

Preface

During Lent of 2013, artist and art professor David Hooker was commissioned by Wheaton College to construct a piece of art for the college's newly renovated Department of Biblical and Theological Studies. The piece, called *Corpus*, received attention from the press for its subject matter: a life-sized statue of Christ covered in dirt, hair, and skin cells collected from vacuum bags around the college's campus. While some might wrongly be—and indeed were—tempted to see Hooker's piece as “today's omen that the end is obviously nigh,”¹ Hooker's piece is provocative, challenging, and laden with deep theological meaning. Christ bears our sin in his own body; we return to dust after death and find our only hope in the resurrection, the firstfruits of which we see in Christ's disfigured flesh; or, as poet Christian Wiman puts it, “God goes belonging to every riven thing he's made.”² The liturgical life of the church calls us to take seriously Christ's body as we see it broken for us and appeal to it active among us; yet, throughout the history of theological reflection in the church, discussion of Christ's flesh has been quite controversial. The early heresy of Docetism, for instance, said that Christ's flesh merely appeared to be a real, physical thing. While the ecumenical councils of the church attempted to clarify the christological and Trinitarian

1. Eric Owens, “Christian College Professor Smears Jesus Statue with Vacuum Crud, Calls It Art,” *The Daily Caller* (March 2013), <http://dailycaller.com/2013/03/13/christian-college-professor-smears-jesus-statue-with-vacuum-crud-calls-it-art/>.

2. Christian Wiman, “Every Riven Thing,” in *Every Riven Thing: Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 24–25.

issues related to the confession that “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14), the resulting formulae at Nicaea, Chalcedon, Constantinople, and Ephesus did not resolve all of the problems or debates surrounding what it meant to say that Christ physically ascended into heaven and is yet still here on earth, active among his people.

This book is an attempt to give some clarity to the issues related to the discussion of the flesh of Christ, specifically as it relates to the debates that arose during the Reformation concerning Christ’s human and divine natures and the Eucharist—codified in the obscure doctrine known as the *extra Calvinisticum*. I intend not only to show that this doctrine is not as obscure and archaic as it might sound, but also to argue that it helps the church make sense of its talk about Christ’s flesh.

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