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SINLESS SAVIOR IN FALLEN FLESH? TOWARD CLARIFYING AND CLOSING THE DEBATE

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Abstract: *Did Christ assume a fallen human nature? This question has provoked much controversy in recent theological literature. This article aims to clarify and bring a measure of closure to the debate. First, the claims of the "fallenness" view(s) are clarified by addressing six objections. I conclude that both sides have misinterpreted one another. Secondly, in light of this conclusion, three proposals set out a path toward potentially ending the debate by excluding outliers, recognizing conceptual consensus while tolerating terminological diversity, and adjusting terminology. I end with an appeal for reconciliation grounded in the Incarnation.*

Key words: *Christology, Edward Irving, fallen vs. unfallen human nature, fallenness debate, Karl Barth, non-assumptus, Oliver Crisp, unassumed is unhealed, Stephen J. Wellum, Thomas F. Torrance*

Measure a doctrine's influence by its coverage in *Christianity Today*. The November 2019 issue of *CT* included an article on Christ's humanity by analytic theologian Oliver Crisp. The article allows that Christ may have had "a fallen human nature" while remaining sinless.[1] The very next month, *CT* published an online article in which Daniel Cameron, an adjunct professor at Moody Bible Institute, defended the same general position. Ironically, Cameron's article quotes an older essay of Crisp's in order to rebut it.[2] Crisp's older essay had opposed "the fallenness view" as compromising Christ's sinlessness. Now further study of the issue has led him to concede that fallenness and sinlessness need not be contraries in Christ's experience.[3]

These two *CT* articles represent the popular-level tip of an iceberg of recent scholarship and debate on the question, Did Christ become incarnate in a fallen or

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[1] Oliver Crisp, "Tempted in Every Way? Making Sense of Jesus' Humanity in Light of Fleshly Temptations," *Christianity Today* 63.8 (November 2019): 74.

[2] Daniel J. Cameron, "What It Means that Jesus Was 'Without Sin,'" ChristianityToday.com, December 5, 2019, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/november-web-only/what-it-means-that-jesus-was-without-sin.html. Cameron quotes from Oliver D. Crisp, "Did Christ Have a *Fallen* Human Nature?," *IJST* 6.3 (2004): 270–88; repr., Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 90–117. See Daniel J. Cameron, *Flesh and Blood: A Dogmatic Sketch Concerning the Fallen Nature View of Christ's Human Nature* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016) for a fuller rebuttal to Crisp's essay.

[3] For a slightly earlier statement of Crisp's developing position, see Oliver D. Crisp, "On the Vicarious Humanity of Christ," *IJST* 21.3 (2019): 235–50.

unfallen human nature?[4] Yet this question has generated even more passion than scholarship. Kelly Kapic has explained why:

> On the one hand, those who seek to affirm that the Son assumed a *fallen* human nature (or sinful flesh) are often interpreted as sacrificing the sinlessness of Jesus and thus leaving believers still in need of a Savior. On the other hand, those who affirm that the Son assumes an *unfallen* human nature (cf., Adam *prior* to the fall) are often charged with presenting a generic Jesus who is not truly [one of us], thus losing the soteriological significance of his life, death, resurrection and ascension. Both parties think nothing less than the very heart of the gospel is in jeopardy.[5]

Unfortunately, both parties have too often argued passionately right past one another.[6] My purpose in this essay is to address concerns about the fallenness view, then offer a way forward in the controversy.

I. QUESTIONING FALLENNESS: SIX CONCERNS

For a summary of concerns about fallenness, I engage with the half-dozen objections to the fallenness view in Stephen Wellum's volume on Christology in Crossway's Foundations of Evangelical Theology series.[7] Wellum is my selected interlocutor for three reasons. First, he lays out the case against the fallenness view concisely yet comprehensively. Second, his volume may fairly be considered a contemporary standard for evangelical articulation of the classically orthodox doctrine of Christ.[8] Third, Wellum is himself a bridge-builder between dispensationalism and covenant theology, and so models in ecclesiology and eschatology what I hope to achieve in Christology.[9] So as not to strike an unhelpfully adversarial pose, I shall reframe Wellum's objections as questions that may legitimately be put to the fallen-

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[4] Even the sum of all the sources cited throughout this article represents only a sampling of the extensive scholarly literature on this issue. For a bibliography of the debate from 1991 through 2015, see E. Jerome Van Kuiken, *Christ's Humanity in Current and Ancient Controversy: Fallen or Not?*, T&T Clark Theology (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 1–2n1, 4–6. For additional contributions to the debate, see Crisp, "Vicarious Humanity," 236–37nn2, 4.

[5] Kelly M. Kapic, "The Son's Assumption of a Human Nature: A Call for Clarity," *IJST* 3.2 (2001): 154 (italics his). My bracketed phrase ("one of us") replaces Kapic's word "man," which is unclear, potentially misleading, and apparently contradictory to the earlier part of the sentence. If Christ assumed the nature of "Adam *prior* to the fall," he would certainly be "truly man" in a generic sense. The question is whether he would truly be able to sympathize with us in our fallen condition and heal it from the inside out.

[6] Kapic, "The Son's Assumption of a Human Nature," is itself an early effort at ameliorating this problem.

[7] Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 232–35. My thanks to Dr. Rafael Bello, Dr. Wellum's former student, for encouraging me to interact with this volume.

[8] Regarding these first two reasons, it is worth noting that Wellum's objections all appear already in an earlier standard evangelical Christology, Donald Macleod's *The Person of Christ*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), chap. 9, upon which Wellum draws heavily.

[9] Notably in Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

ness view. I shall also sequence them in reverse order of Wellum's presentation and so begin with theology and end with Scripture. Since theological presuppositions tend to color one's reading of Scripture, these will be addressed first. To these questions we now turn:

1. *Does not the assumption of a fallen nature necessarily violate Christ's sinlessness?* As Wellum puts it, "a fallen incarnation *requires* that Christ is sinful or has the property of original sin."[10] The issue here is fundamentally one of definition. Consider the following distinctions:

a. *Moral vs. amoral effects of the fall.* While denying that Christ sinned or possessed the moral corruption of original sin brought on by the fall, orthodox theologians acknowledge that Christ suffered from the fall's amoral effects, such as grief, weariness, prolonged hunger, opposition by enemies and even neighbors and family members, desertion by friends, a sense of abandonment by God, and the emotional and physical agonies of dying.[11] Some who apply the language of "fallenness" to Christ use that term to refer to his being subject to these amoral effects even without sinning or possessing original sin. As Crisp writes in his *CT* article, "So perhaps Jesus can have a fallen human nature, provided we mean by that a human nature that feels the effects of the fall—a bit like someone who may have flu-like symptoms even if she does not actually have the flu."[12]

b. *Assumption from vs. assumption to.* The statement that "Christ assumed a fallen human nature" contains an ambiguity. It may refer to the condition *out of which* Christ assumed it or to the condition *into which* he assumed it. A number of theologians who apply fallenness language to Christ claim that the act of assumption was a sanctifying act that cleansed a formerly morally corrupt human nature, bringing it into a state of perfect holiness through union with the all-holy Savior. Thomas F. Torrance puts the claim succinctly and forcefully: "In the very act of taking our fallen Adamic nature the Son of God redeemed, renewed and sanctified it AT THE SAME TIME…. The only human nature which our Lord HAD, therefore, was utterly pure and sinless."[13] As Karl Barth expresses it more fully,

> In Him is the human nature created by God without the self-contradiction which afflicts us and without the self-deception by which we seek to escape from this our shame. In Him is human nature without human sin. For as He the

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[10] Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 235 (emphasis mine).

[11] These effects are "amoral" in that they do not automatically determine the moral status of the one who suffers them (e.g., grief afflicts both the godless and the godly). Another term for them is "innocent infirmities."

[12] Crisp, "Tempted in Every Way?," 74. See also Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 115–16. Here, the key difference between his earlier and later views is not in substance but simply in terminology: the later Crisp is willing to apply the term "fallen" to Christ's innocent infirmities in a postlapsarian world.

[13] T. F. Torrance, "Christ's Human Nature," *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland* (May 1984): 114 (capitalization his). Torrance is replying to editor Donald Macleod, "Did Christ Have a Fallen Human Nature?," *Monthly Record* (March 1984): 51–53. Cf. Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 61–64, 201, 231–32.

> Son of God becomes man, and therefore our nature becomes His, the rent is healed, the impure becomes pure and the enslaved is freed.[14]

This pre-assumption impurity and enslavement may be thought of in two ways: first, if Christ's individual human nature is in view, then its corruption is only *logically*, not *chronologically* prior to its sanctifying assumption by the Word. That is, because his individual human nature is simultaneously conceived, assumed, and hallowed, we may make hypothetical but not temporal distinctions between these three aspects of the Incarnation. Christ's humanity *would have been* sinful were it not sanctified by the hypostatic union.[15] Second, fallenness theologians often have in view how the Incarnation relates to human nature in general.[16] From Genesis 3 onward, the Bible depicts humanity as corrupted by sin in every generation. It is this common, corrupt human nature that God the Son lays hold of in the Incarnation and assumes into purifying union with himself, operating inseparably from the Holy Spirit's overshadowing of Mary.[17] The indivisible working of the creative Word and Spirit does not generate the Son's humanity *ex nihilo* but from Mary's own human substance, tainted as it is by the fall.[18] No prior Immaculate Concep-

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[14] *CD* III/2:48; cf. *CD* I/2:189. "Rent" here means "a torn place," not a payment to a landlord.

[15] Crisp, "Vicarious Humanity," 237–47, sets forth this view without adopting it himself. At this stage in the development of his thought, he still equated all fallenness with sinfulness. Cf. R. Michael Allen, *The Christ's Faith: A Dogmatic Account* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 130n105, who does adopt this view. More recently, he has come to recognize the same distinction between assumption "from (*a quo*)" and assumption "of and unto (*ad quem*)" that I have articulated above. See R. Michael Allen, "Christ," in *T&T Clark Companion to the Doctrine of Sin*, ed. Keith L. Johnson and David Lauber (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 463. Allen still equates all fallenness with sinfulness, however.

[16] Failure to account properly for this point leads to confusion when reading T. F. Torrance in particular. When he speaks of Christ's lifelong conflict with "our" depraved mind and perverse will and with the power of sin indwelling "our" flesh, Torrance does *not* mean that Christ's own human mind, will, and flesh were corrupted by sin throughout his earthly life; rather, he means that within the corporate mass of corrupt human nature, Christ's own personal humanity stands as a sanctified exception that conflicts with the sin infecting the rest of humanity. See Van Kuiken, *Christ's Humanity*, 31–42, esp. 38–40, which rebuts the faulty Torrance interpretation of, among others, Peter Cass, *Christ Condemned Sin in the Flesh: Thomas F. Torrance's Doctrine of Soteriology and Its Ecumenical Significance* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Dr. Müller, 2009) and Kevin Chiarot, *The Unassumed Is the Unhealed: The Humanity of Christ in the Theology of T. F. Torrance* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013). This rebuttal also applies to chapter 3 of Rafael Nogueira Bello, "'That Which Is Not Assumed Is Not Healed': A Dogmatic Response to Recent Formulations of the Son's Assumption of a Fallen Human Nature" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), now published as Rafael Bello, *Sinless Flesh: A Critique of Karl Barth's Fallen Christ* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), which relies on Chiarot's misreading that Torrance's doctrine of Christ's self-sanctification is incoherent.

[17] Crisp, "Vicarious Humanity," 248–49, defends the consonance of the Son's sanctifying assumption of fallen human nature with the doctrine of inseparable operations. By contrast, Bello, "That Which Is Not Assumed," chapter 4, deploys a Thomistic account of inseparable operations to refute Barth's and Torrance's fallenness Christology. Unfortunately, Bello does not discuss Barth's and Torrance's own coverage of inseparable operations in chapters 2 (Barth) and 3 (Torrance) of his volume, resulting in an apples-to-oranges comparison.

[18] Wellum accepts that Christ is Adam's descendant while insisting that "the Holy Spirit created and sanctified the human nature that the Son assumed in his incarnation. And what God creates is very good—holy, pure, and uncorrupted" (*God the Son Incarnate*, 239). Fallenness theologians like Barth and Torrance would agree with Wellum here.

tion of the Virgin herself is necessary in order to shield Christ from original sin. On this understanding of Christ's sanctifying union with human nature, the statement, "Christ assumed a fallen human nature" carries the same implication as "Christ touched a leper"—in both cases, rather than the Holy One being defiled, the defiled is made whole.[19]

The two sets of distinctions above may be combined in a complementary manner: Christ assumed his human nature from a humanity marked by both the moral and amoral effects of the fall. He sanctified it upon assumption so that within the hypostatic union, it no longer had the moral effects of the fall (original sin) and so was not "fallen" in the strongest sense. Still, it continued to be liable to the amoral effects of the fall until Christ's resurrection and so may be said to remain "fallen" in the weaker sense in which Crisp has come to use the term.

Given these distinctions, when assessing the claim of *Christ's* assumption of a fallen nature, we as theologians must also assess *our own* assumptions. We must avoid reading our own understandings of "fallen" and "assumed" into one another's views. Theological progress will only come about by listening not only to one another's words but also to what is meant by them.

2. *If Christ's human nature was fallen, is not Nestorianism implied?*[20] If Christ was sinless in person yet fallen in his human nature, then how are we to avoid a self-divided Savior whose holy, divine mind and will are locked in constant combat with his corrupt human mind and will? At best, such a scenario suggests a Romans 7-style split between the inner "I" who delights in God's law and the sin-dominated flesh that resists it. At worst, it suggests a Nestorian model of two independent persons or agents within a composite Christ. For an example of this implication, Wellum quotes nineteenth-century fallenness advocate Edward Irving.[21]

This charge has some validity when pressed against Irving. The Church of Scotland found him guilty of heresy and defrocked him for teaching "that in Christ there was the law of sin and death, which the law of the Spirit of life did ever prevail against…; and that the thing spoken of in the holy Scriptures as holiness, is nothing else than the putting down of the law of sin and death in the members, by the law of the Spirit of life in the mind."[22] Irving's doctrine posits too sharp a divide between Christ's person and human nature, compromising his sinlessness with concupiscence.[23]

It is a mistake, however, to read Irving's idiosyncratic heterodoxy into other theologians' support for a fallenness view. For instance, while Barth cites Irving as a predecessor for his own fallenness Christology, it is only by way of secondhand,

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[19] Torrance draws this comparison. Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 440–41.

[20] Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 235.

[21] Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 235n71.

[22] This is his own summary of his view, as found in Edward Irving, *Christ's Holiness in Flesh, the Form, Fountain Head, and Assurance to Us of Holiness in Flesh* (Edinburgh: John Lindsay, 1831), 38–39. On pp. 42–44, he notes and qualifies his habit of applying Romans 7:17 to Christ.

[23] Michael Paget, "Christology and Original Sin: Charles Hodge and Edward Irving Compared," *Chm* 121.3 (2007): 236–43; Van Kuiken, *Christ's Humanity*, 13–21, 156–57.

cursory acquaintance and without adopting the details of Irving's position.[24] Thomas F. Torrance both explicitly and implicitly differentiates his doctrine from Irving's.[25]

Neither Barth nor Torrance portray Christ as perpetually suppressing corrupt desires, as Irving does. True, Barth claims that Christ "stepped into the heart of the inevitable conflict between the faithfulness of God and the unfaithfulness of man. He took this conflict into His own being. He bore it in Himself to the bitter end. He took part in it from both sides. He endured it from both sides."[26] But Barth immediately proceeds to deny that Christ was ever resistant to his Father.[27] Rather, he submitted to his Father's will that he, God the Son, associate with sinners, stand in solidarity with sinners, and endure punishment as a sinner, while also enduring the enmity of sinners against himself as the Holy One.[28] This, then, is the conflict that Christ bears in his theanthropic being: as man, he is the judged (by both God and humanity) while as God, he is the Judge. Torrance concurs, taking a special interest in Christ's emotional and mental life within this conflict.[29] Barth's and Torrance's account avoids Irving's attribution to Christ's humanity of culpable impulses to sin.[30]

Theological progress depends on discerning not only the distinct use of terms between fallenness and unfallenness theologians, but also the significant differences among fallenness theologians themselves.

3. *Does the patristic slogan "the unassumed is the unhealed" refer to Christ's* fallen *humanity or merely his* full *humanity?* To support his view of Christ's sanctifying assumption of a fallen human nature, Torrance appeals to Gregory of Nazianzus's dictum Τὸ ... ἀπρόσληπτον, ἀθεράπευτον ("the unassumed is the unhealed"), sometimes abbreviated as the *non-assumptus*.[31] Wellum notes this appeal but disputes Torrance's interpretation. Nazianzen's statement comes in a letter in which he opposes Apollinarianism, the heresy that Christ did not assume a human mind. Wellum concludes, "At stake was whether Christ had a full human nature [i.e., mind as well as body], not whether that nature was fallen."[32]

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[24] Barth briefly lists Irving along with several other nineteenth-century fallenness proponents in *CD* I/2:154–55. On the significance (or rather, insignificance) of this fact for Barth's own position, see William Duncan Rankin, "Carnal Union with Christ in the Theology of T. F. Torrance" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1997), 101, 249–50n50. See Rankin's entire illuminating discussion on 249–57 of the theological milieu of Barth's fallenness Christology in *CD* I/2.

[25] Rankin, "Carnal Union," 102–3, including 103n235, 119.

[26] *CD* II/2:397.

[27] *CD* II/2:397–98; cf. *CD* IV/1:269–71.

[28] *CD* I/2:152, 172; II/1:152; III/2:47–48; IV/1:94–96, 165–66, 175, 216–24, 237, 239, 258, 552–53; IV/2:92; Karl Barth, *Credo*, trans. J. Strathern McNab (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936, 1964), 81.

[29] Torrance, *Incarnation*, 136–51, 231–56 (noting as well the demonic opposition Christ faced); Torrance, *Atonement*, 69–70, 75–167, 209–19, 437–47 (these last ten pages are an epilogue devoted to the conversion of our depraved mind through Christ's healing assumption of it).

[30] Van Kuiken, *Christ's Humanity*, 21–42, 161–63.

[31] *Ep.* 101.5 (PG 37:182c).

[32] Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 235.

This alternative interpretation of Nazianzen is correct in what it affirms but not in what it denies. The key question is *Why* did the Apollinarians deny that Christ took on a human mind? Part of their concern was metaphysical coherence. A person with two minds, they believed, would have two competing control centers and so be schizophrenic.[33] But the Apollinarians also had a soteriological rationale: they saw the human mind as the source of sin and so wished to preserve Christ's sinlessness by quarantining him from such a mind. Likewise, Apollinaris was rumored to hold that Christ brought his human body down from heaven—once again, in order to avoid any contamination by sinful flesh. Salvation, then, was a matter of our following (from afar, as it were) the example of an otherworldly role model.[34] Against the Apollinarian effort to maintain the Savior's sinlessness by buffering him from sinful human nature, the point of the *non-assumptus* is that it was precisely by his contact with human nature in its fullness *and* fallenness—mind and body, warts and all—that Christ could heal our nature from the inside out. Salvation came not by a splendid yet isolated exemplar but by one who, in Nazianzen's words, "was actually subject as a slave to flesh, to birth, and to our human experiences [πάθεσι]; for our liberation, held captive as we are by sin, he was subject to all that he saved."[35]

Nor was Nazianzen unique in this conviction. Athanasius interprets Philippians 2:7, with its language of Christ's "taking the form of a slave [δούλου]," as "putting on the enslavement [δουλωθεῖσαν] of the flesh to sin."[36] Yet rather than the Word being blemished by the flesh, he sanctified and freed it by assuming it.[37] Like the bronze serpent that healed snakebitten Israel (Num 21:9), "he brought about the complete eradication from the flesh of every bite of the serpent and the repulsion of any evil that had sprung up from the movements of the flesh."[38]

Likewise, Nazianzen's Cappadocian colleague Gregory of Nyssa teaches, "But the apostolic word testifies that the Lord was *made into sin for our sake* [2 Cor 5:21] by being invested with our sinful nature."[39] Again, Nyssen writes, "Man, then, is freed from sin through him who assumed the form of sin and became like us who had

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[33] *Ep.* 101.6–7.

[34] (Pseudo[?]-)Athanasius, *C. Apoll.* 1.2, 7, 20; 2.1, 3, 6, 8, 11.

[35] *Or.* 30.6 (PG 36:109c). ET Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham, Popular Patristics (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 97. On the significance of πάθος in Nazianzen's thought, see Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ix–x.

[36] *Or.* 1.43. Greek: William Bright, *The Orations of St. Athanasius against the Arians* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1873; facsimile by Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1978), 45; ET mine.

[37] *C. Ar.* 1:46–50; 2:47, 55–56, 61, 72; *Epict.* 4, 9.

[38] *C. Ar.* 2.69. ET Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius*, The Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 2004), 162.

[39] *Vit. Moys.* 2.33. ET Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1978), 62 (italics original).

turned into the form of the serpent."[40] Yet Nyssen also clearly asserts Christ's freedom from sinful deeds and desires.[41]

In commenting on John 1:14, Cyril of Alexandria echoes Nazianzen's dictum: "for what is not assumed, neither is saved [ὅ γὰρ μὴ προσείληπται, οὐδὲ σέσωσται]."[42] He describes the Incarnation as "having the fallen body [τοῦ προσπεσόντος σώματος] united in an ineffable manner with the Word that endows all things with life."[43] Elsewhere he explains that "it was vital for the Word of God … to make human flesh, subject to decay [ὑπενηνεγμένην τῇ φθορᾷ] and infected with sensuality [νοσήσασαν τὸ φιλήδονον] as it was, his own."[44] Given Cyril's status as the church father who first identified and fiercely opposed Nestorianism as a heresy, it would be quite odd if Cyril himself were accused of Nestorianism over his teaching of a fallenness Christology!

In sum, there is patristic support for the view that Christ assumed human nature out of a fallen, even sinful state but sanctified it upon assumption so that it was thoroughly sinless through its union with him.[45] The church fathers who teach this view see it as vital for our salvation. Contemporary theologians will benefit by close, contextualized readings of these fathers of orthodoxy.

4. *Does Christ need a fallen human nature in order to be truly tempted? and 5. Does Christ need a fallen human nature in order to be truly human?*[46] These concerns may be addressed together. It is certainly the case that in the Genesis account, Adam and Eve were both truly, sinlessly human and subject to temptation prior to the fall.[47] It is also the case that the glorified saints in heaven and in the eschaton are truly, sinlessly human yet presumably no longer liable to temptation at all. Strictly speaking,

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[40] *Vit. Moys.* 2.276. ET Malherbe and Ferguson, *Life of Moses*, 125.

[41] See the evidence compiled by J. H. Srawley, "St Gregory of Nyssa on the Sinlessness of Christ," *JTS* 7.27 (1906): 434–41, as well as its assessment in Van Kuiken, *Christ's Humanity*, 118–22.

[42] *In Jo. Ev.*, John 1:14 (PG 74:89cd). ET mine.

[43] *In Jo. Ev.*, John 1:14 (PG 73:160c). ET Norman Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, The Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 2000), 105.

[44] *First Letter to Succensus* 9, in Cyril of Alexandria, *Select Letters*, ed. and trans. Lionel R. Wickham, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 78–79 (Greek on p. 78; ET on p. 79). As noted by T. A. Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People: The Theology of Christian Perfecting* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 191, the term φιλήδονον is literally "love of pleasure" and so, in context, refers to bodily pleasures generally. Wickham's translation "sensuality" might be mistaken as referring narrowly to sexual lust.

[45] For an alternative interpretation of the church fathers, see Emmanuel Hatzidakis, *Jesus: Fallen? The Human Nature of Christ Examined from an Eastern Orthodox Perspective* (Clearwater, FL: Orthodox Witness, 2013). Hatzidakis's tome attempts to refute contemporary fallenness Christology but suffers from a superficial reading of the patristic evidence. His own view is essentially Aphthartodocetic: Christ's humanity was so fully deified from conception onward that he was unable to experience temptation or even normal human development in any existentially meaningful sense, while his sufferings and death were apparently miraculous due to the natural impassibility and immutability of his flesh.

[46] Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 233–34.

[47] The relationship of the early chapters of Genesis, the traditional doctrine of the fall, and current scientific accounts of human origins involves debates of its own. A recent primer is James B. Stump and Chad V. Meister, eds., *Original Sin and the Fall: Five Views*, Spectrum Multiview Books (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020). My arguments should remain sound even if one were to view the original prelapsarian state as a purely symbolic, ahistorical ideal. (Such a view, however, faces serious exegetical and theological challenges.)

then, neither a fallen condition nor even a temptable condition is essential to being human. The real question is whether one's account of Christ's humanity fits with the particular stage in salvation history (or the biblical metanarrative) in which we find ourselves. Consider a counterfactual example: If Christ were to have become incarnate in first-century Judea but in a glorified human nature incapable of pain, death, or temptation, he still would have been technically human but likely would have seemed rather inhuman to his afflicted Jewish compatriots. Indeed, Christological views that approximate this hypothetical example (such as Docetism, Eutychianism, and Aphthartodocetism) were declared heresies by the early church. Our redemption depends on a Redeemer who not only has all the proper ontological equipment (human mind, will, and body) but who has enough experiential solidarity with us to be an effective advocate with God the Father.

The claim that the Incarnation must have involved a fallen nature if Christ's temptations are to be genuine begins with the biblical metanarrative. Adam and Eve were tempted in a paradisiac state: they enjoyed beautiful surroundings; plentiful food; an absence of pain, harsh labor, sorrow, and fear of death; and they had uninhibited fellowship with one another, the animals, and God (Gen 2–3). The incarnate Christ was not tempted in such a state. He was tempted in the desert, where the animals were hostile, food was scarce, and his hunger was extended and intense (Matt 4:1–2; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:1–2). In Gethsemane and on Golgotha he experienced extremes of pain, travail in praying and in simply breathing while crucified, and such sorrow and fear upon facing death that he begged for the cup to pass from him. His relationships with others were troubled; for a time, he felt forsaken even by his Father (Matt 26–27; Mark 14–15). In short, Christ was tempted in a fallen world, while Adam and Eve were not. Hence fallenness theologians link Christ's temptations to a fallen state. According to Hebrews, it is precisely by being made like us not only ontologically ("flesh and blood") but also experientially (learning obedience through suffering, interceding "with loud cries and tears" for deliverance from death, dying a shameful death) that he can serve as a sympathetic mediator while remaining utterly sinless (Heb 2:17–18; 4:15–16; 5:7–10; 12:2; 13:12–13).[48]

On the other side in the debate, unfallenness theologians do not dispute the severity or non-Edenic environs of Christ's temptations. When they deny that Christ was tempted in a fallen state, they mean that his internal state was not one of original sin.[49] As noted above, excluding Edward Irving, prominent fallenness theo-

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[48] Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

[49] Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 233: "Christ does not partake of the corrupted Adamic nature. Jesus [is] not 'in Adam' as we are, and thus he is not fallen. The New Testament acknowledges that Christ fully entered into the human condition, thus exposing himself to this fallen world." Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 115–16: "Christ's sinless nature was affected by the Fall without actually being fallen" inasmuch as he "possessed the symptoms and effects of being sinful in terms of moral and physical weakness, without himself possessing the sinful human nature that gives rise to these effects." Macleod, *Person of Christ*, 229 (paragraph break omitted): Christ was in neither a fallen state nor a paradisiac state nor his presently glorified state but in a state of humiliation: "He was liable to all the miseries of this life; he was vulnerable to all its darker emotions; he was destined to lose communion with God; and he was

logians have concurred, denying that Christ struggled with sinful concupiscence during his earthly life. Yet Christ still suffered from the amoral effects of the fall. Proponents of the fallenness view take this fact as warrant for speaking of Christ's experience of a fallen state. When they hear other theologians using the language of unfallenness to describe Christ's state amid temptation, it strikes them as rhetorically and conceptually relocating Christ to Eden and posting cherubim with a flaming sword to barricade him from solidarity with us.[50] Each side hears in the other's language innuendos that the other does not intend.

As with Christ's temptations, so with unfallenness proponents' claim that Christ assumed human nature in a prelapsarian state. What they mean is, once again, simply that Christ was free from original sin.[51] But fallenness theologians mishear them as implying that Christ did not take his humanity from the fall-stained line of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, David and Bathsheba, and Mary. In that case, fallenness advocates wonder, where did Christ get his human nature? From Eden, somehow teleported across time into the first century AD? From heaven, as in various heresies?[52] From an immaculately conceived mother?[53] Or was his human nature created *ex nihilo*, with Mary serving merely as a surrogate?[54] Or again, is his human nature a sort of eternal Platonic Idea, the Form of Humanity?[55] As before, fallenness theologians foresee the common ground between our Mediator and ourselves crumbling away with any of these options. And yet again, we in both the fallenness and unfallenness camps must listen carefully to one another, keeping in mind the slipperiness even of shared terms, in order to make theological headway.

6. *Does the Bible support fallenness Christology?* Wellum focuses on Paul's statements, interpreted in the same manner as those of Gregory of Nazianzus:

> Pauline expressions such as "born in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7), "being found in human form" (Phil. 2:8), and "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3) refer to our common human nature, not our corrupt human nature.… The

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mortal. But why? Not because he was fallen, but because, prompted by love, he freely chose to suffer with the fallen and, at last, to suffer *for* the fallen."

[50] E.g., Barth, *CD* I/2:151–55, 189.

[51] Kapic, "Assumption," 164.

[52] We have seen above that Apollinaris was accused of holding this view. The church fathers also charged some Gnostics (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.6.1) and the Marcionites (Tertullian, *Carn. Chr.* 1.16–17) with this error.

[53] Fallenness theologians are typically Protestant and so reject the Roman Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception. A fascinating exception is Thomas G. Weinandy, former Executive Director for the Secretariat of Doctrine for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. His *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh: An Essay on the Humanity of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993) ends with a postscript (153–56) that seeks to reconcile a fallenness Christology with Marian dogma. For my view, see Van Kuiken, "Why Protestant Christians Should Not Believe in Mary's Immaculate Conception: A Response to Mulder," *Christian Scholar's Review* 46.3 (2017): 233–47.

[54] As held by Menno Simons. See his "Brief Confession on the Incarnation" (1544) and "The Incarnation of Our Lord" (1554) in Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. J. C. Wenger, with a biography by Harold S. Bender (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956, 1984), 427–40 and 785–834, respectively.

[55] For a critique of this and the *ex nihilo* option, see Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People*, 167. The whole of his chap. 7 is a lucid, well-balanced statement of fallenness Christology.

> Pauline contrast between the first Adam and Christ as the last Adam makes sense only if Christ does not partake of the corrupted Adamic nature.[56]

In approaching these texts, the meaning of the word "likeness" (ὁμοίωμα) is a key consideration. Paul's line in Philippians 2:7 that Christ came "in the likeness of humans" (ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων) could be taken to mean that Christ was only "human-like" rather than truly human. Such an interpretation would favor Docetism. An orthodox understanding of "likeness" here is that it means a *concrete instantiation* of human nature, not a mere semblance of it. The same must be true of Paul's quite similarly worded claim in Romans 8:3 that Christ came "in the likeness of the flesh of sin" (ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας). To insist that "likeness" means "really alike" in Philippians 2:7 but only "somewhat alike" in Romans 8:3 is special pleading. According to Paul, Christ came in the concrete form of the flesh of sin.[57] But Paul does not stop there, and neither should we when making such a jarring claim. Immediately Paul adds that Christ came in this manner precisely in order to condemn sin in the flesh so that the requirement of righteousness might be fulfilled in us (Rom 8:3–4). This passage in turn parallels 2 Corinthians 5:21, which says that the one who knew no sin was made sin on our behalf so that we might become righteousness in him. So too Galatians 3:13 teaches that Christ became a curse for the sake of our being freed from the curse of the law. Like the church fathers who followed him, therefore, Paul sees his Lord as condescending to the human condition this side of the fall—but with the effect not of becoming corrupted by it but of rectifying it, condemning our sin by his perfect sinlessness and liberating us by his gracious power. In just this way, Christ is the last and greater Adam who more than makes right the first Adam's failure (Rom 5:12–21).

In addition to the Pauline material considered here, we have referred to Hebrews under our fourth point above to support a fallenness Christology (properly understood as excluding any besetting inner depravity from Christ's earthly experience). We also must glance briefly at the Johannine material. Under our third point above, we found that Cyril of Alexandria read John 1:14 as recounting that Christ took a "fallen body." This verse, "The Word became flesh," must be understood in light of the reference of John 1:12 to "the will of the flesh" that God sets aside in birthing his children. Similarly, 1 John 2:16 warns against "the lust of the flesh." For the Word to become "flesh," then, is for Christ to assume not a neutral human nature but human nature in its willfulness and weakness. Yet just as Paul and Hebrews insist on Christ's perfect sinlessness, so too does the Johannine literature. Christ is the spotless lamb who bears away the world's sin (John 1:29), the sin-free Son who sets sin's slaves free (John 8:34–36, 46), the pure one who destroys the devil's works and purifies his own people (1 John 1:7–2:2; 3:3–10). However taint-

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[56] Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 233.

[57] As Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 232, notes, this is the interpretation favored by C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed., 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 379. Cf. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 277–82, and Barth, *Epistle to the Philippians*, trans. James W. Leitch, 40th anniversary ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 63.

ed the human nature that Christ assumed, it became fully holy upon his assumption of it. Just as the church holds together other paradoxes of Scripture like divine sovereignty yet human responsibility, the oneness yet threeness of God, and the deity yet humanity of Christ, so too must it do with the fallenness yet sinlessness of Christ's flesh.

We have examined a half-dozen legitimate concerns raised about the fallenness view of Christology. In each case we have found that these concerns may be eased by careful interpretation, whether of modern fallenness advocates, the church fathers, or Scripture itself. Simultaneously we have nodded to fallenness theologians' tendency of misinterpreting their unfallenness counterparts, as well as to the conceptual commonality buried beneath both sides' mutual misunderstanding. The next section of this essay stakes out that common ground in more detail and offers a blueprint for building on it.

II. ENDING THE FALLING OUT: THREE PROPOSALS

Like the legendary land of Oz, the fallenness controversy has its share of straw men and tin ears. Each camp has suffered from caricature and in turn missed the nuances of the other's language and concepts. What follows are three measures to assist in resolving the conflict.

1. *Leave Irving behind.* Edward Irving is an endlessly fascinating figure in the history of Christian thought as a harbinger of modern Spirit Christology, Pentecostalism, pretribulational premillennialism, and fallenness Christology, all charged with the emotional power of his flamboyant rhetoric and life.[58] He is, however, a red herring in the current fallenness debate and an albatross around the necks of more recent fallenness theologians, whether hung there by themselves or their opponents. Rather than trying to rehabilitate him or appealing to him as a protomartyr for the cause, today's fallenness proponents would serve themselves better by explicitly severing ties with his heterodox stance.[59] Likewise, unfallenness advocates

[58] Biographies of Irving include (Margaret) Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving*, 2nd ed., rev. in 2 vols. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862); A. L. Drummond, *Edward Irving and His Circle* ([London]: James Clarke, [1936]); H. C. Whitley, *Blinded Eagle: An Introduction to the Life and Teaching of Edward Irving* (Chicago: Alec R. Allenson, 1955); Arnold Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving: Fore-runner of the Charismatic Movement* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983); and Tim Grass, *The Lord's Watchman*, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2011). Grass's work is evenhanded; the others tend toward uncritical hagiography or heresiography.

[59] Besides biographers like Oliphant and Whitley, attempted rehabilitators of Irving include Colin Gunton, initially in Colin E. Gunton, "Two Dogmas Revisited: Edward Irving's Christology," *SJT* 41.3 (1988), 359–76 and often thereafter; Gunton's student Graham McFarlane, *Christ and the Spirit: The Doctrine of the Incarnation according to Edward Irving* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1996) and Graham W. P. McFarlane, ed., *Edward Irving: The Trinitarian Face of God*, The Devotional Library (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1996); J. B. Torrance, "The Vicarious Humanity of Christ," in *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 381*, ed. T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1981), 141; his student David W. Dorries, *Edward Irving's Incarnational Christology* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon, 2002); and Byung-Sun Lee, *"Christ's Sinful Flesh": Edward Irving's Christological Theology within the Context of his Life and Times* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2013).

must avoid treating the views of mainstream fallenness theologians as warmed-over versions of Irving's doctrine.[60] He simply does not speak for them.

2. *Recognize conceptual commonality while tolerating terminological diversity.* Once Irving's idiosyncratic position is bracketed and we listen to what major representatives of both the fallenness and unfallenness camps *mean* (rather than simply what they *say*), a four-point conceptual consensus emerges:

a. *Human nature outside of Christ.* Both sides agree that human nature as we find it outside of the incarnate Christ exists under the scourge of original sin and all other effects of the fall. This was the condition of Jesus's forebears down to his mother Mary.

b. *Christ's conception.* Both sides concur that while Christ derived his human substance from his mother, that which he derived was cleansed, renewed, or created (*ex virgine*, not *ex nihilo*) in such a way that the stain of original sin did not pass over to him.

c. *Christ's afflictions.* Both sides nevertheless affirm that Christ suffered from the amoral effects of the fall throughout the "days of his flesh" (Heb 5:7), culminating in his suffering and death on the cross.

d. *Christ's sinlessness.* Finally, both sides deny that Christ ever committed sin or experienced the culpability of corrupt concupiscence during his earthly life.[61]

Given these significant points of overlap, the question arises as to how much the fallenness debate is about matters of substance and how much is merely a quarrel over words. Already in the mid-twentieth century, Scottish theologian Donald Baillie concluded that the conflict centered on the phrases "fallen human nature" and "assumption of human nature," but that it reduced to "an unnecessary and unreal theological dilemma."[62] If so, then the proper response by both sides may well be to hold firmly to the underlying common conceptuality while tolerating variant uses of the same terminology. Consider how the Apostle Paul and James the Just appear to clash on whether justification is by faith apart from works or by faith plus works (Gal 3:6–14; Jas 2:14–26), yet agree at the conceptual level.[63] Again, recall that in the heat of the Arian controversy, Athanasius's *Tome to the Antiochenes*

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[60] Donald Macleod is an oft-repeated source of this fallacy. In his *Monthly Record* article, "Did Christ Have a Fallen Human Nature?," he lumped together Irving and Barth. After T. F. Torrance wrote a letter to the editor in rebuttal, Macleod henceforth included Torrance along with Barth and Irving as all holding a monolithic view. See Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, chap. 9, and *Jesus Is Lord: Christology Yesterday and Today* (Fearn, UK: Mentor, 2000), chap. 5. Macleod's material is cited uncritically by Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 232–35; Allen, "Christ," 462n49; cf. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 93 (in light of the preceding material in Crisp and in his citation from Macleod). Katherine Sonderegger has made the same lumping error with Irving and Barth in her *Systematic Theology, Volume 1, The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 217. To his credit, Bello, "'That Which Is Not Assumed,'" 17, 86–87, acknowledges Barth's and Torrance's difference from Irving.

[61] For documentation of this quadrilateral of consensus, see Van Kuiken, *Christ's Humanity*, chaps. 1–2 and pp. 163–66.

[62] D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 17.

[63] For a survey of the apparent contradiction between James and Paul and its solution, see P. H. Davids, "James and Paul," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 457–61.

brokered an alliance between parties that used the term *hypostasis* in diverse ways because he discerned beneath the diversity a shared anti-Arian orthodoxy.[64] Perhaps a latter-day *Tome* is long overdue to unite fallenness and unfallenness parties against today's real Christological heresies.

3. *Revise misleading terminology.* While toleration of differing uses of the same terminology is good, it prolongs a situation in which confusion over wording is a perennial risk. "Fallen" suggests "sinful and enslaved to depravity." "Unfallen" implies "still in Eden, isolated from the bulk of biblical history." Both terms are too static to capture well the change in human nature that occurred upon its union with God the Son. A better solution is for both camps to replace the troublesome terms with more precise and less theologically fraught language. During his earthly career, Christ's humanity was less prelapsarian or postlapsarian than *ex*-lapsarian. We may more accurately describe this dynamic reality by speaking of his human nature as "uprighted," "sanctified," "renewed," or "vicarious."[65] Perhaps the time is right to declare a moratorium on the terms "fallen" and "unfallen" with respect to Christ's human nature.

III. CONCLUDING WITH A KISS: ONE FINAL PLEA

This essay has had two aims. First, it has sought to alleviate a number of characteristic concerns that conservative evangelicals carry with regard to the claim that Christ assumed a fallen human nature. Second, it has marked out a threefold path past the impasse of impassioned debate over this issue. I now conclude with a parable.

Faulkner Prize-winning author and physician Richard Selzer tells of a young woman under his care whose cheek has sustained an injury that has left one side of her mouth permanently slack. Her husband visits her as she lies in her hospital bed. He surveys his bride's damaged face. Then he leans down to kiss her, carefully holding his own lips awry to conform to the distorted shape of hers. Awed by the husband's loving condescension, Dr. Selzer compares him with a Greek god manifesting as a man. But the good doctor's analogy is too timid. It is Christ's incarnation that the young man's action truly mimes.[66] God Most High has stooped in love, accommodating to our fallen state in order to unite with humanity in a holy kiss—the kiss of peace.

Let us as theologians follow suit, adjusting our argumentation and jargon so far as we can in order to accommodate one another's concerns. By so doing, our distinctions yet may share the kiss of peace.

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[64] *Tome* 5–6; for context, see John Behr, *The Nicene Faith, Part 1: True God of True God*, Formation of Christian Theology 2 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 95–100.

[65] The lattermost of these suggestions is Crisp's preferred term in his "Vicarious Humanity," 235–50.

[66] Richard Selzer, *Mortal Lessons: Notes on the Art of Surgery* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1987), Kindle locs. 415–32. I owe to Dr. Matt Friedeman the tying of this tale to the Incarnation.