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## Christian Ensoulment Theories within Dualist Psychological Discourse

Anna Usacheva

### Abstract:

This study of the philosophical and patristic texts of the second – fifth centuries, explores Christian theories of reproduction in the context of Hellenic dualist discourse and embryology. I argue that due to the specific metaphysical principles of Christian doctrine, the church fathers were bound to balance the dualist lexicon, which they often used, with holistic anthropological and Christological statements. Patristic theories of reproduction represent a vivid example of the balanced Christian holistic thought, which imbibed plenty of Hellenic concepts, yet remained true to the fundamental principles of Christian doctrine.

### **I. Introduction**

Throughout millennia, questions concerning the beginning and the end of the life of the human body have excited a similar kind of curiosity, worry and awe. Long before the dawn of Christianity, Hellenic thought about the mystery of life generally revolved around various interpretations of the union between the perceptible and perishable nature of the body and the intelligible and non-perishable nature of the soul. These principles are traditionally associated with Platonic substance dualism. Although it is well known that Plato's own allegiance to the rigid substance dualism is questionable, his followers developed his ideas in a variety of ways

ranging from a more rigid to frankly compromised forms of dualism.<sup>1</sup> In tune with Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics of all generations also admitted the fundamental difference between the intelligible and corporeal substances.

Although the disagreements between the philosophical schools were so substantial that they overshadowed their consensus on the mere existence of intelligible and corporeal natures, it can safely be said that the Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection simultaneously emphasised and challenged all the different types of substance dualism known to Greek philosophy.

Thus, on the one hand, right from the start of Christian preaching, God was established as spiritual, non-perishable, independent, and eternal,<sup>2</sup> while man was seen as a dependent creature that combined in his/her nature the corporeal and perishable with the spiritual and everlasting (Gen 2:7). This essential distinction between God and man was counterbalanced by a belief in the creation of man in the image of God and in the ongoing divine assistance in human reproduction.<sup>3</sup> In such a way, God himself guaranteed the presence of his divine image in man and thereby procured a way for human bodily resurrection and salvation.

The dogmas of Christ's incarnation and bodily resurrection, which implied the everlasting existence of corporeal nature, married two fundamental metaphysical principles of Greek philosophy that were sometimes viewed as incompatible: the existence of the perishable, corporeal nature and of non-perishable, intelligible nature. Thus, Christian belief in the twofold character of holistic human nature was supported by a conviction of the union between the divine and human natures in Christ and his bodily resurrection.<sup>4</sup> In this way, a special form of substance dualism, coupled with an attempt to overcome it, are inherent in Christian thought: if one or another is taken away, the whole system collapses.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. Marmodoro / S. Cartwright (eds.), *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity*. New York 2017, 33–52.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, the gospel of John preached that “God is spirit” (John 4:24), while Pauline epistles spoke of God as “invisible” (Col 1:15), “the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God” (1 Tim 1:17). Here and below, biblical citations follow the New Revised Standard Version (<https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-Revised-Standard-Version-NRSV-Bible/>).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the first divine blessing on human reproduction in Gen 1:28, the second blessing on reproduction addressed to Noah and his sons (Gen 9:1), and various accounts of divine assistance in reproduction in the book of Psalms: “He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children” (Ps 113:9); “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Ps 139:13); “Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward” (Ps 127:3).

<sup>4</sup> Thus, Athenagoras spoke about “composite” (συναμφότερον, Athenag., res. 18.4) human nature (Greek text: W.R. Schoedel [ed.], *Athenagoras: Legatio and De resurrectione*, Oxford 1972. Retrieved from: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/libproxy.helsinki.fi/Iris/Cite?1205:002:0>; transl.: B.P. Pratten, ANF 2. Retrieved from: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0206.htm>). The apologists also emphasised that the two parts of human nature act as one (Athenag., res. 15.2), an idea that was developed, among others, by Gregory of Nyssa, who spoke about the compound nature of man, which includes vegetative, perceptive and rational components (Gr. Nyss., hom. opif. 14.2). Gregory explained the holistic character of human nature by pointing out the indispensable practical collaboration of the intellectual and material components: “Thus, neither is there perception without material substance (ὀλικῆς οὐσίας), nor does the act of perception take place without the intellectual faculty (τῆς νοεῖσθαι δυνάμεως)” (Gr. Nyss., hom. opif. 14.3; Greek text: PG 44. Retrieved from: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/libproxy.helsinki.fi/Iris/Cite?2017:079:0>; transl.: NPNF 5. Retrieved from: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2914.htm>). On the history of the so-called anthropological argument in Christology, cf.: M.-O. Boulnois, *Le modèle de l'union de l'âme et du corps dans les débats christologiques du IVe siècle: les origines, Annuaire*, in: *Résumé des conférences et travaux, École Pratique des Hautes Études (2006-2007)*, EPHE (2008), 217–222.

Right from the start, Christian preaching had a pronounced apocalyptic character with an emphasis on bodily resurrection after death in the soon expected kingdom of God. Thus, in 1 Corinthians, Paul famously argued against those who did not believe in the resurrection of the body and who considered bodily life irrelevant for the task of salvation (1 Cor 6:13). Moreover, in Paul's terms, the whole procedure of individual salvation was represented as a transformation of physical body into spiritual body. In other words, Paul's preaching was not so much about the salvation of the soul but about bodily transformation, understood as "the personal, individual unity of physical and non-physical dimensions".<sup>5</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, in his *Adversus haereses*, aptly grasped this Pauline attitude towards the body when he described the process of resurrection as a transformation of ignoble and dead flesh into the glorious and incorruptible spiritual body (Iren., haer. 5.7,2).<sup>6</sup>

Thus, at the nucleus of Christian religion we find a belief that human nature is, in some way, *unlike God*, and, in some way, *like God*; and that the increase of this likeness brings about the salvation or transformation of human nature. Significantly, there are two necessary requirements for the process of transformation: it has to be assisted by God, and its progress should not entirely destroy the dissimilarity between man and God. Hence, Christian anthropology was bound to remain *simultaneously dualist and holistic*.

It is very important to keep this complex nature of Christian doctrine in mind, especially for a balanced view of the history of Christian anthropology, psychology and Christology. Unfortunately, such a balanced treatment of early Christian literature has not always been the prevailing scholarly attitude: many researchers have postulated the dominance of the Platonising dualist discourse among Christian authors.<sup>7</sup> The well-known story recounts how, after the legalization of Christianity, apocalyptic expectations grew weaker, the philosophical and educational ambitions of the new religion became stronger and the eschatological emphasis of the early preaching was somewhat overshadowed by Christological discussions.<sup>8</sup> Since many Christian authors openly declared their sympathy towards some Platonic ideas, scholars considered the spread of such binaries as soul vs body, mind and reason vs flesh and instincts and virtues vs passions in Christian literature as a sign of the prevailing dualist mentality. This is how Andrew Louth aptly summarises the key-ideas of this dualist discourse:

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<sup>5</sup> In his profound analysis of 1 Corinthians, Vito Limone emphasised the holistic character of Paul's vision of the body (cf. V. Limone, *The Christian Conception of the Body and Paul's Use of the Term Sōma in 1 Corinthians*, in: Marmodoro / Cartwright (eds.), 2017, 204.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. A. Rousseau / L. Doutreleau / Ch. Mercier (eds.), *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les hérésies*, livre 5, tome 2, SC 153, Paris 1963, 88-90. Similarly, Athenagoras expounded on the unity, harmony and concord of the soul and body after the resurrection as the *telos* of creation (Athenag., res. 15.3). Pseudo-Justin also professed that "when God promised to save man, He promised to the flesh" ("Ἐνθα γὰρ τὸν ἄνθρωπον εὐαγγελίζεται σωσαι, καὶ τῇ σαρκὶ εὐαγγελίζεται – Ps.-Just, res. 593d; Greek: J.C.T. Otto [ed.], *Corpus apologetarum Christianorum saeculi secundi* 3, Jena 1879. Retrieved from: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/libproxy.helsinki.fi/Iris/Cite?0646:005:5611>; transl. mine).

<sup>7</sup> Pondering the dominance of Platonism within both a Christian and non-Christian milieu, Henry Chadwick noted that "starting from the Delphic recommendation 'Know thyself,' the real nature of man was defined as the soul's making use of the body as an instrument (and therefore secondary)." Cf.: H. Chadwick, *Philosophical Tradition and the Self*, in: G.W. Bowersock / P. Brown / O. Grabar (eds.), *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, London 2001, 60–81 (61).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. F. Bovon, *The Soul's Comeback. Immortality and Resurrection in Early Christianity*, in: HThR 103 (2010), 387–406 (399).

“the human is more than the two-legged animal we observe, but is really an invisible soul which in principle governs the body; the purpose of the soul is to come to behold God in an act of contemplation, something for which the body is often a distraction”.<sup>9</sup>

In her analysis of the late antique Christian attitude towards body, Gillian Clark also emphasised the dualist account by focusing on abstinence, punitive hatred of all bodily concerns, misogynistic language and the aversion of medical treatment.<sup>10</sup> This overview may well capture the mainstream of Christian ascetic rhetoric supported by the general late-antique tendency to favour Platonic dualist jargon and the *loci communi* of the Platonic dialogues. However, behind the polemical and moralistic rhetoric lay the rather firm and unbending principles of Christian holistic anthropology, which mastered the Patristic reception of Platonic and other philosophical concepts.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the unbalanced and increasingly negative perception of the Christian conception of body has been recently criticised by scholars who have shown that some of the Christian authors were well-versed in medicine and contributed to the progress of medical institutions and education.<sup>12</sup> Recently, scholars of late antiquity have openly acknowledged the insufficiency of previous research on the Christian conception of body, and encouraged further investigation of this topic.<sup>13</sup>

In this chapter, I explore how complex dualist-holistic ideas are featured in the Christian views of ensoulment. I analyse the Patristic view of reproduction within the framework of Hellenic embryology. To tackle the diversity and continuity between the various Christian ideas, I begin with theories from the second–fourth centuries, and afterwards focus on two authors from the fifth century. I shall demonstrate that, although we see various philosophical and sometimes medical influences on the surface of Christian ensoulment views, the rationale of Christian ideas throughout the first four (plus) centuries had always remained different from the metaphysical principles of the philosophical schools and true to the fundamentally complex nature of Christian doctrine.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. A. Louth, *Platonism from Maximus the Confessor to the Palaiologan Period*, in: A. Kaldellis / N. Siniosoglou (eds.), *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, Cambridge 2017, 325.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. G. Clark, *Bodies and Blood: Late Antique Debate on Martyrdom, Virginité and Resurrection*, in: D. Montserrat (ed.), *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings. Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity*, London 1998, 107f. Mathew Keufler also depicted a sadly negative picture of the Christian attitude towards body, which in his opinion remained unchanged for a thousand years. Cf. M. Kuefler, *Desire and the Body in the Patristic Period*, in: A. Thatcher (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, Oxford 2014, 244–252.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Ps.-Justin, in his *Hortatory address to Greeks*, offered the following curious interpretation of Plato’s dualism: “For certainly they will never say that the soul has a head and hands, and feet and skin. But Plato, having fallen in with the testimonies of the prophets in Egypt, and having accepted what they teach concerning the resurrection of the body (τῆς τοῦ σώματος ἀναστάσεως), teaches that the soul is judged in company with the body (μετὰ τοῦ σώματος τὴν ψυχὴν κρίνεσθαι διδάσκει).” (Ps.-Just., coh. Gr. 26; Greek: Otto, 1879; transl.: M. Dods, in: ANF 1. Retrieved from: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0129.htm>).

<sup>12</sup> Cf.: A. Crislip, *Thorns in the Flesh. Illness and Sanctity in Late Ancient Christianity*. Philadelphia 2013; H. Marx-Wolf, *Religion, Medicine, and Health*, in: J. Lössl / N.J. Baker-Brian (eds.), *A Companion to Religion in Late Antiquity*, New York 2018; W. Mayer, *The Persistence in Late Antiquity of Medico-Philosophical Psychic Therapy*, in: JLA 8 (2015), 337–351.

<sup>13</sup> Cf.: V. Burrus, “*Begotten, not made*”: *Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity*. New York 2000; B. Feichtinger / S. Lake / H. Seng (eds.), *Körper und Seele: Aspekte spätantiker Anthropologie*, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 215, Berlin/New York 2006; A. Torrance / J. Zachhuber (eds.), *Individuality in Late Antiquity*. Studies in Philosophy and Theology in Late Antiquity, Ashgate 2014; Marmodoro / Cartwright (eds.), 2017.

## II. Early-Christian Ensoulment Theories

### II.1. Traducianism and Aristotelian Embryology

General scholarly overviews of late-antique ensoulment theories normally identify two main trends. The first is the *pre-existence* of the soul that is associated with Platonic teaching. This is the belief that the soul comes into existence before the body and that the soul descends into the body from outside (sc. a variation of the external theory of ensoulment). The Second trend is *traducianism*, which is coupled with the materialistic views of the Stoic and Peripatetic schools, and which postulates that the soul is transmitted from the parents (sc. a variation of the internal theory of ensoulment). In his recent article about Christian ensoulment theories, Benjamin Blosser argued that early-Christian authors were not particularly keen on issues of the provenance of the soul and its connection with the body.<sup>14</sup> Determined to refute the dualism of Gnostics, early-Christian authors, in Blosser's opinion, were inclined to adopt *traducianism*, which undermined Gnostic dualism and endorsed the psychosomatic unity of the human person. The fourth century, in Blosser's account, brought a more philosophically versed episcopate and a different vision of ensoulment:

“A strong Neoplatonic conviction of the immateriality of the soul had ruled out *traducianism*; an eagerness to exorcise any lingering remnants of Gnostic dualism had ruled out pre-existence. The immaterial soul could have no material origin; neither could it pre-exist its insertion into the body. Thus was born, out of intellectual desperation, as it were, the new theory of creationism.”<sup>15</sup>

Blosser's account is somewhat misleading because it creates the impression that the early-Christian authors were ready to roughly acknowledge the materialistic provenance of the soul while later Christian thinkers shifted to a more dualist psychology under the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy.<sup>16</sup> An examination of the early-Christian texts, however, demonstrates a different picture. Authors such as Justin, Athenagoras, Tertullian and Methodius maintained the external theory of ensoulment and the holistic vision of the human nature.

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. B.P. Blosser, *The Ensoulment of the Body in Early Christian Thought*, in: Marmodoro / Cartwright (eds.), 2017, 207–223 (211).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Blosser, 2017, 216. Blosser also noted that the rudiments of *traducianism* survived in the doctrine of original sin, which he presented as a late-antique argument for infant baptism.

<sup>16</sup> I believe that the chief cause of confusion in Blosser's analysis of early-Christian ensoulment theories comes from the unqualified use of the terms pre-existence and *traducianism*, which represent just two varieties of the two major trends in the ensoulment discourse — the external and internal theories of ensoulment. For example, although Christian authors consistently supported the external view of ensoulment, some of them vacillated on rejection of the pre-existence. Likewise, although the absolute majority of Christian authors repudiated the internal view of ensoulment, most of the early and later authors acknowledged various kinds of heredity traits transmitted from parents. Thus, it appears important to employ a more detailed and specified terminology even in producing general overviews of the Christian ensoulment theories.

For example, when Athenagoras affirmed that “souls do not produce souls... but men produce men”<sup>17</sup> in his *De resurrectione*, by “men” he clearly meant the holistic soul-body compounds. Athenagoras emphasised the indispensability of the soul-body *synergy* in the process of reproduction: “since the difference of male and female does not exist in them [the souls], nor any aptitude for sexual intercourse, nor appetite for it, and where there is no appetite, there can be no intercourse”.<sup>18</sup> Further on in the same treatise, we find that, according to Athenagoras, not only reproductive but also cognitive functions belong to the man (sc. the soul-body compound), and not specifically to the soul.<sup>19</sup> Athenagoras argued that, as the prime creature, man enjoys divine providence and care about human reproduction (Athenag., res. 18.2–4). Thus, Athenagoras pinpointed a collaboration between man and divine providence, which contributes to the process of conception by ensouling the embryo.

At the beginning of his treatise, Athenagoras explicitly states that the male seed gives origin to the body, while the power of God enables the shapeless matter to become a live human being (Athenag., res. 3.1). The essential role of God in the process of ensoulment was particularly important for Athenagoras’ argument because he took this point further by claiming that, similarly to the moment of birth, God will reassemble the dissolved elements, reunite the bodies with their souls and bring them back to life in the *eschaton*:

“And it is no damage to the argument, if some suppose the first beginnings to be from matter, or the bodies of men at least to be derived from the elements as the first materials, or from seed. For that power which could give shape to what is regarded by them as shapeless matter, and adorn it, when destitute of form and order, with many and diverse forms, and gather into one the several portions of the elements, and divide the seed which was one and simple into many, and organize that which was unorganized, and give life to that which had no life — that same power can reunite what is dissolved, and raise up what is prostrate, and restore the dead to life again, and put the corruptible into a state of incorruption”.<sup>20</sup>

A similar line of eschatological argumentation was taken up by Justin, who referred to the miracle of conception as a promise of the future resurrection (Just., 1 apol. 19). Pseudo-Justin

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<sup>17</sup> Athenag., res. 23.3: οὐ γὰρ ψυχαὶ ψυχὰς γεννᾶσαι τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς ἢ τῆς μητρὸς οἰκειοῦνται προσηγορίαν, ἀλλ’ ἀνθρώπους ἄνθρωποι. (Greek: Schoedel, 1972. Retrieved from: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/libproxy.helsinki.fi/Iris/Cite?1205:002:62630>).

<sup>18</sup> Athenag., res. 23.4,3-5. Retrieved from: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0206.htm>; transl.: B.P. Pratten, ANF 2.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Athenag., res. 15.3–6; res. 15.6: ὁ δὲ καὶ νοῦν καὶ λόγον δεξάμενός ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος, οὐ ψυχὴ καθ’ ἑαυτήν· ἄνθρωπον ἄρα δεῖ τὸν ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων ὄντα διαμένειν εἰς αἰεὶ, τοῦτον δὲ διαμένειν ἀδύνατον μὴ ἀνιστάμενον. (“But that which has received both understanding and reason is man, not the soul by itself. Man, therefore, who consists of the two parts, must continue forever”).

<sup>20</sup> Athenag. res. 3.2: καὶ τῷ λόγῳ βλάβος οὐδέν, ἐξ ὕλης ὑποθῶνται τινες τὰς πρώτας ἀρχάς, κἄν ἐκ τῶν στοιχείων ὡς πρώτων τὰ σώματα τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κἄν ἐκ σπερμάτων. ἥς γὰρ ἐστὶ δυνάμεως καὶ τὴν παρ’ αὐτοῖς νενομισμένην ἄμορφον οὐσίαν μορφῶσαι καὶ τὴν ἀνειδεον καὶ ἀδιακόσμητον πολλοῖς καὶ διαφοροῖς εἶδεσιν κοσμήσαι καὶ τὰ μέρη τῶν στοιχείων εἰς ἓν συναγαγεῖν καὶ τὸ σπέρμα ἐν ὄν καὶ ἀπλοῦν εἰς πολλὰ διελεῖν καὶ τὸ ἀδιάρθρωτον διαρθρῶσαι καὶ τῷ μὴ ζῶντι δοῦναι ζωὴν, τῆς αὐτῆς ἐστὶν καὶ τὸ διαλελυμένον ἐνώσαι καὶ τὸ κείμενον ἀναστῆσαι καὶ τὸ τεθνηκὸς ζωοποιηθῆσαι πάλιν καὶ τὸ φθαρτὸν μεταβαλεῖν εἰς ἀφθαρσίαν.

explicitly called the soul “a part of God” and stated that it was inspired by Him.<sup>21</sup> Methodius of Olympus gave an elaborate account of the divine creative power that assists human procreation:

“And now that these things are completed, it remains for you to apply this picture, my wisest of friends, to the things which have been already spoken of; comparing the house to the invisible nature of our generation, and the entrance adjacent to the mountains to the sending down of our souls from heaven, and their descent into the bodies; the holes to the female sex, and the modeller to the creative power of God, which, under the cover of generation, making use of our nature, invisibly forms us men within, working the garments for the souls (τὸν δὲ πλάστην τῇ ποιητικῇ δυνάμει τοῦ θεοῦ, ἥτις ἐπικαλύμματι τῆς γενέσεως ἡμῶν ὡς ἔφην τῇ φύσει χρωμένη ἔνδον ἡμᾶς ἀοράτως ἀνθρωποπλαστεῖ, τὰ ἐνδύματα ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἐργαζομένη). Those who carry the clay represent the male sex in the comparison; when thirsting for children, they bring and cast in seed into the natural channels of the female, as those in the comparison cast clay into the holes. For the seed, which, so to speak, partakes of a divine creative power, is not to be thought guilty of the incentives to incontinence. (Θείας γὰρ ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν μοίρας τῆς δημιουργικῆς τὸ σπέρμα μεταλαμβάνον οὐκ αὐτὸ αἴτιον νομιστέον εἶναι τῶν τῆς ἀκολασίας ὑπεκκαυμάτων.)”<sup>22</sup> (Meth., symp. 2.5,1–12).

Even Tertullian, who unlike the majority of Christian authors maintained the corporeal nature of the soul, believed that the intelligible part of the soul comes from God.<sup>23</sup> The presented examples show that, contrary to Blosser’s opinion, a number of famous early-Christian authors 1) generally supported the external theory of ensoulment; 2) did not only demonstrate interest in the question of the soul’s provenance and the nature of its liaison with the body but sometimes also reveal their informed judgement about specific embryological matters.

In his profound analysis of early-Christian embryological theories, Bernard Pouderon affirmed the strong influence of Aristotle on the procreation doctrine of the early church fathers.<sup>24</sup> In Pouderon’s exposition, the Stagirite’s embryology regarded the process of conception as a result of the emission of the form-bearing male seed (τὸ εἶδος) into the female and the subsequent mixture of the seed with the menses, which provide matter for the embryo (ἡ ὄλη). In this picture, the male seed acts as the formal and efficient cause of the embryo, while

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Ps.-Just., res. 594a: ἀλλ’ ἡ μὲν ψυχή ἐστιν ἀφθαρτος, μέρος οὐσα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐμφύσημα (“the soul is incorruptible, being a part of God and inspired by Him”).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Greek: V.-H. Debidour / H. Musurillo (eds.), *Méthode d'Olympe: Le banquet*, SC 95, Paris 1963. Retrieved from: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/libproxy.helsinki.fi/Iris/Cite?2959:001:28277>; transl.: W.R. Clark, ANF 6.

<sup>23</sup> Tert., anim. 3.4: “we claimed the soul to be formed by the breathing of God, and not out of matter” (quia animam ex Dei flatu, non ex materia uindicamus); anim. 4.1: “We, however, ...teach that it had both birth and creation” (Et natam autem dpcemus et factam ex initii constitutione); anim. 5.4: “Cleanthes, too, will have it that family likeness passes from parents to their children not merely in bodily features, but in characteristics of the soul. (...) The soul certainly sympathizes with the body, and shares in its pain... The soul, therefore, is corporeal from this inter-communion of susceptibility (Igitur anima corpus ex corporalium passionum communiōne).” (Latin: J. Leal [ed.], *Tertullien, De l'âme*, SC 601, Paris 2019; transl.: P. Holmes, ANF 3.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. B. Pouderon, *L'influence d'Aristote dans la doctrine de la procréation des premiers Pères et ses implications théologiques*, in: L. Brisson / M.-H. Congourdeaneau / J.L. Solère (eds.), *L'embryon: Formation et animation, Antiquité grecque et latine tradition hébraïque, chrétienne et islamique*, Paris 2008, 161.



the female menses provide the material cause by nourishing and sheltering the embryo (Arist., GA 2.4,738b; 2.3,737a).

In my opinion, Pouderon slightly overestimates the Aristotelian influence on the early-Christian doctrine of procreation. Aristotle was a strong proponent of the one-seed theory, and indeed most of the early fathers endorsed the same position. However, the internal theory of embryology was also Aristotelian, that is to say, he believed that the male seed alone is the transmitter of the soul.<sup>25</sup> In *De generatione animalium*, he said: “Hence it is clear both that the semen possesses Soul, and that it is Soul potentially”<sup>26</sup> (Arist., GA 2.2,735a). In other words, the potential ensouling capacity of the seed proceeds to action (sc. becomes actualised) whenever it is presented with the matter to be acted upon (sc. the female menses in the womb). This picture describes the essentially natural process of internal self-reproduction, which includes two contributors: the mother and the father.

As I have demonstrated, early-Christian authors disproved of the internal view of ensoulment because it was incompatible with their opinion about the role of God in the process of conception. It is not unlikely that Christian authors inherited the concept of divine partaking in the process of conception from the Old Testament tradition, filled with accounts of divine intervention/providence about the procreation of Israel (cf. the stories of Sarah in Gen 17:16, Rebecca in Gen 25:21 and Rachel in Gen 29).

The difference between the early-Christian and Aristotle’s views of embryology can be traced back to the contrary concepts of the soul that were held by these authors. The Stagirite, in the first chapter of the second book of *De anima*, famously defined the soul as “the first actuality of an organic body having life in potentiality”<sup>27</sup> (Arist., De An. 412a). As actuality (sc. *entelecheia*, or simply, energy) of the body, the soul cannot be alive without the body. This is why, according to Aristotle, the process of ensoulment is gradual and the “principles whose activity is physical cannot be present without a physical body — there can, for example, be no walking without feet”.<sup>28</sup> Hence, Aristotle argued that, at first, the embryo lives the life of a plant run by the nutritive soul, then — the life of an animal with the sentient soul, and eventually the rational soul actualises itself in the properly formed man (Arist., GA 2.2f.,735a–736b). This theory explains why Aristotle considered abortion a totally decent measure until the fortieth day

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<sup>25</sup> Aristotle said that the male seed is the vehicle of the vegetative and sensitive soul (Arist., GA 2.3,736b8–24). He also made a rather confusing statement about the rational soul, which comes to the embryo from the outside (Arist., GA 2.3,736b27–29). This idea obviously clashed with the main rationale of his psychology built around the definition of the soul as the *ἐντελέχεια* or the first actuality of the physical body (Arist., De An. 412b5–6). Nowhere in his works did Aristotle provide an explanation for this discrepancy. However, Aristotle’s ideas about the provenance of the rational soul should not prevent us from seeing his embryology as an internal ensoulment theory. As the transmitter of the entelechy, the seed, in Aristotle’s view, is the source of life, and consequently the reproduction of life is an internal process.

<sup>26</sup> Greek text and English transl. from: A.L. Peck / T.E. Page et al. (eds.). *Aristotle: Generation of Animals*, London 1943, 155.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Arist., De An. 412a: ἡ ψυχὴ ἐστὶν ἐντελέχεια ἢ πρώτη σώματος φυσικοῦ δυνάμει ζῶν ἔχοντος. (Greek: W.D. Ross [ed.], *Aristotle, De anima*, Oxford 1961. Retrieved from: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/libproxy.helsinki.fi/Iris/Cite?0086:002:44697>; transl.: C. Shields (ed.), *Aristotle, De anima*, Oxford 2016, 22).

<sup>28</sup> Transl. Shields, 2016, 168f.; Greek: ὅσων γὰρ ἐστὶν ἀρχῶν ἢ ἐνέργεια σωματικῆ, δῆλον ὅτι ταύτας ἄνευ σώματος ἀδύνατον ὑπάρχειν, οἷον βαδίζειν ἄνευ ποδῶν. (Arist., GA 2.3,736b22–24).

of pregnancy, that is to say, “before it [the embryo] has developed sensation and life” (Arist., Pol. 1335b).<sup>29</sup>

Unlike Aristotle, the early-Christian authors differentiated between the principles of physical formation, transmitted by the seed, and the soul, provided by God. Thus, as I have demonstrated, Athenagoras, Justin, Tertullian and Methodius affirmed that the bodily principles are contained in the seed, while God ensouls the embryo at the moment of conception. Athenagoras professed his admiration of the soft seed, which holds “such a variety and number of great powers, or of masses, which in this way arise and become consolidated,” — that is — “of bones, and nerves, and cartilages, of muscles too, and flesh, and intestines and the other parts of the body” (Athenag., res. 17.2,3–5). In a similar vein, Justin asserted that “from a small drop of human seed bones and sinews and flesh” are formed into the shape of man (Just., 1 apol. 19.1).

The conviction that ensoulment is simultaneous to conception rendered every abortion as murder in the eyes of Christians.<sup>30</sup> In this respect, the opinion of Christians was different not only from the views of Peripatetics but also from Platonists, Stoics and Galen.<sup>31</sup>

Although the early-Christian authors uniformly supported the one-seed doctrine, this fact does not prove a strong Aristotelian influence on their ideas about procreation. Unlike Aristotle, Christians believed in the external theory of ensoulment, which in many respects was essential for the metaphysical principles of their theology. Thus, external ensoulment agreed with the concept of God — the creator, whose providential care had not ceased after the hexameron. In addition, it supported the eschatological expectation of bodily resurrection. Unlike Aristotle, Christians maintained the idea of simultaneous ensoulment at the moment of conception, which made them intolerant of abortion.

## II.2. Platonic Embryology

Generally speaking, the similarities between Platonic and Christian theories of embryology end at their mutual support of the one-seed concept and the external ensoulment. For example, Gregory of Nyssa, arguing for the external theory, said that “nothing among the things in nature is brought into existence without deriving its peculiar constitution from evil as its source”.<sup>32</sup> Similar argumentation was often used by Neoplatonists, for it proceeded from the conviction that *the product is always an interior likeness of its producer*. James Wilberding recognised this

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. H. Rackham / T.E. Page et al. (eds.), *Aristotle: Politics*, London 1943, 625.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. B. Pouderon, *L'interdiction de l'avortement dans les premiers siècles de l'Église*, in: RHPR (2007), 55–73.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. K. Kapparis, *Abortion in the Ancient World*, Duckworth 2002, 201–213.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Dialogus De anima et resurrectione* 46.116,37–39: μηδὲν τῶν ὄντων εἰς γένεσιν ἄγεσθαι δογματίζων, καὶ κακίας τῆ ἐκάστου φύσει τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐνδιδοῦσης (Greek: PG 86, Retrieved from: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/libproxy.helsinki.fi/Iris/Cite?2017:056:0>; transl.: NPNF 5. Retrieved from: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2915.htm>).

idea as one of the three main principles of Neoplatonic metaphysics.<sup>33</sup> Porphyry formulated this principle with a reference to Plato:

“according to him [Plato] the things that have been engendered from the substances of some things are always a step down from the things that had engendered them in terms of power and substance, and it is impossible for them to be of the same substance as the things that engendered them” (AG 6.2=42.17–21).<sup>34</sup>

In tune with this principle, Porphyry maintained that the seed, which upholds the principles of physical formation, is generated by “something worse than itself” — the vegetative soul of the father (“ἡ ἐν ἡμῖν φυτικὴ χεῖρον ἐγέννα ἑαυτῆς,” AG 14.3=54.12-13), cf. 3.1=36.16-18). As I have shown, Christians also saw in the seed a provider of the form-principles of the physical body, and thus distinguished the contribution of the seed from the life-giving ensoulment provided by God.<sup>35</sup> Similarly to the Neoplatonists, Gregory of Nyssa professed that the seed is generated by the vegetative soul of the father.<sup>36</sup> Like most philosophers and medical doctors of his time, Gregory maintained the tripartite vision of the soul as comprised of the vegetative, sensitive and rational parts.<sup>37</sup>

While Aristotle argued that the seed contains in itself the form principles of the vegetative and sensitive parts of the soul, Neoplatonists credited the male seed with the transmission of the vegetative soul only. In the Neoplatonic view, sensitive and rational souls do not enter the child before its birth because this would contradict the hitherto described second metaphysical principle of their doctrine. The distinctly hierarchical structure of the Neoplatonic psychology rendered it impossible for them to accept that the vegetative soul of the father could generate anything higher than the vegetative soul contained in the seed. Unlike the hylomorphic

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. J. Wilberding, *Forms, Souls, and Embryos: Neoplatonists on Human Reproduction*, Issues in Ancient Philosophy, New York 2017, 34.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. transl. by J. Wildering, *Porphyry, To Gaurus On How Embryos are Ensouled and On What is in Our Power*, London 2011, 39; Greek: K. Kalbfleisch, *Die neuplatonische, fälschlich dem Galen zugeschriebene Schrift Πρὸς Γαῦρον περὶ τοῦ πῶς ἐμψυχοῦνται τὰ ἔμβρυα*, APAW, Berlin 1895. Retrieved from: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/libproxy.helsinki.fi/Iris/Cite?0530:006:0>.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Just., 1 apol. 32; Athenag., res. 3.2. Methodius criticised the idea that “this fleshly garment of the soul, being planted by men, is shaped spontaneously apart from the sentence of God” (Meth., symp. 2.7,2f.).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Greg. Ny., hom. opif. 240.1–5=29.10: δυνατὸν γὰρ ἔστι τὸν τῆς ζωῆς τρόπον κατανοήσαντα, καὶ ὡς πρὸς πᾶσαν ζωτικὴν ἐνέργειαν ἐπιτηδεῖως ἔχει τὸ σῶμα καταμαθόντα, γινῶναι περὶ τί κατησχολήθη τὸ φυσικὸν τῆς ψυχῆς παρὰ τὴν πρώτην τοῦ γινομένου διάπλασιν. (“For it is possible for one who considers the mode of his own life, and learns how closely concerned the body is in every vital operation, to know in what the vegetative principle of the soul was occupied on the occasion of the first formation of that which was beginning its existence”).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Gr. Nyss., hom. opif. 176.9–19=14.2: Ἐπειδὴ δὲ τρεῖς κατὰ τὴν ζωτικὴν δύναμιν διαφορὰς ὁ λόγος εὔρε, τὴν μὲν τρεφομένην χωρὶς αἰσθήσεως, τὴν δὲ τρεφομένην μὲν καὶ αὐξανομένην, ἀμοιροῦσαν δὲ τῆς λογικῆς ἐνεργείας, τὴν δὲ λογικὴν καὶ τελείαν δι’ ἀπάσης διήκουσαν τῆς δυνάμεως, ὡς καὶ ἐν ἐκείναις εἶναι καὶ τῆς νοερᾶς τὸ πλέον ἔχειν· μηδεὶς διὰ τούτων ὑπονοεῖτω τρεῖς συγκεκροτῆσθαι ψυχὰς ἐν τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ συγκρίματι, ἐν ἰδίαις περιγραφαῖς θεωρουμένας, ὥστε συγκροτῆμά τι πολλῶν ψυχῶν τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν εἶναι νομίζειν. (“But since our argument discovered in our vital faculty three different varieties — one which receives nourishment without perception, another which at once receives nourishment and is capable of perception, but is without the reasoning activity, and a third rational, perfect, and co-extensive with the whole faculty — so that among these varieties the advantage belongs to the intellectual — let no one suppose on this account that in the compound nature of man there are three souls welded together, contemplated each in its own limits, so that one should think man's nature to be a sort of conglomeration of several souls”).

psychology of Aristotle, or the naturalistic psychology of Galen,<sup>38</sup> Neoplatonists considered the whole process of embodiment of the rational soul as its degradation.<sup>39</sup> In Neoplatonic eyes, the embodied status of the soul was as unnatural as it was pitiable.

Christian authors stoutly opposed such views. The metaphysical attitude of the Christian religion, which I mentioned in the introduction, maintained that the paradoxical kind of union between mortal body and immortal intelligible soul was designed by God. Moreover, this union of the soul and body was fastened and sanctified by the incarnation of Christ and by the expectation of the upcoming bodily resurrection. The early-Christian allegiance to holistic anthropology remained in the fourth century. Thus, similarly to Athenagoras, who gave a lengthy account of the soul-body interdependence,<sup>40</sup> Gregory of Nyssa argued:

“For our purpose was to show that the seminal cause of our constitution is neither a soul without body, nor a body without soul, but that, from animated and living bodies, it is generated at the first as a living and animate being, and that our humanity takes it and cherishes it like a nursling with the resources she herself possesses, and it thus grows on both sides and makes its growth manifest correspondingly in either part: — for it at once displays, by this artificial and scientific process of formation, the power of soul that is interwoven in it, appearing at first somewhat obscurely, but afterwards increasing in radiance concurrently with the perfecting of the work”<sup>41</sup> (Gr. Nyss., hom. opif. 30.29).

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. S.M. Cohen, *Hylomorphism and Functionalism*, in: M.C. Nussbaum / O. Rorty (eds.), *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*. Oxford 1995, 62; C. Gill, *Naturalistic Psychology in Galen and Stoicism*, Oxford 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Porphyry, *De abstinentia* 1 30.4f.=108: “In the same way we too, if we are going to reascend from here to what is really ours (πρὸς τὰ ὄντως οἰκεῖα μέλλομεν ἐπανιέναι), must put aside everything we have acquired from our mortal nature, and the attraction to those things which itself brought about our descent (ἀποθέσθαι πάντα μετὰ τῆς πρὸς αὐτὰ προσπαθείας), and must recollect the blessed and eternal being and eagerly return to that which is without colour or quality, engaging in two exercises. One is putting aside everything material and mortal (πᾶν τὸ ὑλικὸν καὶ θνητὸν ἀποθησόμεθα), the other is working to return and survive, ascending there in the opposite way to that by which we descended here” (ἐτέραν δὲ ὅπως ἐπανέλθωμεν καὶ περιγενόμεθα, ἐναντίως ἐπ’ αὐτὰ ἀναβαίνοντες ἢ ἐνταῦθα κατήλθομεν). Greek: A. Nauck, *Porphyrii philosophi Platonici opuscula selecta*, Olms 1963. Retrieved from: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/libproxy.helsinki.fi/Iris/Cite?2034:003:35789>; transl.: G. Clark (ed.), *Porphyry: On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, London 2000, 42.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Athenag., *res.* 15.2–3,6: “For if the whole nature of men in general is composed of an immortal soul and a body which was fitted to it in the creation (ἢ τῶν ἀνθρώπων φύσις ἐκ ψυχῆς ἀθανάτου καὶ τοῦ κατὰ τὴν γένεσιν αὐτῇ συναρμοσθέντος σώματος ἔχει τὴν σύστασιν), and if neither to the nature of the soul by itself, nor to the nature of the body separately, has God assigned such a creation or such a life and entire course of existence as this, but to men compounded of the two, in order that they may, when they have passed through their present existence, arrive at one common end, with the same elements of which they are composed at their birth and during life, it unavoidably follows, since one living-being is formed from the two, experiencing whatever the soul experiences and whatever the body experiences, doing and performing whatever requires the judgment of the senses or of the reason, that the whole series of these things must be referred to some one end, in order that they all, and by means of all — namely, man's creation, man's nature, man's life, man's doings and sufferings, his course of existence, and the end suitable to his nature, — may concur in one harmony and the same common experience. ...But that which has received both understanding and reason is man, not the soul by itself. Man, therefore, who consists of the two parts, must continue forever (ἄνθρωπον ἄρα δεῖ τὸν ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων ὄντα διαμένειν εἰς αἰεῖ)”. Cf. also Tert., *anim.* 3.5.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Gr. Nyss., *hom. opif.* 253.19–30: Τὸ γὰρ προκείμενον ἦν δεῖξαι τὴν σπερματικὴν τῆς συστάσεως ἡμῶν αἰτίαν, μήτε ἀσώματον εἶναι ψυχὴν, μήτε ἄψυχον σῶμα, ἀλλ’ ἐξ ἐμψύχων τε καὶ ζώντων σωματίων ζῶν καὶ ἔμψυχον παρὰ τὴν πρώτην ἀπογενᾶσθαι ζῶν· ἐκδεξαμένην δὲ τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν, καθάπερ τινὰ τροφὸν ταῖς οἰκειαῖς δυνάμεσιν αὐτὴν τιθηνήσασθαι· τὴν δὲ τρέφεσθαι κατ’ ἀμφοτέρα, καὶ καταλλήλως ἐν ἑκατέρῳ μέρει τὴν αὐξήσιν ἐπίδηλον ἔχειν. Εὐθύς μὲν γὰρ διὰ τῆς τεχνικῆς ταύτης καὶ ἐπιστημονικῆς διαπλάσεως τὴν συμπελεγμένην αὐτῇ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐνδείκνυται δύναμιν, ἀμυδρότερον μὲν κατὰ τὴν πρώτην ἐκφαινομένην, καθεξῆς δὲ τῇ τοῦ ὄργανου τελειώσει συναναλάμπουσιν.

It is clear from this passage that Gregory renounced the critical Neoplatonic attitude towards the embodied status of the soul and declared the body-soul liaison as a mutually befitting and glorious union.

Although Gregory acknowledged the incremental development of both the bodily and psychic powers of the embryo, his more detailed vision of this development was different from the positions of Aristotle and Porphyry. Aristotle, and also Galen, stood for *epigenesis*: the psychic powers of the embryo develop gradually, following the formation of the bodily organs.<sup>42</sup> Porphyry believed that the formation of the bodily organs is not accomplished until the foetus leaves the womb, hence the sensitive and rational souls enter it only at birth (AG 10.3=46.24–47.5).

Gregory maintained that the moment of conception comprises two simultaneous processes: the formation of the embryo out of the male seed and the menses, and the ensoulment somehow enabled and empowered by God. As a result of conception, the embryo receives the “full package” of the necessary bodily and psychic functions (in the state of potentiality). In other words, according to Gregory, the vegetative, sensitive and rational parts (sc. powers) of the soul are potentially present in the embryo from the moment of conception.<sup>43</sup> A similar view of the incremental development of the embryo combined with the idea of comprehensive ensoulment at conception was shared by Basil of Caesarea.<sup>44</sup>

Another important aspect of the Aristotelian, Neoplatonic and Christian versions of the one-seed theory was their explanation of the heredity traits of the parents. Aristotle defined the male seed, generated from the fully concocted blood, as the transmitter of *κίνησις*, able to set the menses (sc. non-concocted blood) in motion, and thereby to conceive the embryo (Arist.,

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Arist., GA 734a. – Galen, in *De foetuum formatione*, argued that the first stage of the foetus' growth is marked by the formation of the liver, which marks the plant-like life of the foetus (Foet. 4.665–667). Then the heart is formed, and the foetus lives like an animal (Foet. 4.670f.). Lastly, the formation of the brain and the development of the cognitive functions, which continue after birth, designate the final stage of the foetus' formation (Foet. 4.672–674; cf.: C.G., Kühn, *Claudii Galeni opera omnia* 4, Leipzig 1822).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Gr. Nyss., hom. opif. 237.31–45: “As, then, in the case of those growing seeds the advance to perfection is a graduated one, so in man's formation the forces of his soul show themselves in proportion to the size to which his body has attained. They dawn first in the foetus, in the shape of the power of nutrition and of development: after that, they introduce into the organism that has come into the light the gift of perception: then, when this is reached, they manifest a certain measure of the reasoning faculty, like the fruit of some matured plant, not growing all of it at once, but in a continuous progress along with the shooting up of that plant. Seeing, then, that that which is secreted from one living being to lay the foundations of another living being cannot itself be dead (for a state of deadness arises from the privation of life, and it cannot be that privation should precede the having), we grasp from these considerations the fact that in the compound which results from the joining of both (soul and body) there is a simultaneous passage of both into existence; the one does not come first, any more than the other comes after.”

<sup>44</sup> Basil. Caes., *De creatione hominis* 1.12,269c: κατὰ τὴν πρώτην σύστασιν τὴν καταβληθεῖσαν ἐν τῇ μήτρᾳ καταβλήθησαν καὶ οἱ λόγοι τῆς αὐξήσεως. οὐ γὰρ μετὰ ταῦτα νεώτερόν ἐστι τὸ χάρισμα τῆς ἡλικίας ἐπιγενόμενον, ἀλλ' αἱ μητρῶν καταβολαὶ συγκαταβεβλημένας ἔχουσι τὰς πρὸς τὸ ἀξάνεσθαι ἐπιτηδειότητας. εἴτα προέκυψε τῆς μήτρας, ἠϋξήθη τὸ ὅσον ἐν ταῖς ἀγκάλαις τῆς μητρός. ἔπεσαν οἱ ὀδόντες, ἐγνωμεν ὅτι ἠϋξήθη τόσον μέτρον. τριετὲς τὸ παιδίον ἐμέτρησεν ὁ πατήρ· οἶδεν ὅτι τὸ διπλάσιον τούτου μέγεθος ἀπολήψεται ἐν τῇ τελειώσει. (“En rapport avec la constitution première introduite dans la matrice, y ont été déposées également les raisons de la croissance. Car après cela, ce que l'âge apporte en supplément n'est pas nouveau : les substances introduites chez la mère reçoivent en même temps les éléments qui les rendent aptes à la croissance. Les dents sont tombées, et nous savons que la croissance a atteint tel seuil. Le père qui mesure son enfant de trois ans sait que celui-ci atteindra une taille double à la fin de la période”). (Greek text and French transl. : A. Smets / M. van Esboeck (eds.), *Basile de Césarée: Sur L'Origine de L'Homme*, SC 160, Paris 1970, 198–201).

GA 2.4,738b–739a). As Roberto Lo Presti has persuasively demonstrated, the roles of male and female in Aristotle’s view of the process of conception should not be understood in the terms of dominion vs submission, but rather as a pair of correlatives or as a matching and effectual partnership.<sup>45</sup> In such a way, Aristotle remarked that, while the active power of the male seed acts upon the passive power of the menses, the latter can act back.<sup>46</sup> Besides, the matter provided by the female can not only submit to the power of the seed but can also resist it, therefore the result of the collaboration between the active male and passive female powers can rightfully account for the heredity traits of both parents.<sup>47</sup>

Neoplatonists had a different understanding of conception. In Porphyry’s view, the seed, generated by the vegetative soul of the father, lacks actual motion and receives it from the sensitive soul of the mother (AG 14.3=54.3–15). In this way, as James Wilberding has convincingly demonstrated, Neoplatonists explained the heredity traits of both parents by way of pointing to the creative collaboration between the vegetative soul of the father and the vegetative and sensitive souls of the mother.<sup>48</sup>

As for the early-Christian view of the transmission of heredity traits, the ambiguous evidence we have about it makes our conjectures rather loose. On the one hand, we have statements that seem to testify to the understanding that the maternal contribution to the embryo and foetus does not extend to the transmission of heredity traits. For example, Methodius declared that when a man “is overcome by the desire of generation”, he offers his side to the divine Creator, “so that the father may again appear in the son” (Meth., symp. 2.2). On the other hand, Gregory of Nyssa professed that a child is “the very image of its parents’ beauty” (Gr. Nyss., virg. 3). These and other similar statements about the transmission of heredity traits may be easily considered equivocal and interpreted in various ways. What can be said with certainty is that, with regard to the birth of Christ, theologians demonstrated a more pronounced concern about the maternal contribution to the embryo and foetus than in the case of regular human reproduction. Thus, at the background of the dogma of Mary’s virginity was a belief that the human nature of Christ was without sin because he inherited it from his uncorrupted mother.<sup>49</sup> At the turn of the fourth and fifth century, Theodore of Mopsuestia framed the issue of Mary’s maternal contribution to the formation of Christ’s nature in the following manner:

“It was a novel thing to have been fashioned from a woman without marital intercourse, by the power of the Holy Spirit, but He is associated with the human nature by the fact

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. R. Lo Presti, *Informing Matter and Enmattered Forms. Aristotle and Galen on the 'Power' of the Seed*, in: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy: Causing Health and Disease: Medical Powers in Classical and Late Antiquity* 22 (2014), 929–950.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Arist., GA 4.3,768b: “The reason why the movements relapse is that the agent in its turn gets acted upon by that upon which it acts (e.g., a thing which cuts gets blunted by the thing which is cut, and a thing which heats gets cooled by the thing which is heated, and, generally, any motive agent, except the ‘prime mover’, gets moved somehow itself in return...)”. Transl. Peck / Page, 1943, 411.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. P.J. van der Eijk, *Les Mouvements de la Matière Dans la Génération des Animaux Selon Aristote*, in: V. Boudon-Millot / A. Guardasole / C. Magdelaine (eds.), *La Science Médicale Antique. Nouveaux Regards. Études Réunies en L'honneur de Jacques Jouanna*. Paris 2007, 405–424.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Wilberding, 2017, 63–84.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Jerome in virg. 19.277, claimed that “from a virgin wedlock a virgin son was born (ex virginali conjugio virgo filius nasceretur).” (Latin text: PL 23.1, 213; transl.: W.H. Fremantle / G. Lewis / W.G. Martley, NPNF 6).

that He is from the nature of Mary, and it is for this that He is said also to be the seed of David and Abraham, as in His Nature He is related to them”.<sup>50</sup>

Christological discussions of the fifth century brought a new turn to the Christian embryological discourse, which I shall touch upon in the following section.

### III. Christian Embryological and Ensoulment Theories of the Fifth Century

In this section I analyse the contributions of two fifth century authors to ensoulment theories in order to introduce a comparison between the early-Christian period and the later time.

Theodoret of Cyrus and Nemesius of Emesa, whose legacies I examine in this section, could be classed as representatives of the Antiochene school of theology. Another common characteristic of these authors is that, compared to previous Christian writers, they held somewhat innovative views of reproduction. Theodoret of Cyrus denied comprehensive ensoulment at the moment of conception and instead believed in incremental ensoulment. He also explicitly argued for internal ensoulment, although he did allow that divine assistance was provided through the means of providence and the operation of the natural law of human physiology, established by God at creation.

In such a way, with a reference to Ex 21:22, Theodoret claims in a special chapter devoted to the nature of man (Περὶ φύσεως ἀνθρώπου) that the ensoulment of the foetus happens only after it has been fully formed in the mother’s womb.<sup>51</sup> In a different treatise, and again with a reference to Ex 21:22–24, Theodoret even more directly claims that the foetus, which is altogether formed in the womb, has the soul, while the yet unformed foetus does not have it.<sup>52</sup> To support his opinion, Theodoret alludes to the well-known passage from the book of Genesis that infers the sequential character of human creation: “the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.” (Gen 2:7).

This biblical citation concurred with the conviction, shared by Aristotle, Galen and Neoplatonists, that the soul can only enter a fully formed body. As I have shown, Aristotle and Galen believed in incremental ensoulment, while the Platonists affirmed that the sensitive and intellectual souls enter the body at birth.

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Nicene Creed*, Woodbrooke studies, Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic and Garshuni, ed., transl., with critical app. by A. Mingana, vol. 5. Cambridge 1932, 18–116.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Thdt., affect. 5.52f.: “Speaking of a pregnant woman, whose miscarriage was brought on by a stroke, [the lawgiver] said that first the foetus is formed in her womb, and then it is ensouled” (Περὶ γὰρ δὴ τῆς ἐγκύμονος τῆς ἐκ τινῶν πληγῶν ἀμβλωσκούσης διαλεγόμενος, διαμορφοῦσθαι πρότερον ἐν τῇ νηδίῳ λέγει τὸ βρέφος, εἴθ’ οὕτω ψυχοῦσθαι). (P. Canivet [ed.], *Théodoret de Cyr: Thérapeutique des maladies helléniques* 1–2, SC 57, Paris 1958, 243; transl. mine).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Thdt., haer. 5,27: ὡς τὸ μὲν διαμεμορφωμένον ἔμψυχον, τὸ δὲ μὴ μορφωθὲν ἄψυχον.: Greek Text: PG 83,484A; transl. mine.

Although Theodoret did not specify the time of ensoulment, neither did he elaborate on the sequence of the formation of the bodily organs, it seems likely that he thought ensoulment took place sometime before birth. The passage from Exodus, which he repeatedly referred to, describes the case of a miscarriage or premature birth, which proved that sometimes the foetus came out fully formed and alive, while sometimes it did not. With a reference to Job 10:9–12, Theodoret states the following sequence of the reproduction processes: “[at first] the small semen takes on a thousand forms, and then the soul is formed and joined with the body. After the throes of childbirth, divine aid protects and guides [the child]”.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, according to Theodoret’s logic, his vision of ensoulment coincided with the holistic anthropological ideas of previous church fathers. He maintained:

“The church, complying with the words of God, despises the view of such heretics, and turns away from such myths, and following the Scripture believes that the soul is created together with the body and that it is not from the matter of the seed whence it has the origin of its creation”.<sup>54</sup>

Importantly, the last part of this citation, which might create an impression that Theodoret supported the external theory of ensoulment, should be compared with his other statements. Thus, in the passage cited above from the chapter *On the nature of man*, he declared that after the foetus is fully formed in the mother’s womb, it receives the soul, “but not in such a way that the soul comes from the outside, nor that it is engendered from the seed, but by the natural law, from the beginning established by God, the foetus receives its being”.<sup>55</sup> Clearly in this passage, Theodoret implies the joined operation of human physiology and divine providence.<sup>56</sup>

It is difficult to detect any particular philosophical or medical influence on Theodoret’s views on reproduction. He explicitly mentioned a wide range of special philosophical and medical literature about ensoulment and started his chapter *On the nature of man* with a detailed analysis of various theories of the Classical and Hellenic authors.<sup>57</sup>

Unlike Theodoret, his contemporary, Nemesius of Emesa, criticised those who believed that cooperation of the human physiology and divine providence can account for the

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Thdt., affect. 5.54.1–5: τὸν μικρὸν ἐκεῖνον θορὸν εἰς μυρίας ιδέας μεταμορφούμενον καὶ τηνικαῦτα τὴν ψυχὴν δημιουργουμένην τε καὶ ξυναπτομένην τῷ σώματι, καὶ μέντοι καὶ μετὰ τὰς ὠδῖνας τὴν θείαν ἐπικουρίαν φρουροῦσαν καὶ κυβερνῶσαν. Greek text: Canivet, 1958, 243; transl. mine.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Thdt., haer. 5.24f.: Ἡ δὲ Ἐκκλησία, τοῖς θείοις πειθομένη λόγοις, τὸν μὲν τούτων διαφερόντως μυσάττεται λόγον, ἀποστρέφεται δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τοὺς μύθους· τῇ δὲ θεῖα πειθομένη Γραφῇ λέγει, τὴν ψυχὴν συνδημιουργεῖσθαι τῷ σώματι, οὐκ ἐκ τῆς ὕλης τοῦ σπέρματος ἔχουσαν τῆς δημιουργίας τὰς ἀφορμὰς, ἀλλὰ τῇ βουλήσει τοῦ ποιητοῦ μετὰ τὴν τοῦ σώματος συνισταμένην διάπλασιν. Greek text : PG 83,481C; transl. mine.

<sup>55</sup> Thdt., affect. 5.52f.: οὐ θύραθεν ποθεν τῆς ψυχῆς εἰσκρινομένης, οὐδέ γε ἐκ τῆς γονῆς φυομένης, ἀλλὰ τῷ θεῷ ὄρω κατὰ τὸν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐντεθέντα ἐν τῇ φύσει νόμον δεχομένης τὴν γένεσιν. Greek text: Canivet, 1958, 243; transl. mine.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Thdt. haer. 5.21: Ὡσπερ γὰρ νῦν βουληθέντος αὐτοῦ τὸ ἔμβρυον ἐν τῇ μήτρᾳ δημιουργεῖται, καὶ ἡ φύσις τοῖς ἐξ ἀρχῆς παρ’ αὐτοῦ τεθείσιν ὅροις ἀκολουθεῖ, οὕτως τότε ἀνθρώπινον ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἐθελήσαντος αὐτοῦ συνεπάγη σῶμα, καὶ ὁ πηλὸς ἐγένετο σὰρξ, καὶ αἷμα, καὶ δέρμα, καὶ πιμελῆ, καὶ νεῦρα, καὶ φλέβες, καὶ ἀρτηρίαί, καὶ ἐγκέφαλος, καὶ μυελὸς, καὶ τὰ τῶν ὀστέων ὑπερείσματα (“Nowadays still, by the will of the Creator, the embryo is created in the mother’s womb, and nature follows the rules established by God at the beginning. Similarly then [at the time of the first creation], according to His will, the human body was made up of earth, and the clay became flesh, blood, skin, fat, nerves, veins and arteries, brain and marrow”). Greek Text: PG 83,477D; transl. mine.

<sup>57</sup> Thus, Theodoret mentioned Pythagoras, Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon, Galen and Plotinus (cf. Thdt., affect. 5.82f.).



reproduction of human life.<sup>58</sup> Nemesius pointed out the difference between divine providence, focused on the preservation of life, and the first creation of life *ex nihilo* (nat. hom. 2.31,16–19). According to Nemesius, if the souls were born from internal reproduction and not created *ex nihilo*, they would be mortal (nat. hom. 2.31,23–25). Nemesius also rejected the idea that “souls are born from souls, as bodies are from bodies”, which he ascribed to Apollinaris (nat. hom. 2.32,3). Nemesius declared this position a blasphemy because it represents God as “an accomplice of adulterers, since children are begotten by them also” (nat. hom. 2.32,7f.). In addition, Nemesius renounced the belief that souls are created by God at the moment of conception. In his view, this notion contradicted Genesis 2:2: God “rested from all the works He had made”. Thus, Nemesius was left with the last logical explanation of ensoulment — the pre-existence of the soul. Although he never explicitly acknowledged that such was his view, the rationale of his argument suggests no other alternative.

This indirect support of pre-existence made him appear as a supporter of the Neoplatonic teaching and, especially, of Platonic substance dualism in the eyes of scholars.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Nemesius explicitly cited Ammonius (nat. hom. 3.39,16) and Porphyry’s *Miscellaneous Questions* (nat. hom. 3.43,2). He referred to these authors as authorities in the question of the unconfused union, which was topical in the Christological debate of his time.

Naturally, the context of the Neoplatonic discussion around the specific kind of union between intelligible substances was very different from the theological debates about the union between the intelligible soul and material body, or even between the human and divine natures of Christ. For example, when Porphyry describes the “divine and paradoxical” kind of union between the vegetative souls of mother and father in the *Ad Gaurum* 10.5,1–10, he spoke about the souls, i.e. intelligible substances. Hence, the union between soul and body, and even the union between the intelligible divine nature of Christ and his mixed human nature, did not exactly fit the context of the Neoplatonic discussion.

However, it is true that in Neoplatonic teaching, the vegetative soul has the complicated status of a medium between the abstract reality of Forms and the empirical reality of the sensible world.<sup>60</sup> If we add to this consideration the fact that Porphyry (and also Nemesius) admitted that the soul can suffer together with its body,<sup>61</sup> the “grey zone” localization of the

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<sup>58</sup> Nemesius particularly addressed his critique to Eunomius, who, according to his words, believed that “the universe is not yet complete,” and that the ongoing creation of incorporeal souls in the bodies will eventually fulfil the design of God, i.e. it “will complete the number of souls required for the resurrection (τῶν πρὸς τῇ ἀναστάσει τὸν ψυχικὸν ἀριθμὸν ἀποπληροῦντων)” (Nemes., nat. hom. 2.31,9; 2.31,13). Greek: M. Morani (ed.), *Nemesii Emeseni de natura hominis*, Leipzig 1987. Retrieved from: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/libproxy.helsinki.fi/Iris/Cite?0743:002:0>; transl.: R.W. Sharples / P.J. van der Eijk (eds.), *Nemesius of Emesa: The Nature of Man*, Liverpool 2008.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. G. Verbeke, *Filosofie en echristendom in het mensbeeld van Nemesius van Emesa*, coll. Med. H. Vlaamse Acad. Wet. Lett. Schone Kunsten Belg., kl. Lett. 33.1, Brüssel 1971; D. Krausmüller, *Faith and Reason in Late Antiquity: The Perishability Axiom and Its Impact on Christian Views about the Origin and Nature of the Soul*, in: M. Elkaisy-Friemuth / J.M. Dillon (eds.), *The Afterlife of the Platonic Soul: Reflections of Platonic Psychology in the Monotheistic Religions*. Leiden 2009, 49; G., Karamanolis, *Nemesius of Emesa*, in: D.H. Hunter, / P.J.J. van Geest / B.J. Lietaert Peerbolte (eds.), *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity Online*, 2018, ([http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2589-7993\\_eeco\\_SIM\\_00002357](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2589-7993_eeco_SIM_00002357)).

<sup>60</sup> Thus, Porphyry identified the vegetative soul with nature, and associated it with nourishment, growth, and reproduction (AG 6.3=42.28f.).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Nemesius argued that the soul, “while remaining one and the same in substance, changes its qualities, passing from ignorance to knowledge, and from badness to goodness” (“ψυχή δὲ μία καὶ ἡ αὐτὴ μένουσα κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπαλλάττει τὰς ποιότητας ἐξ ἀμαθίας εἰς ἐπιστήμην μεταπίπτουσα καὶ ἐκ κακίας εἰς ἀρετήν,” – nat.

vegetative soul becomes clear. Consider also Nemesius' profound knowledge and admiration of Galen, who declared his allegiance to the Platonic school and, at the same time, created his essentially naturalistic psychosomatic psychology.<sup>62</sup> In these circumstances, it is no wonder that Nemesius used Neoplatonic concepts solely for the benefit of his own argumentation and with no binding influence of the philosophical notions on his metaphysical principles.

Nevertheless, it is open to conjecture whether Nemesius was himself unaware of the distinction between the Neoplatonic and Christian discourses around the concept of the unconfused union, or whether he deliberately chose to ignore it for some reason. On the one hand, sometimes Nemesius gave rather loose accounts of famous philosophical theories, but, on the other hand, his knowledge of Porphyry was considerable.<sup>63</sup> I believe that whatever Nemesius' doxographical principles were, he clearly felt free to give his interpretation of the philosophical concepts because the chief goal of his treatise was not doxographical but creative.<sup>64</sup>

The rationale of Nemesius' anthropology was fundamentally different from the hierarchical structure of the Neoplatonic universe. Although he accepted the substantial difference between soul and body, he repeatedly praised and admired the unity of these different substances.

For example, Nemesius employed a term introduced by Theodore of Mopsuestia, who called man the bond of creation (σύνδεσμος), which joined together intelligible and material substances for the mutual benefit of both.<sup>65</sup> With reference to the Mosaic story of creation, and similarly to Theodore, Nemesius asserts:

“when intelligible reality and also visible reality had come to be, something needed to come to be to bind them both together (σύνδεσμον ἀμφοτέρων), so that everything should

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hom. 2.30,14f.), and also that unless the soul manages to attune its body “through reason and character” it will be perverted together with it (ἐὰν μὴ σφόδρα νήψη, καὶ συνδιαστρέφεται αὐτῷ, – nat. hom. 2.26,2f.).

<sup>62</sup> Thus, according to Morani's count, the treatise contains about 70 citations of Galen, sometimes explicit, extensive and verbatim (Morani, 1987, 139), while the 28 direct references to the Bible are short, patchy, and applied as support for Nemesius' argument and never as its starting point. For an overview of Galen's holistic psychology cf. P. Singer, *Galen, Psychological Writings*, Cambridge 2017.

<sup>63</sup> For Nemesius' misrepresentation of philosophical theories, cf. e.g. Sharples / van der Eijk (eds.), 2008, 53, note 230. According to Sharples / van der Eijk's edition of Nemesius' nat. hom., *index locorum Porphyrii* included 21 citations from different treatises.

<sup>64</sup> For a long time, the study of the nat. nom. has been propelled by such secondary interests as doxographic research or the history of dogmatic theology, while the rich and miscellaneous content of the treatise *per se* did not excite much scholarly curiosity (cf. a bibliographic overview by A. Siclari, *L'antropologia di Nemesio di Emesa nella critica moderna*, in: *Aevum* 5(6), 1973, 477–497). This *status quo* was first contested by William Telfer (1962), Anastasios Kallis (1978), only tolerably recently Beatrice Motta (2004) and Sabine Föllinger (2006), who persuasively demonstrates the independence and creativity of Nemesius' ideas. Cf. W. Telfer, *The Birth of Christian Anthropology*, in: *JTS* 13 (1962), 347–354; A., Kallis, *Der Mensch im Kosmos: das Weltbild Nemesios' von Emesa*, Münster 1978; B., Motta, *La mediazione estrema. L'antropologia di Nemesio di Emesa fra platonismo e aristotelismo*, Padova 2004; S. Föllinger, *Willensfreiheit und Determination bei Nemesios*, in: B. Feichtinger / S. Lake / H. Seng, (eds.), *Körper und Seele. Aspekte spätantiker Anthropologie*, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 215, Berlin/New York 2006, 143–157.

<sup>65</sup> For example, in his commentary on Romans, Theodore said that by joining the soul with the body, God created man — a bond of creation (“σύνδεσμος τῆς κτίσεως,” cf. *Fragmenta in epistulam ad Romanos* (in catenis) 138.10, cited from: K., Staab, *Pauluskommentar aus der griechischen Kirche aus Katnenhandschriften gesammelt*, Münster 1933. Retrieved from: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu.libproxy.helsinki.fi/Iris/Cite?4135:015:65720>.

be one and in sympathy with itself (συμπαθὲς ἑαυτῷ) and not foreign itself to itself. So man, the animal that binds both natures together, came to be (τὸ συνδέον ἀμφοτέρας τὰς φύσεις ζῶον ὁ ἄνθρωπος)” (nat. hom. 1.5,5–7).<sup>66</sup>

Significantly, Nemesius viewed man not simply as a boundary between the different spheres<sup>67</sup> but as a functional joint, or “μικρὸς κόσμος” (nat. hom. 1.15,6), manifesting organic continuity between visible and intelligible spheres. Moreover, Nemesius also called man “the image of the whole creation” (πάσης κτίσεως τὴν εἰκόνα) (nat. hom. 1.15,6), which may appear as a development of Theodore’s “σύνδεσμος τῆς κτίσεως”. Nemesius never explicitly called man “the image of God”, which was a clear shift from the popular anthropological concepts of the Cappadocians.<sup>68</sup>

In his depiction of the organic unity between man and cosmos, Nemesius went further than mere declarations. His treatise contains multiple examples of the human psychosomatic integrity, human-environmental physiological and psychological continuity<sup>69</sup> as well as his teleological explanations of all these processes. For example, dwelling on Galen’s psychosomatic notions,<sup>70</sup> Nemesius declared:

“The Creator in accordance with his supreme foresight wove the functions of the soul together with the natural and vice versa” (συνέπλεξε τοῖς φυσικοῖς τὰ ψυχικὰ καὶ ἀνάπαλιν, – nat. hom. 27.88,25).

Remarkably, among the psychosomatic functions Nemesius mentioned reproduction, which partially is subject to impulse and partially to reason:

“the generative faculty belongs to the part which is not capable of obeying reason: for we eject semen in dreams without wishing to, and the desire for sexual intercourse belongs to nature, for we are moved towards it when unwilling. But the activity is incontestably up to us and involves the soul: for it is accomplished through the organs that are subject

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<sup>66</sup> Transl. Sharples / van der Eijk (eds.), 2008, 40.

<sup>67</sup> According to Norris, Philo maintained that man was a boundary, or a mediator, between different spheres (cf. R.A. Norris, *Manhood and Christ. A Study of the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia*. Oxford 1963, 147).

<sup>68</sup> Cf., e.g., Gr. Nyss., hom. opif. 133.51, *et passim*.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Nemes., nat. hom. 40.116,11: “...if the surroundings are dry, bodies become dry, if not all in the same way, and if mother lives an unhealthy life and is luxurious her children will in consequence be born with a poor bodily temperament and wayward in their impulses. So it is clear from what has been said that people may find themselves with an unfavourable bodily temperament either through the general environment or through the preferred life-style of their parents or through themselves being damaged by luxuriousness...” (τοῦ γὰρ περιέχοντος ξηροῦ ὄντος ξηραίνεται τὰ σώματα, εἰ καὶ μὴ πάντα ὁμοίως, καὶ μητρὸς οὐκ εὖ δεδαιτημένης καὶ τρυφώσης ἀκολούθως τὰ τικτόμενα καὶ τοῖς σώμασι δύσκρατα καὶ ταῖς ὀρμαῖς παράφορα γεννᾶται. δῆλον οὖν ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων ὅτι συμβαίνει καὶ κράσει σώματος οὐκ εὐτυχεῖ περιπεσεῖν ἢ τῷ κοινῷ τοῦ περιέχοντος ἢ ἐξ ἐκουσίας διαίτης τῶν γεννησάντων ἢ καὶ αὐτῶν ἐκείνων ἀπὸ τρυφῆς διεφθαρμένων).

<sup>70</sup> In *De motibus dubiis*, Galen describes the instances of unconscious voluntary movements such as breathing, or snoring (DMD 10.1; 164.1–5), and of the half-conscious, involuntary movement such as the erection of the penis (DMD 4.17; 138.20–22), etc. Greek: V. Nutton (ed.), *Galen: On Problematical Movements*, Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries 47, Cambridge 2012.

to impulse, and it is in our power to abstain and conquer the impulse”<sup>71</sup> (nat. hom. 25.85,24–30)

Another shift from the familiar Christian views brought Nemesius’ support of Galen’s two-seed theory (nat. hom. 25.87,1–5). Although Nemesius challenged some wide-spread Christian psychological ideas in many ways, his efforts to smooth out the dualist character of human nature unmistakably matches the complex dualist-holistic nature of Christian doctrine, which I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. Thus, Nemesius, in tune with Paul, Irenaeus and other early-Christian authors, professed that since the soul is already immortal, the salvific efforts of men should be focused on the transformation of the body understood as the psychosomatic unity of an individual person. In other words, the teleological goal of the soul, according to Nemesius, is to bring the body to immortality.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, this task, in Nemesius’ view, has a cosmological perspective because of the initial divine design to bind together intelligible and corporeal natures through humans.

#### IV. Conclusion

At the introduction to this chapter, I outlined the complex dualist-holistic nature of Christian doctrine and presented a hypothesis that, despite plentiful influences of various philosophical and medical embryological concepts, the rationale of Christian thought remained faithful to this complex nature. To summarise the conclusions of the first section of this chapter, and thereby to facilitate comparison between the early-Christian and later examples of ensoulment theories, I present Table 1.

From the second and until the fifth century, Christian authors, together with Aristotle, Plato and their followers, denied the existence of the female seed, proposed by Hippocrates and his famous follower, Galen. Although theologians and philosophers unanimously believed that the embryo is formed out of the male seed and menses, they had different views of the process of conception. Unlike Aristotle and Galen, and similarly to Platonists, Christians stood for the external theory of ensoulment, which complied with their religious dogmas about creation, incarnation and resurrection. However, similarly to Aristotle and Galen but unlike the Platonists, Christians held a holistic view of the soul-and-body union. In addition, also in tune with Aristotle and Galen but unlike the Platonists, Christians supported *epigenesis*. However, while Aristotle and Galen complemented their epigenetic concepts with the belief in incremental ensoulment, Christians affirmed comprehensive ensoulment at the moment of

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Nemes., nat. hom. 25.85,24–30: Καὶ τὸ γεννητικὸν δὲ τοῦ μέρους ἐστὶ τοῦ μὴ κατηκόου λόγῳ (ἀβουλήτως γὰρ ἐν ταῖς ὄνειρώξεσι προΐεμεν τὴν γονίην) καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία δὲ τῆς συνουσίας φυσικὴ· ἄκοντες γὰρ ἐπ’ αὐτὴν κινούμεθα. ἡ δὲ πράξις ὁμολογουμένως ἐφ’ ἡμῖν καὶ ψυχικὴ, καὶ γὰρ διὰ τῶν καθ’ ὄρμην ὀργάνων συντελεῖται, καὶ ἀποσχέσθαι καὶ κρατῆσαι τῆς ὀρμῆς ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἐστίν.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Nemes., nat. hom. 1.6,17: “[man] was created mortal, but capable of becoming immortal if perfected by progress: in other words, potentially immortal” (θνητὸς μὲν κατεσκευάσθη, δυνάμενος δὲ ἐκ προκοπῆς τελειούμενος ἀθάνατος γενέσθαι, τουτέστι δυνάμει ἀθάνατος).

conception. Christian views on this issue also differed from the Platonic conviction that ensoulment happens at the moment of birth. Unlike philosophers and medical doctors, Christians were strong opponents of abortion.

Christian authors did not speculate upon the minute details of conception, which could account for the heredity traits of both parents. Theologians regarded the male seed as a vehicle of the principles of physical formation, while menses supplied the nutrition for the growing foetus. These ideas, however, should not rule out the possibility that Christians accepted the transmission of maternal heredity traits (as did Aristotle and also the Platonists and Galen, although, with different explanations). Since Christians admitted divine assistance at conception, one should perhaps not expect from them a perfectly natural explanation of all embryological processes. Thus, in the case of Christ's conception, theologians proclaimed that Mary mysteriously transmitted the nature of David and Abraham, so that Christ could be lawfully called their descendant.

By a rough and superficial count, we can observe that, in the matters of embryology and ensoulment, Christians had three points in common with Aristotle, two with the Neoplatonists and two with Galen. This perfunctory statistic, in my opinion, does not testify to any superior influence of Aristotle on Christian teaching. Framed by its basic metaphysical principles, Christian thought showed a remarkable creativity at combining various aspects of various concepts, without fully accepting any one of them. This attitude demonstrates that in answering embryological questions Christian authors merely consulted common philosophical and medical opinions of the time, while principally theologians were guided by the logic of their own religious discourse.

In the fifth century, Christian interest in the mysteries of reproduction was heated by the debates about the union of the divine and human natures of Christ, and the details of Jesus' generation. Some novel views of ensoulment were introduced by such representatives of the Antiochene school of theology as Theodoret of Cyrus and Nemesius of Emesa. Thus, Theodoret reduced the extent of divine assistance at ensoulment to the joined operation of providence and human nature, and also renounced comprehensive ensoulment at the moment of conception. Nemesius' devotion to Galen and Porphyry made him an explicit supporter of the two-seed embryology and an indirect proponent of the pre-existence of souls. Nevertheless, Nemesius also retained a continuity with the Antiochene exegetic tradition (Theodore of Mopsuestia) and gave an essentially holistic interpretation to the unconfused union of intelligible and corporeal natures in man. A brief analysis of Theodoret and Nemesius' views of reproduction demonstrate that, although these authors closely engaged with Aristotelian, Galenic and Neoplatonic concepts, their ideas preserve continuity with early-Christian concepts. Thus, Theodoret and Nemesius tried to outbalance the concept of the dualist human nature by emphasising its functional unity, which they regarded as the essential point of the divine plan concerning creation and salvation.

TABLE 1:

<i>Authors / Themes</i>	<b>Aristotle</b>	<b>Platonists</b>	<b>Galen</b>	<b>Christians until the 5th cent</b>
<i>One seed / two seeds</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	2	<b>1</b>
<i>Internal / external ensoulment</i>	Internal	<b>External</b>	Internal (professional agnosticism)	<b>External</b>
<i>Formation of embryo &amp; foetus</i>	<b>Gradual development of embryo &amp; foetus (epigenesis)</b>	Uncertainty of views, prevailing idea of concurrent body formation shortly before birth	<b>Gradual development of embryo &amp; foetus (epigenesis)</b>	<b>Gradual development of embryo &amp; foetus (epigenesis)</b>
<i>Manner of ensoulment</i>	Incremental ensoulment	Ensoulment at birth	Incremental ensoulment	Comprehensive ensoulment at conception
<i>Attitude to abortion</i>	Tolerant of abortion	Tolerant of abortion	Tolerant of abortion	Against abortion
<i>Heredity</i>	<b>Heredity traits from the male seed &amp; female menses</b>	Heredity traits from the vegetative souls of male & female	Heredity traits from the male seed & female seed	<b>Heredity traits from the male seed &amp; female menses</b> / female soul of the virgin Mary
<i>Anthropological paradigm</i>	<b>Holistic (hylomorphism)</b>	Hierarchical (varieties of dualism)	<b>Holistic</b> (humoral theory)	<b>Holistic</b> (endowed with the image of God at birth, man awaits bodily resurrection and transformation)
<i>Number of points in common with Christianity</i>	4	2	2	