FLESH AND BLOOD: A Dogmatic Sketch Concerning the Fallen Nature View of Christ's Human Nature

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Dan Cameron is a member of the T. F. Torrance Theological Fellowship and a recent graduate with a Master of Arts in Systematic Theology from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (USA). *Flesh and Blood* is the published version of his Master's thesis. Cameron's object is to defend T. F. Torrance's doctrine of Christ's assumption of fallen human nature against Oliver Crisp's criticisms.[1]

Following a foreword by Myk Habets, Cameron prefaces his study with a three-level hierarchy for ranking doctrines: first, those which separate orthodoxy from heresy; secondly, those which separate orthodox churches (e.g., Reformed vs. Lutheran vs. Baptist); thirdly, those over which believers may disagree while yet worshiping together. In this third category he places the dispute over whether or not Christ assumed a fallen human nature. The guiding question of the book, though, is this: "while remaining orthodox can it be said that Christ assumed a fallen human nature in the incarnation?" (xviii) This way of putting the issue stands in some tension with Cameron's ranking of it among third-order adiaphora, since answering the question negatively implies that those who answer affirmatively do not remain orthodox. This tension indicates the twin commitments that animate Cameron's book: to orthodoxy and to peacemaking. The preface also outlines the flow of argument of the rest of the book.

Chapter One explains Cameron's rationale for selecting Torrance and Crisp as his primary representatives of the "fallenness" and "unfallenness" viewpoints, respectively. He points out that Crisp mounts a formidable argument that the fallenness view is incompatible with orthodoxy yet never references T. F. Torrance, one of the view's most articulate exponents. Cameron wishes to clarify Torrance's view and show whether it can withstand Crisp's objections. The rest of the chapter unfortunately bears witness to oversights in the editing process:

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1 Oliver Crisp, "Did Christ Have a *Fallen* Human Nature?", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6.3 (2004): 270–288, reprinted in his *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

it repeats the preface's discussion of the threefold ranking of doctrines and once again outlines the book, but the outline here is incorrectly numbered (e.g., "Chapter 1" is really Chapter Two), and no reference is made to Chapter Five.

Chapter Two describes the significance that Torrance attributes to the Virgin Birth and the homoousion for understanding Christ. Against this backdrop of the union of person and work, divinity and humanity in Christ, Cameron proceeds to sketch two explanations given by Torrance of the Son's assumption of fallen human nature. The first explanation, which appears in Torrance's early Auburn lectures, is that Christ took on a nature subject to infirmity, satanic assault, and divine judgment but not to original sin. Drawing from Emil Brunner's teaching that original sin is located in one's personhood, the young Torrance stresses the Son's anhypostatic incarnation: because Christ assumes human nature but not a human person, he takes up that nature's fallenness but not that person's original sin. By contrast, the second explanation appears in Torrance's postdoctoral writings and affirms that Christ took on original sin and guilt in assuming a fallen human nature, but that from the moment of conception onward he healed that nature so that it was sinless. Cameron sees this second explanation as signaling Torrance's addition of enhypostasia to anhypostasia: the humanity assumed by Christ becomes "personalized" in his divine person so that humanity's depraved mind and will are sanctified by his uniting with and thinking and willing through them. While Cameron does not explicitly say so, this shift in Torrance's explanations depends on his breaking with Brunner and relocating original sin from human personhood to human nature.[2]

Chapter Three examines Crisp's critiques of the fallenness doctrine. First, advocates of fallenness are partly motivated by the desire to ensure that Christ's humanity is not alien to our own. Crisp, however, points out that the condition of fallenness is an accidental rather than essential property of human nature; therefore Christ need not be fallenly human to be fully human. Secondly, Crisp equates fallenness with possession of original sin. The Augustinian-Reformed concept of original sin consists of two aspects: the corrupt propensity to sin (concupiscence) and original guilt. Crisp himself finds the notion of original guilt logically questionable. Even in the absence of original guilt, though, a person whose nature bears concupiscence would be unacceptable to God, hence sinful. Crisp can see no escape from the conclusion that fallenness entails sinfulness

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2   See E. Jerome Van Kuiken, *Christ's Humanity in Current and Ancient Controversy: Fallen or Not?* (London: T&T Clark, forthcoming), §§1.3.1 and 1.3.2. As noted by Dick O. Eugenio, *Communion with the Triune God: The Trinitarian Soteriology of T. F. Torrance* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 49n71, more investigation needs to be done into Torrance's hamartiology.

and so would disqualify a fallen-natured Christ from being the Savior. Thirdly, Crisp claims that another motive for asserting Christ's having a fallen nature is to render his temptations genuine by allowing that in his humanity, he could have sinned—although either his divine nature or the Holy Spirit restrained him from ever doing so. Yet this notion of divine restraint is functionally equivalent to the notion that Christ's human nature was impeccable, thus undermining the fallenness proponents' final rationale. Lastly, although Crisp denies that Christ's humanity was fallen (i.e., possessed of original sin), he grants that Christ experienced Fall-consequent physical and moral infirmities.

In Chapter Four, Cameron seeks to rebut Crisp's critiques. First, he follows Ian McFarland[3] by distinguishing between fallenness as a property of human nature and sinfulness as a property of human persons. This move vindicates Torrance's Auburn-era fallenness view but seems to leave his later view vulnerable. To resolve this problem, Cameron appeals to Christ's vicarious assumption of human nature: the fallen mind and volition exist as sinful in all merely human persons but exist as non-sinful in Christ due to his sanctifying assumption of them into the hypostatic union. Secondly, Cameron rejects Crisp's claim that fallenness advocates wish to assert Christ's peccability. Here Cameron cites Barth rather than Torrance to prove his point even though Torrance's Auburn lectures contain a clear affirmation of non posse peccare.[4] Thirdly, Cameron masterfully replies to Crisp's objection that Christ may be fully human apart from assuming a fallen human nature: the point of the Incarnation is not simply to become human per se but to redeem fallen humanity; in order to make atonement (as opposed to a mere metaphysical experiment) the assumption of fallen human nature is necessary. Fourthly, the protest that assuming such a nature would defile the Savior's holiness likewise misses the soterio-logic of the Incarnation. Christ does not leave the nature which he assumes in its corrupt state; instead, he hallows it from the first moment of its assumption. Having defused Crisp's critiques, Cameron very briefly sketches the fallenness view's exegetical basis in 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:3; Heb. 2:14 and 4:15; and John 1:14. This section is too cursory to convince an unfallenness proponent but does demonstrate that the fallenness view enjoys some *prima facie* biblical support. The chapter's final section presents Cameron's conclusion that the fallenness view falls within the

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3   Ian A. McFarland, "Fallen or Unfallen? Christ's Human Nature and the Ontology of Human Sinfulness", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10.4 (2008): 399–415, reprinted in his *In Adam's Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

4   Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 125–129.

bounds of orthodoxy. In keeping with his concern for peacemaking, he also urges both sides in the debate to focus on their significant points of agreement.

Leaning hard on Myk Habets' 2015 address to the T. F. Torrance Theological Fellowship,[5] Chapter Five looks to Spirit Christology for assistance in understanding Christ's assumption of fallen human nature. Cameron documents that Torrance describes Jesus' life of sanctifying the flesh as occurring in the power of the Spirit, but he finds Torrance lacking a full-orbed Spirit Christology. Here Cameron echoes Habets in calling for constructive work in this area. Cameron also adopts Habets' appeal to the perichoretic unity underlying the Trinity's works ad extra in order to deflect Oliver Crisp's criticism that Spirit Christology divides the divine Son from his assumed humanity. Following Chapter Five is an appended bibliography of Torrance's books.

Flesh and Blood is a promising theological student's summary and defense of Torrance's doctrine of Christ's assumption of fallen human nature. Its brevity, clarity, and personal touches commend it as a supplemental textbook, book-study resource, or theological "tract" for those who are just becoming acquainted with Torrance's thought and who may wrestle, as Cameron did, with the notion of Christ's fallen humanity. As C. S. Lewis somewhere observes, often a struggling student gains the most real help on a hard subject from a fellow student who has not advanced too far to sympathize.

E. Jerome Van Kuiken

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5   Published as Myk Habets, "The Fallen Humanity of Christ: A Pneumatological Clarification of the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance", *Participatio* 5 (2015): 18–44.