

Did Christ have a *fallen* human nature?

A number of theologians of the past two hundred years have maintained that Christ had a humanity that was fallen, but not sinful.¹ The most influential among them is Karl Barth. He says,

there must be no weakening or obscuring of the saving truth that the nature which God assumed in Christ is identical with our nature as we see it in the light of the Fall. If it were otherwise, how could Christ be really like us? What concern would we have with him? We stand before God characterised by the Fall. God's Son not only assumed our nature but he entered the concrete form of our nature, under which we stand before God as men damned and lost.²

This view has also found support among a number of more recent theologians. One such is J. B. Torrance:

[A]s Edward Irving the great Scottish theologian in the early nineteenth century and Karl Barth in our own day have said ... Christ assumed 'fallen humanity' that our humanity might be turned back to God in him by his sinless life in the Spirit, and, through him, in us.³

This, it is claimed, safeguards the true humanity of Christ and his identification with fallen human beings in the Incarnation, as well as upholding the sinless integrity of his divinity. For these reasons (amongst others) defenders of this view claim that this position is to be preferred to the alternative notion, that Christ was sinless and possessed an unfallen humanity. (This sinlessness view is said to jeopardise the true humanity of Christ, who – so the argument goes - is neither truly identified with fallen humanity in their fallenness, nor is truly subject to temptation as other humans are.) In what follows, we shall refer to the claim that Christ's humanity was fallen as the 'fallen' or 'fallenness' view, and the notion that Christ's humanity was unfallen as the 'sinless', or 'sinlessness' view.

¹ Karl Barth advocated this view in *Church Dogmatics* 1/2, (eds.) G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957-1969), pp. 147-159. In the nineteenth century, Edward Irving made similar claims in *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature* (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1830). Irving's discussion has been revitalised by contemporary theologians like Colin Gunton, in 'Two Dogmas Revisited: Edward Irving's Christology', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41 (1988): 359-376, and Thomas Weinandy in his monograph, *In The Likeness of Sinful Flesh, An Essay on The Humanity of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993). There are a number of Eastern Orthodox theologians who have taken this position on Christ's humanity. However, I shall restrict this essay to discussion of western theologians, particularly (though, not exclusively) in the Reformed tradition.

² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2, p. 153.

³ J. B. Torrance, 'The Vicarious Humanity of Christ' in T. F. Torrance (ed.) *The Incarnation* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1981), p. 141, cited in Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1998), p. 224.

Unfortunately, defenders of this fallenness view of Christ's humanity are not always very clear in their articulation of the fallenness position.⁴ Yet, despite this, the fallenness view has been espoused by an impressive range of contemporary theologians, particularly among those in the Reformed tradition. For this reason, it is worth considering the coherence of this controversial claim, in order to ascertain whether some sense can be made of it.

We shall set about achieving this objective in three stages. In the first, we shall look at the theological problem original sin poses for defenders of the fallenness view. In the second stage, we shall use the concepts outlined in discussing the traditional doctrine of original sin in order to set forth one version of the fallenness view that seems, *prima facie*, to overcome these problems. Although this argument would not be endorsed by most of those who defend the fallenness view, it has the merit of making sense of a fallen humanity that is without actual sin. In the third stage of the argument the discussion of original sin in the first stage will be applied to the argument in defence of the fallenness view, outlined in the second stage. We shall see that this defence of the 'fallen' humanity doctrine does not succeed, for reasons laid out in the initial discussion of original sin. In fact, there does not seem to be any way of making sense of the notion that Christ had a fallen but not sinful humanity, where 'fallenness' is understood in the same way as traditional theology, that is, as sinful.⁵ And no substantive meaning can be given to the notion of 'fallenness' that does not entail sinfulness, even in some weak, non-culpable form. All of which appears to be fatal to the fallenness view.

⁴ Compare Kelly Kapic's comment, 'we must conclude by demonstrating that the issues at hand are less clear than sometimes acknowledged, requiring more than simply an affirmation of whether the Son assumes a *fallen* or *unfallen* nature. Given the lack of clear and agreed definitions, claiming one position or the other does not actually convey much of theological substance.' From, 'The Son's Assumption of a Human Nature: A Call for Clarity' in *International Journal for Systematic Theology* 14 (2001): 163-164.

⁵ A similar point is made by Donald Macleod in discussing Edward Irving's version of the fallenness view. He says Irving's doctrine 'requires that original sin should be ascribed to Christ; for original sin is a vice of fallen human nature; and the doctrine that our Lord's human nature was fallen, means, if it means anything, that it was tainted with original sin.' From *The Person of Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1998), pp. 228-229.

‘Falleness’ and original sin

Theologians in the Augustinian tradition without exception maintain that Christ’s humanity was sinless.⁶ Up until the nineteenth century, such theologians understood this to mean that Christ had an unfallen humanity. The reasons for this devolve upon their doctrine of original sin. The traditional doctrine of original sin rules out the possibility that Christ could have a fallen humanity. The reasons for this can be set forth fairly easily. Let us take these two issues in reverse, beginning with the human nature of Christ, before turning to an exposition of the position of Reformed orthodoxy on the doctrine of original sin.

Those in the Reformed orthodox tradition maintain that the humanity of Christ (leaving to one side the question of whether Christ had a personal, or impersonal, generic human nature) comprises certain essential, and certain contingent properties at any given temporal index at which it obtains. Jesus of Nazareth, like all human beings, may gain or lose contingent properties (such as, having a right arm, or possessing a good memory), but may not gain or lose essential properties and remain the same concrete individual. Such essential properties a particular human being possesses might include having a particular soul, having a particular parentage, or having a particular genetic code. Such essential properties are part of the particular human nature of Christ, without which it is metaphysically impossible for Christ’s human nature to be exemplified at all.⁷ In this regard, the property of ‘being fallen’, or ‘falleness’ is not an essential property of a particular human nature. The reason for this is simply that the property of falleness is not an essential property of human nature per se. This means that it cannot be part of the kind essence of humanity.⁸ That

⁶ In what follows I shall use a number of terms to refer to distinct, but interrelated theological positions. ‘Classical’ theology is used here interchangeably with ‘Augustinian’ theology since, arguably, Augustinian theology (of various hues) is the majority report in the Christian tradition. I shall also refer to ‘Reformed’ theology, ‘Reformed Scholasticism’ and ‘Reformed orthodoxy’. These all refer to the same theological tradition. This is the tradition of Calvinistic theology that grew up post-Reformation and adopted the elenctic methods of the medieval schoolmen. In the recent literature on this movement a distinction is made between Reformed (and Protestant) Scholasticism as a theological method, and Reformed (and Protestant) orthodoxy, the content of the dogmatic systems espoused by these theologians. For more on these distinctions, see the Introduction to *Reformation and Scholasticism, An Ecumenical Enterprise* (eds.) Willam J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

⁷ For the purposes of what follows, I define the nature of a particular thing as follows: Nature: Df. A nature is that which individuates one thing from another. It is *de re* necessary. That is, it is necessary that, in any possible world in which this individual is exemplified that the individual in question has the properties that make up their distinctive nature. Or, put more carefully, a nature is that conjunctive property that comprises all the essential properties a concrete individual possesses that individuates that concrete individual in any possible world in which the individual in question is exemplified. There are no possible worlds in which this individual is exemplified without this conjunctive property. In this regard I am following Plantinga’s discussion of natures in *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

⁸ A point raised by Thomas Morris. See, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), ch. 3.

is, it is not a property that an entity has to exemplify in order to be counted part of a particular kind (of thing), in this case the kind, 'humanity'. It is not essential to being human that a particular human be fallen. This would appear to be theologically uncontroversial, since at least one human being, Adam, had a human kind essence *before* the fall. Prior to the fall Adam could not have had the property of being fallen. Therefore, 'being fallen' is not essential to the kind, 'humanity'. So it cannot be part of the kind essence of 'humanity'. From which it follows that the kind essence of humanity cannot include the property of fallenness.

It has been argued by a number of classical theologians that Christ had a humanity similar to Adam's unfallen humanity. This would mean that Christ's humanity was able not to sin (*posse non peccare*), and, as a consequence of his remaining in this state, *sinless*. Theologians in the Augustinian tradition maintain the stronger thesis that Christ's humanity was not able to sin (*non posse peccare*), and as a consequence of this, *impeccable*.⁹ Nevertheless, for the purposes of this argument we shall assume that Christ has a 'fallen' humanity, as classical theologians maintain all human beings have had, since Adam's primal sin (usually, with the exception of Christ).

Next, we need to explain something of the classical doctrine of original sin. The medieval schoolmen distinguished two aspects to original sin, hereditary corruption (*corruptio hereditaria*) and hereditary guilt (*culpa hereditaria*). However, those in the Reformed tradition rejected the notion of *inherited* corruption and guilt, in favour of *imputed* corruption and guilt. The majority opinion amongst the Reformed was that these two aspects of original sin were directly, or immediately imputed to all of Adam's posterity after the fall. They were not imparted mediately, through natural generation (although this was the opinion of the Saumur School of Reformed theology, following Placaeus¹⁰). We shall refer to original corruption and original guilt, rather than inherited corruption and guilt, in keeping with the Reformed orthodox, rather than medieval, tradition.¹¹ (The related problems associated with the mechanism of imputing sin and guilt shall be passed over in silence.)

⁹ For this distinction, see W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology Vol. II* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1888), pp. 330-331.

¹⁰ For more on the difference between mediate and immediate imputation see Oliver D. Crisp, 'On The Theological Pedigree of Jonathan Edwards's Doctrine of Imputation' in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003): 308-327.

¹¹ Richard Sturch observes that one of the problems besetting discussions of this nature is the fact that there has been no agreed definition of what original sin consists in, in the Christian tradition. See his *The Word and The Christ, An Essay in Analytic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Excursus IV, p. 262. This is true, as evidenced by the few words of discussion about inherited or imputed sin here.

Original corruption involves a propensity or proneness to actual sin, but is not the same as actual sin.¹² In the same way, a person might have a proneness to drink too much wine when it is offered to him. But this is not the same as that person actually giving in to this propensity and drinking too much wine when it is offered to him. This proneness to sin inclines human beings to sin, but it does not necessitate that they do sin on any particular occasion. (Of course, the same could be said for the wine bibber.) Nevertheless, it is usually thought that human beings who possess original corruption will, at some point in their lives, commit an actual sin as a result of this proneness to sin. Similarly, those with a propensity towards intoxication will probably, other things being equal, act upon that proneness at some point in their lives (though, of course, they need not, and may not). That is, persons with such proneness will (probably) sin on at least one occasion. Augustinian theologians (including those in the classical Reformed tradition) go further and state that human beings will *inevitably* sin, where they possess original corruption, without the intervention of divine grace.¹³ Since divine grace does not normally intervene to prevent actual sin from taking place in the case of human beings with original corruption, such human beings inevitably sin (at least once).¹⁴

Original guilt, the other component of a traditional doctrine of original sin, has proved more controversial, particularly in the recent literature. Richard Swinburne is one contemporary philosophical theologian who rejects it in his account of original sin, retaining only inherited (as opposed to original) corruption as a sort of genetic vitiation that is propagated, but not, as with Pelagianism, imitated.¹⁵ In other words, inherited corruption is passed down the generations through biological propagation, not through the perpetuation of sinful social practices, imitated by one generation from the previous generation.

There are good reasons to be suspicious about the coherence of inherited guilt. The principal problem with it is that guilt is not a notion that admits of transfer from one person to another. Whereas punishment may be transferred, guilt may not. A simple example will make the point: Trevor steals a watch from a jeweller and is caught red-

¹² The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* states in answer to Question 18 that, '[t]he sinfulness of that first estate whereinto man fell consists of the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of the whole nature: which is commonly called original sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.' I am not including actual transgression as a distinct aspect of the notion of original sin. Strictly speaking, actual sin is a consequence of original sin; it is not part of original sin.

¹³ This point is made by Richard Swinburne in *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 138.

¹⁴ There might be an even stronger position than this. It could be argued that every action of a sinful human being is affected by sin to such an extent that no act of a sinful human being can ever be pleasing to God, and every act by such human beings is offensive to God. How would every act be offensive to God? Perhaps, if every act of a sinful human is not properly orientated towards glorifying God in some way. We shall return to this issue later in the discussion.

¹⁵ Pelagianism is the notion that human beings have libertarian free will, and are not subject to original sin.

handed, by a policeman. The penalty for his crime is a fine of one hundred pounds, which Trevor is unable to pay, because he is penniless. Happily for him, however, his friend Gary is willing and able to pay the fine, and, as a result of his intervention Trevor is set at liberty once more. However, although Gary has paid Trevor's fine, he has not thereby erased Trevor's guilt. Nor has Trevor's guilt passed to Gary by virtue of Gary paying the fine owed by Trevor. Trevor remains the guilty party, since it was Trevor who committed the crime. This remains true whatever Gary may do on Trevor's behalf, however extravagant or generous he may be. Although Gary can, in certain circumstances, take on Trevor's punishment, he may not take on Trevor's guilt.

This sort of thought experiment seems to provide good grounds for claiming that guilt is in principle non-transferable.¹⁶ In which case, the notion of *inherited* guilt is nonsense, for the simple reason that the guilt pertaining to Adam's first sin cannot be transferred from Adam to anyone else.

In medieval scholastic theology, the notion of original guilt was subdivided into two aspects:

- (1) Inherited guilt, comprising,
 - a. *Reatus culpae* (liability to guilt) denoting that by which a person is unworthy of divine grace, and counted worthy of divine wrath and punishment.
 - b. *Reatus poenae* (liability to punishment) denoting that by which a person is subject to condemnation.

In extrapolating this distinction, the medievals claimed that,

- (2) *Reatus culpae* may be remitted by God through the work of Christ (*obedientia Christi*).

However,

- (3) *Reatus Poenae* is not remitted by the work of Christ, but may be satisfied by, for example, a moral life or a punishment served, e.g. time spent in purgatory.

An example may make this distinction clearer. Let us say a man commits murder, but repents and becomes a Christian. God forgives the man his sin through the work of Christ, such that the man's liability to guilt (*reatus culpae*) for that sin is dealt with. But he still has to serve a custodial sentence for his crime, thereby paying the penalty due his sin (*reatus poenae*). In this instance, the man has his sin forgiven him and the

¹⁶ I have not provided a more comprehensive argument for my claims about inherited guilt since this would take us beyond the scope of this essay. The problem has been discussed by William Wainwright in 'Original Sin' in Thomas Morris (ed.) *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 31-60.

liability to guilt that goes with this removed, or remitted. But he still has the liability to punishment that must be served in gaol.

A similar thought experiment might be used to show that a person could have liability to guilt removed in the case of sin against God, (blasphemy, say). But such a person would still have the liability to punishment which is not remitted by Christ's work, and might, on the understanding of the medievals, lead that person to be punished for their sin in purgatory. Nevertheless, in this situation the person concerned will not be finally condemned for their sin, since the liability to guilt has been remitted through the work of Christ. But they still may have a sentence to serve prior to entry into heaven. (A biblical example of this might be King David and the death of his firstborn with Bathsheba, a punishment for the sin of adultery. We might say that David's guilt was removed by God, but the punishment for his sin was still served upon David. The guilt for his sin was removed; but the penal consequence of that sin was still enforced.)

This distinction was rejected by the Reformed orthodox, who posited potential and actual guilt (*reatus potentialis* and *actualis*) in place of these two notions.¹⁷ The Reformed orthodox position can be expressed in the following manner:

- (4) There are two aspects to original (that is, immediately imputed, as opposed to inherited) guilt:
 - a. *Reatus potentialis* (potential guilt) denotes the intrinsic desert of punishment that is inseparable from sin, and is non-transferable.
 - b. *Reatus actualis* (actual guilt) denotes that aspect of guilt that is transferable and can be remitted by divine mercy.

The Reformed orthodox were critical of the medieval view for the following reason:

- (5) The *reatus* (liability or propensity) that accompanies the *macula* (vitiating nature) of original sin simply *is* the obligation to punish a person because of their culpability. In which case, removal of liability to culpability entails removal of liability to punishment.

Thus, for example, Francis Turretin:

Since culpability and punishment are related and guilt is nothing else than the obligation to punishment arising from culpability, they mutually posit and remove each other so that culpability and its guilt being removed, the

¹⁷ Richard Muller says, '[t]he Protestant scholastics refused to separate *poena* and *culpa* in this manner, and therefore refuse to make a distinction between *reatus culpae* and *reatus poenae*. Instead, they argue a single *reatus*, or liability, on the basis of the fall, a liability to both guilt and punishment.' From his *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), p. 258, entry, 'reatus; reatus poenae'. This point is echoed by Heinrich Heppe in *Reformed Dogmatics* (trans.) G. T. Thompson (London: Wakeman Trust, 1950), p. 326: 'A distinction is drawn between *reatus potentialis* and *actualis* [potential and actual sin]; on the other hand the scholastic distinction between *reatus culpae* and *poenae* is rejected.'

punishment itself ought to be taken away necessarily (as it can be inflicted only on account of culpability). Otherwise culpability cannot be said to be remitted or its guilt taken away, if there still remains something to be purged from the sinner because of it.¹⁸

Turretin and the other Reformed orthodox maintained that the medieval distinction between *reatus culpae* and *poenae* is simply mistaken in bifurcating guilt in the manner in which it does. If guilt requires punishment, then no meaning can be given to a notion that seeks to distinguish them. Hence, in place of the medieval distinction, the Reformed orthodox spoke of potential and actual guilt as the two component parts of original guilt.

In the mid-twentieth century, Louis Berkhof took a slightly different position from the Reformed orthodox, which appears more in keeping with the language of the medieval schoolmen, although utilised for his own (Reformed) purposes. He argues:

- (6) Liability to guilt (*reatus culpae*) is non-transferable and is of the essence of sin even though God may forgive the sinner their sin.
- (7) Liability to punishment (*reatus poenae*) is transferable, relates to the penal sanction of the law and is therefore not of the essence of sin.

Thus Berkhof:

By this [liability to punishment] is meant desert of punishment, or obligation to render satisfaction to God's justice for self-determined violation of the law. Guilt in this sense is not of the essence of sin, but is rather a relation to the penal sanction of the law. If there had been no sanction attached to the disregard of moral relations, every departure from the law would have been sin, but would not have involved liability to punishment. Guilt in this sense may be removed by the satisfaction of justice, either personally or vicariously. It may be transferred from one person to another, or assumed by one person for another.¹⁹

This means that a person could be guilty of a sin, even where that sin is not punishable. A person could be guilty of bigamy, say, in a society where bigamy is not punishable by law. Similarly, a person could be guilty of sinning against God, and that guilt remain (because it is non-transferable), though they are forgiven by God through the work of Christ. Such a person would be forgiven the guilt of their sin (*reatus culpae*) though the *reatus* remains even after forgiveness. But the punishment they would have suffered had their sin not been forgiven (*reatus poenae*) is remitted because of the work of Christ.

¹⁸ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Vol. 1*, (trans.) George Musgrave Giger, (ed.) James T. Dennison Jr. (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 9: IV, pp. 595-596.

The nineteenth century Princetonian theologian Charles Hodge defends precisely this view in the following terms:

A man condemned at a human tribunal for any offence against the community, when he has endured the penalty which the law prescribes, is no less unworthy, his demerit as much exists as it did from the beginning; but his liability to justice or obligation to the penalty of the law, in other words, his guilt in that sense of the work, is removed. It would be unjust to punish him a second time for that offence.²⁰

We might express this distinction according to the doctrine of the immediate imputation of original sin as follows. All human beings post-fall have imputed to them Adam's guilt, and, as a consequence of this, Adam's corruption. It is not the case that all post-fall humanity have a corrupt nature passed down to them via natural generation, and, as a consequence of this, incur an inherited guilt. This is the mediate imputation doctrine, and it would mean that original corruption logically precedes and is the ground of original guilt.²¹ Instead, guilt is logically prior to corruption according to immediate imputation. But, as Berkhof and Hodge show, original guilt has two aspects that need to be distinguished: liability to guilt and punishment. This liability to punishment is a logical consequence of the liability to guilt. It could be said that liability to punishment supervenes upon liability to guilt, and that original corruption, at least, on the doctrine of immediate imputation, supervenes upon original guilt. Thus, although the Reformed orthodox rejected the medieval distinction between *reatus culpae* and *reatus poenae*, this distinction does serve a useful purpose in differentiating between the logical components of original guilt and original corruption.

So, to sum up, the classical Reformed doctrine of original sin comprises both original corruption and original guilt. However, there seem to be considerable problems with the notion of inherited guilt, problems that would also pertain to original guilt, viz. the transference problem. It may be that, if no solution to this problem in the traditional doctrine of original sin is forthcoming, original guilt needs to be excised from original sin. This would have important implications for the logic of immediate imputation. If there is no original guilt, then it would seem that the corrupt nature that post-fall humanity possesses is not, strictly speaking, culpable. This would be extremely

²⁰ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol. II* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1874), II: VIII: §7, p.189. It seems that Berkhof has taken his own views from Hodge's discussion of the same issue, although Berkhof does not credit Hodge as the source of his own position. I am indebted to Dr. Daniel Hill for pointing this out to me.

²¹ Could there be a hybrid of these two views? Could it be that original corruption logically precedes original guilt, where both aspects of original sin are immediately imputed to Adam's posterity? Perhaps. The Reformed orthodox rejected any notion that guilt was logically contingent upon corruption because it is *Adam's* sin that is immediately imputed, and, in Adam's case, guilt (for sin) logically precedes the corruption of his nature. He is corrupt because he is guilty of sin, he is not guilty of sin because he is corrupt. If it is Adam's sinful nature that is immediately imputed to his posterity, then the same logical priority applies to original sin: Adam's posterity has original guilt and corruption imputed immediately to them, but the guilt logically precedes and grounds the corrupt nature.

problematic for the classical Reformed doctrine with respect to the imputation of original sin to fallen humanity. But it may be conducive to our concerns with Christ's fallen humanity, since, if a plausible version of original sin without original guilt can be defended in the case of Christ's humanity, then there may be grounds for an argument in favour of the notion of Christ's fallen humanity. We shall not consider whether the traditional Reformed doctrine of original sin, in its application to fallen humanity *per se*, is coherent or not. Instead, we shall focus on whether the doctrine of original sin can be revised in order to make sense of the claim that Christ's humanity might be fallen. This involves removing original guilt.²²

Before turning to consider an argument in defence of the fallenness view of Christ's humanity along these lines, we need to examine one further question with regard to the Reformed orthodox doctrine of original sin. It is this: does possession of original corruption, even in the absence of original guilt, mean that the person in possession of such a condition is damned? The answer appears to be in the affirmative. To make this clear, consider the following scenario. In a particular world, W1, God brings about the creation of beings to whom the sin of the first human creature is imputed. However, this imputation involves only the first component of the traditional doctrine of original sin, that is, original corruption. So, in W1, as a result of Adam's sin, God imputes original corruption to all of Adam's posterity, but not original guilt. Now, Trevor is one of Adam's (fallen) posterity in W1. Does this mean that Trevor in W1 is worthy of punishment merely on the basis of possessing original corruption? Perhaps not. If he has no original guilt, then he cannot have *reatus culpae* or *reatus poenae*. And if he has neither aspect of original guilt, then it does not seem that he is culpable for possessing original corruption. However, he could still be loathsome to God in virtue of being corrupt. This would be the case even if he never actually sins. It is no defence in this situation, to claim that if a person never actually sins because, say, he is prevented from doing so by dying at birth, he is free from actual sin, (and, being a citizen of W1, original guilt), and therefore not punishable by God in hell. For God could refuse such an individual a place in heaven even where he never actually sins, or has original guilt, merely because, in virtue of having a fallen human nature (original corruption), he is loathsome to God and must have the blessings of heaven withheld from him.

So, it seems that, if a human person had original corruption but not original guilt, and were to be prevented (by some circumstance, or other agent) from committing actual sin (whether intentionally or unintentionally), that person would still be loathsome to God, and, as a consequence of that, excluded from heaven. We might say that, even if fallenness entails only that a human person has original corruption and not original

²² It seems to me that, as it stands, the Reformed doctrine of original sin is fatally flawed. (This does not mean that the doctrine of original sin is fatally flawed; only that this version of the doctrine is.) However, there may be ways of reviving the Reformed view, or articulating a doctrine very similar in many respects. For instance, it may be that God does not need to 'impute' original sin to fallen humanity, because all human beings are one metaphysical entity. In which case Adam and his posterity really do share in the same sinfulness. Augustine advocates a view similar to this one in *City of God* Bk. XIII, ch. 3.

guilt, that person is still excluded from heaven, even if they are not, strictly speaking, *guilty* of possessing original corruption. But what we must say, according to Reformed orthodoxy, is that being fallen entails being sinful. Even if a person only has original corruption and never actually sins, possession of original corruption is itself a sin, and therefore loathsome in the sight of God. And to be fallen, a human being must have at least this component of original sin, whether or not such a being also has the two component parts of original guilt.

An argument for the ‘fallenness’ view

With this discussion of the traditional doctrine of original sin in view, we may proceed to an argument for Christ having a ‘fallen’ human nature. We begin with a robustly Chalcedonian proposition:

- (1) The second person of the Trinity elects to take to himself a human nature.

As before, I leave open the question of whether the human nature taken is a particular, or generic human nature, since that would lead us beyond the purview of this discussion. Next, and following our discussion of the metaphysics of human natures in the first stage of our argument:

- (2) This human nature has an individual essence.
- (3) This human nature is an instance of the kind-essence, ‘human being’.
- (4) This human nature is fully, but only merely, human.

This last distinction is taken from Morris’ discussion in *The Logic of God Incarnate* (chapter 3). He distinguishes between those human beings who are fully, that is, completely human (as opposed to, say, cyborgs who, in science-fiction, are part human and part machine), and those humans who are only merely human, that is, human and not more-than-human in some capacity, at one and the same time. (4) claims that Christ’s humanity is truly, fully human. But it is not merely human, since it is in hypostatic union with the divine nature of the second person of the Trinity.

- (5) This human nature is one of two natures held in a hypostatic union in the person of Christ.

We shall assume, in this argument, that a coherent doctrine of the hypostatic union, compatible with the Chalcedonian definition, can be articulated.²³ Now, recall that,

²³ Contrary to those who, like John Hick in the recent literature, deny this. See his *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1993). Sarah Coakley has recently shown that the Chalcedonian definition is more limited in what it delivers to Christology than has often been thought in recent analytic discussions of Christology. For instance, Chalcedon does not tell us what hypostasis means when applied to Christ, or what the divine and human natures consist in. But, though its explanatory power may be less than has sometimes been thought, this does not affect the point being made here. See Sarah Coakley, ‘What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does it Not? Some Reflection on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian “Definition”’, in (eds.) Davis, Kendall and O’Collins *The Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 162-163.

according to essentialism, concrete individuals (particular individual things) have both essential and contingent properties. But no contingent properties can be part of the nature of a given individual thing. The reason for this is simply that an individual thing can lose contingent properties and still be the same individual thing. But it cannot lose essential properties (properties that are part of this individual's nature) and remain the same thing. To distinguish between these two things in the person of Christ, let us refer to the *human nature* of Christ (essential properties as part of a *de re* necessary nature), and the *humanity* of Christ (his human nature plus contingent properties he has at a particular time and place, such as 'being in Bethany with Lazarus at tn' and 'having collar length hair'). With this in mind we come to:

- (6) The humanity of Christ (not his human nature) has, amongst other properties the property, 'being fallen'.

The reason being that, according to classical theologians:

- (7) The property 'being fallen' is a contingent property of *all* human beings after the fall of Adam, without exception.

This may sound too strong. What of human beings that are in heaven? Are they also fallen, if they have lived and died after the fall? No, they are not. Those in heaven are usually thought to be in a different state from human beings 'here below'. Such human beings possess natures that have been perfected, or purified by a work of divine grace, not through some power exercised by the human natures in question, and therefore cannot have any contingent properties which are entailed by 'being fallen' and 'being sinful'. Without this divine intervention, all human beings after the fall of Adam would have the property 'being fallen' as part of their humanity, according to this argument. So this sort of objection to the strength of (7) can be rebutted. To continue:

- (8) The humanity of Christ is fallen.
(9) The fallenness of Christ's humanity entails that Christ has original sin.

As we saw in the first section of the essay, the notion that fallenness requires original sin seems to be the universal affirmation of classical theology until the nineteenth century, and the development of the 'fallen' humanity view in Christology.²⁴ That is, those theologians who speak of human beings after the fall as having a fallen humanity mean by this that any such human being has the property of original sin. (Some, like Barth, speak in terms of 'fallen human natures', but as I have pointed out in the preceding, this is a misnomer, for good metaphysical reasons.²⁵) Indeed, it

²⁴ However, this is disputed by Thomas Weinandy. His book, *In The Likeness of Sinful Flesh* is an apology for the fallenness view. He claims that it has a long history in scripture and the tradition.

²⁵ I am grateful to Dr Randal Rauser for pointing this out to me. An earlier version of this chapter that appeared in the *International Journal for Systematic Theology* was flawed because I was not sufficiently clear about this point.

seems that part of the very notion of fallenness is that a person who is fallen is sinful in some way. From this we move to:

(10) If Christ has original sin, then he has both inherited corruption and inherited guilt.

This, assuming the full-blooded classical doctrine of original sin and (9). The problem with this is obvious:

(11) If Christ has original sin (as per (10)), then he shares inherited guilt with the rest of humanity post-fall, and is thereby culpable.

Notice that this is entirely in accord with the traditional articulation of original sin. If Christ shares in original sin because he has a fallen humanity, then, on this argument, he is sinful. Once his 'fallen' humanity has been granted, it is a short step to extrapolate what that involves, namely, the full-strength doctrine of original sin, and from there, to the conclusion that Christ must therefore be sinful. This obtains, on classical theology, even if Christ were never to actually sin. That is, even if Christ were simply to have a fallen humanity, and never once act upon the propensity original corruption generates towards actual sin, he would still be culpable. The reason being that, as we have already noted in expounding the traditional doctrine of original sin, possession of original corruption is itself culpable in virtue of original guilt. So, a classical understanding of original sin, coupled with a commitment to a 'fallenness' doctrine of Christ's humanity, yields the conclusion that Christ's 'fallen' humanity is sinful.

Clearly, this is not acceptable to any theologian wishing to remain credally orthodox. But is this the only way that a 'fallenness' doctrine can be construed? No, it is not. Consider the following variation on the argument just outlined. The contentious move is made in (9) which was,

(9) The fallenness of the humanity of Christ entails that Christ has original sin.

None of the defenders of a fallenness doctrine of Christ's humanity that I have read would affirm this proposition, for the very reason that it commits them to the claim that Christ is sinful, which is clearly unorthodox. However, it is not clear in the writings of such theologians quite how they expect to avoid this problem. One solution would be to retain the doctrine of original corruption, as Swinburne does, whilst rejecting the notion of original guilt on the grounds that it is incoherent, or uncongenial to a fallenness view. Were the defenders of a fallen humanity doctrine to take this view, they would be able to make a case for Christ's humanity being both fallen, and therefore possessing original sin, without the unhappy consequence of maintaining that Christ is thereby guilty of actually sinning.

Let us extrapolate such an argument, assuming propositions (1)-(9) of the argument thus far:

(10') (9) does not entail that Christ is *guilty* of being sinful.

This is because:

(11') Christ may possess original sin without the constituent original guilt.

This may be because original guilt is incoherent, and I have already suggested is the case on at least one form of the doctrine of original sin. Or it may be that it is merely extremely implausible, just as time travel to the future may not be incoherent or impossible, but is extremely implausible. Or, it might be that original guilt makes perfect sense, but that it is simply not imputed to, or inherited by, Christ. Whether or not original guilt makes sense, all that the argument requires is that original corruption be imputed without original guilt. This seems plausible. In which case,

(12) Christ's humanity is fallen, possessing original corruption but not original guilt.

At this point, the defender of a fallenness doctrine will have to choose between the weaker and stronger versions of original corruption, mentioned earlier. To re-cap, these were,

- Weak original corruption – human beings post-fall actually sin because of original corruption, without the prevenient grace of God.
- Strong original corruption – human beings post-fall inevitably actually sin because of original corruption, without the prevenient grace of God.

There is a stronger version of original corruption than this. One might claim that all actions of fallen human beings are sinful without the intervention of divine grace because they are not directed towards the glory of God in every respect. For instance, Jonathan Edwards says,

Let it be supposed, that some beings, by natural instinct, or by some other means, have a determination of mind to union and benevolence to a particular person, or private system, which is but a small part of the universal system of being ... this disposition or determination of mind is independent on [sic], or not subordinate to, benevolence to being in general. Such a determination, disposition, or affection of mind is not of the nature of true virtue ... [unless it is] subordinate to benevolence to being in general.²⁶

²⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue in The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 1* (ed.) Edward Hickman (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988 [1834]), p. 126.

This need not mean that all actions of human beings post-fall are sinful, only those not directed towards ‘benevolence to being in general’, identified by Edwards with God. But it might be claimed (though Edwards does not say this here), that all actions of human beings with original corruption are sinful because they are bound over to benevolence to private systems or particular persons, not to being in general, or at least, not primarily, perhaps even, pre-eminently, to being in general. However, since this is a more controversial view than the strong inherited corruption claim, and since it would require further argument to defend the proposition that all the actions of fallen human are sinful, I shall not pursue this option further here. All that is needed in this argument are the weak and strong versions of the original corruption claim. By contrast to the strong and very strong versions of original corruption, the weak version of original corruption makes no claim about the inevitability of actual sin, only that it is a consequence (but not a necessary consequence) of possessing original corruption.

Defenders of a ‘fallenness’ view of Christ’s humanity may, therefore, endorse a weaker view of inherited corruption, taking as a concomitant to this view the idea that Christ’s fallen humanity is, because of its inherited corruption, able to sin (*posse peccare*). Moreover without the intervention of divine grace, Christ, on this version of events, will probably sin on at least one occasion. However, with the assistance of divine grace, Christ’s humanity will be enabled to resist actual sin, despite having weak inherited corruption. Thus,

(13) Christ’s humanity may actually sin.

However,

(14) Due to divine grace, Christ’s humanity never actually sins.

So, on this argument, it is possible to defend a version of a fallenness doctrine of Christ’s humanity (though not, strictly speaking, of Christ’s fallen human *nature*²⁷). Christ is, on this view, both fallen, but never actually sins, as defenders of this view maintain. Although, unlike those who take the fallenness view, this argument involves a commitment to Christ having one aspect of original sin, that is, (weak) inherited corruption. However, since sinfulness seems to be part of the notion of fallenness, it appears that defenders of fallenness simply have to bite the bullet on this aspect of the problem. Christ may have had a fallen humanity that had original corruption, but not original guilt.

²⁷ This would mean Christ’s human nature could not be exemplified without Christ having a fallen (and, sinful) human nature. But this is obviously false for the reason stated earlier: that sinfulness, or fallenness is not an essential property of being human, and so not a part of any given human nature, since human natures are de re necessary. So Christ cannot have a sinful human nature (when nature is taken in this specific, metaphysical sense, rather than the broader, usage in much theological reflection on the topic).

Problems with the argument

However, this argument for the fallenness of Christ's humanity has a number of very serious defects, and is fatally flawed, for the following reasons.

First, on this argument Christ would be sinful. This, it need hardly be said, is a serious problem, since if Christ has a sinful humanity, then it is not clear how he is able to act as a redeemer, along the lines envisaged in classical theology. (This, despite the fact that there is no agreed understanding of the atonement in the tradition.) Theologians are divided on the theory of atonement, but are agreed on the Chalcedonian definition, that Christ is like other human beings in every way, sin excepted. So, a sinful Christ is simply unorthodox. This alone is fatal to the argument.

Secondly, even if Christ only has original corruption and not original guilt, this means his humanity is vitiated, and, given the argument mounted in the first stage of this essay, loathsome in the sight of God, even if it is not, strictly speaking, culpable. In the language of scholastic theology, Christ's humanity has a *macula*, or deformity of soul, because of original corruption. This in itself is sinful and would prevent Christ from entering heaven, since, as we noted previously, God may withhold heaven from someone who is loathsome. But not as a punishment, since, according to this argument, Christ has no original guilt. If this is the case, then Christ cannot be sinless, even if he is not guilty. But then he would not be merely fallen, but fallen and sinful. So, the argument folds once again, for the same reason as before: it is theologically unorthodox.

Third, on this argument, Christ cannot commit actual sin. But this is one of the principal reasons for endorsing the fallenness view (viz. being tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin). Given the weak version of original corruption, Christ will actually sin on at least one occasion without divine intervention. But this means that the divine nature of Christ, or, perhaps, the Holy Spirit, must safeguard Christ's sinlessness, and prevent Christ from actually sinning. But if this is the case, then Christ's *posse peccare* humanity is only able to remain sinless if divine grace causes the humanity of Christ to remain sinless. The upshot of which is that the humanity of Christ is not able to sin, although it could and will sin without divine intervention, given the constitution of Christ's humanity, *posse peccare*. That is, although without the intervention of divine grace Christ's humanity will sin at least once, (because it is constituted *posse peccare*), in fact it never can sin, because Christ's humanity is never in a position to be able to sin. Divine grace prevents that outcome. But this means that one of the most important reasons for preferring a fallen humanity view to a sinlessness view is removed. For, on this version of the fallenness view, there is still no possibility that when Christ is tempted he will sin, even though his humanity is constituted such that he could sin. Divine grace prevents this from ever occurring. This is not the same as a *posse non peccare* (able not to sin) view of Christ's humanity. This can be shown with reference to one recent argument in favour of the *posse non peccare* view, that of Thomas Morris. Morris borrows Frankfurtian counterexamples to the problem of determinism and moral responsibility to show that

the humanity of Christ could be *posse non peccare*.²⁸ One of his Frankfurtian examples will suffice to make the point here.

A person enters a room that has a two-hour automatic locking mechanism on the door. She occupies herself for that period, unaware that, even if she were to attempt to leave the room during those two hours, she could not. Nevertheless, she does not choose to leave the room, until two minutes past the second hour, when the locking mechanism has been released and she is able to leave. The point Morris makes here, is that she does not desire to leave, and chooses not to leave, even though she could not leave, had she chosen to do so. But the fact that she could not leave does not make her any less responsible for choosing not to leave. Similarly, Christ's humanity *posse non peccare* never chooses to sin. However, if he did so choose, he would be prevented from sinning by his divine nature (acting like the automatic locking mechanism on the door). As it is, Christ never chooses to sin, so the divine nature is not called upon to intervene, in order to ensure that the human nature remains sinless. Hence, it is meaningful to claim that Christ is *posse non peccare*, and still truly tempted. His humanity truly and successfully resists the temptations he suffers, although it was possible for his humanity to sin. Had he been about to succumb to such temptation, however, his divine nature would have prevented such an occurrence from taking place. But this was not necessary; Christ's humanity remained *posse non peccare* and sinless throughout his earthly trials.

This view is clearly not the same as the *posse peccare* (able to sin) view I have outlined in the fallenness argument. On this view, Christ's humanity would have sinned on at least one occasion, due to the presence of original corruption. Hence, it is not possible, on this view, that Christ's humanity successfully resists every temptation without the intervention of divine grace (either Christ's divine nature or the Holy Spirit). To return to Morris' locked room, the woman will, on this view, be tempted at least once during the initial two hours she is in the room, to open the door and leave, and will try to do so. Let us say that this outcome is prevented by electrodes implanted in her brain, which alter the physical chemistry of her brain and prevent her from choosing that course of action when the temptation presents itself. These electrodes are activated by a mad scientist in the adjacent room, who has set up a sophisticated surveillance of the activities of the woman, in order to activate the electrodes when she is tempted to leave the room within the stated two hour period it is locked. It is clear from this thought experiment that if Christ's humanity is prevented from actual sin by his divine nature in this way, it is not his humanity that successfully resists temptation on every occasion. His divine nature is required to ensure this is the case, on that occasion or occasions when he would otherwise succumb to temptation. In short, Christ's humanity is able to sin, being fallen, yet is prevented from sinning by divine intervention.

²⁸ See Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, pp. 150 ff. For Frankfurt's original argument, see 'Alternate possibilities and moral responsibility' in *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

This is not an obviously incoherent way of understanding Christ's sinlessness. But it does pose problems for defenders of a fallenness view. If Christ's humanity, although *posse peccare*, is actually unable to sin due to the intervention of divine grace, then one of the reasons for endorsing the fallenness view, namely, that Christ is truly tempted, and truly resists temptation by his (fallen) humanity alone, is removed. Indeed, the net result of this position is equivalent to that of the Augustinian *non posse peccare* (not able to sin) view: Christ cannot, not merely may not, sin. And this significantly reduces the appeal of this option over and against the *posse peccare* and *non posse peccare* options favoured amongst those who defend Christ's unfallen sinlessness and impeccability, respectively.

Might there be a way for defenders of the fallenness view to circumvent the problems raised by this argument by endorsing some other argument where Christ's humanity is fallen, but not sinful, the position defenders of the fallenness view are committed to? That is, could defenders of the fallenness view claim that Christ is fallen and not sinful, contrary to our argument for a fallen and originally corrupt Christ? Not if fallenness requires sinfulness. This is the issue upon which the fallenness view stands or falls. Without some way of distinguishing between the two notions, notions, which, I have argued, are entailed, or are understood to be entailed in the tradition, no sense can be made of the fallenness view.²⁹ And since fallenness requires sinfulness of some sort, no sense *can* be made of the fallenness view along these lines. This leaves the option of revising the traditional doctrine of original sin, along the lines attempted here, or abandoning a Chalcedonian Christology. We have shown that the only obvious candidate for a revision of original sin, using original corruption without original guilt, yields a doctrine that is incompatible with Chalcedonian orthodoxy. Hence, defenders of the fallenness view do not appear able to articulate a version of the doctrine that is orthodox, even if they can make sense of original corruption without original guilt.

None of this denies the traditional position of theologians like Augustine, that Christ's sinless humanity was affected by the fall without actually being fallen. Augustine claims that,

God could of course have taken a man to himself from somewhere else ... not from the race of that Adam who had implicated the human race in his own sin.... But God judged it better to take a man to himself from the very race that had been conquered, in order through him to conquer the enemy of the human race; to take one however whose conception from a virgin was inaugurated by the spirit not the flesh, by faith not lust.

²⁹ Of course, these are two quite different claims. I might think something entails something else, and be wrong about this. But even if I am wrong and (*per impossibile*) fallenness does not entail sinfulness, the defender of the fallenness view still has to contend with the fact that there is, to my knowledge, no classical theologian who would endorse this distinction for the very reason that it makes no sense. One could simply reject the weight of that tradition. But then some account needs to be given of why it is that the tradition has so fundamentally misunderstood the nature of sin.

He goes on,

What was born, I say, was a man who had not and never would have any sin at all, a man by whom would be reborn all those who were to be set free from sin, who could not themselves be born without sin.³⁰

From these two citations it is clear Augustine believed that Christ is both sinless and yet possesses a humanity affected by the fall. And this makes sense of those biblical passages where Christ is tired, weeps and is sad.³¹ So he has the propensity to physical, and perhaps moral, weaknesses. But exemplifying the effects of the fall in his humanity is not the same as possessing a fallen humanity (nor a fallen human nature!), the claim we have been analysing. A thought experiment will make this clear. Imagine a regime that could produce in a person the measles without that person having the bacillus. A person undergoes this regime in the interests of science. They have the symptoms of the condition, spots, a high temperature, feverishness and so forth, but do not have the measles. Augustine and other classical theologians maintain that, in a similar way, Christ possessed the symptoms of sinful humanity in terms of moral and physical weakness, without possessing a sinful humanity that gives rise to these effects. In this sense then, Christ takes on the infirmities of fallen humanity, but did not take on the condition of fallenness.³²

Thus, the traditional sinlessness view is able to account for the identification of Christ with fallen human creatures without thereby identifying Christ's humanity with a fallen humanity.

Conclusions

I have argued that the traditional doctrine of original sin poses a serious problem for defenders of the view that Christ's humanity was fallen, rather than sinless, or impeccable. Although it is possible to construct an argument that avoids this problem by revising the way in which original sin applies to the case of Christ's humanity, this revision has a number of undesirable consequences for the defender of the fallenness view, and, in any case, appears to be fatally flawed if one wishes to retain a Chalcedonian Christology. If so, the argument cannot be used as a successful defence of the fallenness view.

I have not claimed that there is no other argument that may be mounted in defence of the fallenness view. I do not know whether there is such an argument. Only that one

³⁰ Augustine, *The Trinity* (trans.) Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991), Bk. XIII. 23, pp. 361 and 362 respectively. Weinandy in his discussion of Augustine is guilty of selective citations which fail to give the whole sense of what Augustine is saying on this issue. See *In the likeness of Sinful Flesh*, pp. 29 ff.

³¹ To illustrate this from just one of the canonical Gospels, see John 4: 6; 11: 33 and 35.

³² This thought experiment was suggested to me by Prof. Paul Helm in private correspondence.

potential candidate argument, the argument I have mounted, does not work. And any such candidate argument has to overcome apparently insuperable difficulties posed by this view, difficulties to do with the fact that fallenness requires original sin.³³

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