

The lack of the flesh in postmortal resurrection permits one to be resurrected immediately after death. As the author explains, "some inquire further and want to know whether one will be saved immediately, if the body is left behind. Let there be no doubt about this."¹³ The resurrection is really a return to a pre-embodied state: "Nothing then redeems us from this world, but the all, which we are, we are saved. We have received salvation from end to end."¹⁴ What exactly is the status of "the all"? The author continues, "the all is what is embraced. [Before] it came into being, it was existing."¹⁵ The premortal state of the self returns again in the resurrection.

When the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* replies to Rheginos's inquiry about why the flesh is not an essential aspect of one's identity, he notes that the flesh is susceptible to old age and to perishability. Here, he is simply listing the flesh's limitations, not condemning them.¹⁶ His Platonism does not result in a moral opposition to the flesh, only a sense of its impermanence. The resurrected self and the mortal self are hierarchically ordered, as one would expect, but this hierarchy does not constitute an antagonistic dualism:

You have this absence [i.e., from the flesh] as profit, for you will not give up what is choice when you leave. That which is inferior has less, but there is grace for it. Nothing redeems us from this world, but we are of the all, and we are saved. We have been saved from start to finish. Let us think about it in this way; let us accept it in this way.¹⁷

The author states, "you will not give up what is choice," having explained a few lines earlier that "that which is more choice than the flesh" is what causes life for the flesh.¹⁸ The "choice" part continues on after death, and the absence of the inferior part, or the flesh, is counted as "profit" rather than as something lost in the process.

This hierarchical ordering of the choice and inferior parts may seem dismissive of the flesh, yet the author is quick to add, "but there is grace for it." Some have suggested that the antecedent here is the soul, and that the author means that there is grace for the soul upon its release from the body, or possibly that the body owes gratitude to the soul for its very existence.¹⁹ This reading, however, does not give enough force to the conjunctive "but," which softens the blow to the corruptible, inferior body by insisting that for the body there is still grace. Just what this grace may be is difficult to say, but such a statement is meant to prevent Rheginos from concluding that this hierarchy means that the corruptible body does not receive any grace from God.

These two discussions of the flesh, one about its structural “lack” in old age, and another about some kind of “grace” reserved for the flesh, provide limited information on their own about the author’s views. The most surprising treatment of the nature of the flesh in the *Treatise on the Resurrection* relates to a discussion of Christ’s incarnation.²⁰ The author suggests that the flesh is, in fact, central to Christ’s work of salvation, of bringing the self into the full reality of its true nature, and that one can experience spiritual resurrection while living in mortal flesh.

The *Treatise on the Resurrection* strongly defends the incarnation of Christ, resisting any docetic interpretation. The text affirms that Christ suffered and that believers suffer along with him.²¹ The author assigns special significance to the incarnation in the context of his argument about the nature of resurrection:

What sort of things did the Lord make use of while he was in the flesh and when he had revealed himself as Son of God? ... Rheginos, the Son of God was the Son of Man. He embraced them both, humanity and divinity, so that he will destroy death by being the Son of God, and through being the Son of Man, the return to the fullness might occur.²²

The “embrace” refers not only to how Christ was “in the flesh,” but also to Christ soteriologically embracing humans until they die.²³ Elsewhere, Christ embraces “the fullness,” which is identified with believers.²⁴ At the point of death, believers are released from this embrace and ascend into the eternal realm.²⁵ The Lord thus embraced the flesh in the same way that he embraces all believers now. While such an embrace is temporary, it is necessary for the salvation of the believers.

Defenders of the resurrection of the flesh in the late second century frequently referred to Christ’s incarnation to explain the resurrection, though they invoked it as proof of several different ideas. This event revealed something about the nature of the flesh that informed how early Christians thought about the resurrection. Pseudo-Justin used the incarnation of Christ as evidence for the end of sexual desires and reproduction, citing the virgin birth as a nonsexual form of reproduction.²⁶ For the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, however, the incarnation points neither to questions of sexual renunciation nor to the future resurrection of the flesh. In its Christology, the *Treatise on the Resurrection* insists that there are not two Christs, one human and one divine, but that there is a single figure. The nature of Christ is instructive about the nature of all human beings. They, too, have come from above, and they, too, dwell in this world. The Christological argument about Jesus’s relationship to the flesh in mortality offers a model for the orientation that all human beings should have to their flesh.

Yet Jesus is also different from other humans. Jesus is simultaneously Son of God and Son of Man (or Child of Humanity), and this dual role enables him to accomplish the destruction of death and the restoration of the elect.²⁷ As the

Son of God, Christ “will destroy death,”²⁸ but as the Son of Man, Christ restores divine fullness. In this dual role, Christ lived in the world, died, and was resurrected.²⁹ The author suggests that the incarnation of Christ not only brings about the restoration to fullness, but also is, along with the death and subsequent resurrection, a necessary step in the process of redemption. Christ’s incarnation shows that the flesh is not fundamentally in conflict with the spirit; instead, they are mutually engaged.³⁰ What is at stake here, then, is the nature of this engagement.

How exactly has Jesus’s humanity effected this restoration to the fullness? The text explains that it is “through” being a human that he accomplishes this goal. Jesus’s flesh is not merely incidental to his accomplishment of this task; it is instrumental to it. The instrumental nature of the flesh in the salvation of humanity suggests that the flesh is not an antagonistic substance that must be escaped or rejected because of its inferior nature.

The most striking point of contrast between the *Treatise on the Resurrection* and a text such as pseudo-Justin’s, then, is not the different treatment of the substance of the resurrection—flesh or spirit—but their differing conceptions of what constitutes the flesh. This conceptual difference affects their understanding of bodily parts, all those pieces that make up the identity of a person, including the genitals. We need to avoid reading this or any text as if we already know what it says about flesh, because flesh is not, at this point, a stable concept. For pseudo-Justin, flesh becomes problematic when understood in terms of its role in sexual function, but not in terms of sexual difference. For the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, however, the problem is flesh is not its association with desire, sin, lust, or the evils of reproduction, but rather that it is not essential to the identity of the person. The flesh is simply a contingent outer manifestation of an inner essential self.

Continuity and the Invisible Parts

In the postmortal resurrection, something more rarified ascends in place of the body. Though the text resists a single definition of exactly what this is, anthropologically speaking, it explains “the thought of those who are saved shall not perish. The mind (*nous*) of those who have known him shall not perish.”³¹ Though this statement is made in the context of claims about how one can know God, rather than a deliberate answer to the question of what continues on, it is also the clearest statement the author makes with regard to what exactly is raised in postmortal resurrection. The *nous* at the very least may be the “choice” aspect of the human being. However, this statement does not fully grasp what the author argues regarding the resurrection.

As with pseudo-Justin, the question of continuity between the mortal and resurrected states is a central concern for the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection*. How can one be sure that the person is the “same” in these two conditions? While many of the defenders of the resurrection of the flesh argue

that the flesh establishes the continuity of the self, the *Treatise on the Resurrection* establishes such continuity on the basis of some fundamental aspect of the self—an interior, invisible self, not the outward flesh. The fundamental distinction in the *Treatise on the Resurrection* is not between flesh and spirit, but between the visible and the invisible.³² The author explains, “the visible parts that are dead shall not be saved, for (only) the living parts which exist within them shall arise.”³³ For the author, the invisible and living parts are inside the mortal body’s “visible parts.”

The author’s advocacy for the continuation of bodily parts diverges from the claims of other advocates of the spiritual resurrection, including the opponents of pseudo-Justin and perhaps the author of *Testimony of Truth*, who imagine an angelic resurrection lacking sexual difference. Still, the concept of an interior self with parts is not without precedent. Pauline language draws on a similar anthropology.³⁴ Epiphanius reports that the Valentinians believe that they will be saved with an inner spiritual body.³⁵ The idea that the interior, non-fleshly self bore morphological resemblance to the fleshly, visible parts was a contested idea, but a part of the landscape of ancient thought.

The idea that the living, interior self has “parts” suggests a morphological correspondence between the mortal and resurrected selves. The author seems to address directly the question of the nature of these living parts after they have separated from the visible parts when he asks, “What then is the resurrection? It is always the disclosure of those who have risen. For, if you remember in the Gospel that Elijah was made manifest and Moses with him, do not think the resurrection is an illusion (*phantasia*). It is not an illusion, but it is truth!”³⁶ After insisting upon the resurrection of the “invisible parts,” the author points to concrete examples from the Gospel to insist that the resurrection is not an illusion.

One might expect a reference to the transfiguration appearances of Elijah and Moses reported in the Gospel, almost certainly one of the Synoptics; many Christians invoked the Transfiguration story to talk about the continuity between the resurrection and mortal identity. Tertullian suggests that the story shows, contrary to his Valentinian opponents, that the flesh is transformed, and that the “outward appearance of the body (*habitudinem corporis*) continues the same even in glory.”³⁷ Tertullian locates the continuity of the self in the resurrection in the outward appearance, by which he means the flesh. Origen, however, uses the example to make a point that seems more in line with the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, namely that the Transfiguration proves that “the features that once existed in the flesh will remain the same features in the spiritual body.”³⁸

For the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, invoking Elijah and Moses serves to show that the resurrected subject appears as a human body, with recognizable parts, just as Elijah and Moses are recognizable in the Transfiguration. In this way, the assertion that for the *Treatise on the Resurrection* only the bare *nous* survives must be modified. Just as Tertullian and

Origen explain, the transfigured body is identifiable as the person itself, suggesting that the resurrection is not a radical reshaping of the human form. For the author, the identifiability of Elijah and Moses moreover serves as evidence that the resurrected body has parts, and that there is continuity between the mortal and resurrected self.

Without the flesh, is not this resurrected self just a kind of mirage? In addition to his insistence that the resurrected body has parts and is recognizable, the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* worries about this concern, and for good reason.³⁹ This was a common accusation against the advocates of the spiritual resurrection. For instance, pseudo-Justin accused his opponents' view of the spiritual resurrection of being an "illusion" (*phantasia*).⁴⁰ In response to this kind of charge, the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* contrasts the changeability of the world with the eternal resurrection by flipping the charge:

But what am I telling you?
 Now those who are living will die.
 How do they live in an illusion (*phantasia*)?
 The rich have become poor.
 The kings have been overthrown.
 Everything changes.
 Let me not rail at things so much!
 The world (*kosmos*) is an illusion.
 The resurrection is different.
 It is real. It stands firm.⁴¹

This Platonic framing of the nature of reality informs how the author evaluates the spiritual resurrection. Here, the author reverses the charge that the spiritual resurrection is an illusion. What is resurrected postmortem is firm and real, while things in the world change. The suggestion that the illusion is the cosmos or the world, not the resurrection, reveals something about how the author views reality. What is "real" and what is an "illusion" correspond to the differences between the eternal realm, of which the resurrection is a part, and the temporal realm, of which the world takes part. The rich and the kings who lose their status illustrate the transience of the world and death. The continuity between the mortal and the resurrected self cannot lie in the illusion of the changeable flesh and the cosmos, but in the firm and stable spiritual resurrection.

This treatise reveals considerable variation among advocates of the spiritual resurrection for what the parts and the flesh signify. Far from hindering spiritual resurrection, the parts signify identity, generally. Moses and Elijah appeared as they were, not transformed into angelic or sexless creatures. The *Treatise on the Resurrection* thus opposes the resurrection of the flesh itself, but not of the features that differentiate the identity of persons from each other, including what signifies gender differences. Flesh itself is assumed to be inessential and

illusory, but sexual difference is not a hindrance to resurrection because resurrection involves what is essential about the person. Difference is a matter of identity, not of the flesh. The flesh and its parts are an external image of the interior self.

Resurrection in the Flesh

The role of the flesh in the resurrection is complicated in this text by another aspect. The spiritual resurrection is not only something that occurs after death when the flesh is discarded, but also affects the mortal body. In addition to the future resurrection that occurs at death when the invisible parts arise, the author also understands the resurrection as the manifestation of the believer in this life. There is some tension between these two accounts of a present and future resurrection.⁴² The Savior's resurrection is a historical event that happened after his death, but the elect come to know that they are already resurrected. The text declares, "you already have the resurrection,"⁴³ and, "we have received salvation from end to end."⁴⁴ This tension reveals a striking attitude toward the flesh. If the believer is already resurrected as a mortal being in the flesh, the spiritual resurrection is not mutually exclusive with fleshly existence.

The ideas that the resurrection is a future event, and something that may occur in this life, are both attested in the *Treatise on the Resurrection*. For instance, the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* uses the metaphor of "swallowing" to discuss the transition toward the spiritual resurrection. The imagery of swallowing as a metaphor may be traced to Paul. It is clear that Paul was an important authority for the author of *Treatise on the Resurrection*, not only because of the numerous instances of shared language, but also because of a mixed quotation from the "Apostle."⁴⁵ In the case of swallowing, the language of 1 Corinthians 15:54, "death is swallowed up in victory," is an adapted quotation of Isaiah 25:8; the language of victory indicates a situation in which death is vanquished and destroyed. In 2 Corinthians 5:4, however, "so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life," has a slightly different sense. Here, the "mortal" that is "swallowed up by life" is not destroyed, but something more is given, as the previous phrase explains, "we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed." The mixed metaphor of being further clothed, but also swallowed, suggests transformation, rather than destruction, of the flesh. The author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* makes a similar point to Paul in 2 Corinthians in his use of the term to communicate continuity in transformation.

The author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* calls upon this Pauline terminology in opaque ways. In a key passage, he explains to Rheginos how it was that the Savior died and was resurrected, and how the Savior's resurrection prefigures our own:

The Savior swallowed death. You must not be ignorant: for he put aside the world which is perishing. He transformed⁴⁶ into an imperishable

age, he raised himself up, having swallowed the visible by means of the invisible, and he gave us the way to immortality. Then indeed, as the Apostle [Paul] said, “We have suffered with him, and we arose with him, and we went to heaven with him.”⁴⁷ Now, if we are visible in this world wearing him, we are that one’s beams, and we are embraced by him until our setting, that is to say, our death in this life. We are drawn to heaven by him, like beams by the sun, not restrained by anything. This is the spiritual resurrection which swallows the psychic [resurrection] just as fleshly [resurrection].⁴⁸

This strange passage identifies three different kinds of resurrection, and describes the “spiritual resurrection” swallowing the other two kinds of resurrection. The parallel adjective forms appear in the Greek feminine as opposed the Greek neuter, which is more typical for Coptic.⁴⁹ It is clear, then, that the feminine adjectives are in apposition to the feminine noun—resurrection. Therefore, it is not the soul or the flesh that is swallowed up, but both the *resurrection of the soul* and the *fleshly resurrection*. This tripartite division between flesh, soul, and spirit also draws on Pauline categories from 1 Corinthians.

This latter term, the “fleshly resurrection,” seems to be a term of abuse for the resurrection of the flesh; both pseudo-Justin and the *Testimony of Truth* attest to this phrasing in a polemical context.⁵⁰ But what does it mean to say that the spiritual resurrection “swallows” the psychic and fleshly resurrections? Does it mean that the spiritual resurrection destroys the other two types? Or does it mean that the spiritual resurrection transforms the psychic and fleshly resurrection? Though the statement that the Savior swallows death implies destruction, it is difficult to interpret the act of the spiritual resurrection swallowing the psychic and fleshly resurrection as an act of destruction in this instance. Rather, the spiritual resurrection entails that at death one may rise into the eternal realm. This spiritual resurrection swallows the other kinds of resurrection in the sense that it is superior to the psychic and fleshly resurrections.

Swallowing is not the only metaphor present in this passage. Here, the language of “wearing” is extended to the example of the light from the sun, such that one is a beam when one wears the light. This language too may draw upon the Pauline imagery of the resurrection as being “further clothed.” These metaphors of swallowing and becoming a beam of light are the antecedents for the declaration, “this is the spiritual resurrection.” Given the progression of the description, it seems that the “spiritual resurrection” refers to the final state, the one where the beams are drawn to the sun at death. Here, the author depicts the spiritual resurrection as a future event that happens after death, as the soul separates from the body and returns to its source.

To claim, as the *Treatise on the Resurrection* does, that the resurrection will both occur after death and that believers already “have the resurrection” is to say that the elect will receive the fullness of resurrection at that time.⁵¹ Rather than an over-realized eschatology, this text presents a resurrection that has been

received in part, but that will be completed after death. The text presents an “already” and a “not yet” with respect to the resurrection.⁵² The entity that will be resurrected is also present in the mortal body.

The resurrection that exists “already” consists of the manifestation of the elect and their transformation in this life. The author even draws upon the image of swallowing to describe the transition of the resurrection before death, just as the language describes the resurrection after death. The resurrection “is the revelation of what is, and the transformation of things, and a transition into newness. For imperishability descends upon the perishable [cf. 1 Cor 15:53–54]; the light flows down upon the darkness, swallowing it up; and the fullness fills up the deficiency. These are the symbols and images of the resurrection.”⁵³ Here, “swallowing” is related to transformation and transition in terms of three other actions: descending upon, flowing down upon, and filling up.⁵⁴ Light swallows up darkness and the fullness fills up the deficiency. The language is not at all about leaving behind or escaping from the flesh, but rather about fulfillment and (again) an enveloping. Transformation and manifestation in this life thus include a period of “resurrection” while in the mortal flesh. The language of swallowing communicates both the goals of transformation of the self into a resurrected state in mortal life, as well as the notion of rising to a superior condition.

The author accounts for the continuity of the self between the mortal and resurrected states with the notion of the two-stage resurrection. The idea of a two-stage resurrection, one in this life and another after death, was not at all uncommon in the second century. The *Gospel of Philip*, which rejects both spiritual resurrection and a resurrection of mortal flesh, describes the relationship Christians might have with the future resurrection: “People who say they will first die and then arise are wrong. If they do not receive the resurrection first, while they are alive, they will receive nothing when they die.”⁵⁵ Hippolytus similarly discusses certain Phrygian Gnostic views of the spiritual resurrection. In this view, the spiritual resurrection is seen as a change that begins in this life. One is spiritually resurrected while in the flesh, even though the flesh is seen quite negatively in this context, as a “mausoleum and tomb.”⁵⁶ Resurrection in the present life was not incompatible with negative views of the flesh.

Advocates of the resurrection of the flesh also taught that the resurrection begins in this life. Irenaeus suggests that Paul’s term “swallowing” refers to the process of becoming “spiritual” while mortal. The Spirit is not something that one either has or doesn’t have, but is received little by little. In this way, the Spirit slowly prepares the flesh for the resurrection: “But now we receive only a part of his Spirit, for the perfection and preparation for incorruption, being little by little accustomed to receive and bear God, which the Apostle calls a ‘pledge’ [Eph 1:14].”⁵⁷ The “pledge” of a smaller portion of the Spirit functions to prepare the flesh for its resurrected state. Tertullian too shares such a view of an initial spiritual resurrection, accompanied by a future bodily resurrection: “It is therefore more competent for us even to maintain a spiritual resurrection at the commencement of a life of faith, since we acknowledge its full

completion at the end of the world.”⁵⁸ Irenaeus and Tertullian admit to a first resurrection during mortal life, but insist that it precedes a future resurrection of the flesh, just as advocates of the spiritual resurrection suggest that it occurs in part now and is completed with the abandonment of the flesh at death.

Other early Christian authors echo this language of “swallowing” and spiritual transformation or resurrection before death.⁵⁹ While Tertullian argues for a spiritual resurrection that precedes a resurrection of the flesh, he objected to those who reversed this by arguing for a resurrection in the (mortal) flesh that preceded a spiritual resurrection. Tertullian argues vociferously against those who termed the spiritual resurrection received by a mortal person a resurrection “of the flesh.” His objection, however, is not to the idea of spiritual resurrection in mortal flesh, but rather that this resurrection is *called* a resurrection of the flesh. He admits that one is resurrected while in this flesh, and acknowledges a spiritual transformation that can be called a resurrection while in mortality:

So also, they add, the resurrection must be maintained to be that by which a man, having come to the truth, has been reanimated and revived to God, and, the death of ignorance being dispelled, has as it were burst forth from the tomb of the old man [Cf. Eph 4:22; Col 3:9.]: because the Lord also likened the scribes and Pharisees to whitened sepulchers [Cf. Matt 23:27]. Thereafter then, having by faith obtained resurrection, they are, they say, with the Lord, whom they have put on in baptism. In fact, by this device they are accustomed often enough to trick our people even in conversation, pretending that they too admit the resurrection of the flesh. “Woe,” they say, “to him who has not risen again in this flesh,” to avoid shocking them at the outset by a forthright repudiation of resurrection. But secretly, in their private thoughts, their meaning is, “Woe to him who has not, while he is in this flesh, obtained knowledge of heretical secrets: for among them resurrection has this meaning.”⁶⁰

Here, Tertullian notes that his opponents assert a “resurrection of the flesh,” even though they believe that they will shed the flesh after their physical death. They are able to do so, he claims, because they believe that they are resurrected while they are still alive in this life. His objection, then, is not to the claim of resurrection in life, but only to the calling this event the “resurrection of the flesh”—that term should be restricted to a future event to take place at the end of the world.⁶¹ In any case, the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* is not engaged in this terminological practice, but Tertullian’s accusation shows the various ways in which the flesh came to be important to advocates of the spiritual resurrection.

This discussion should make clear that a twofold understanding of the resurrection, such as that presented in the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, was widely held among early Christians, spanning the spectrum of those who believe in

the resurrection of the flesh and those who do not. This notion suggests a lack of antagonism toward the flesh as an impediment to resurrection. The flesh is not something that must be abandoned before the resurrection can be manifest. Rather, the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* holds that, with practice, “you already have the resurrection” even in the mortal flesh. Such a view was not uncommon, nor did it entail a negative view of the flesh.

Achieving Spiritual Resurrection in the Flesh

How does one achieve this state of resurrection while still living in the flesh of the mortal body? The author instructs Rheginos that he can receive the resurrection in mortality through bodily practices:

Therefore, do not think in part, O Rheginos, nor conduct life according to this flesh because of unanimity, but flee from the divisions and the fetters, and already you have the resurrection If you have the resurrection but continue as if you will die—and yet that one knows he has died—why then do I forgive? Only because of your lack of training. Each person needs to practice ways of being released from this element so that he does not err, but shall himself receive what was at first.⁶²

Rheginos is instructed to do three things: not to think in part, that is, incompletely; not to live in conformity with the flesh, because of “unanimity”; and to flee from divisions and fetters, a vague phrase that has prompted scholars to offer multiple possible referents. If Rheginos does these things, he is told, “already you have the resurrection.” Importantly, the author makes a reference to the reception of “what was at first” as the goal of the resurrection.

In the teaching not to live “according to this flesh,” the *Treatise on the Resurrection* likely takes the position of Paul that one should not live in a fleshly manner, rather than assuming a radical opposition between spirit and flesh as substances.⁶³ The author uses the same term as Paul in Philippians 1:27 and 3:20, who instructed his readers to “live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ,” and “to stand with one mind for the faith of the gospel and in no way [be] intimidated by your opponents.” The author of *Treatise on the Resurrection* offers similar encouragement to live well, not to be divided, and to avoid contentious divisions in the community.

The instruction to flee from the “fetters” may be understood similarly. Some have seen in this language a comparison of the flesh to a kind of prison, from which one must escape. However, the use of “divisions” and “fetters” bears closer resemblance to Ignatius’s usage, which speaks of the divisions of heresy and the fetters of wickedness.⁶⁴ In this reading, these terms are not elaborations on the defects of the flesh, but rather instructions about the kinds of practices Rheginos should pursue in order to realize resurrection. The flesh is neither

inherently bad nor inherently good. Rather, it may be mobilized in either direction. This does not entail that it must or even will be resurrected, only that it constitutes a part of mortal embodied experience.

More broadly, just as the Savior's practice of incarnation and death have a soteriological significance, so, too, do the practices of the mortal body create the conditions for realizing the resurrection in the present. The usage of verbs about bodily training—from the Greek roots of *askesis* and *gymnazō*—suggest more than mere contemplation or a condition of the soul. The body is a vehicle that carries the person toward salvation, not a hindrance to it. While those exercises that lead to a resurrected state in mortal flesh may be bodily practices—even if they are simply mental practices (assuming that a division can be made along these lines when it comes to practices)—the ability to experience the resurrection while in a mortal body troubles any interpretation that requires separation from the body in order to experience the noetic realm. While the author of the *Treatise of the Resurrection* does not use precise philosophical language, we may see a distinction between the ontological substance of the flesh as a mere “lack” and the moral quality of the flesh as something with which one ought not live in conformity.

One must continue to live in the flesh while being spiritually resurrected. As long as it is possible to be spiritually resurrected even now, the flesh cannot be in fundamental conflict with resurrection. This accommodation of the flesh in spiritual resurrection, while not a part of the resurrection after death, may explain why the *Treatise of the Resurrection* does not object to the flesh as fundamentally sexualized, nor object to the resurrection of the parts, as other advocates of the spiritual resurrection had done. Rather than signifying the parts as the locus of sexuality, or as the exemplum of virginal lack of sexuality, for this author the visible parts, and their parallels the invisible parts, signify one's identity. What must be left behind in the resurrection is neither one's gender, nor one's sexuality, but the substances and practices that mark mortality. Even without the flesh, the parts match the fleshly outline. The parts do not bear any burdensome features in themselves; only the substances and practices of the self must be transformed. Otherwise, the parts are neutral with respect to sin and substance.

What is significant for the author of this treatise is the way in which the parts of the resurrected body provide continuity of identity. Rather than a spiritual resurrection that imagined the dissolution of sexual desire and sexual difference in a new kind of angelic body discontinuous with the mortal form, the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* suggests that the bodily parts establish continuity between the mortal and resurrected body, pointing to a scriptural example in the transfiguration scene revealing Elijah and Moses. The interior self corresponds to the exterior self (whether to call this interior self a “soul” or “mind” or some other thing is not always precise in this epistle).

Though the author defends the resurrection of the parts in the absence of the flesh, it is clear that this is a key point of disagreement between him and

his contemporaries. Does the soul possess sexual difference manifest through the morphology of its parts? Athenagoras, for instance, will disagree that the parts can provide continuity of identity without the flesh because he believes the soul has no sexual difference. Tertullian, in contrast, will agree with the author of this epistle that the soul is sexed with corresponding parts—but he will insist upon the resurrection of the flesh along with the soul for different reasons. In any case, the notion that the “invisible parts” sustain individual identity shifts their significance away from their sexual potential, as pseudo-Justin’s writing had emphasized, to the question of identity. The radical transformation of the self here is not about transcendence of sexual difference, but its preservation in a transition to the resurrection. There is no appeal to a primal androgyne as the model for the spiritual resurrection, but rather an eschatological self that takes part in the sexual difference of mortal bodies. The solution is not all that different from pseudo-Justin, after all. The substance of the resurrected parts is different, but the continuity of the person is still established in those bodily parts that bridge the mortal and resurrected spheres.

Notes

- 1 The critical edition cited here is Malcolm Lee Peel, “The Treatise on the Resurrection.” In *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of Nag Hammadi Codices 5*, ed. by James McConkey Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 2000). Willem C. van Unnik, “The Newly Discovered Gnostic ‘Epistle to Rheginos’ on the Resurrection: I and II,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 15:2 (1964), 141–167. Malcolm Lee Peel has pointed to the conceptions of the New Testament canon, referring to the “Gospel” and “Apostle” as characteristic of this time period. Malcolm Lee Peel, *The Epistle to Rheginos: A Valentinian Letter on the Resurrection: Introduction, Translation, Analysis and Exposition* (London, S.C.M. Press, 1969), 23–24. Bentley Layton also suggests a late second-century context given the text’s affinity to Middle Platonism. Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection from Nag Hammadi* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 2–4. Jacques E. Ménard, *Le Traité sur la Résurrection: (NH I, 4)* (Québec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 1983), 1.
- 2 In the conclusion to the letter, the author shifts his address to Rheginos’s “brethren” and uses the plural “you” several times. NHC I,4:50,1–6.
- 3 Ménard, *Le Traité sur la Résurrection*; van Unnik, “Newly Discovered Gnostic ‘Epistle to Rheginos.’”
- 4 Malcolm Lee Peel, “Gnostic Eschatology in the New Testament,” *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970): 159–160; Hugo Lundhag, “These Are the Symbols and Likenesses of the Resurrection: Conceptualizations of Death and Transformation in the *Treatise on the Resurrection*,” in *Metamorphoses*, 203–205.
- 5 Layton, *Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection*, 12, 91–92. Some differences in translation have led to alternative interpretations. Mark Jeffrey Olson, *Irenaeus, the Valentinian Gnostics, and the Kingdom of God (A.H. Book V): The Debate about 1 Corinthians 15:50* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1992), 17–27.
- 6 Layton, *Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection*, 12, 124.
- 7 NHC I,4:44,20–21.
- 8 My understanding of these lines is basically in line with Layton, who put these words into the voice of an imaginary interlocutor. However, I divide the questions and answers differently than he does. Layton, *Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection*, 12, 77.

- 9 NHC I,4:47,4–19.
- 10 The author’s style generally concludes a section with “this is” or “these are,” rather than introducing a new section with this phrase. See, for example, 45, 12–13; 45, 39–40; 47, 29–30; 49, 6.
- 11 Lundhag, “These Are the Symbols and Likenesses,” 193–195.
- 12 NHC I,4:49,5–6.
- 13 NHC I,4:47,30–37.
- 14 NHC I,4:47,24–29.
- 15 NHC I,4:46,38–47, 1.
- 16 Here, the “body” seems to be used indistinguishably from the “flesh,” since in answer to the question about why the flesh does not continue, the author answers that it is because of the limitations of the body. At death, one takes off the body. NHC I,4:47,36.
- 17 NHC I,4:47,19–30.
- 18 NHC I,4:47,9–10.
- 19 Layton, *Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection*, 12, 88.
- 20 Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the “Valentinians”* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 85.
- 21 NHC I,4:45,25–28.
- 22 NHC I,4:44,12–34. More common translations of the Christological terms in Nag Hammadi studies are “child of divinity” and “child of humanity,” even when the definite articles do not appear. Here, I use the more familiar Christological titles.
- 23 NHC I,4:45,33.
- 24 NHC I,4:46,38–39.
- 25 NHC I,4:45,38–39.
- 26 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 3.13.
- 27 The use of these two phrases to describe independent Christological features begins in the second century. See Ignatius, *Ephesians* 20.2; *Odes of Solomon* 36.3, and *Sophia of Jesus Christ* 3.4:105.19–22.
- 28 NHC I,4:44,3–39; NHC I,4:46,18–19.
- 29 NHC I,4:46,14–26.
- 30 Thomassen’s suggestion is a good one that this text displays Eastern Valentinian notions of “mutual exchange.” Einar Thomassen, “Treatise on the Resurrection,” in Meyer and Funk, *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, 51.
- 31 NHC I,4:46,23–24.
- 32 Lundhag, “These Are the Symbols and Likenesses,” 204.
- 33 NHC I,4:47,30–48, 3.
- 34 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 3:16; Rom 7:21–25. Peel, “The Treatise on the Resurrection,” 189.
- 35 Epiphanius, *Panarion* 31.7.5.
- 36 NHC I,4:48,3–19.
- 37 Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Dead* 55.10.
- 38 Origen, *Homilies on the Psalms* 1.5.
- 39 NHC I,4:48,10–11; 48,15; 48, 21–23.
- 40 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 2.14.
- 41 NHC I,4:48,20–33.
- 42 Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 85.
- 43 NHC I,4:49,15–16.
- 44 NHC I,4:47,24–29.
- 45 NHC I,4:45,25–28. Craig A. Evans, Robert L. Webb, and Richard A. Wiebe, *Nag Hammadi Texts and the Bible: A Synopsis and Index* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 4–47.
- 46 Peel notes that the Coptic New Testament uses this term to describe the resurrection in 1 Cor 15:51–52, and that Christ is called an “imperishable Aeon” in texts from

- this period; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.3.1; 1.26; 1.4.5; Clement, *Excerpts of Theodotus* 43 and 63.1–64. Peel, “The Treatise on the Resurrection,” 161.
- 47 This “quotation” is a mixture of Rom 8:17 and Eph 2:5–6. Peel, *Epistle to Rheginos*, 70–72. Other suggestions include Col 2:12–13; 3:1–4; Rom 6:3–11; 2 Cor 4:10–13; 2 Tim 2:11–12. Peel, “The Treatise on the Resurrection,” 162.
- 48 NHC 1,4 45,14–46, 2.
- 49 Such exceptions are noted in Bentley Layton, *A Coptic Grammar: With Chrestomathy and Glossary: Sahidic Dialect* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), 117c.
- 50 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 2.12. The *Testimony of Truth*, NHC IX 3:36, 29–37, 6.
- 51 NHC I,4:47,30–48,2; 45,30–46,2.
- 52 Thomassen in Meyer and Funk, *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, 51.
- 53 NHC 1,4:48,34–49,8.
- 54 Cf., Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 12.9. See also Layton, *Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection*, 12, 99.
- 55 NHC II, 3:73,1–4. Cf. 56,15–20. Translation from Meyer and Funk, *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*.
- 56 Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 5.3.23–24.
- 57 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.8.1 (SC 153:92).
- 58 Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 25.4–6. Translation from Ernest Evans, *Tertullian’s Treatise on the Resurrection* (London: S.P.C.K., 1960). Cf. Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Dead* 19.2–7.
- 59 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.13.3; 5.5.2; Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Dead* 54.1.
- 60 Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Dead* 19.2–7. Translation from Evans, *Tertullian’s Treatise on the Resurrection*.
- 61 Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Dead* 25.4–6. Translation from Evans, *Tertullian’s Treatise on the Resurrection*.
- 62 NHC I,4:49,9–37. Two very different translation traditions exist for this text. First, Peel: “For if he who will die knows about himself that he will die—even if he spends many years in this life, he is brought to this—why not consider yourself as risen and (already) brought to this? If you have the resurrection but continue as if you are to die—and yet that one knows that he has died—why, then, do I ignore your lack of exercise? It is fitting for each one to practice in a number of ways, and he shall be released from this Element that he may not fall into error but shall himself receive again what at first was.” Malcolm Lee Peel, “The Treatise on the Resurrection,” in *The Coptic Gnostic Library*, 155–157. Layton’s translation sees this passage addressing different aspects of the human being: “For if the dying part (flesh) ‘knows itself,’ and knows that since it is moribund it is rushing towards this outcome (death) even if it has lived many years in the present life, why do *you* (the spirit) not examine your own self and see that *you* have arisen? And you are rushing towards this outcome (separation from the body) since you possess the resurrection.” Layton, *Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection*, 12, 31.
- 63 Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (New York: Oxford, 2010), 104. With respect to the body and the flesh, Paul refers to the “body of sin” (Rom 6:6) and that “those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh” (Rom 8:8), and “if you live according to the flesh, you will die” (Rom 8:13).
- 64 Peel, “The Treatise on the Resurrection,” 204. Cf. Ignatius, *Philippians* 2.1; 3.1; 7.2; 8.1; *Smyrniacs* 7.2; *Ephesians* 19.3. *Philippians* 8.1 uses both terms together.

“THE PRACTICE OF EVERY VIRTUE”

Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection*

A third surviving treatise, Athenagoras’s *On the Resurrection*, deals with the now-familiar issues of how the resurrection is both possible and necessary. His treatise is intended to convince “unbelievers” and “doubters” that resurrection includes the resurrection of the body, including those “who accept our basic assumptions,” that is, other Christians.¹ Little reliable biographical information is available for Athenagoras. He may have been the author of two apologetic treatises, *Plea for the Christians* and *On the Resurrection*. The manuscript *inscriptio* for the *Plea* identifies Athenagoras as a “philosopher Christian” from Athens.² Based on the contents of his writings, the label “philosopher Christian” is not unreasonable; he was closely engaged with contemporary philosophical and medical discussions. However, the late date of the surviving manuscript makes it impossible to know if his Athenian provenance is reliable historical information or imagined biography created by later Christians.³ While scholars consider Athenagoras as the genuine author of the *Plea* in the late second century, they have debated Athenagoras’s authorship of *On the Resurrection*. Some conclude that the text is late, even as late as the post-Origenist resurrection controversy in the fourth century.⁴ In spite of uncertainty about the author’s identity and the period of its origins, however, the text fits the late second-century debates about the resurrection in both its themes and its approach. Since no definitive evidence rules out Athenagoras’s authorship, I will refer to him as the author according to convention.⁵

Athenagoras wants to persuade fellow Christians of a material link between the resurrection and the mortal body. In the process, he defends the resurrection of the bodily parts, including the sexual organs. What is most interesting about this text is the author’s approach to the bodily parts. For Athenagoras, there is no question that the bodily parts are essential for establishing the continuity of an individual’s identity from the mortal to resurrected state. And like the other texts discussed so far, Athenagoras believes that sexual difference persists in the resurrection, but sexual desires and practices do not. Yet, his account differs from the Nag Hammadi *Treatise on the Resurrection* on the question of the substance of those parts, and he differs from pseudo-Justin on the question of what those resurrected parts mean for sexual practice. When Athenagoras

describes the resurrected body, he is adamant that all of the parts, from the genitals to individual bits of flesh, are raised together. These parts make up human identity. What is new in Athenagoras is how he conceives of the relationship between the mortal and the resurrected self somewhat differently than the other authors, offering an alternative approach for thinking about sexual ethics.

Athenagoras suggests that sexual desires, properly controlled, are an acceptable part of mortal identity. This perspective creates a greater gap between the mortal and resurrected self heretofore offered by pseudo-Justin and the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection*. The former insisted that one should live as a virgin because the resurrected flesh does so, and the latter that one should live as if one is already resurrected (though he was silent on sexual desire). This difference in behavior between the mortal and resurrected self does not create a problem for the resurrection of the parts, but rather becomes a key point of God’s evaluation of the human person. Athenagoras depicts the relationship between the bodily parts and sexual desires and practices by re-conceptualizing the flesh as fundamentally mutable and subject to transformation. In the last judgment, God will evaluate the nature of each person. All the body parts, including those of generation and sexual difference, must continue to allow God to judge the full scope of human actions as his saying of Jesus about the resurrection that derives from Mark and Matthew, correctly.

Eschatology and the Resurrection of the Body

The most striking aspect of Athenagoras’s discussion of the resurrection is his use of the final judgment as a way of making sense of mortal bodies. This feature is striking not so much because it is unexpected to a modern reader, but because its presence immediately draws attention to its absence from the previous two treatises under discussion. For Athenagoras, the problem of the parts is eschatological, not soteriological. The parts must be saved because the human being must be judged. Judgment, he insists, derives from a notion of divine providence.⁶ Those who believe in providence must admit that God cares for the flesh, and that the care of providence is evidence of a future judgment.⁷ To illustrate his point, Athenagoras imagines a world in which there is no judgment. What if God sits over the world in “darkness,” “ignorance,” and “silence”?⁸ For Athenagoras, a world in which the Creator is inattentive to creation would lack any incentive for virtuous behavior. By contrast, for Athenagoras, God is the interpreter and final judge of human behavior—good and bad, virtuous and sinful.

In its immediate context, Athenagoras’s emphasis on divine judgment is both a critique of the socially imbalanced judicial system in the Roman Empire and a critique of the inability of any kind of earthly judgment to produce ethical subjects. A future divine judgment is necessary because of the inability of human justice to reward virtuous deeds and punish serious crimes. The concern is not that terrestrial judgment is unevenly applied to the bodies of the elite and the poor, nor that it is too harshly distributed upon Christians, slaves, or

others. Rather, Athenagoras is concerned that terrestrial punishment is not harsh enough for the most serious crimes. A man who slays thousands cannot be adequately punished by his single death. Those who violate boys and women, destroy cities, burn houses, or kill entire populations require a punishment much greater than their own deaths to pay for their crimes. In cases of extreme evil, only divine punishment will suffice.⁹

This turn to judgment marks an important shift in resurrection discourse at this time. The concern for ethics is not simply a proof of the resurrection, but an argument for theodicy. Pseudo-Justin and the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* argued that the prospect of resurrection meant that one must live as if resurrected already, either by practicing virginity or by living the spiritual resurrection while in mortal flesh. Instead, Athenagoras introduces the threat of final judgment as the motive for obtaining virtue, denying that resurrected bodies are the normative ideal for mortal bodies and emphasizing the ethical significance of the mortal body itself. This point of departure rethinks the meaning of the resurrected body entirely, moving away from seeing it as a model to be imitated toward an object of punishment or reward instrumental to achieving virtue. For Athenagoras, without the bodily resurrection, there is no bodily judgment, and without that judgment, the “practice of every virtue” is in vain.¹⁰

The efficacy of a bodily judgment depends on the raising of the same parts that were in the mortal body. Divine judgment requires the resurrection of the body, because virtue does not reside in the soul alone, but in the relationship between the soul and the body. The soul must learn to master the body in this life, because the body is also necessary for a virtuous life after death. If the soul were to continue on without the body, then practicing the classical virtues in this life would be in vain:

For if there is no resurrection, the nature of humans *as humans* would not persist. And if the nature of humans does not persist, in vain has the soul been fit together with the needs of the body and its passions; and in vain has the body, yielding to the reins of the soul and being bridled, been shackled from obtaining what it yearns for. Vain is intelligence; vain is prudence and righteous observance or the practice (*askesis*) of every virtue and the setting and arrangement of laws. ... It is absolutely necessary that the deathlessness of the soul should continue eternally with the permanence of the body according to their own appropriate nature.¹¹

Athenagoras’s view of the relationship of the soul to the body sees no point in the classical emphasis on ethical training (*askesis*) of the soul and the body unless they continue to be united at some point after death. The connection between a proper anthropology of the human being, and a proper approach to ethics, makes a philosophical case for the permanence of bodies through the resurrection.

Athenagoras contrasts his own position with other philosophical arguments on the existence of the human subject after death. He notes that there are three ways of thinking about life after death: the soul and body are extinguished at death; the soul continues, but the body decays; or the body and soul continue together after death. The first option, in which both the soul and body are destroyed at death, would lead to the “height of lawlessness—atheism.”¹² The second option, in which the soul continues on without the body, produced inequitable judgment. The soul cannot be rewarded or punished on its own, or else the body loses its share in the reward or punishment. Instead, he reasons, the soul and the body must arise and be judged together for God’s providence to demonstrate the need for virtue.

This emphasis on divine judgment and the cultivation of virtue as the basis for the relationship between body and soul places Athenagoras’s *On the Resurrection* in a broader contemporary philosophical discussion of the care of the self in the first few centuries C.E. These discussions theorized a close relationship between the body and the soul where the actions and dispositions of one had a correlative effect on the other. In the second century, the traditional Platonic-Aristotelian conception of the self, in which the essence of the self, the soul, is distinguished from the inessential body, increasingly conflicted with other philosophical and medical theories. These perspectives hypothesized a different relationship between the soul and the body and the ways in which that relationship should be regulated.

In contrast to the view of the human as divided into two distinct parts, Stoics and Epicureans, for instance, posited a more holistic psychophysical self in which there is no independence between the body and soul.¹³ By the first century C.E., though, some Platonic thought began to move toward this more holistic self. Plutarch, for example, suggests that the field of medicine, which traditionally cared for the body, and philosophy, which traditionally cared for the soul, are a “single field.”¹⁴ Similarly, various schools of philosophy emphasize regulations of diet and sexual practice for the sake of pursuing philosophy.¹⁵ Porphyry defines the scope of this *askesis* for regulating the passions, explaining, “our attentions to things are not effected with a part, but with the whole of ourselves.”¹⁶ Here, the *part* refers to the dualistic distinction between the body and soul in contrast to a more holistic conception of the self.

Athenagoras too holds to a more holistic view of the self, linking this anthropology to theodicy and the care of the self. Athenagoras held that a person who does not believe in a future judgment *of the body* will not be sufficiently motivated to engage in the bodily *askesis* of virtue:

For if there is never to be a judgment on the deeds of humans, then they will have nothing greater than irrational beasts; or rather, they will fare more miserably than these [beasts] in subordinating the passions and having given heed to piety, justice, and every other virtue. Then the life of beasts or savages is best, virtue is senseless, the threat of

judgment a huge joke, to cultivate pleasure is the greatest good, and the common doctrine and law of all will be that which is beloved to the unbridled and lecherous, “Eat, drink and be merry” [1 Cor 15:32]. For the end of such a life is not pleasure, according to some, but complete insensibility.¹⁷

Since Christians believe in the resurrection, they not only conform better to philosophical reason, but also to the practical values of “piety, justice, and every other virtue.” Without the final judgment of the body and the soul, there is no greater purpose in life, and even the pursuit of pleasure is in vain.¹⁸

Together, these arguments lay out a philosophical perspective for the bodily *askesis* necessary for developing virtue.¹⁹ Athenagoras explicitly argues that resurrection gives meaning to the cultivation of the classical virtues.²⁰ In a passage that indicates the extent of Athenagoras’s engagement with the philosophical tradition, he enumerates the four cardinal virtues of Stoic philosophy: courage or fortitude, temperance, prudence, and justice, and adds to these other common virtues discussed in philosophy such as self-control.²¹ By framing the resurrection of the body in the discussion of the virtues, he insists that such virtues are possible only with the body and soul in union, when the soul can control the desires of the body:

How can anyone have even the notion of courage or fortitude as existing in the soul alone, when it has no fear of death, or wounds, or maiming, or loss, or maltreatment, or of the pain connected with these, or the suffering resulting from them? And what shall we say of self-control and temperance, when there is no desire drawing it to food or sexual intercourse, or other pleasures and enjoyments, nor any other thing soliciting it from within or exciting it from without? And what of prudence, when things are not proposed to it which may or may not be done, nor things to be chosen or avoided, or rather when there is in it no motion at all or natural impulse towards the doing of anything? And how in any sense can justice be an attribute of souls, either in their relation with each other or some other being like or unlike them?²²

Athenagoras thus questions the effectiveness of the cultivation of the self, arguing that there is no guarantee that people will be sufficiently motivated to acquire virtue without a belief in the future existence of the body. The division between the body and soul is not fully bridged in these classical non-Christian discourses about the cultivation of virtue. In Athenagoras’s view, the emphasis on the cultivation of the self at the expense of an eternal system of law and punishment is singularly inadequate for the production of ethical subjects. According to Athenagoras, if the acquisition of virtue is simply an act of aesthetic value, such a system is bound to fail if it is not also connected to a threat of

discipline. The resurrection is a demonstration of a cosmic juridical power that enforces and rewards the virtues.

Flesh and the Continuity of Identity

The key to Athenagoras’s vision of justice is not simply the judgment of the body and the soul together, but rather that the same body and soul are judged for their particular deeds. All of the treatises on the resurrection discussed thus far have, in one way or another, theorized continuity between the mortal and resurrected selves. Athenagoras responds to two common objections to the resurrection of the body, both of which were also discussed by pseudo-Justin. The first objection argues that God is unable, and the second that God is unwilling, to “draw together again dead bodies (or even those entirely decomposed) and restore them so as to constitute the very same humans.”²³ The worry here has to do with the continuity in identity between the mortal and resurrected human—whether it is possible for God to reconstruct the “very same human” after it has died and the body has dissolved. The resurrected body must be the same as the mortal body, Athenagoras argues, because if the human being that is judged is not the same as the human being that acted in mortal life, then one acts while another is judged. He explains, “the living being will be purely the same if everything is the same which serve as its parts.”²⁴ The parts again take the central position for human identity.

At issue, then, is what remains the same in resurrected bodies. The genitals themselves do not receive any special attention as the primary source of the problem of the flesh. Athenagoras’s account of the resurrection transforms the flesh differently from pseudo-Justin and the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection*. Athenagoras argues that neither the functions nor the flesh is eliminated, but instead the humoral qualities that cause the body to change. Athenagoras’s formation of bodily resurrection accounts for change on the basis of classical medical discourses about the nature of the body. Significantly, Athenagoras reformulates the terms in which those discourses conceptualize the body—that is, the role played by the humors in determining a person’s identity. The mutable and variable aspects of a person’s identity disappear in resurrection, he argues, leaving behind that which accurately signifies the whole person, the unchanging substrate of the body.

Instead of the resurrection of the flesh, the text prefers to speak of the “resurrection of humans” and the “resurrection of dissolved bodies” when emphasizing that the “same body” is reunited to the “same soul.”²⁵ Though Athenagoras does affirm that the flesh will be raised, he is not concerned about the substance of the body parts. He suggests, “there is no damage done to our argument whether [some] suppose that the first principle arises from matter or that human bodies have the elements as first principles or that they are made up of seed.”²⁶ He does not name the philosophers who advanced these different theories of the root substance of the body. He may be referring to the

pre-Socratics when he says that some considered matter as a first principle.²⁷ Plato and Aristotle, as well as the Stoics, advanced the theory that the elements were the first principle. The pre-Socratic Anaxagoras also argued that human beings were made up of seed, as did some medical writers.²⁸ Athenagoras’s philosophical agnosticism with respect to the precise stuff that makes up the human parts demonstrates how his views of the body could and should be held by all, regardless of the substance of the body.

Despite this agnosticism about the substance of the resurrected body, Athenagoras puts forward an argument that a special kind of flesh provides the thread that connects the mortal and resurrected self. Athenagoras recognizes that the body is unstable and subject to change—the body and its parts are in constant flux. The consumption and digestion of food are primary evidence of this change. How, then, can the parts be a source of a stable identity? Athenagoras answers by arguing that at least some of the flesh is so intimately connected with the human subject as to be inseparable from it.²⁹ In this way, continuity in resurrection can be achieved in the parts.

Athenagoras argues that changes in the body point to two different kinds of flesh. One kind of flesh is contingent and fluctuates. A second kind is essential to the human body, a durable flesh that forms the basis of continuity between the various changes of the mortal body and connects the mortal and resurrected bodies. Although some parts of the body change, parts of the body do not change: “the parts of the body which receive food in order to remain what they are, do not change along with flesh and fat.”³⁰ These parts are fundamental to the identity of the self. He distinguishes the fluctuations of “fat” from flesh that is “joined” to the human being. “Only that [flesh] remains that is naturally disposed to bind, or to closely cover, or to provide warmth to the parts, which [flesh] has been selected by nature and joined to those [parts] that contribute to life and the labors in life according to nature.”³¹ The parts cannot stand on their own, but must be joined to some material reality. The verbs used here to describe the stuff that rises in resurrection with the parts connote a certain degree of closeness. The final verb in the series, “to provide warmth,” often describes the relationship between lovers or spouses, as well as the care a mother has for her children.³² This flesh is closely bound with the parts of the body. As the verb “to closely cover” signifies, the flesh is something that keeps things in and keeps things out. Here, the sense of a flesh is that more “natural” to the parts is contrasted with an unnatural flesh, such as fat. This more natural flesh is selected “by nature” and contributes to life “according to nature.”

Ancient medical writers depicted fat as separate from the flesh, similar in kind to bodily humors such as the blood. Aristotle noted that “fat also, like semen, is a residue, and is in fact concocted blood.”³³ Like the humors, fat could be regulated for the purposes of health, particularly reproductive health. Lean men and women were thought to have more semen and menstrual blood. Some physicians maintained that women who were too thin and those that were too fat were unable to conceive.³⁴ Athenagoras, too, notes the great volatility of

the fat, explaining, “the flesh is subject to such great transformation, sometimes becoming fat, other times become withered away.”³⁵ This two-tiered notion of flesh admits that *some* flesh fluctuates, but posits another kind of flesh that is essential to the self.

Like pseudo-Justin and the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, Athenagoras excludes certain aspects of the body that he perceives to be based too much in change. “What is without purpose,” he explains, “can have no place among the things created by God.”³⁶ The emphasis on the parts is about material continuity as well as morphological identification. The change in the *context* of the body requires that the body be changed, as well. The body, as a passive agent, accepts these “changes,” including “age, appearance, size, and resurrection.”³⁷ Resurrection is just the final change that the body will go through: “The resurrection is a certain change, and the last of all, and a change for the better of what still remains in existence at that time.”³⁸ The change of resurrection stabilizes the identity of the human being once and for all.

Other early Christians theorized that there were two kinds of flesh. The *Gospel of Philip* in the Nag Hammadi corpus, for instance, suggests a difference between the resurrected flesh of Christ and the flesh humans possess now: “The [master rose] from the dead, but [he did not come into being as he] was. Rather, his [body] was [completely] perfect. [It was] of flesh, and this [flesh] was true flesh. [Our flesh] is not true flesh, but only an image of the true.”³⁹ This passage serves both a Christological function for explaining the nature of Christ’s resurrected body as the “true flesh,” as well as explaining the nature of the resurrected flesh in general. Athenagoras is engaged in making a similar appeal to “true flesh” that is distinct from the fluctuating flesh that we know in mortality.

Athenagoras’s emphasis on continuity in the resurrection in the bodily parts allows a great deal of room for differences between the mortal and resurrected self. Discontinuity is not a problem for Athenagoras because “a certain discontinuity is observed concerning the permanence of humans,”⁴⁰ and humans have “inherited discontinuity from the beginning by the will of the Maker.”⁴¹ This fact helps to explain discontinuity as the basis for the transformation of the body in resurrection. Similarly, children change as they become young adults, then adults, and finally elderly. These transitions point toward the discontinuity that exists between the body in this life and the resurrected body. By conceptualizing the flesh as the locus of discontinuity and describing the human body as essentially changing, Athenagoras envisions a resurrected body that is quite different from the mortal body. For Athenagoras, resurrection signifies a future state toward which mortal bodies progress.

Identity and the Integrity of the Body

Athenagoras’s main concern with the resurrected body is not sexual difference, but rather individual bodily integrity through the continuity of the parts. Eating poses a problem that threatens the identity of human bodies even after

the resurrection. What the body consumes perforce becomes integrated into either the mutable and contingent or the essential parts of the body. The issue of chain consumption, in particular, posed a challenge to any stable signification of identity.

Chain consumption is the theory that, in the process of eating the flesh of another being, the body assimilates the substance of what is being eaten, so as to make the body composed of other bodies.⁴² In normal consumption, a human being who eats the flesh of a fish or perhaps even a lion would assimilate the consumed flesh to its own. But what if *humans* were the ones being eaten? What if, for instance, animals or fish ate the remains of human beings who were improperly buried? Any human who ate animals that had feasted on human bodies would be feeding indirectly on the bodies of other humans, thereby uniting their identities.⁴³ The problem is only exacerbated by instances of direct cannibalism, whether out of desperation, madness, or deception.⁴⁴ The problem of separating the parts of bodies becomes nearly insurmountable for humans who had been nourished on the flesh of other humans.⁴⁵

Even though the chain consumption of humans would not have been a common problem, it nevertheless posed important philosophical issues for the resurrection of the body. If human bodies are made up of elements of other human bodies that preceded them, how can they each be raised in the resurrection? How can they each be judged if the bits of the body in judgment are spread across numerous other bodies? In those cases, the notion of the body as the site of signifiers that express identity would collapse under the burden imposed by a surplus of identity in any particular bit of the body. Such an argument had apparently persuaded many Christians to reject the notion of bodily resurrection and had “greatly upset some people even among those admired for their wisdom.”⁴⁶ The mixing of human elements created a theological problem for Athenagoras’s view of the resurrection, which insisted on the reconstitution of the material and bodily parts of each individual human being. The main concern is that the body’s individual integrity needs to be preserved as a way to maintain individual identity.

Athenagoras suggests that correct knowledge of digestive processes alleviates any concern about chain consumption. He explains, “[God] adapted to the nature and species of each animal a suitable and appropriate food.”⁴⁷ On this basis, animals cannot digest all foods, but only the food that nourishes them.⁴⁸ Only what nourishes the body of the species that consumes it “according to nature” is properly called “food,” while the remainder that is “contrary to nature” is expelled.⁴⁹ In this way, human bodies cannot be nourished on other human bodies, which simply pass through the digestive tract unassimilated:

In short, even if one should concede that nourishment from such sources [e.g., other human bodies] enters into someone—let us speak of this more customarily, even though it is contrary to nature—to be sorted and to transform into one of the things—being wet or dry or

hot or cold—even so, there is nothing useful for our opponents from such concessions. Bodies which arise again are resurrected from their very own parts. Nothing which has been mentioned [wet, dry, hot, cold] is a part, nor does it have the quality or position like a part, nor do they endure forever in the parts of the body which are nourished, nor will it arise with the resurrected parts, contributing nothing further towards life, neither blood, nor phlegm, nor bile, nor spirit. For then bodies will no longer need the nourishing things they once needed, since, along with the want and corruption of the bodies which are nourished, the function by which they were nourished is destroyed.⁵⁰

Once he has demonstrated his confidence that resurrected bodies are free from the substance of other human bodies, Athenagoras cleverly inverts the second-century accusation that Christians were cannibals. His opponents' insistence that human beings are made up of other human beings constitutes for Athenagoras an admission on their part that cannibalism is “according to nature.” If they really believe that human bodies provide nutrition to other human bodies, he suggests that they should feast upon them directly! Yet, he reasons, since everyone knows that feasting on human flesh is unnatural, it must be “contrary to nature” and thus unable to nourish the body. Instead, it just passes through the digestive tract without assimilating into the consumer.⁵¹ In this way, Athenagoras maintains the discrete uniqueness of each human body's individual parts as the guarantee of the continuity of identity between the mortal and resurrected bodies.

What is most significant about this particular statement, however, is the way in which it parses the bodily parts from the humoral qualities of wet, dry, cold, and hot. In resurrection, the processes of nutrition are eliminated, without which the merely contingent parts of the flesh can no longer exist. What remains is flesh, but not mutable and contingent flesh. In resurrection, when what is inessential to the person is left behind, the flesh that continues contains only the stable signifiers of that person's identity. The individual is guaranteed to possess his or her unique qualities, making the significant difference among human beings their discreet being, including bodily difference. While the *Treatise on the Resurrection* saw the flesh as that which changes too much, an illusion that disguises true identity, Athenagoras reimagines a kind of flesh that is impervious to such change, that can accomplish the twin goals of sustaining identity in the resurrection and shedding its unworthy qualities.

The Humors, Identity, and Sexual Difference

The elimination of the humors in the resurrection has some important, unintended effects. The reason that the parts can remain unchanged in the resurrection, Athenagoras argues, is because they are no longer regulated by the changeable and changing humors. In classical medicine, the four elements (air, fire, earth,

and water) were associated with particular qualities (warm and moist, warm and dry, cold and dry, and cold and moist, respectively) and particular bodily substances (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm). According to Galen, “If you wish to know which alterative faculties are primary and elementary, they are moisture, dryness, coldness, and warmth, and if you wish to know which ones arise from the combination of these, they will be found to be in each animal of a number corresponding to its sensible elements.”⁵² These basic qualities pertain to all created substances.

Ancient philosophers and physicians from Aristotle on debated the relationships between these elements, qualities, and humors.⁵³ In the Hippocratic view, quality and substance were not separable, but intertwined, so that changes to one always affect the other.⁵⁴ Galen distinguished the elements (fire, earth, air, and water) from the qualities or principles (cold, heat, dryness, and moisture), but, like the Hippocratics, he did not see a fundamental separation between the elements and the qualities. Rather, he rejected the view that either the elements or the qualities are basic, instead seeing matter as fundamental, as the thing that “underlies all the elements and is without qualities.”⁵⁵ The humors display the qualities of the elements, though not in an absolute sense. In this way, blood is moist and hot, but is not absolutely hot like fire or absolutely wet like water.⁵⁶

Athenagoras’s argument that the parts would no longer be regulated by the humors in the resurrection effectively separates the parts from their qualities, creating an absolute distinction between them where the medical thinkers saw a relative distinction. Such a break has important implications for thinking about sexual difference. These qualities of heat and wetness were assumed to be at work in the process of generation (the creation of a new human being) and alteration (the growth of that human being).⁵⁷ But Athenagoras denies that these qualities are present at all in resurrected bodies, eliminating relative heat or dryness as a means of differentiating male and female bodies. This move pushes the distinction between parts and qualities to an extreme not seen in ancient medical concepts. It moreover entailed a new view of sexual difference, because the humors were so important to ancient medical theories of sexual difference.

Galen’s medical discourse argued that the humoral qualities, hot, cold, wet, and dry, mark the key differences between males and females. In Galenic and Hippocratic medical discourse, men and women were said to have flesh of different textures. For Galen and others, heat produces sexual difference, or nature’s way of establishing a gender hierarchy. In this hierarchy, males are hotter and drier, while females are colder and moister.⁵⁸ Galen explains, “Now just as mankind is the most perfect of all animals, so within mankind the man is more perfect than the woman, and the reason for his perfection is his excess of heat, for heat is nature’s primary instrument.”⁵⁹

In these accounts, heat and dryness regulate the health of males and especially of females. Women’s flesh was thought to be softer, wetter, spongier, and able to absorb greater amounts of fluid. Regular menstruation is necessary to dispose of the excess fluids.⁶⁰ Should the menses stop, a woman’s body would

become too hard, compact, and pressured, resulting in sickness.⁶¹ Remedies such as a drying diet or exercise could be prescribed to reduce phlegmatic menses.⁶² The Hippocratic tradition held males and females to be more different than in the Aristotelian model, so the regulation of moisture and fluids was especially important to female health, and female difference. Hippocratic approaches focus attention on menstruation and bodily fluids, not genital anatomy, as the defining aspect of sexual difference.⁶³ In particular, proper moisture was key to preventing “wandering womb,” in which the uterus was understood to move around in the body in search of a wet environment.

In both traditions, sexual practice was part of the regimen for controlling and managing the relative wetness of male and female bodies. For men, the expression and retention of semen was a means of managing male health. Sexual intercourse was prescribed for women to open the passageway for menstrual blood, but also to wet the womb with seminal fluid. For many ancient physicians, women’s health was connected to sexual and reproductive activity, where a healthy woman was also a sexually and reproductively active woman.⁶⁴

More importantly, in these accounts, heat and dryness are what create morphological sexual difference itself. Both Galen and Aristotle argued that males are more fully dry and “cooked,” so their genitals are outside, while women, who are not fully cooked, must keep their genitals on the inside to preserve what little vital heat they have.⁶⁵ In this tradition, men and women share the same “parts,” only they are manifest as inversions of one another.⁶⁶ If one turned the penis/scrotum outside in, and the vagina/uterus inside out, one would see that the penis/scrotum and vagina/uterus are inversions of one another.⁶⁷

Against the backdrop of his contemporaries, Athenagoras’s description of the resurrected body as lacking the changes of the humors stands out. The implications of this description of the flesh for thinking about sexual practices and sexual difference have not been explored. Athenagoras’s notion of the parts offers an account of how maleness and femaleness exist in a resurrected state in which there is no humoral change, no semen, menses, or fat, and no relative heat and dryness between males and females. In these ways, the resurrected body is distinct from the mortal body; it no longer needs anything to nourish or sustain these merely mortal aspects of the flesh. The parts themselves signify the difference between men and women, cutting the humors out of the process entirely.

Sexual Difference and Virtue

Athenagoras defends the resurrection of the same body for the purposes of judgment, and insists that such a body is free from change. Yet, Athenagoras also defends the continuation of sexual difference. For Athenagoras, the continuity of the body in resurrection, including the parts responsible for sexual identity, ensures that the same person shall be judged in the resurrection. This,

in turn, encourages the cultivation of virtue in this life. Connecting his views on the continuity of identity with his ideas about the cultivation of virtue, Athenagoras’s commitment to sexual differences comes into focus. He argues for the resurrection and judgment of the same body to make an argument about moral behavior. It is also clear why and how Athenagoras offers a different view of sexual ethics than those advocating for virginity.

In contrast to pseudo-Justin’s treatise, which represents two perspectives that virtue requires the practice virginity, Athenagoras held that sexual virtue in mortal life permits monogamous, procreative sex. The difference in their views suggests that Athenagoras saw some breathing room between the mortal body and its resurrected future. While the parts are still crucial to securing identity, virtue and the judgment of those parts sustain sexual difference.

For Athenagoras, the connection between resurrection, the judgment, and the pursuit of virtue rests on a proper understanding of the body’s relationship to desire. Do desires come from the soul, the body, or some combination of both? If both the body and the soul are resurrected and judged, will not these desires rise, too? Athenagoras argues that souls alone cannot be the genesis of desire. How could the soul, an incorruptible substance, have hunger, or fears, or greed for possessions? For this reason, it is “absurd for the passions to be attributed to the souls as such.”⁶⁸ Souls, then, cannot be virtuous without bodies because souls cannot manage the desires of the body unless they are joined to a body. The correspondence of the body and the soul is additionally critical for honoring the biblical commandments. The Decalogue’s commandments against “adultery, murder, theft, robbery, dishonor of parents, and in general all desire which arises to injure or harm our neighbors” can be observed only by bodies and souls joined together.⁶⁹

When Athenagoras emphasizes the necessity of the body and soul in union for the pursuit of virtue, he makes special note of the body as the source of sexual difference. On this point, he lays out a position that is at odds with other explanations of sexual difference and the resurrected self. Though he considers that the soul is neither male nor female, he has no desire to embrace this primal androgyny because it undermines virtue. Only sexually differentiated male and female bodies may fulfill the interdiction against adultery, because souls alone are neither male nor female:

Neither could the commandment, “Do not commit adultery” ever be held to or thought necessary for souls, since there is no difference among them with respect to male and female, nor any tendency or appetite for sexual intercourse. For those who do not have aptitude, sexual intercourse is not possible since sexual intercourse does not exist at all, not even lawful sexual intercourse, that is, marriage. If there is no lawful sexual intercourse, neither is there unlawful appetite nor is sexual intercourse possible with another’s wife—for this is adultery.⁷⁰

This is a remarkable passage about the nature of the soul with respect to sexual difference and sexual desire. For Athenagoras, the soul possesses neither. Sexual righteousness is possible only with embodied sexual difference, but, consequently, so is sexual sin. On this point, Athenagoras agrees with pseudo-Justin, who saw that actually observing the commandments against sexual acts required having bodies. Yet Athenagoras views sexual fidelity within marriage, rather than virginity, as the necessary response to these commandments.

The approval of reproduction as an acceptable practice for mortal bodies, despite the elimination of such practices in the resurrection, requires explanation. In evaluating reproduction within the framework of natural and necessary needs, Athenagoras’s analysis falls more in line with Plato and Epicurus than with pseudo-Justin.⁷¹ He explains, “the human being, concerning whom we set forth to say something, being needful, it requires food, being mortal it requires offspring, and being logical it requires justice. Each of these things said is according to nature for a human being.”⁷² Reproduction is “according to nature,” which makes it also necessary. Neither sexual desire nor even sexual practices *per se* are necessary according to nature, but reproduction is. Athenagoras’s sexual ethics begin, then, from his treatment of reproduction as a divinely authorized practice, both natural and necessary.⁷³

Though Athenagoras accepts reproduction as a natural practice, he insists that the passions themselves are to be controlled. The mastery of the passions is the criterion on which the person is ultimately to be judged, and the soul cannot be judged alone for the deeds it committed in the body:

If each bears judgment for its deeds, it is necessary to provide just judgment for the wages of the works of the body not for the soul alone—for the soul as itself is free from the healing of the faults related to bodily pleasure or food; nor for the body alone—for the body itself cannot judge by itself law and justice, but the human being from both of these things, receives judgment for each of its deeds.⁷⁴

Although food and reproduction are natural, the human being will be held accountable for the pleasures it takes in these actions. For Athenagoras, the soul is not capable of pleasure without the body. God holds only the fully human subject, both body and soul, responsible for how it regulates or submits to pleasures and desire.

Athenagoras offers a version of the resurrection that is consistent with the previous authors, but only to a certain degree. He emphasizes that the parts establish individual human identity. He also rejects the appeal to any kind of primal androgyny, instead expecting eschatological dimorphism. He admits that a soul by itself is neither masculine nor feminine, but the full human being has both body and soul. Unlike in the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, there are no “invisible parts” of the interior self in Athenagoras’s work. Sexual difference is a bodily phenomenon, which is why the body must be resurrected.

In establishing this constancy in the parts, Athenagoras directly confronts the problem of bodily disillusion and disintegration using the most problematic example he can imagine: cannibalism. Chain consumption exposes the problem of the fluidity of the body as a disruption to the resurrection. The changeability of the bodily humors additionally suggests the body as an unstable signifier of individual identity. In contrast, Athenagoras posits a stable, bodily identity that transcends change. Rather than the soul, the entirety of the body, each of its individual parts and pieces, make up the stable human. At the same time, the changeable stuff, like fat and humors, can be shed, leaving behind just the essential bodily parts themselves. This notion of a secure, essential body roots sexual difference in the unchanging bodily parts and separates it from the instability of the humors and change.

For Athenagoras, this fact of the resurrection means something different than for the authors in the previous chapters. The resurrection is neither the model that must be imitated in mortal life, nor must one live as if already resurrected. Instead, Athenagoras makes space for discontinuity between moral and resurrected flesh by emphasizing that one must live as a mortal, including properly controlled sexual practices. Virtue is a bodily phenomenon. The soul is judged on the basis of how it interacts with the body. All the commandments and all the virtues, including sexual virtue, are practiced with the body. The necessity of the parts is to ensure that continuity, and these parts cannot be separated from the flesh.

For early Christians, it is not self-evident what parts are discarded in the resurrection and what parts persists; rather, this must be discerned and interpreted. The insistence that the “same parts” of the body are raised, while other aspects of the flesh are transformed, suggests something about how Athenagoras, and other early Christians, conceived of the body as a signifier. As in the previous chapters, the continuity of identity that the parts supply is generated in the re-signification of some aspect unworthy of association with the parts. The imagination of sexual difference apart from the humors in a kind of static body supplies Athenagoras with the conceptual framework for a body to be presented at judgment. What is most important for Athenagoras is the different set of practices and behaviors allowed to the mortal body because it is not yet resurrected.

Notes

- 1 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 1.5.
- 2 The *inscriptio* of *Plea* is written by Baanes, the secretary to Arethas, the archbishop of Caesarea (Cappadocia). Arethas himself wrote the corrections and *scholia* on the manuscript. Baanes’ *inscriptio* attributes the text to Athenagoras. The text immediately follows Athenagoras’ *A Plea for the Christians* in the manuscript, *Parisinus gr.* 451, copied in 913–914 C.E. For a more critical discussion of the text and its transmission, see Miroslav Marcovich, *Athenagorae Qui Fertur: De Resurrectione Mortuorum* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 6–12.

- 3 David Rankin argues that the particular philosophical conversations that Athenagoras addresses belongs to the Platonic discussions in Athens in the late second century, though his primary analysis focuses on the *Plea*. David Rankin, *Athenagoras: Philosopher and Theologian* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 70–71.
- 4 Grant argues that the text belongs to the late third and early fourth centuries, and Schoedel agrees. Lona pushes it even farther back to the late fourth century. Robert M. Grant, “Athenagoras or Pseudo-Athenagoras,” *Harvard Theological Review* 47 (1954): 121–129; William R. Schoedel, *Athenagoras: Legatio and De Resurrectione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Horacio Lona, “Die dem Apologeten Athenagoras zugeschriebene Schrift ‘De Resurrectione Mortuorum’ und die altchristliche Auferstehungsapologetik,” *Salesianum* 52 (1990). More narrowly, Rankin has argued, “there are no significant differences in the treatment of the resurrection in the [*Plea*] and in the [*On the Resurrection*].” Rankin, *Athenagoras*, 154.
- 5 Rankin, *Athenagoras*, 11, 17–40; Ezio Gallicet, “Athenagora o Pseudo-Athenagora?” *Rivista di Filologia* 104 (1976): 420–435; Ezio Gallicet, “Ancora sullo Pseudo-Athenagora,” *Rivista di Filologia* 105 (1977): 21–42; Nicole Zeegers-Vander Vorst, “Adversaires et destinataires du *De Resurrectione* attribué à Athénagore d’Athènes,” *Salesianum* 57 (1995): 75–122; Bernard Pouderon, *Athénagore d’Athènes: Philosophe Chrétien* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1989), 86–88.
- 6 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 14.4–6; 18.1.
- 7 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 18.2–3.
- 8 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 19.2.
- 9 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 19.7.
- 10 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 15.8.
- 11 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 15.7–8.
- 12 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 20.2.
- 13 Gill, *The Structured Self*, 12–13.
- 14 Plutarch, *Advice about Keeping Well* 122e. Translation from Plutarch, *Moralia*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt and W. C. Helmbold, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 2:219.
- 15 Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* 146–171. Martha Craven Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 13–47.
- 16 Porphyry, *On Abstinence* 1.41,5. Translation from Porphyry, *Select Works of Porphyry Containing His Four Books on Abstinence from Animal Food; His Treatise on the Homeric Cave of the Nymphs; and His Auxiliaries to the Perception of Intelligible Natures*, trans. Thomas Taylor (London: T. Rodd, 1823).
- 17 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 19.3.
- 18 He may have in mind someone like Hegesias (c. 300 B.C.E.), who argued that the insensibility of death was a greater good than life because pain necessarily outweighed pleasure. He famously recommended death over life as a result of life’s inability to actually produce pleasure. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 2.86, 93–95; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*. 1.83–84; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 3.2.9.
- 19 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 15.7
- 20 In his discussion of justice, he notes the categories used by Aristotle, “that which is equal according to dessert,” and “that which is proportionally equal.” Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 22.5; Aristotle, *Politics* 5.1.2; 5.1.12 (1301a26, 1301b31).
- 21 Plutarch, *On Stoic Self-contradictions* 1034c; Arnim, *SVF*, I, 20; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 7.126.
- 22 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 22.2–5.
- 23 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 2.3.
- 24 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 15.3.

- 25 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 10.2; 11.1; 25.3; 25.3.
- 26 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 3.2.
- 27 Aetius, *Placita* 1.9.6. Pseudo-Justin, however, attributes this view to Plato. Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 6.1–17.
- 28 Schoedel, *Athenagoras*, 95, n1. For similar catalogues, see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* II.14.2; Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 6.1–17; Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 5.7; Galen, *Of the Natural Faculties* 1.6.
- 29 The treatment of the issues of “being and becoming” is central to the *Plea* as well, taking part in the generally Platonic concern with this topic. Rankin, *Athenagoras*, 51–53.
- 30 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 7.2. Marcovich provides a new text-critical reconstruction of this passage: “the four (basic) parts of the body [blood, phlegm, bile, breath] which receive food in order to remain what they are, do not change along with flesh and fat.” Trans. Marcovich, *De Resurrectione*, 10. Marcovich’s reconstruction is tempting, but I am not convinced that it works. In this reading, the “four parts,” or humors, are described as receiving food, but not changing. Yet, this view not only is strange in an ancient context since the humors were thought to change, but also contradicts Athenagoras’s earlier description of the humors. In 7.1, he explains that the humoral transformations of wet, dry, hot, and cold will not arise in the resurrection, distinguishing the “parts” from blood, phlegm, bile, and breath, which “will make no further contribution to life.” Marvovich’s reconstruction would render these humors as “parts,” which Athenagoras earlier denies, and would suggest that they do not change, while Athenagoras earlier says they do change, which is why they will not be resurrected.
- 31 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 7.3.
- 32 For other uses of this term, see Josephus, *Antiquities* 7.343; 1 Thess 2:7; Eph 5:29.
- 33 Quoted in Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 38. Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals* 1.19.727a11–15; *The History of Animals* 7.10.587b32–588a2. Cf. HA 3.20.521b7; GA 4.4.771a4ff.
- 34 Soranus, *Gynecology* 1.35; 3.7–9. Cf. Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals* 746b27–29.
- 35 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 7.2.
- 36 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 12.7.
- 37 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 12.8.
- 38 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 12.9.
- 39 NHC II, 3:68,29–37. Translation from Meyer and Funk, *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*.
- 40 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 16.4.
- 41 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 17.1.
- 42 The problem that animals eating human flesh created for the resurrection had been around since at least the early 130s. *Apocalypse of Peter* 4. The problem appears in other texts, including Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Dead* 32. Origen discusses the problem of humans eating animals that have eaten humans in Methodius’s epitome *On the Resurrection* 1.20–24. Pouderon situates this argument in the context of Galenic medicine. Bernard Pouderon, “La chaîne alimentaire chez Athénagore: Confrontation de sa théorie digestive avec la science médicale de son temps,” *Orpheus* N.S. 9 (1988).
- 43 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 4.1–2.
- 44 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 4.3. For accounts of these instances, see Josephus, *War of the Jews* 6.199–219 (cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.6.1–7.6).
- 45 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 4.4.
- 46 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 3.3. Cf. Methodius, *On the Resurrection* 1.20.4; 2.26.2–5.

- 47 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 5.1.
- 48 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 5.1–3.
- 49 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 6.1–2.
- 50 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 7.1.
- 51 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 8.3.
- 52 Galen, *On the Natural Faculties* 1.6.
- 53 Galen recounts these, *On the Natural Faculties* 1.3.
- 54 Flemming, *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women*, 96.
- 55 Galen, *On the Elements According to Hippocrates* I.469–470. Cf. R. J. Hankinson, “Philosophy of Nature,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Galen*, ed. R. J. Hankinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 213–217.
- 56 Hankinson, “Philosophy of Nature,” 219.
- 57 Galen, *On the Elements of Nature*, 1.6.
- 58 Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 26.
- 59 Quoted in Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 28.
- 60 King, *Hippocrates’ Woman*, 33.
- 61 King, *Hippocrates’ Woman*, 28–31; Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 4–5.
- 62 King, *Hippocrates’ Woman*, 36–37.
- 63 King, *The One-Sex Body on Trial*, 43–48.
- 64 Flemming, *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women*, 117.
- 65 Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts*, 14.6
- 66 Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts*, 14.6 (II, 296–297).
- 67 Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 26, 27.
- 68 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 21.8.
- 69 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 23.2. Missing from this list are the commandments to worship God alone, not make idols, refrain from taking the Lord’s name in vain, observe the Sabbath, and not lie.
- 70 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 23.4.
- 71 See the discussion of necessary and unnecessary desire in Chapter 1 on pseudo-Justin.
- 72 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 18.4.
- 73 Athenagoras takes a similar view in *Plea* 33.1–3.
- 74 Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 18.5. This notion of a symmetrical relationship between soul and body may derive from Plato. Rankin, *Athenagoras*, 174–175.

“AS A BRIDEGROOM WITH A BRIDE”

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*

By now, the problematics early Christians faced in articulating the resurrection will be familiar to readers. How can the resurrected substance be the “same” person, but also different so as to render it worthy of heavenly existence? What is the relationship between the body and sexual desires and acts? Like the other early Christians discussed so far, Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons, attempts to separate the categories of male and female from the realm of sexual desire, sexual acts, and reproductive capacities. He also begins to link arguments about the resurrection to broader topics such as Christology, salvation, and hermeneutics. Much of Irenaeus’s discussion of the resurrection is in the fifth book of his massive heresiological undertaking *Against the Heresies*, or “The Refutation and Overthrow of the Knowledge [Gnosis] Falsely So Called.”¹ It is likely that Irenaeus wrote this section of *Against the Heresies* in Lyons sometime before 189 C.E. As one of the most famous and influential early Christian thinkers in both his own day and the period following his death, his writings were widely read.²

At first glance, Irenaeus does not offer a radically different perspective on the resurrection of the parts than what we have seen in previous chapters. Irenaeus sees the continuity between the mortal and resurrected bodies in sharing the same parts, such that “in these parts we served sin and bore the fruit of death, with these same parts he wants us to serve righteousness, in order that we bear the fruit of life.”³ The terms in which he describes this continuity, however, tend to collapse the distinctions between the markings of sexual identity and sexual function. In the process, the instabilities inherent in separating the two become more manifest. The disarticulation of sexual difference from sexual desires and sexual acts cannot always be maintained, running aground on the conflicting ways in which sexuality is evaluated. Sexuality is both that which distances humans from the divine in the mortal realm, but also establishes the hierarchy between them in the resurrected realm.

This conflict affects male characters through their association with the feminine substance of flesh. In Irenaeus’s account of salvation, the sexual roles of males and females, in fact, become the site at which sexual differences are most obscure. God’s penetration of believers “as a bridegroom with a bride,” both male and

female, and Christ’s nurturing capacities, figured in explicitly feminine terms, frustrate any attempt to distinguish male and female with reference to penetration, fertility, or virginity. The excess of the feminine flesh spills over to the male.

Creation and Resurrection

For Irenaeus, the resurrection is the full flowering of human potential.⁴ In this way, he differs from pseudo-Justin and the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* who see the resurrection, as a model for human behavior in the present. He also departs from Athenagoras, who sees the resurrection as the guarantee of justice and the motive for ethical human behavior. In framing the resurrection as the fulfillment of human potential, Irenaeus has to explain why we do not yet live in that condition. Sexual desire and procreation are an important symbol of this differing status between the mortal and immortal realms. Consequently, Irenaeus is conflicted about the place of sexual renunciation and virginity in mortal life.⁵ The conflict between the ideal human body and the mortal body humans dwell in in the present becomes a cosmological question. For Irenaeus, scripture offers a narrative to explain the arc of human becoming with resurrection as the final state.

More than any of the authors discussed in previous chapters, Irenaeus seeks to authorize his understanding of the resurrected body by appeal to scriptural authority, rather than philosophical or medical discourse. His reading of Genesis 1 and 2 is closely connected with his reading of Paul, especially, “As in Adam all shall die, so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:22). Irenaeus thus builds his account of salvation and bodily resurrection on the typological parallels between Christ and Adam.⁶ He depicts Adam as an unfinished type of Christ, suggesting that the creation is still ongoing, or at least that it was not culminated until Christ.⁷ In the garden, Adam possessed the spirit until he lost it through disobedience, forgoing the “robe of sanctity which I [Adam] had from the spirit.”⁸ The flesh that humans possess now is less than this perfect flesh, or the “robe of sanctity,” something that falls short of its potential. However, the creation of this imperfect flesh was part of a process; the flesh was not meant to be perfected fully in Adam. Adam was simply the “psychic” human, not yet the “spiritual” human who is Christ.⁹

Both male characters, the prelapsarian Adam and Christ, point to the characteristics of the resurrected body in their prefiguration of sinless flesh. The resurrected body recapitulates the pristine human nature from the garden, in that it is in the “image and likeness” of God (Gen 1:28).¹⁰ Just as the body of Adam anticipates the resurrected flesh, the sinless flesh of Christ shows the possibility of a resurrected body. Adam was created in sinless flesh, but fell into sin.¹¹ Only Jesus Christ was able to reach the *telos* of the creation in the “image and likeness” of God, making it available once again to humankind.¹²

Irenaeus spots a new problem that the other treatises had not yet confronted. If the resurrection is a better version of the human being, why did God not

create it to begin with? What is the point of the mortal body at all? His answer goes back to creation to provide a narrative. The temporal distance between Christ and Adam suggests that human growth is a part of the process of creation itself. One must act in righteousness to recover what was originally given, but then lost: “if they observe with diligence and receive the word of God just as a graft, they will arrive at the pristine human nature—that which was made according to the ‘image and likeness’ of God.”¹³ This final image and likeness are attained through development made possible by Christ. Christ offers a model of the adult male, in contrast to the infantile Adam, who is in full possession of these qualities.

Virginity and Salvation

If Christ’s male flesh without sin represents the fullness of the image and likeness of God, Irenaeus argues, the typological role of women is to signify the importance of obedience. The implicit instantiation of a gender hierarchy is one aspect of the role that Mary plays in this account. Just as the text contrasts the innocence of Adam with the maturity of Christ, it contrasts Eve’s disobedience with the obedience of Mary. And in these terms, Mary and Eve also illustrate the difference between eschatological and protological virginity. Irenaeus shows that virginity itself is not enough to secure purity; one must be obedient in other ways. Mary and Eve exemplify these two types of virginity:¹⁴

But Eve was disobedient. For she did not obey while she was still a virgin. Just as she who indeed had a husband, Adam, but nevertheless was still a virgin ... having become disobedient, came to be the cause of death both for herself and for the entire human race; so Mary, having a husband already designated but nevertheless a virgin, was obedient, and came to be the cause of salvation both for herself and for the entire human race.¹⁵

The focus on Mary and Eve signals a qualitatively different kind of understanding of God’s commands. In parallel with the Adam–Christ typology, Mary represents a more responsible version of Eve in the same way that Christ is a more mature Adam. Eve’s virginity alone is not enough for righteousness, since it must also be coupled with Mary’s obedience.

The Mary–Eve typology is not just about different kinds of virginity, but also about different soteriological effects. Eve’s unruly sexuality is contrasted with Mary’s example for their effect on humanity as a whole. In Irenaeus’s account, the virgin Eve ties the knot of sin, while the Virgin Mary unties it.¹⁶ In Mary’s virginity, she obeys and produces life:

And just as that one [Eve] was seduced so that she was disobedient to God, so also this one [Mary] was persuaded to be obedient to God, in

order that the virgin Mary might become the advocate of the virgin Eve. And just as the human race was bound to death through a virgin, it was set free through a virgin, the disobedience of a virgin having been balanced by an equal scale through virginal obedience.¹⁷

Eve’s sexualized seduction into disobedience is countered by Mary’s chaste obedience. Mary has become an “advocate” for Eve, paralleling Mary’s soteriological efficacy with Christ’s. The text goes even further, indicating that “just as the human race was bound to death through a virgin, it was set free through a virgin.”

We should not be surprised that the concept of “virginity” takes specifically feminine forms, since, for Irenaeus, the concept itself is definitionally female. Irenaeus reserves the term “virgin” exclusively for females, whether Eve, Mary, or the Earth. This usage is not unique to Irenaeus. Consider, for example, that in Achilles Tatius’s erotic novel *The Adventures of Leucippe and Clitophon*, which also dates to the second century, Clitophon says: “I have imitated your virginity, if there be a male equivalent of virginity.”¹⁸ It is equally true that other ancient authors explicitly describe men as virgins.¹⁹ Pseudo-Justin uses the term “virgins” to refer explicitly to males.²⁰ Tertullian also speaks of male virgins as a distinct class from female virgins.²¹ Soranus recommends that virginity is healthful for both males and females.²² Nevertheless, where virginity is conceived in physiological terms to refer to persons who have not been penetrated, there seems to have been some resistance to describing men as virgins.

In any case, Irenaeus avoids the term “virgin” for Adam and Christ. Instead, Irenaeus refers to a pristine nature (*natura*) that is corrupted after the apostasy. Even so, the term that Irenaeus uses to describe both Adam and Eve in the garden is the term attributed to female virgins: an “intact nature.” He explains, “they were at that time keeping their nature [*natura*] intact ... [having] no thought or imagining of evil things.”²³ When Irenaeus says that Adam and Eve were “keeping their nature intact,” he recalls his reference to Adam’s “pristine human nature” in the garden. This “pristine human nature” is “that which was made according to the ‘image and likeness’ of God.”²⁴ Talk of Adam’s pure, pristine, and intact nature before the apostasy thus has explicit parallels to Eve’s virginity, and connects virginity to the image and likeness fulfilled by Christ.

Protological Virginity and the Place of Sexual Desire

Adam’s nature was pristine during the period in which he was in the image and likeness of God, the time during which he lacked lustful desire, in a state of innocence. At times, Irenaeus seems to argue that Adam and Eve were physically children in order to explain their lack of carnal knowledge and practice. He seeks to clarify how it is that God commanded Adam and Eve to reproduce, yet they remained virgins: “because having been created just a little bit before, they did not have an understanding of the generation of children. For it

was necessary that they first grow up [*adolescere*] and then accordingly multiply.”²⁵ Adam and Eve’s immaturity made reproduction impossible. According to this interpretation, they only reached maturity upon leaving the garden. At other moments, however, Irenaeus suggests that they were not *actually* children, but only lived chastely “after the manner of children.”²⁶

The exit from the garden put humanity on a different course. Since the fall, humanity finds itself on the path toward God’s image, as realized in Christ. Sexual desire and reproduction are a part of this path. This narrative of growth accounts for sexual desires and reproduction as in accordance with the command to multiply and replenish, but there remains a significant gap between obedience to that command and the virginal exempla who are free from such fleshiness: Adam and Eve, Mary and Christ, and ultimately the resurrected person in the flesh.

Irenaeus’s attitude toward sexual desires, sexual acts and reproduction is notably more complex than has been traditionally understood. Many scholars have suggested that Irenaeus lacks or rejects ascetic tendencies with respect to sexuality.²⁷ Irenaeus does consider sexuality to be a key component of human growth and development, but this does not mean that he holds a positive view of sexuality. On the one hand, he upholds the commandment to “multiply and replenish” as approval for reproduction.²⁸ On the other, he praises virginity in the paradigmatic figures of Adam, Eve, Mary and Christ, and he imagines the resurrection as a time free from sexual desires, sexual acts, and reproduction. For Irenaeus, at both ends of the temporal spectrum, virginity is the state in which human beings live. Mortality punctures and interrupts the ideal from beginning to end. It is during the exceptional period, and only during this exceptional period, that God allows for sexuality. Irenaeus sees sexuality as a paradigmatically mortal phenomenon, the thing that most clearly distinguishes mortality from immortality.

And that is where the gender trouble begins. In his account of bodily resurrection, Irenaeus needs to preserve obedience to the command of procreation, but also to eliminate sexual desire and reproduction from the framework of typological connections between Adam and Eve and Mary and Christ. Irenaeus draws them into his own recapitulative framework. As the body of Adam anticipates the resurrected body, so also the sinless flesh of Christ shows the possibility of a resurrected flesh. Adam was created in this model, but lost it. Sexual desire and reproduction in the garden would destroy the symmetry of Irenaeus’s schema of recapitulation and contaminate the redeemed body with lust and sin. This conflicting evaluation of sexual desires and practices seeps into his account of salvation.

Flesh and Sin

As we have seen, in one way or another, second-century writers who confronted the problem of the role of the genital parts in bodily resurrection

found ways to draw a distinction between two different kinds of flesh: one merely contingent, mortal, and beset by sin, and the other essential to the identity of the person, redeemed in resurrection, and purified of all the sins associated with the other kind of flesh. Irenaeus makes a similar distinction based on his reluctant acceptance of sexual desires and practices in mortality.

In his account of the differences between mortal and resurrected flesh, Irenaeus turns to Paul. For Irenaeus, no text is more important on this issue than 1 Corinthians 15:50: “flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” No passage was more troublesome to defenders of the resurrection of the flesh than this one. Irenaeus cites this passage 12 different times in *Against the Heresies*, three times more than any other passage of scripture, devoting Chapters 9 to 14 of Book Five to its exposition.²⁹ Pseudo-Justin and Athenagoras hardly engage Paul in their defenses of bodily resurrection, perhaps because, as Irenaeus notes, “all heretics” use this passage “to point out that the handiwork of God is not saved.”³⁰ But Irenaeus argues that his opponents are mistaken when they say that 1 Corinthians 15:50 “refers to the flesh proper, and not to fleshly works.”³¹

Flesh is not, it turns out, a single thing. The “flesh” signified in Irenaeus’s reading of 1 Corinthians 15:50 is polysemous. In Irenaeus’s interpretation, Paul makes a distinction between what he calls the “substance” (*substantiam*) and the “qualities” (*qualitatem*) of the flesh and of the spirit.³² This distinction allows him to denigrate the flesh as a quality, but to tolerate it as a substance. That is, the qualities of flesh, such as desire, corruption, and weakness, can be separated from the actual substance of the flesh so that neither redeemed nor prelapsarian flesh possesses those qualities. The fleshly qualities of sexual desires and acts are not inherent to the flesh in its original and final state.

The substance/quality distinction allows Irenaeus to reconcile all of Paul’s negative evaluations of the flesh with the resurrection of the flesh as substance.³³ For Irenaeus, the works and qualities of the flesh must be eliminated from the substance of flesh. This interpretive move reveals Irenaeus’s double-mindedness about the flesh.³⁴ As opposed to fleshly flesh, this non-fleshly flesh can be redeemed. Only the non-fleshly flesh inherits (or, rather, is inherited by) the Kingdom of God.³⁵ By purging all that is fleshly from the flesh, including sexual desire, the resurrected body is able to receive salvation.

Christ’s flesh points out how the resurrected flesh is different with respect to sexual desires and sexual acts. Irenaeus constantly guards against the implication that the flesh of Jesus was in any way fleshly, because his soteriology requires him to claim that Jesus did not sin. Rather, Christ’s flesh was more akin to resurrected flesh, the kind of flesh that is pure and free from desires. Irenaeus explains this difference: “If therefore someone says that according to this the flesh of the Lord is different from our flesh, since he did not sin, ‘nor was any deceit found in his’ soul [1 Pet 2:22], while we are sinners, he speaks correctly. But if he adds that the flesh of the Lord is another substance, the words [of the Apostle] concerning the reconciliation will not agree with him.”³⁶ This

concession that the flesh of the Lord is not different with respect to substance, but with respect to whether it has committed sins, is the Christological anchor for Irenaeus’s view of the resurrection.

The distinction between the substance and the quality of the flesh thus becomes the hermeneutical key for Irenaeus’s reading of Paul. Such a philosophical distinction can be found in Aristotle, but Irenaeus seems to derive this idea from Stoic discussions.³⁷ In the Stoic view, the *Logos* is the active principle that operates on passive material. For Irenaeus, this means that flesh is an entirely passive substance that can manifest either the qualities of fleshiness or the qualities of spirit.

The flesh, he argues, is competitively situated against the spirit in a battle for the soul.³⁸ In order for the flesh to receive salvation, it must submit to the spirit. This is because

the complete person is composed out of three things, which I have already shown, flesh, soul, and spirit. One of these saves and forms the person, which is the spirit, and another is saved and is formed, which is the flesh, and the other in between these two, which is the soul, which sometimes follows the spirit, it is raised up by it, and sometimes it sympathizes with the flesh, and falls into earthly desires.³⁹

Here, the distinction between substance and quality is not entirely clear. The soul chooses to follow one substance or the other—spirit or flesh.⁴⁰ When the soul follows the flesh, it falls into “earthly desires.” The flesh by itself is subject to these desires, but with the “spirit,” it is able to rise above them. This tripartite view of the human introduces the spirit as an active salvific character that can transform the passive flesh.

Irenaeus’s association of activity with the spirit and passivity with the flesh utilizes a gendered hierarchy. This framework codes the body’s materiality as feminine, and the spirit as masculine.⁴¹ If spirit is masculine and the flesh is feminine, and it is “spiritual actions” that “vivify a person,” then the goal is to subdue and eventually to eliminate the “feminine” qualities of the flesh. Philo’s discussion of virtue exhibits this understanding: “For progress [toward virtue] is indeed nothing else than the giving up of the female gender by changing into the male, since the female gender is material, passive, corporeal, and sense-perceptible, while the male is active, rational, incorporeal, and more akin to mind and thought.”⁴² Rather than the cooperative relationship between body and soul found in the writings of pseudo-Justin or Athenagoras, Irenaeus’s view of the sexual hierarchy similarly defines his understanding of the relationship between the body and soul.

For Irenaeus, Paul’s multivalent usage of the term “flesh” signifies how the resurrection of the flesh functions as an exhortation to moral behavior and righteous works in mortal life. We live in the flesh, but are not of it. The question of how to interpret the claim that “flesh and blood shall not inherit

the kingdom of God” is not simply exegetical, but rather a wrangling over the value of the works of the flesh and the attainment of virtue in the flesh. The flesh can perform either the works of death or the works of life.⁴³ Irenaeus’s interpretation emphasizes the “fruit of the works” of the flesh as that which enables it to receive salvation. He says that it is not the substance of the flesh, but “spiritual actions” that “vivify a person.”⁴⁴ Fleshiness is associated with sexual desire: “Away with the desires of the flesh, which bring death to humans!”⁴⁵ The spirit enters one’s life through “faith and a chaste manner of life.”⁴⁶ This chastity is figured in several paradigms for ideal sexual practice, including the virginity of the prelapsarian garden and resurrection. The ideal for the image and likeness of God are the males Adam and Christ, and the ideal for virtue is the masculine spirit. Both seek to tame the feminine flesh.

Feminine Flesh

In his account of the goodness of the flesh, Irenaeus weaves together the incarnation of Christ with an exegetical treatment of Genesis and Paul to demonstrate how the flesh (and specifically what kind of flesh) can be saved.⁴⁷ To defend the resurrection of the bodily parts is to defend God’s creation. He relates the creation, Christ’s incarnation, Mary’s virginity, and the final resurrection into one economy of salvation, connected through his distinctive doctrine of recapitulation.

Irenaeus creates a new problem with his gendered associations of masculine virtue and male bodies composed of female flesh. The problem is that the flesh as a substance, not just its qualities, continues to be feminine. The terms in which Irenaeus defends the resurrection of the flesh result in and from a feminization of all humanity, males as well as females, and collapse gender distinctions even as they allow Irenaeus to defend the purity and innocence of resurrected flesh. In the hierarchy of male and female, spirit and flesh, the original basis of fleshly creation is feminine materiality. Christ’s birth from a virgin is critical to his identity. He explains, “Just as through ‘the disobedience of one man,’ who was originally made of untilled earth, ‘many were made sinners’ and lost life; so it was necessary that through ‘the obedience of one man,’ who was originally born from a virgin, ‘many are justified’ [Rom 5:19] and receive salvation.”⁴⁸ Irenaeus sees Mary’s role as comparable to that of the “untilled earth” used in the creation of Adam.⁴⁹ Mary’s virginity not only parallels Eve’s deficient virginity, but also the virgin soil from which Adam was created. Her “pure womb which regenerates men unto God, and which He Himself made pure” recapitulates the earth from which Adam was formed.⁵⁰ In this symbolic representation, the virgin female, like the earth, is crude and unplanted.⁵¹ Creation occurs when the divine male inserts himself into this virginal territory and provides form to the matter. Irenaeus extends the Pauline parallel between Christ and Adam by adding an additional connection between their formation from female virginal territory.⁵²

The feminine purity of the earth out of which Adam was formed constitutes a critical feature in Irenaeus’s system. He emphasizes the virginal status of the earth, which, according to Genesis 2:5, remained unpenetrated by plant, rain, or agricultural activity:

From where then was the substance of the first-formed? Out of the will and wisdom of God and out of virgin earth: “for God did not bring about rain,” says Scripture, before a human had been created, “and there was no human to work the earth” [Gen 2:5]. Therefore out of this earth, while it was still virgin, “God took dirt from the earth and formed a human,” the beginning of humanity.⁵³

A “virgin” earth functions to fend off criticisms of the low quality of the “dirt” as a substance from which humans are made.⁵⁴ This virginal soil is feminized in two ways: it is virginal in the sense that it is unpenetrated, and it is also potently fertile.⁵⁵ The conceptualization of virginity as what is “untilled” describes female bodies, since it relies on a logic of penetration. As Benjamin Dunning has argued, this same feminine logic of virginity also applies to the fertility that Mary and the earth possess.⁵⁶ However, that logic applies to both males and to females. Irenaeus does not restrict the qualities of being both unpenetrated and fertile to Mary and the earth alone. Irenaeus’s commitment to the flesh as a substance causes the femininity of the flesh itself to spill over to males as well.

Subversive Sexes

The passivity of the feminine flesh ends up in an erotic relationship with the spirit. While Irenaeus depicts the sexual parts as free from sexuality in their virginal states at the creation and in the resurrection, he nevertheless uses sexual and reproductive language to frame the ideal divine–human relationship. Even in the absence of sexual acts in the divine realm, the logic and symbolic significance of sexual intercourse and reproduction persist in specifically feminine forms. All human bodies are depicted as penetrated by God, and Christ’s body itself is presented in feminized terms. Though Irenaeus has a sense of sexual intactness that applies to men and women, he also imagines both as equally penetrated by God in the process of purifying the flesh. The sexual relationship is thus the prototype for the relationship between God and humanity.

Irenaeus’s imagery of the church as bride and the Lord as bridegroom defines the status of human and divine. He describes the spirit as penetrating and purifying the virginal believer: “For this reason he desires the temple [of the flesh] to be pure, that the spirit of God may delight in it, as a bridegroom with a bride.”⁵⁷ God desires a virginal flesh in the same way that a bridegroom desires the virginal flesh of the bride. This is not the mystical union of the soul with God, the erotic embrace of later Christian thinkers, but a specific relationship God has with the flesh. Irenaeus continues this analogy elsewhere as a

typology. Citing Paul, when the “unbelieving wife is sanctified through her husband” (1 Cor 7:14b), Irenaeus makes the case for sanctifying intercourse as a typological trope for the relationship between the spirit and humanity.⁵⁸ Irenaeus quotes only the part of the passage where the male sanctifies the female and omits the part where the female also sanctifies the male. All of the types he cites are males sanctifying females through intercourse. He points to the harlot wife of Hosea, as well as Rahab, as symbols of the relationship to the divine: “God will take pleasure to receive a Church which shall be sanctified by intercourse [*communicatione*] with His Son, just as that woman was sanctified by intercourse [*communicatione*] with the prophet.” He continues: “that which had been done in type through his actions by the prophet, the Apostle demonstrates to have been done truly by Christ in the Church. Thus, too, did Moses also take to wife an Ethiopian woman, whom he thus made Israelitish, prefiguring that the wild olive tree is grafted into the cultivated olive, and participates in its fatness (Rom 9–11).”⁵⁹ Here, participation, one of the central terms used to describe the interaction of the flesh and the spirit, is compared typologically to the intercourse between Hosea and the prostitute and Moses and his Egyptian wife.⁶⁰

For Irenaeus, Paul taught what Moses and Hosea already had exemplified—that the penetration by a more righteous spouse sanctifies the penetrated partner. God’s penetration of humans, whether male or female, changes their status from impure to pure. As such, God’s masculine spirit acts upon the feminized bodies of the church and believers, and in doing so sanctifies the lowly flesh. Both the earth and Mary remain virginal after God penetrates them to create life. In the same way, God is able to penetrate and purify all believers. He delights in his virgins with the spirit, and in so doing gives them life.

Just as intactness and divine penetration apply to both males and females, so also does the paradoxical state of virginal fecundity. Christ is a potent figure in Irenaeus’s conceptualizations, as he who not only brings life, but also sustains it. When Christ takes on the feminine substance of the flesh, he also takes on his role as feminine nurturer:

And because of this, us being as infants, he who was the perfect bread of the Father offered Himself to us as milk, when He appeared as a human, in order that we, being nourished, as it were, from the breast of his flesh, and having, by such milk nourishment, become accustomed to eat and drink the Word of God, may be able also to contain in ourselves the Bread of immortality, which is the spirit of the Father.⁶¹

Here, Irenaeus imagines human beings breastfeeding from Christ as infants in order to grow into the fullness of the Word.⁶² The description “the breast of his flesh” once again draws on the gendered language of the flesh itself as feminine. Christ’s incarnation is a breast on which humanity can suckle until they are able to partake of the spirit of the Father. The flesh breast acts as a

sort of bridge that enables one to cross to fuller glory from flesh to spirit. The motherly “breast of his flesh” is for children, as yet unable to handle the bread of the spirit of the Father. The mother provides the milk of the Word of flesh, while the Father provides the bread of the spirit. Here, Christ is the ambiguously gendered male who symbolically takes the place of the mother figure by assuming the feminine flesh.

Irenaeus continues the motherly image of Christ when he speaks of spiritual nourishment for human bodies. In another description, Christ is not the milk, but the Eucharistic bread. Here, one moves from figurative nourishment on the Word to literal nourishment on the Eucharistic bread. The believer feasts on the body of the Lord, slowly transforming the body of the believer into a resurrected body:

Then again, how can they [the heretics] say that the flesh, which is nourished with the body of the Lord and with His blood, goes to corruption, and does not partake of life? But our opinion is in accordance with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn establishes our opinion. For we offer to Him His own, announcing consistently the intercourse [*communicationem*] and union of the flesh and spirit. For the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity.⁶³

Turning Athenagoras’s chain consumption defense on its head, Irenaeus suggests that the consumption of the flesh of Christ transforms mortal flesh into something else. The specification that the bread “is produced from the earth” recalls the connection to Adam’s flesh, and therefore the flesh in general. What is produced from the earth, whether bread or flesh, is also sanctified and transformed by combining the “two realities” of the heavenly and earthly, the flesh and the spirit in “intercourse,” the same term used above to describe God’s relationship with the believer. Rather than the digestive-medical language of assimilation, Irenaeus uses the quasi-sexual language of intercourse to explain how these two separate realities are joined.

The act of intercourse between these otherwise disparate substances is the essence of the salvific act. This was accomplished through the “communion” that Jesus Christ established between God and humans.⁶⁴ The Eucharist itself symbolizes the resurrection, as much as it also prepares the mortal body to receive it:

When, therefore, the mingled cup and the manufactured bread receives the Word of God, and is made the Eucharist of the blood and body of Christ, from which things the substance of our flesh is

increased and supported, how can they affirm that the flesh is incapable of receiving the gift of God, which is life eternal, which [flesh] is nourished from the body and blood of the Lord, and is a part of Him?—even as the blessed Apostle declares in his Epistle to the Ephesians, that “we are parts of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.”⁶⁵

Irenaeus frequently uses the analogy of becoming a part of Christ’s body by means of the spirit.⁶⁶ The nourishment that comes from the Eucharist transforms the substance of the flesh.⁶⁷ The bodies that are nourished by it, though they die and are planted in the earth, shall fructify into incorruption. For Irenaeus, Christ’s flesh as nourishment continues the comparison between Christ as a nurse whose breast provides the milk that transforms the body, even if it uses a different set of symbols. Here, the body parts for reproduction and nourishment have been stripped of sexual use, but become instead the symbolic features of divine fecundity.

Other Christians similarly saw consuming the Eucharist as the solution to 1 Corinthians 15:50. The *Gospel of Philip* makes a very similar argument that the Eucharist transforms the flesh by consuming Christ’s flesh and blood:

*Flesh [and blood shall] not inherit the kingdom [of God] (1 Cor 15:50). What is this which will not inherit? This which is on us. But what is this, too, which will inherit? It is that which belongs to Jesus and his blood. Because of this he said, He who shall not eat my flesh and drink my blood has not life in him (John 6:53) He who has received these has food and he has drink and clothing. ... It is necessary to arise in this flesh, since everything exists in it. ... In the kingdom of heaven the clothing is better than those who have put them on.*⁶⁸

This author argues that the flesh and blood that we have now will not inherit the kingdom of God. Rather, drawing on a saying of Jesus in the Gospel of John, mortal flesh and blood receives “life” when it consumes the Eucharistic meal. As Irenaeus sees the outcome of the consuming of the Eucharist as becoming of the same kind of body as Jesus, so does the *Gospel of Phillip* suggest that a transformed flesh and blood will be a new kind of clothing, different from this mortal kind, in order to inherit the Kingdom of God.

Irenaeus ultimately offers conflicting views about sexual desires and reproductions in his account of Adam, Eve, Christ, Mary, and the mortal and resurrected flesh. The human being neither imitates the perfect, as in the work of pseudo-Justin and the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, nor behaves in light of the coming judgment, as Athenagoras claims. Rather, for Irenaeus, the human being grows into its exalted nature. In his account, the nature of human potential is differentiated for male and female. The creation of Adam and Eve functions as a central episode in Irenaeus’s understanding of the world, and hierarchical sexual

difference is part of that created order. Christ and Mary also function as a sexually differentiated pair, not for the purpose of creation, but rather for the salvation of humanity. Thus, while Irenaeus reluctantly considers sexual desires and practices to be a necessary part of mortality, he argues that the differences between males and females are not temporal and temporary. Instead, they are features of the states of prelapsarian innocence and ultimate redemption and are conceptualized typologically in terms of the virginity of Eve and of Mary.

The terms in which Irenaeus explains the nature and role of the flesh in resurrection, however, blur the boundaries between male and female. Penetration and procreation are paradigmatic for the relationship between God and all of humanity. As Irenaeus discusses the purity of Adam and Christ, and the virgins Eve and Mary, the paradoxes of spiritual penetration and fecundity accompany all of these bodies. Virginity, sexual continence, and the flesh itself rely on feminized depictions of the body as penetrable and fertile. These bodies are innocent in the sense that they are without desire, but at the same time the spirit of God penetrates them. Irenaeus’s language relies upon a feminizing terminology to create the view of a submissive flesh, submissive and obedient to the commands of God. Only such a feminized flesh can be penetrated by God’s spirit so that he may delight in it. The maleness and femaleness of such penetrated and fecund bodies destabilize the notion of sexual difference that Irenaeus otherwise hopes to maintain.

Notes

- 1 Adelin Rousseau, Louis Doutreleau, and Charles Mercier, eds., Irenaeus: *Adversus Haereses* V, 2 vols, vol. 2, Sources Chrétiennes (Paris: Cerf, 1969). The critical edition from the Sources Chrétiennes (SC) is used for the Latin, Greek fragments, and Greek reconstruction. For Irenaeus’s other text, the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (hereafter *Epid.*), the SC critical edition is used for the Latin and Greek reconstructions, and translation of the Armenian. Adelin Rousseau, ed., *Irenaeus: Démonstration De La Prédication Apostolique*, Sources Chrétiennes 406 (Paris: Cerf, 1995).
- 2 *Oxyrynchus Papyri* 3.405, the oldest fragment of the text is already before the end of the second century.
- 3 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.14.4 (SC 153: 192–194)
- 4 Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 211–231.
- 5 Benjamin H. Dunning, *Specters of Paul: Sexual Difference and Early Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 102–104.
- 6 J. T. Nielsen, *Adam and Christ in the Theology of Irenaeus of Lyons; An Examination of the Function of the Adam-Christ Typology in the Adversus Haereses of Irenaeus, against the Background of the Gnosticism of His Time* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1968), 68–94.
- 7 Anders-Christian Jacobsen, “The Philosophical Argument in the Teaching of Irenaeus on the Resurrection of the Flesh,” in *Studia Patristica XXXVI, Critica et Philologica, Nachleben, First Two Centuries, Tertullian to Arnobius, Egypt before Nicaea*,

- Athanasius and His Opponents* (Louvain: Peeters, 2001). M. C. Steenberg, “Children in Paradise: Adam and Eve as ‘Infants’ in Irenaeus of Lyons,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12:1 (2004): 16
- 8 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.23.5 (SC 211: 458). For important discussions of this theme, see Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu, chez saint Irénée de Lyon* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 161–162; Ysabel de Andia, *Homo Vivens: incorruptibilité et divinisation de l’homme selon Irénée de Lyons* (Paris: Etudes augustiniennes, 1986), 96–97.
 - 9 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.22.1 (SC 211: 438). These terms draw upon Pauline phraseology in 1 Cor 15.
 - 10 See also Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.12.4 (SC 153: 156)
 - 11 Steenberg, “Children in Paradise,” 16.
 - 12 Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 178. Cf. Bernard Sesbouë, *Tout récapituler dans le Christ: Christologie et sotériologie d’Irénée de Lyon* (Paris: Desclée, 2000), 85–89.
 - 13 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.10.1 (SC 153: 126). Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 79–114. Cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.Preface (SC 153: 14); IV.11.2 (SC 100: 500).
 - 14 Benjamin Dunning, “Virgin Earth, Virgin Birth: Creation, Sexual Difference, and Recapitulation in Irenaeus of Lyons,” *Journal of Religion* 89:1 (2008): 57–88.
 - 15 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.22.4 (SC 211: 440).
 - 16 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.22.2 (SC 211: 440–444).
 - 17 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.19.1 (SC 152: 248–250). Cf. Irenaeus, *Epid.* 33 (SC 406:128–130); Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.22.2 (SC 211: 440–444).
 - 18 Achilles Tatius, *The Adventures of Leucippe and Clitophon* 248–250. Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, trans. Tim Whitmarsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 91.
 - 19 *Joseph and Aseneth* 8:1; Rev 14:4.
 - 20 Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 3.8–10.
 - 21 E.g., Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins* 10.1–2.
 - 22 Soranus, *Gynecology* 1.31.
 - 23 Irenaeus, *Epid.* 14 (SC 406: 102).
 - 24 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.10.1–2 (SC 153: 122–128).
 - 25 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.22.4 (SC 211: 440).
 - 26 Irenaeus, *Epid.* 14 (SC 406: 102).
 - 27 Gustaf Wingren offers the conventional wisdom, arguing that “there is absolutely no trace of any such ascetic ethic in Irenaeus, and wherever he detects such ascetic tendencies he opposes them.” Gustaf Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation: A Study in the Biblical Theology of Irenaeus* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 211. John Behr, “Irenaeus AH 3.23.5 and the Ascetic Ideal,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 37: 4 (1993); see also Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 112.
 - 28 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.22.4 (SC 211: 440).
 - 29 Olson, *Irenaeus, the Valentinian Gnostics, and the Kingdom of God*, 94.
 - 30 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.9.1 (SC 153: 106). Tertullian concurred that Paul was the “apostle of the heretics.” Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.5. Mary Ann Donovan, *One Right Reading? A Guide to Irenaeus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), 148–151.
 - 31 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.13.3 (SC 153: 170).
 - 32 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.10.2 (SC 153: 126–128).
 - 33 In particular, Irenaeus is working with Romans 8:9–14 as an inter-text in *Against Heresies* V.10.2 (SC 153: 126–132). Further, Irenaeus quotes Galatians 5:19–22 which enumerates the “works of the flesh” and the “works of the spirit” in *Against Heresies* V.11.1 (SC 153: 132–134).

- 34 Karen King, “Social and Theological Effects of Heresiological Discourse,” in *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, eds. Eduard Iricinschi and Holger M. Zellentin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 41.
- 35 Irenaeus makes this distinction in Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.9.4 (SC 153: 116–122).
- 36 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.14.3 (SC 153: 188–190).
- 37 Andia, *Homo Vivens*, 291–293.
- 38 I have chosen not to capitalize the term “spirit.” There is a question of whether Irenaeus intends *spiritus Dei* or *spiritus homini* when he refers to the *spiritus*. This distinction is made by Irenaeus in V.6.1 “*spiritus homini aut spiritus Dei*.” The critical edition makes interpretive decisions about which is meant. Rousseau’s notes on this explain each choice. Rousseau, Doutreleau, and Mercier, *Irenaeus: Adversus Haereses* V, 226–237. Orbe, however, argues that “Ninguno de los capítulos del libro V conoce el ‘espíritu,’ riguroso constitutivo—como la carne o el alma—de la naturaleza humana.” Antonio Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo: Comentario al Libro V del “Adversus Haereses”* (Madrid; Toledo: Biblioteca de autores cristianos; Estudio teológico de San Ildefonso, 1985), I, 274. Cf. Antonio Orbe, *Antropología de San Ireneo* (Madrid: Editorial Católica, 1969), 128–131.
- 39 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.9.1–2 (SC 153: 106–110).
- 40 For this view of the human, flesh, soul, and spirit, Irenaeus cites 1 Thess 5:23, that “it is the mingling and union of all of these that effects the perfect human being.” Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.6.1 (SC 153: 78).
- 41 Elizabeth Spelman, “Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views,” *Feminist Studies* 8:1 (1982): 109–131.
- 42 Philo, *Questions and Answers on Exodus* 18. Cf. *Questions and Answers on Genesis* 2.12, 49; *The Worse Attacks the Better* 28; *On the Embassy to Gaius* 319. Richard Arthur Baer, *Philo’s Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970).
- 43 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.14.4 (SC 153: 192–194).
- 44 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.11.1 (SC 153: 134).
- 45 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.10.2 (SC 153: 132).
- 46 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.9.3 (SC 153: 114).
- 47 For detailed monographs on Irenaeus’s treatment of Gen 1–11 and the Pauline corpus, see M. C. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Rolf Noormann, *Irenäus als Paulusinterpret: Zur Rezeption und Wirkung der Paulinischen und deuteropaulinischen Briefe im Werk des Irenäus von Lyon* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994); Dunning, *Specters of Paul*, 87–123.
- 48 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.18.7 (SC 211: 368–370). Greek Fragment 27 (Theodoretus, *Eranistes* I, Floril.)
- 49 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.11.3 (SC 211: 146–148). See also Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.7.2; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 100; *Protoevangelium of James* 13.1; *Gospel of Philip*, NHC II, 3:71,16–21.
- 50 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV.33.11 (SC 100: 830).
- 51 Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 110.
- 52 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.21.10 (SC 211: 428–430). See also Irenaeus *Epid.* 32 (SC 406: 128).
- 53 Irenaeus, *Epid.* 32 (SC 406: 128).
- 54 The same point is also made in Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.21.10.
- 55 Dunning, “Virgin Earth, Virgin Birth,” 114–117.
- 56 Dunning, “Virgin Earth, Virgin Birth,” 102–104.
- 57 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.9.4 (SC 153: 116).
- 58 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV.20.12 (SC 153: 670–672).

- 59 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV.20.12 (SC 153: 670–672).
- 60 For other examples of the use of “participation” as the commingling of spirit and flesh, see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV. 6.1 (SC 153: 74); Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV. 9.2 (SC 153: 112). Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 230–231.
- 61 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV.38.1 (SC 153: 944–948).
- 62 Clement, *The Instructor* I.6; *Odes of Solomon* 19.2–4.
- 63 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV.18.5 (SC 100: 610–612).
- 64 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.18.7 (SC 211: 366).
- 65 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.2.3 (SC 153: 34).
- 66 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.2.3 (SC 153: 36–38).
- 67 Godehard Joppich, *Salus Carnis: eine Untersuchung in der Theologie des hl. Irenäus von Lyon* (Münsterschwarzach: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 1965), 77.
- 68 *Gospel of Philip*, NHC II, 3:56,32–57, 22.

FLESH AND FEMALE

Tertullian of Carthage

The writings of the prolific North African named Tertullian are the last to be considered here as he closes out the first generation of authors writing treatises on the resurrection. Ancient inheritors of Tertullian's writings largely credited him as being the first major Latin Christian thinker.¹ His geographical origins and philosophical influences differentiate his perspective from that of the other early Christian thinkers writing treatises on the resurrection. Yet, in other ways, he was deeply indebted to the Greek-speaking Christian intellectual milieu of the previous authors. His expansive vision led him to connect the resurrection more profoundly with broader issues of Christology and anthropology. A trio of his writings on the resurrection of the flesh and Christ's incarnation theorize the nature of the flesh, the soul, and the fate of the parts: *On the Flesh of Christ*, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, and *On the Soul*.² Because Tertullian believed that the resurrection of the flesh and the incarnation of Christ were intertwined, a full understanding of Tertullian's account of flesh, sexual practice, desire, and reproduction is best understood by examining these texts together, drawing upon his other works where relevant.³

For Tertullian, the body signifies sexual hierarchy in a number of ways. Tertullian, like his predecessors, wrestles with the issue of continuity and change in the resurrection; like them, he sees the parts, specifically the substantively fleshy parts, as the guarantors of identity. He asserts, "the flesh shall rise again, in every person, in its own self, in its integrity."⁴ In the resurrection, "then our parts will no longer be held to the law of death, because neither are they held to the law of transgression, from which they have been manumitted."⁵ The laws of both sin and death hold the parts in their power, but the resurrection can free them from these controls.

For Tertullian, the parts signify not only continuity of identity, but also continuity of station. Tertullian avoids the gender-bending language of Irenaeus in an attempt to root the hierarchy of men over women more securely in the hierarchy of flesh and spirit. For him, the susceptibility of the female stands in opposition to the male's openness to redemption and transformation. Tertullian's argument in defense of the flesh appears to be filled with internal contradictions. Glancy, for example, notes that for Tertullian, "flesh is at once despicable and

beloved.”⁶ Tertullian’s paradoxical praise for and disgust with the flesh is indeed notable, even if something like it appears in the other defenders of the flesh as well. The paradox resolves, however, by considering Tertullian’s different approaches to male and female flesh. What we are seeing is not a condemnation of *all* flesh, but rather the corruption of flesh coded as *female*. This is not to say that there are not also redeemed females, or corrupt males, but that, in Tertullian’s writings, the burden of corruption and the blessing of redemption are not evenly shared.

Justice and the Flesh

Tertullian is led to think about the nature of the parts and sexual difference as a consequence of his insistence on the resurrection of the “whole” person. His interest in the resurrection of the flesh—the whole flesh, including the genitals—is rooted in his interest in judgment. God’s justice is the centerpiece of Tertullian’s defense of the resurrection of the flesh. While Athenagoras suggests that justice alone cannot be a sufficient argument for the resurrection of the flesh, Tertullian has no such hesitation. He explains, “the entire cause or necessity of the resurrection, will be this, namely, the final judgment most suitable to God.”⁷ For Tertullian, judgment requires that both the soul and the flesh be judged together. If God’s judgment is complete and perfect, it must be of the complete human. Tertullian suggests that the soul and the flesh are equally culpable for the actions of the whole human being, and must be judged together.

In this argument, Tertullian imagines a symbiotic relationship between the soul and the flesh. Human identity is specifically tied to the particular relationship between soul and flesh:

We maintain that you still remain after life has passed away, and look forward to a day of judgment, and according to your merits are destined to torture or refreshment, either way for eternity. Moreover, to sustain this, your former substance must return to you, the matter and the memory of the same human being: for you could feel neither good nor evil without the faculty of feeling of the flesh; and there would be no grounds for judgment without the presentation of the very person who merits the sufferings of judgment.⁸

The emphasis on continuity and sameness is what gives the judgment its legitimacy. For the judgment to have any validity, it must include the same person, both “matter and the memory.” In particular, it must include the flesh for the suffering to actually be experienced.

His particular interest in bodily suffering, rather than bodily pleasure, is noteworthy. The emphasis on sameness extends not only to the very materials that constitute the body, but also to the memory, or the experiences, that attend them. Tertullian expects a strict continuity between the two realms. It

is for this reason that Tertullian rejects metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls. It is not that the soul must be housed in a body to be judged, but that it must be housed in the same body for justice to be served.⁹ He explains, “the reason for restoration is the inevitable judgment; it is necessary that the very same person who once existed be brought forth.”¹⁰ Otherwise, he sees a kind of injustice: “this flesh of ours should be torn by martyrdom, and another wear the crown; or, on the other hand, that this flesh of ours should wallow in uncleanness, and another receive commendation!”¹¹

Tertullian’s interest in future judgment does not involve an emphasis on ethical practice or the cultivation of the self, as was the case for Athenagoras. The philosophical virtues are not the goal here. Rather, Tertullian’s view of justice is centered on a new order of Christian empowerment. God’s kingdom, not status in the Roman kingdom, provides differential justice. Christians will benefit the most in God’s judicial system, occupying the status of the new elite, while non-Christians will be subject to the humiliation of bodily punishment. It is in this context of Christians as the beneficiaries of a new judicial system that Justin Martyr’s threat that Antoninus Pius “will not escape the coming judgment,” or the martyrs’ threats against their judges are best understood.¹² God’s kingdom does not represent a more equitable system *per se*, but rather one in which the fortunes of Christians and non-Christians will be reversed.

As Tertullian contemplates the future spectacle, he explains: “I see so many rulers, whose reception into the heavens was publicly announced, with ... their own heads groaning now in the lowest darkness ... governors of provinces, too, who persecuted the name of the Lord, in fires more fierce than those with which they raged against Christians.”¹³ Philosophers, poets, tragedians, charioteers, and wrestlers all suffer greatly in Tertullian’s rather stunning delight in their coming fiery punishments. Their status as non-Christians, as those either complicit in or directly responsible for the sufferings of Christ and Christians, warrants this extreme punishment.¹⁴ Tertullian advocates for the resurrection of soul and flesh together, ensuring this scene of social reversal to play out on the bodies of those responsible. The emphasis on judgment requires a theory of the soul that makes it inseparable from the body.

Sex and the Soul

More than any of the other authors from this period, Tertullian tightly stitches together flesh and the soul. This has certain implications for how he describes the soul. For instance, neither the soul nor the flesh has any ontological priority when it comes to determining maleness or femaleness. Reporting the vision of a female prophet, Tertullian argues that the soul actually looks like the flesh it inhabits, including all of its parts.¹⁵ Rather than implying their separability, as the author of the Nag Hammadi *Treatise on the Resurrection* believes, the correspondence of the parts in the soul and the flesh imply their

mutual interdependence in all things: “the flesh is washed so that the soul might be pure. The flesh is anointed so that the soul might be consecrated.”¹⁶

One may trace the correspondence of the soul and the flesh to their origins in conception. Tertullian claims, “the soul, inseminated in the womb at the same time as the flesh, is assigned its sex at the same time; so much so that neither of the substances is responsible in the cause of the sex.”¹⁷ The sex of the soul and the flesh form a “community,” but the process of determining which sex is selected is subject to the mystery of the reason of nature.¹⁸ Such a teaching, directed against the Stoic thought of the Christian teacher Apelles, denies the idea that the soul enters the body upon birth, positing instead that the soul and flesh are ontologically co-temporal.¹⁹ He thus rejects Athenagoras’s idea that the soul is without gender and that the body alone is the source of sexual difference.²⁰ The notion that the soul is “sexed” is unattested in other Greek and Roman writers.²¹

This close connection between flesh and the soul does not, however, relinquish the hierarchical relationship between them. Despite Tertullian’s insistence that the soul and flesh are yoked in sexual identity, the two substances are nevertheless coded in hierarchically gendered terms. The soul takes the dominant, masculine role, while the flesh takes the passive, feminine role. In his account of the separation and unity of the flesh and the soul, the flesh is persistently coded as feminine, a receptacle, as queen, priestess, and sister.²² Though Tertullian sees both soul and flesh as essential aspects of the human being, created equally at conception, soul is the stronger of the two. Tertullian locates flesh as the place of weaknesses even in the heavily contested issue of Christ’s flesh. He explains, “the possession of the two substances displayed him as human and God ... in one respect fleshly, in the other spiritual; in one sense weak in the other exceedingly strong.”²³ All of Christ’s “weak” characteristics reside in Christ’s human side, in his flesh.

In this dualistic anthropology, Tertullian worries about whether the flesh possesses agency independent from the soul. In *On the Flesh of Christ*, Tertullian adopts the view that the flesh is merely an instrument, a passive object, like a cup, that is completely subject to the will of its user.²⁴ Elsewhere, Tertullian more cautiously suggests that the body is not simply a vessel or an instrument to the soul. If that were true, then the soul alone would be responsible for all of its actions, and no injustice is committed by not including the body in the judgment.²⁵ At the same time, Tertullian does not want to suggest that the flesh possesses so much agency that it is completely independent of the soul, for in that model the soul and the flesh should be judged separately, not together.

The view of the relationship between the soul and flesh in *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* is that the two substances work together in harmony. In this latter model, the guiding image of the flesh’s relationship to the soul is not an instrument, like a cup, but rather a slave or a companion. Either way, the soul is not alone in managing life; the soul has “community with the flesh.”²⁶ The notion of the flesh’s passivity, and its status as “slave,” speak in gendered terms about the nature of the flesh, marking it as clearly not “male.” A slave

may possess an independent will, but does not use it (without the fear of punishment). Even though the flesh does not possess an independent will, it is a slave and not an instrument because “in the judgment it will be held to be a slave (even though it has no discernment of its own), having a share of that which does have discernment, not mere chattel.”²⁷ By contrast, the soul is unambiguously master.²⁸ Tertullian seeks to describe the flesh alternatively as a slave, an instrument, and also interdependent with the soul, but the soul’s responsibility as master is never relinquished. Though the precise metaphor to capture this relationship eludes him, he is never interested in establishing an equal relationship between the two substances.²⁹

In addition to the images of the soul as master and the flesh as slave, Tertullian frequently invokes marriage as a metaphor for explaining the relationship between the soul and body. Such terms also draw upon the imagery of the female as more like the flesh and the male as more like the soul. In these descriptions, the flesh is rendered as the passive object. At the end of *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, Tertullian explains the many meanings of this nuptial symbol. In one version, the soul is the bridegroom, and the flesh is the bride. In another, Christ is the bridegroom, and the soul is the bride, feminizing the soul as the follower of Christ. The flesh is the “dowry” that the soul brings to its marriage to Christ, like an “outfit,” so that the soul is not naked.³⁰ In *On the Soul*, Tertullian figures the flesh’s role in this marriage not as a material dowry, but as a slave who now serves Christ as well as the flesh.³¹ This bridal imagery serves to naturalize hierarchical differences between male and female, reinforcing the idea of the female as more fleshly, even while attempting to account for its salvation.³²

Tertullian is not simply reproducing this common discourse, but argues that it should have real effects for the hierarchy between males and females. Tertullian uses this same language of the marriage between the soul and the flesh to argue that men should not be tied to their wives, who signify the flesh, because it implicates them in fleshy things like procreation.³³ Adam and Eve demonstrate this hierarchy because they were not created separately. Eve was first a part of Adam. Tertullian admits that Adam was made in a “completer way,” and “[Eve’s] flesh was for a long time without specific form.” But because she was within Adam, “she was even then herself a living being.”³⁴ While some have attempted to see this as an affirmation of the spiritual equality between males and females, the secondary (even if partially concurrent) creation of Eve underscores the hierarchy between male and female.³⁵ That both substances, just like Adam and Eve, exist together from the beginning does not imply equality in status, only an equality in time. Even though the soul and the flesh are both created at the same time, the hierarchy between them is persistently depicted in gendered terms. The flesh occupies the symbolic place of the feminine, weak, sexual, subservient, and secondary. The flesh must be accounted for, and redeemed, but it is haunted by its symbolic place in this system.³⁶

Ambivalence and Virginit

Tertullian qualifies his commitment to the flesh to enable it to be raised in resurrection in other ways. While he wants to see bodies and souls judged together, he limits the degree of their sameness between the mortal and resurrected state. As with the other authors we have examined, Tertullian's formulation of the continuity of the parts excludes the problematic aspects of bodily existence. He lumps these aspects under the "law of transgression." Tertullian protects the resurrected flesh from the "pollutions" of sex and procreation by arguing that the disgusting "functions of the parts" will cease in their resurrected form.³⁷ Tertullian cites the heretics who pour "scorn mockingly on the natural functions of the parts, for the purpose of exposing the resurrection."³⁸ He insists that the shameful aspects of the flesh are all the more reason why they are redeemed. The "parts" are certainly inclusive of the genitals, and Tertullian, like the other authors considered so far, is quite concerned about the relationship between resurrected asexuality and mortal sexual practices. Tertullian never fully reconciles the proleptic signification of virginit with the permissibility of procreation. His primary interest, however, is not sexual ethics, but sexual hierarchy.

Tertullian's defense of the genitals in the resurrection places such parts in a context of sexual hierarchy. His opponents, he explains, characterize the flesh negatively by emphasizing its weakness and uncleanness, claiming that the flesh is "unclean from the first beginnings from the feces of the earth, uncleaner afterwards from the mire of its own semen."³⁹ His task is to explain how it is possible to be clean and pure when the flesh derives from the twin sources of muck: its nourishment in the womb and its origins in semen.⁴⁰ His solution eliminates all such female fleshiness from the resurrection, while locating the flesh as the persistent symbolic site of femaleness.

If the resurrection brings back the genitals, what purpose will they serve? In answer to this by now familiar question, Tertullian puts sexual desires and reproduction in an ambivalent place. If the flesh signifies weakness and sin, it must be transformed. Like his predecessors, Tertullian separates the fleshy parts of the body from the aspects of the resurrected flesh that he sees as problematic. For him, Paul's comparison of the resurrection to a seed demonstrates that the flesh is the "very same," only with a different glory.⁴¹ This change in glory entails the elimination of the functions of the parts—a line of argumentation that resembles pseudo-Justin's view.⁴² In Tertullian's construction of the heavenly immortal realm, sex and eating are simply no longer necessary. Sight, hearing, speech, and other bodily functions might persist because they are still necessary functions, even for immortal beings. His opponents' concerns, he says, focus on food and sex. Will the flesh, he wonders, "grumble in its intestines and be shameless with its genitals and have trouble with all its parts?"⁴³ He poses this question a second time near the end of the treatise:

What, they ask, will then be the use of the cavity of our mouth, and its rows of teeth, and the passage of the throat, and the crossroads of the stomach, and the gulf of the belly, and the entangled tissue of the intestines, when there will no longer be a place for eating and drinking? ... [In resurrection] why would we have loins, being conscious of semen, and the other genitals in both sexes, as well as the enclosures of conception, and the fountains of the breast, when sexual intercourse, and pregnancy, and the nurturing of infants shall cease? Ultimately, what will be the use of the entire body, when clearly the whole is free from use?⁴⁴

To the argument that the bodily organs have a certain teleology of function, Tertullian answers that these organs will be “liberated from their functions.”⁴⁵ Tertullian also challenges the idea that the digestive and reproductive tracts were ever intended for the single purposes, respectively, of eating and procreating. A mouth, he argues, is not just for food, but also for speech. Teeth do not only chew food, but also guard the tongue.

While the mouth enjoys a more noble teleology, the same cannot be said for the problematic “lower regions”: “There are holes in the lower regions of man and woman, in which no doubt flow sexual pleasures; but why are they not rather regarded as filters for the discharge of natural fluids? Women, moreover, have within them a place for semen to gather; but are they not for the secretion of those sanguineous tissues that their more sluggish sex is inadequate to disperse?”⁴⁶ This ancient notion that women’s bodies are cooler and unable to refine their blood explains, for Tertullian, why they menstruate. Tertullian notes that the genitals are not just for sex, but also for the “natural fluids” of defecation. Yet, it is not clear how defecation is meant to raise the status of the “lower regions” for his readers, especially since these functions too would cease in the resurrection. The tension persists in trying to find a noble purpose for these parts.

The connection of flesh to sexual practices and reproduction suggests the need to control such features of the flesh. Similar to pseudo-Justin again, Tertullian points to virgins who cease sexual functions even in this life as precursors to the resurrection. He adds that even with respect to food, there are examples that point to how these parts may cease such functions:

Even in the present life there may be cessations of the office for intestines and shameful parts [*pudenda*]. For forty days Moses and Elias fasted, being nourished upon God alone. ... We even, as we are able, excuse our mouths from food, and withdraw our sexes from intercourse. How many voluntary eunuchs there are! How many virgins married to Christ! How many, both of men and women, whom nature has made sterile, with a structure of infertile genitals! Now, if even here on earth both the functions and pleasures of our parts may

cease, with a temporary disposition, and yet there is no harm to one's health [*saluus*], how much more, when his salvation is secure ... shall we not cease to desire those things.⁴⁷

Virgins, eunuchs, and sterility, along with fasting, point to the higher order and represent what is possible for the body. The body may change and accommodate new realities in the resurrection.

The tension inherent in the discontinuity between the mortal and the resurrected realms pushed Tertullian toward sexual renunciation, though he never embraced it as fully as pseudo-Justin.⁴⁸ Tertullian sees ascetic practice as preparation for the resurrection, even while imagining that spouses will continue to be married in the resurrection.⁴⁹ Fasting and sexual renunciation imitate the resurrected body, which has no need for food or sex. Tertullian warns, "an over-fed Christian will be more necessary to bears and lions ... than to God."⁵⁰ He suggests that it may be easier to enter the gate of salvation with "slenderer flesh" because "more speedily will lighter flesh rise; longer in the sepulcher will drier flesh retain its firmness."⁵¹

The same ascetic tendency to lighten and dry out the body through fasting applies to sex as well. Tertullian extols Christian men to avoid sexual desire, and to direct their desire toward martyrdom.⁵² Tertullian draws on the common motif of the flesh as a garment when he expounds Revelation: "These are they who have not defiled their clothes with women' [Rev 3:4; 14:4]—indicating, of course, virgins and those who have become 'eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake' [Mt 19:12]. Therefore, they shall be clothed in 'white raiment' [Rev 3:5], that is, in the splendor of the virginal flesh."⁵³ Here, the character of the resurrected flesh is virginal. Virgins not only prefigure the resurrection, but are also rewarded in the resurrection with luminous flesh.

Like pseudo-Justin and Athenagoras, Tertullian engages in an explanation of "natural" and "necessary" desires to both permit and restrain certain kinds of desires in mortality. For Tertullian, this point is made in order to show how both the soul and the flesh desire together. He uses the example of food, suggesting that the soul desires food out of a "special necessity," because of its status as a "lodger" in the house of the body.⁵⁴ Alimentary desires may be natural, but what of puberty and the awakening of sexual desire? Is not sexual desire also natural? Tertullian explains that the natural state of sexual desires is actually pre-pubescent. It is at that point that "its impulse has by this time surpassed the design of nature, but now comes from its vice." Tertullian continues, "the strictly natural desire [the pre-pubescent desire] is solely for nourishment."⁵⁵ The desire for food, he concludes, is both natural and necessary, while sexual desire, the kind that arises in the soul at the point of puberty, is a deviation from nature.⁵⁶ While pseudo-Justin appealed to "survival" as the arbiter of natural desire, Tertullian appeals to the state of paradise and notes that eating, but not sexual activity, existed there. In fact, the concupiscence of the fall itself has tainted the whole human being.⁵⁷

Tertullian places desire in a contingent relationship to the flesh so as to create a flesh that is worthy of the resurrection. He further displaces desire from the flesh in his account of puberty. He explains, “the puberty of the soul coincides with that of the body.”⁵⁸ Tertullian sees puberty as affecting both the soul and the body at the same time, usually around age fourteen, but in different ways. The senses of the soul are affected, while the “parts” of the body change. The soul’s pubescent changes are decidedly more problematic for Tertullian because they introduce shame and desire, and are not simply contingent features of the flesh that can be discarded.⁵⁹ Similar to Irenaeus’s conceptualization of Adam and Eve as innocent children, Tertullian associates the fall of Adam and Eve with the onset of puberty. After puberty, sexual desires affect the eyes and the genitals. Humans then understand sexual desire, which “drives humans out of the paradise of completeness, and after that falls into other sins and unnatural delinquencies.”⁶⁰ The sexual changes, especially around desire, that the body and the soul experience in puberty are seen as “unnatural,” even though they demonstrate the interdependence of body and soul.

Despite Tertullian’s praise of virginity and his framing of sexual desire and intercourse as unnatural to the human body and soul, he does not go so far as to embrace sexual renunciation completely. He allows a certain limited form of sexual activity. As with Irenaeus, the commandment in Genesis to “multiply and replenish” presents a problem for Tertullian’s idealized virginal state of creation and resurrection. Tertullian seeks to resolve the problem by carving out a limited use of sexual practices. He departs from pseudo-Justin’s argument that mortal bodies should practice virginity in imitation of the resurrection. “It is lust which pollutes, not the marriage contract. It is the excess, not the normal state, which is shameless, since indeed this state has a blessing from God, and is blest by him: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth.’ Excess, however, has he cursed, in adulteries, in wantonness, and in prostitution.”⁶¹ Procreation may be practiced without “lust.”

Tertullian invokes Genesis as the guide for permissible behaviors. The problem with sex is not procreation—multiplying and replenishing—but with “lust,” understood as a kind of “excess” of natural sexual behavior. This sort of permissibility, however, is often complicated by Tertullian’s idealization of virginity. Tertullian’s relationship to virginity is complex and perhaps varied at different points in his career. Yet his praise for “the uppermost station of immaculate virginity” is not atypical.⁶² In any case, Tertullian’s permission for reproduction is faint at best. What Tertullian tries to do is find a way to separate sexual desires from the flesh, and he does so by looking to the infantile and paradisiacal bodies of Adam and Eve that precede and denaturalize desires from the flesh.

Penetration and Typology

The unpenetrated female body is crucial to both Tertullian’s and Irenaeus’s understanding of sexual difference. Tertullian closely follows Irenaeus on a

number of points, including the Virgin Mary and the virgin earth as centerpieces in his analysis of the flesh.⁶³ For Irenaeus, Adam and Christ, and Eve and Mary are within a recapitulative framework doing the same kinds of things, producing a balance between the beginning and the end.⁶⁴ But the parallel between Mary and Eve functions differently for Tertullian, who sees the parallel not so much as providing balance, but as providing a reversal effect, a “contrary operation”—as a comparison that emphasizes difference, not similarity.⁶⁵ In this contrast, Mary and Eve are penetrated, while Adam and Christ are not. Tertullian resists Irenaeus’s move to see Mary’s body as typologically redemptive for female flesh, preferring instead to shore up the hierarchy between males and females.⁶⁶ Penetration establishes such a hierarchy, symbolically marking females as inferior to unpenetrated males.

Tertullian’s account of the nativity manifests the hierarchy of the unpenetrated male body over the penetrated female body. While Christ’s flesh embraces the paradox of both salvation and shame, Mary’s flesh does not.⁶⁷ Mary’s flesh is the particular receptacle of the shame of the flesh, without the corresponding redemption that Christ’s maleness affords. A woman’s role in the procreative process marks her so profoundly that Tertullian even claims that Mary, Christ’s mother, emerged from the violence of birth no longer a virgin but a bride, deflowered by her own son, who “opened” her when exiting:⁶⁸

And if as a virgin she conceived, through giving birth she became a bride. For she became a bride by that same law of the opened body—such that it did not matter whether the violence was of the male let in or let out: the same sex did the unsealing. For this is the womb on account of which it is written concerning other wombs also: “Every male who throws open the womb will be called holy to the Lord”. [Luke 2:23] Truly who is really as holy as the son of holiness? Who properly has thrown open a womb, other than he who has opened what is closed? Otherwise nuptials do the opening in all cases. Therefore, that which was all the more opened is that which was all the more closed. All the more then that she ought to be called “not a virgin” rather than a virgin, becoming a mother before a bride by a sort of leap. And what more must be considered concerning this? For what reason did the apostle proclaim that the son of God was born, not from a virgin, but from a woman? He recognized the nuptial passion of the opened womb.⁶⁹

Tertullian’s text emphasizes that Christ’s flesh is just like any other flesh, because he was born from Mary just as any other child would be born (even if he was conceived differently). At the same time, Tertullian’s denial of Mary’s *postpartum* virginity secures the unique position of Christ’s virginity.⁷⁰

Tertullian emphasizes that Christ’s birth is the same as all other births, rather than a miraculous event in which Mary’s virginity persisted. Tertullian

contrasts the commonality of the birth itself with the exceptionality of Mary's virginity at the time of conception. Mary's virginity at the time of conception ensures Christ's purity, and therefore his soteriological efficacy. Tertullian explains, "he was born of a virgin for the reasons we have given in order that our regeneration be virginal—sanctified from all iniquities through Christ, who was himself a virgin, even in the flesh, in that he was the flesh of a virgin."⁷¹ Christ, then, possesses double virginity in that his own virginal flesh was produced from pure virginal flesh. Tertullian rejects Irenaeus's teaching of a salvific role for Mary. Such a move cuts off any claims of a typological valorization of a woman.⁷²

Tertullian draws a contrast between Eve and Mary in Mary's hearkening, rather than in her body. Tertullian notes that the virgin Eve listened to the serpent, while the virgin Mary listened to Gabriel,⁷³ but he also emphasizes the penetrative link between the two.⁷⁴ The ear's penetration by a "word," one into Eve and another into Mary, produces different effects—one resulting in death, and the other resulting in salvation.⁷⁵ In spite of the sexual imagery, Tertullian continues to see both Eve and Mary as virgins after this aural experience. The attempt to contrast Eve and Mary is not to suggest that Eve may have been deflowered by the "word," because Eve's virginity at the moment of aural insemination is just as important as Mary's virginity at the moment of hers. Rather, Tertullian wants to emphasize that both Eve and Mary conceived as a result of this hearing. Departing from Irenaeus on this point, there is no need for Mary to perform any salvific function.⁷⁶

The insemination that occurs from listening is not ultimately an act that compromises virginity. Rather, Tertullian suggests that Eve as well as Mary conceived before the loss of virginity. The typological contrast between them is not in the timing or the method of their penetration, but rather in the differences in their resulting offspring.⁷⁷ Mary gave birth to Christ, but, as Tertullian explains, "the devil's word afterwards became semen within [Eve] that she should conceive as an outcast, and bring forth in sorrow."⁷⁸ For Tertullian, neither Eve nor Mary's intactness is ever really in doubt after the moment that she heard either the devil or the angel.

Part of the reason that Tertullian resists framing virginity as simply a matter of penetration is that it limits sexual continence to a physical state, rather than to the interrelation of the soul and the flesh. If the problem with sexual activity were simply penetration, or even just desire of the flesh, then it could be safely contained to the realm of the flesh, leaving the soul untouched. Tertullian counters, "since the transgression which is the cause of human perdition was committed quite as much by the instigation of the soul from concupiscence as by the action of the flesh from the taste [of the fruit], it has marked the entire human with the sentence of transgression."⁷⁹ The implications of this primal transgression are hereditary, staining both the soul and the flesh. The nature of seed for Tertullian is that it passes on certain traits. In addition to the evil that is introduced to the soul later in life, there is "an antecedent, and in a certain

sense natural, evil which arises from its corrupt origin.”⁸⁰ This natural evil is passed on through the shame of regeneration. He explains, “Every soul then has its nature in Adam until it is born again in Christ; moreover, it is unclean without this regeneration; and because unclean, it is sinful, receiving shame from its conjunction with the flesh.”⁸¹ Adam communicates the “stain” to the rest of humanity.⁸² Not only is the process of birth shameful for the flesh, but the soul too is contaminated by this pollution.

For Tertullian, pollution by impure semen is as much cause for worry as penetration. Christ’s conception without semen from a mortal virgin guarantees his superior cleanliness. This cleanness from the lack of semen, “the more perfect Adam, that is Christ, more perfect by virtue of his being so untouched,” functions as a model for those who are “willing to be a eunuch in the flesh.”⁸³ At the same time that Christ is not the inheritor of sin through Adam’s seed, he is nevertheless still an inheritor of humanity. His humanity is inherited not from Adam, but from the earth from which Adam was made: “As earth was converted into this flesh of ours without the seed of a man, so also was it possible for the Word of God to take to himself the substance of the self-same flesh, without [seminal] coagulation.”⁸⁴ Just as Adam was produced without seed from a virgin, so was Christ produced without seed from a virgin.

The Wom(b)an of Flesh

Understanding the transformation of the parts in the resurrection requires understanding how such parts function in mortality. Tertullian casts negatively the reproductive functions of the flesh consistently, even when they are summoned to do certain kinds of soteriological work. The womb, for instance, is a problem in need of a solution. Nowhere is this more evident than in Tertullian’s treatment of the birth of Christ. In his larger project of defending both the flesh of Christ and the resurrection of the flesh, Tertullian turns to the nativity as the key evidence of the “verity and quality” of Christ’s flesh.⁸⁵

Tertullian sets up his own position as defending against a negative view of the flesh, which would have included outright hatred. He accuses Marcion of thinking that the womb is a “sewer.”⁸⁶ Celsus, a philosophical opponent of Christianity, affirms Heraclitus’s saying, “corpses ought to be thrown away as worse than dung.”⁸⁷ But the picture of Tertullian’s understanding of the flesh, especially reproducing flesh, is considerably more complex. Tertullian himself ultimately holds to the same association of the body as inherently scatological. The fetus is “nourished on that same mire.”⁸⁸ Female flesh is in flux, breaking boundaries between inside and outside, polluting and corrupting, worthy of no more than shame and ridicule.

Tertullian’s emphasis on the disgust, fragility, fluidity, and shame of the female flesh does not conflict with his image of the redemption of the flesh. While he criticizes his opponents, like Marcion, for degrading the flesh, he actually accepts this degradation and shame as part of the flesh. The flesh is shamed,

and in this shame it is redeemed.⁸⁹ In his treatise *Against Marcion*, Tertullian decries the attack on Christ's nativity:

Start from that birth you hate, attack the foulnesses of the genital elements in the womb: the disgusting coagulations of fluid and blood and the flesh being nourished for nine months from that same muck. Decry the womb day to day restless, heavy, anxious ... You are horrified at the infant shed (from the womb) with its impediments. ... Certainly Christ loves that person who was curdled in the filths of the womb, the one brought forth through the shameful parts [*pudenda*] and nourished by organs of ridicule.⁹⁰

Tertullian offers this image of Christ curdling in the blood and filth of the womb not only as a means of characterizing Marcion's view, but also to show how Christ actually is flesh because of his nourishment on Mary's blood.

Christ's connection to Mary's blood continues even after the birth. Drawing from the wisdom of "midwives, doctors, and naturalists," Tertullian notes that breasts flow, "when the womb is affected with pregnancy, when the veins convey the blood of the dregs, and in the act of transference convert the secretion into the nutritious substance of milk."⁹¹ For Tertullian, the transformation of Mary's blood into milk demonstrates that Christ was actually born from his mother's womb.⁹² Christ was nourished in the womb, but also nourished on this blood, transformed and heated into milk after birth.

In part because of passages such as this one, some scholars have argued that Tertullian actually challenges dominant paradigms that associate women's bodies with shame.⁹³ Yet, Tertullian takes care to emphasize that resurrected bodies will not be subject to such shameful acts as birth and lactation. His treatment of women's bodies as secondary to men's is actually rooted in, not in spite of, his valuation of resurrected flesh. Tertullian is not interested in the honor of childbirth. Rather, as Virginia Burrus has shown, Tertullian revels in its shamefulness.⁹⁴

Tertullian's construction of male and female difference is most clear in his account of Christ's conception and birth. Human male semen was unnecessary to Christ's birth, while procreation, even of Christ, requires the female contribution. God, the ideal male, is able to create without intercourse, but Mary must be subjected to all of the processes of pregnancy, birth, penetration, and postnatal care. Tertullian explains, "it was not fit that the Son of God should be born of a human father's semen."⁹⁵ In order to be both the Son of God and Son of Man, Christ needed to derive from both: "flesh (I say) without semen from man, Spirit with semen from God."⁹⁶ Ancient medical discourse closely associated the *sperma* with *pneuma*, believing that *sperma* is concocted from the blood with *pneuma*.⁹⁷ In this system, God might be considered to have contributed his super-pneumatic semen. This rhetoric takes part in the traditional cultural divisions that associated fleshiness with the feminine and the higher

spiritual substance with the masculine. This division reinforces the hierarchy between spirit and flesh in explicitly gendered terms.

All of this reveling in the flesh of Christ's incarnation communicates something about how the resurrected flesh differs from mortal flesh. Tertullian does not advocate a neutral flesh, but rather a kind of flesh that is imbued with particular ideological positions. Tertullian's paradoxical embrace of the shame and salvation of the flesh falls especially on women, and especially on the womb. Female flesh is the particular host to the most shameful aspects of fleshly existence, yet remains an ambiguous good.⁹⁸ For Tertullian, mortal flesh features the flowing of breasts and womb, which are gratefully abandoned when resurrected flesh finally shines in virginal glory.

Yet, what would mark such flesh as feminine in the resurrection without all this fleshiness? The femaleness of flesh must be both opposed and retained—opposed in any trace of female reproductive actions such as penetration or birth, but retained in the symbolic hierarchy that places the female flesh below the male soul long after the sexual practices are gone. The metaphors of soul and flesh as master/slave and bridegroom/bride are not just Tertullian's way of reproducing his cultural discourse about the flesh in ways that undermine his argument for their equality. They also represent his attempt to work out how the flesh does not become too much like the soul, how the female does not become too much like the male. The flesh signifies femaleness even when all such female attributes of flesh are eliminated.

Notes

- 1 Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, trans. Thomas P. Halton (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 74; Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 194; Eric Francis Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 2 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 2.5.
- 3 Tertullian's explicit concern with the status and nature of the flesh is relatively consistent across his many works. M. C. Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 59. There is no reason to see Tertullian's advocacy of the New Prophecy later in his career as marking a break in his thinking, especially with regard to the body. Laura Salah Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Theological Studies, 2003), 100. See also Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority, and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 66–69.
- 4 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 63.1.
- 5 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 46.10.
- 6 Jennifer Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 120.
- 7 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 14.8.
- 8 Tertullian, *On the Testimony of the Soul* 4.1.
- 9 Tertullian, *Apology* 11; 48.
- 10 Tertullian, *Apology* 48.4.

- 11 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 56.1.
- 12 Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 68; *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* 18.8; *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 11.2.
- 13 Tertullian, *On the Games* 30.3.
- 14 Tertullian, *On the Games* 30.4–6.
- 15 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 9.7–8.
- 16 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 8.3.
- 17 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 36.2.
- 18 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 36.4.
- 19 J. H. Waszink, *De Anima* (Amsterdam: J. M. Meulenhoff, [1947] 2010), 419–422.
- 20 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 36.2–3. Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 23. Other early Christians imaged the soul without sex as well. Cf. Clement, *Stromata* 4.8.60.1; 3.13.93.3; Clement, *The Instructor* 1.4.10.
- 21 Waszink, *De Anima*, 420. Sissa, *L'âme est un corps du femme*, X.
- 22 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 9.2.
- 23 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 5.7.
- 24 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 40.3.
- 25 Like Athenagoras, Tertullian believes that judgment is a key feature of the resurrection. Osborn, *Tertullian*, 220–224.
- 26 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 15.3.
- 27 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 16.12.
- 28 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 7.13.
- 29 On the soul's precedence over the body see Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 73–79.
- 30 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 63.1–3.
- 31 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 41.1–4.
- 32 Catherine Conybeare, "Tertullian on Flesh, Spirit, and Wives," in *Severan Culture*, eds. Simon Swain, Stephen Harrison, and Jaś Elsner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 432.
- 33 Tertullian, *An Exhortation to Chastity* 9.1–5; See Carly Daniel-Hughes, "Wear the Armor of Your Shame! Debating Veiling and the Salvation of the Flesh in Tertullian of Carthage," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 39:2 (2010): 184.
- 34 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 36.4.
- 35 Carly Daniel-Hughes, *The Salvation of the Flesh in Tertullian of Carthage: Dressing for the Resurrection* (New York: Palgrave, 2011), 67–69. See also Dunning, *Specters of Paul*, 130–135.
- 36 Conybeare, "Tertullian on Flesh, Spirit, and Wives," 439.
- 37 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 60.5.
- 38 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 61.4.
- 39 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 4.2.
- 40 Taylor G. Petrey, "Semen Stains: Seminal Procreation and the Patrilineal Genealogy of Salvation in Tertullian," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 22:3 (2014): 343–372.
- 41 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 52.4.
- 42 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 60.1. Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 3.1–2. Tertullian seems to have used pseudo-Justin's work. See Heimgartner, *Pseudojustin*, 87–90; D'Anna, *Pseudo-Giustino*, 272–277.
- 43 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 4.5.
- 44 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 60.2–3.
- 45 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 60.5.
- 46 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 61.3.
- 47 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 61.5–7.
- 48 Carly Daniel-Hughes, "Monogamy Claims You for Itself': Tertullian on Sexual Chastity and the Resurrection of the Flesh," in *Coming Back to Life: Exploring the*

- Boundaries Between Death and Life, Mortality and Immortality, Past and Present in the Ancient Mediterranean*, eds. Fred Tappenden and Carly Daniel-Hughes (Montreal: McGill University Library, forthcoming).
- 49 Tertullian, *On Monogamy* 10.7–9.
- 50 Tertullian, *On Fasting* 17.9.
- 51 Tertullian, *On Fasting* 17.7. This lies somewhat in tension with Tertullian's early claims that the flesh will rise equally no matter its state in Tertullian, *On the Soul* 51–57.
- 52 Tertullian, *On Fleeing from Persecution* 9.4; cf. Tertullian, *On Monogamy* 15.3–16.5.
- 53 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 27.1–2.
- 54 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 38.5.
- 55 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 38.2–3.
- 56 Waszink suggests that Tertullian relies on both scripture, as well as the Stoic view on the naturalness of desire for nourishment. Waszink, *De Anima*, 438.
- 57 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 34.1.
- 58 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 38.1.
- 59 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 38.2.
- 60 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 38.2.
- 61 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 27.4.
- 62 Tertullian, *An Exhortation to Chastity* 9.5. Cf. Tertullian, *On Monogamy* 3.1.
- 63 Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise On the Resurrection*, xxxii–xxxiv.
- 64 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 17.2–4.
- 65 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 17.4.
- 66 Dunning, *Specters of Paul*, 129.
- 67 Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge*, 125.
- 68 Jennifer A. Glancy, "The Law of the Opened Body: Tertullian on the Nativity," *Henoah* 30:2 (2008): 45–66; Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Mary's Virginity in Partu and Tertullian's Anti-Doceticism in *De Carne Christi* Reconsidered," *Journal of Theological Studies* 58:2 (2007): 482–483.
- 69 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 23:3–5. I have adopted the translation offered by Dunning, *Specters of Paul*, 145–146.
- 70 Dunning, *Specters of Paul*, 147.
- 71 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 20.7.
- 72 Dunning, *Specters of Paul*, 147.
- 73 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 17.5.
- 74 Dunning, *Specters of Paul*, 138.
- 75 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 17.6.
- 76 Dunning, *Specters of Paul*, 137.
- 77 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 17.5.
- 78 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 17.6.
- 79 Tertullian, *Resurrection of the Flesh* 34.1.
- 80 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 41.1.
- 81 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 40.1.
- 82 Tertullian, *On the Soul* 27.7–9; 40.1–2.
- 83 Tertullian, *On Monogamy* 5.7.
- 84 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 16.5.
- 85 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 1.2; 5.5.
- 86 Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.11.
- 87 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.14.
- 88 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 4.1.
- 89 Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge*, 120.
- 90 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 4.1–3.

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- 91 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 20.6.
92 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 20.6–7.
93 Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate: A Marian Narrative of Women's Salvation* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 97; Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities*, 161.
94 Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects*, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 52–57.
95 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 18.1.
96 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 18.3.
97 E.g., Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals* 2.2.3:735b–736a 1.13–16; b 35–37.
Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 7.159.
98 Daniel-Hughes, “Wear the Armor,” 184.

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Parts and the Foundations of Flesh

The late second- and early third-century Christian communities witnessed a blossoming discussion of the resurrection—defending it from non-Christian critics, teaching it to sympathetic Christians, and defining it against rival Christian understandings. Early Christians sought to stake out what a body is in the competitive context of emerging orthodoxy. Close readings of the surviving treatises on the resurrection show that there are almost no issues relating to the resurrection that early Christians agreed upon completely. By the time of the fourth century, the resurrection of the flesh had become a formulaic dogma, belying the messiness and hard-fought battles of the earlier periods. The Origenist controversy at the close of the fourth century would again raise the question of the nature of the flesh and the resurrection in some monastic communities, partly retracing the steps of the earlier controversies of the second and early third centuries on these issues, partly dealing with new theological and cultural struggles. After that, real, intense debate about the nature of the resurrection would only arise sporadically. While broader scholarly attention to this question has focused on the doctrinal paradigm contrasting flesh and the spirit, this study suggests such an approach is insufficient. It has highlighted aspects of early Christian thought that attempted to theorize the essential self, bodily parts, and sexuality.

The idea that captivated early Christians about the resurrection, and what they had to work out philosophically and exegetically, was what it meant to assert that something of the self persisted after death. Certainly, there were widely accepted theories in the ancient world that the soul or some shadow of the self remained. Early Christians accepted this basic cultural assumption, but generally agreed that it was insufficient and that something more substantial must persist. If the soul alone remained, they believed, then the resurrected human was something different entirely from what had lived, embodied, in the flesh. This posed a problem. What could ensure a continuity of embodied identity that was not just a shadow of a former person? The body and its parts were offered as a solution. Attention to the resurrected body in early Christianity reveals significant concern for defining the essential body, for discerning what about the body is important enough to be raised. The early Christian treatises

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on the resurrection prioritize the bodily parts, making the visible and external aspects of human flesh a more permanent part of identity than invisible sexual desires or impermanent reproductive states.

Among the greatest disagreements among Christians was a disagreement about what a resurrection of the flesh meant and what a spiritual resurrection consisted of. Attempts to unify a certain orthodox or even proto-orthodox perspective on the resurrection of the flesh cover over serious disagreements within this “camp,” especially with respect to how its advocates understood the flesh’s relationship to gender and sexual desire. Even when they agreed that the flesh would rise, they disagreed on their definitions of the flesh. Flesh, it turns out, was not a stable category.

The representation of the body is a political act, not because it invokes material political power, but rather because it uses the affective power of images, symbols, and description. Reproducing the ancient Christian claim that the resurrection is a defense of the body overlooks how it frames the body. It is easy to see how such a claim has been so persuasive for so long. Ancient Christians framed their defense of the resurrection in such terms. However, what these Christians meant by “the body” is the question that we must now ask. Specifically, I have looked at how early Christians formed “the body” as resurrected, and its possibilities to be resurrected. Early Christians did not engage in such descriptions as a neutral reporting on what resurrected persons were like, but understood that representations of resurrected bodies had intellectual, social, and material effects on mortal bodies.

In this history of the body, I have attempted to show that the debates about the resurrection in this period introduced new ways of thinking about the nature of the body, desire, and sexual difference. There can be no understanding of the body as a site of history in early Christianity without attention to the resurrected body, which defined the necessary and unnecessary aspects of human existence. A history of the resurrected body in early Christianity reveals not only attitudes toward the eschatological body, but also how the eschatological body shaped the mortal body at the level of definition—namely, what was essential and what was contingent about the body. The notion that desire and reproduction are not essential to the body has profound effects for a history of sexuality and sexual difference. This eschatological body affected the present to reveal the truth of the body to early Christians. The resurrected body imposed itself upon early Christians, framing how they made an account of themselves and told the story of sex, sexual difference, and the flesh. Far from believing that the same body, the same parts, or the same flesh would continue, the early Christian theorization of the resurrected body systematically redefined the mortal body.

These early Christians resolved concerns over the continuity of personal identity by emphasizing that the body parts could both change and stay the same in the resurrection. Further, this discursive turn to the parts played a central role in how early Christians imagined the body and the self. Early

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Christians defined the parts differently and variously contrasted the parts with the aspects of bodily existence that would not continue, like functions, conditions, humoral properties, or even the flesh itself. In spite of these differences, the move toward the parts is itself worthy of attention.

The implication of eliminating these bodily features while preserving “bodies” remains an important issue for feminist theory and theology. Some feminists have seen the persistence of sexual difference in ancient Christian discourse on the resurrection as the valuation of equality in difference. Beth Felker Jones, for instance, develops a feminist theology of the resurrection by suggesting that the resurrection shows not only that God values material difference, but also that the sexual difference in mortality is not the same as in the resurrection. Jones contrasts the “disordered purposes” to which sexual differences are put in earthly life with the redeemed “ordered differences.”¹ With this account of sexual difference, Jones argues that some differences are divinely sanctioned, while others are the effects of sinful humans. In this view, differences themselves do not pose a problem; only their troubling purposes do. Following the ancient discourse about the resurrection, Jones’s theology of the resurrection preserves what is “essential,” in this case material continuity, while eliminating what is contingent, in this case, social hierarchies.

Jones’s positive appropriation of this division between materially sexed identity alongside the elimination of sexual desires and practices reproduces the early Christian supposition that materiality constitutes the important differences between bodies.² We have seen, however, that the starting point of materiality naturalizes sexual difference in particular ways. There is no reference to materiality without a definition of what counts as material; in this case, that definition eliminates sexual desires and practices. What rises in the resurrection is not material difference alone, but a material that has already been manufactured. Butler argues that “to invoke matter is to invoke a sedimented history of sexual hierarchy and sexual erasures which should surely be an *object* of feminist inquiry, but which would be quite problematic as a *ground* of feminist theory.”³ That is, materiality itself is already rooted in an ontology of sexual specificity that frames identity in terms of morphology. In this sense, Butler aims to move beyond a view that the body is “constructed,” which she sees as rooted in a conception of a fixed “sex,” onto which is overlaid changeable notions of “gender.” Rather, one ought to investigate critically the ways in which what is “fixed” and “changeable” come to be constituted. In this case, we might subject to critical scrutiny what early Christians deemed “material.” The view that the resurrection of the flesh is a defense of the flesh takes as an ontological given what should be an epistemological question. In this study, the particular formulation of what is fixed and what is changeable has been the object of inquiry.

The previous chapters have suggested that the nature of sexual difference is an implicit and explicit problem in the early Christian treatises on the resurrected body. Their representation of the parts has important implications for

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understanding their thinking on sexual difference. Indeed, I am suggesting that the discursive elaboration of the resurrected body entails a theory of sexual difference in antiquity that more closely resembles theories of binary, absolute material difference between males and females than one-sex models or primal androgyny. One of the dominant ways of depicting second- and third-century Christian theories of gender is in terms of the primal androgyne, a notion that depends on an idea of gender transgression or gender transcendence as a kind of ideal. Much of the ancient and modern commentary on ascetic virtues, gender, and sexuality has centered on the primordial bodies of Adam and Eve. This study suggests that we add the eschatological situation of the resurrected body to this depiction of early Christian frameworks of sexual difference. This is the case not only because of the ways that Irenaeus and Tertullian connect protological and eschatological bodies, but also because eschatological bodies function differently than protological bodies. Instead of a primal androgyne, the resurrected body described by early Christians was an eschatological dimorph.

What is surprising to the modern reader about these dimorphic bodies is what they exclude. From the surviving evidence it appears that no early Christian could conceive of any purpose or value for sexual desires or acts with resurrected bodies. This suggests, in turn, some important implications for the history of sexuality in antiquity. In part, these texts in which early Christians discussed desire offer something else than the moralists and the ascetics. The eschatological body provided an occasion to think about sexual ethics. To the extent that the early Christian framework for thinking about the history of sexuality is about the hermeneutics of desire, the texts on the resurrection provide scholars with important data to address this question. Sexual desires, sexual acts, and reproduction paid the highest price in this early Christian hermeneutics of the embodied self. Even the most robust understanding of the bodily parts still stripped them of humors, desires, functions, and, in some cases, flesh. This “whole” body and its parts, purportedly the same as the mortal self, depends on designating some things as “outside” of the resurrection, marking what is unlivable in that sphere. Attention to this exclusion is vital. The *repudiation* of sexual desires and reproduction in the resurrected body identifies them as the abject. The resurrected body’s most important features are its affirmation of the continuity of the bodily parts and its abjection of sexual desires and practices.

In spite of a broad agreement on the resurrection of the bodily parts, and an apparent consensus on the rejection of sexual desires and practices in the resurrection, second-century Christians continued to disagree on the relationship between the resurrected and the mortal body. Early Christian attitudes toward desire and reproduction, as represented in the treatises on the resurrection, did not register on a simple dichotomy between asceticism and approval, but instead offered ambivalent messages, contradicting attitudes, and multivalent symbols. Nor can we chart the history of sexuality linearly because multiple options exist within a single moment and even a single figure. Early Christians had to grapple with the question of imagining a body that was not sexual, but

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somehow also continuous and the “same” as the mortal body. What would remain? What would have to be eliminated? What effects would this change have on a body? What were the proleptic implications of this coming change for living in the here and now? While these thinkers criticize their opponents for insufficiently respecting the goodness of creation, including the flesh, they are simultaneously working out ways to excise sexuality from the essence of the flesh. Desires, reproduction, and sexual acts are contingent, unnecessary, and perhaps even unnatural with respect to creation.

The results of this framing of the resurrected body as without desire, reproduction, and intercourse were inconsistent. The late second century in early Christianity generated conflicting ideas about the virtue of celibacy and marriage, for instance, and utilized the example of the resurrected body in different ways. On the one hand, the resurrected body provided a mode that Christians must imitate. On the other, the resurrected body was a future state that deferred celibacy and made space for desire and reproduction in mortal life. In some cases, the same author seemingly held both views.

The authors of the treatises make a number of surprising moves to arrive at such conclusions. The protological and eschatological place of virginity produces a proleptic crisis about the status of sexual desire and reproduction. The notion of a permeable border between the resurrection and the mortal body is present throughout these chapters. The boundaries between the resurrected self and the mortal self were fungible. The closer the resurrected body resided to the mortal body, the more difficult it was to make room for sexuality within mortal life. The imperative that these two bodies be “the same” produces a framework of the embodied self that must distinguish between what is essential and what is secondary. Pseudo-Justin suggests not only that the resurrected flesh will be free from the problematic aspects of sexual desire and sexual intercourse, but also that the mortal flesh can be healed of these difficulties. For pseudo-Justin, the resurrected body shows the path of virginity and sexual renunciation, evidence of God’s destruction of desire, marriage, and procreation. Athenagoras, too, builds on the idea that flesh is changeable, but roots the changeable flesh of fat and humors in some unchanging substrate of flesh that will transform into resurrected and, finally, stable flesh. For Athenagoras, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, God makes space for sexuality in mortality, but primarily as evidence of the inferiority of the mortal flesh to its higher state. The tension between these two bodies, which are also the same, is a site for constructing the body and the self. Even the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, who was more preoccupied with death than sexuality as a problem of flesh, admonished his readers to live as if already raised. The resurrected body was somehow already present in the mortal body. The abjection of desire, reproduction, and sexual acts from resurrected flesh reveals a gap between the flesh in the resurrection and the mortal flesh of creation. In this sense, the advocates of the resurrection of the flesh were much more ambivalent about the flesh than their defense suggests.

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This study has suggested that what is eliminated in the resurrection, and what is gained, is more complex than preserving the good of bodies and discarding the bad. The early Christian theory of sexual difference grounded in bodily morphology alone produces moments of instability in sexual identity. The discursive logic of sexual desire, acts, and reproduction is too closely braided to human bodies to imagine them entirely apart from these discourses. The instability of separating sexual desires and practices from models of sexual difference troubles any claim to a resurrected sexual difference in the absence of sexuality, in part because of the ways in which sexual difference and hierarchy are connected. Sexual desire and reproduction are disavowed, and yet threaten to disrupt the system of sexual difference, without which it cannot exist. Early Christians were engaged in a project to separate morphological bodies from sexual desires and practices, yet following through on such a project meant destabilizing the differences based on “sexed” bodies, male and female, masculine and feminine. In trying to solve the theological problem of sexual desire and reproduction in resurrected, eternal, stable bodies, early Christians produced a new problem of how such bodies can signify sexual differences without recourse to an implied sexual realm, always already rooted in a presumed sexuality of those bodies.

Early Christians offered a plurality of theories to explain and define resurrected bodies because such bodies exceeded and subverted their attempts to fix them, particularly when it came to teasing apart essential and contingent features of such bodies. The attempt to separate sexual difference from sexuality reveals not only early Christian ideologies that come to define the body and shape it in particular ways, but also the investments of power in making that distinction. This very framework for thinking about bodies in the philosophical terms of essence and contingency lays bare the exclusions and abjection that make normatively sexed bodies possible.

Notes

- 1 Beth Felker Jones, *Marks of His Wounds: Gender Politics and Bodily Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 103.
- 2 Jones, *Marks of His Wounds*, 104.
- 3 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 49.

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