

THE FALLEN HUMANITY OF CHRIST: A PNEUMATOLOGICAL CLARIFICATION OF THE THEOLOGY OF THOMAS F. TORRANCE¹

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Abstract. *Thomas Torrance's account of the Incarnation contains a central axiom, namely, the assumption of fallen human nature. Not without precedent, Torrance's christology has been critiqued as incoherent, unbiblical, and unorthodox. When the pneumatological elements nascent in Torrance's christology are examined, Torrance's theology offers a more biblical, coherent, and orthodox theology than its opponents have yet acknowledged. Such a clarification of Torrance's theology, one in which the work of the Holy Spirit is more prominent, offers a dogmatic and pastoral advantage over most text-book approaches to theology, and it also provides a way in which to address the critique Torrance's doctrine of the non assumptus has attracted.*

1. Introduction

While interest in the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth is as old as the Gospels themselves; contemporary Christology shows a decided concern with the specific issue of the humanity of Jesus, and with it, a reconsideration of his human nature. Thomas F. Torrance is no exception in this wider discussion. While not interested in the psychology of Christ or entering into the history of the "Quests" for the Historical Jesus (something he is highly critical of), Torrance is concerned to highlight the reality of Jesus' humanity and its *theological* consequences. Torrance presents the most robust and developed

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doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ yet provided, and does so around the conceptual linchpin of the contentious and often debated argument that Christ assumed a fallen human nature in order to redeem fallen humanity.² The central issue I address here is how Torrance's dogmatic account of the fallen humanity of Christ might be clarified in light of recent criticisms, by further developing the pneumatological insights implicit in Torrance's work and by drawing upon more recent, constructive accounts offered from within the field of Spirit Christology.

It is clear from a reading of the history of Christian doctrine there has been consistent and universal belief in the personal sinlessness of Jesus, as the Scriptures attest, and yet for soteriological reasons there has been an equal emphasis on the fact that Christ had to assume a real human nature, like ours, in order for atonement and reconciliation to occur (an anti-Apollinarian argument). It is at this point that disagreements arise, some of the main being: first, was his human nature like ours post-lapsarian or pre-lapsarian? Second, if it was a post-lapsarian nature that was assumed then how would Christ not incur personal guilt? With the exception of John Owen and Edward Irving, few theologians have been able to provide a substantial explanation as to how Christ could assume a sinful human nature and yet remain sinless.³ Torrance wades into this debate with his usual enthusiasm and theological acumen arguing, for example, that "perhaps the most fundamental truth which we have to learn in the Christian Church, or rather relearn since we have suppressed it, is that the incarnation was the coming of God to save us in the heart of our *fallen* and *depraved* humanity . . ." ⁴ Torrance claims to find this doctrine "everywhere in the early Church in the first five centuries"⁵ and takes up Gregory Nazianzen's maxim "the unassumed is the unhealed" in support. According to Torrance, this doctrine is central to the presentation of the Gospel in the New Testament.

2 For example: Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology from John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ: Auburn Lectures 1938–39* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 121–130; "The Atonement: the Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order," in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. N.M de S. Cameron (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 237–239.

3 Many others have argued for the *non assumptus*, of course. See Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of the Savior: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Human Nature of Christ in Relation to Original Sin, with Special Reference to Its Soteriological Significance* (London: Epworth, 1962).

4 Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 39.

5 Ibid.

2. Torrance on the *non assumptus*

In his 1938 Auburn Lectures, Torrance addressed this question specifically and framed it in this way: "does not the Lord Jesus in his vicarious humiliation take upon himself *our* humanity, *fallen* humanity, and yet without sin?"⁶ Torrance's reply is an assured "yes:" yes Christ did assume the fallen humanity of the human race, not some pristine humanity like that which existed before the Fall. Torrance states this plainly 54 years later in his 1992 lecture to Princeton Theological Seminary students when he said,

. . . we must not flinch from the statement of St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans (8:3) that the Son of God came among us in the concrete likeness of sinful flesh . . . Nor must we try to water down St. Paul's statement that Christ was made sin for us, although he knew no sin (2 Cor 5:21) . . . many people in the West have found this soteriological principle rather difficult and have preferred to think of Christ as having taken upon himself human nature as it came from the hand of God before the fall, but that is to separate the incarnation from reconciliation, the person of Christ from his saving work.⁷

According to Torrance, "flesh" in the Pauline sense of the word often refers to the actual form of our humanity under the fall, and Scripture asserts that Christ assumed human, fallen, and sinful flesh.⁸

That must mean that the flesh he assumes is not to be thought of in some neutral sense, but as really *our* flesh. He has come to redeem *us*, to destroy our sin in human flesh; and therefore he becomes what we are that he might raise us up to where he is.⁹

Torrance is appealing to the patristic notion of the "wonderful exchange," whereby Christ becomes what we are so that we may become what he is.

6 Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 121.

7 Thomas F. Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 58–59.

8 See his brief New Testament survey in Thomas F. Torrance, "The Atoning Obedience of Christ," *Moravian Theological Seminary Bulletin* (Fall 1959): 67. Torrance is here supported by such exegesis as is found in C.E.B. Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 379–382; C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 119–120; Joseph Fitzmyer, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R. Born, J. Fitzmyer, and R.E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990), 822; and Vincent P. Branick, "The Sinful Flesh of the Son of God (Rom 8.3): A Key Image of Pauline Theology," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985): 246–262.

9 Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 121.

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Such an understanding necessitates for Torrance that we understand the Son's assumption of a fallen human nature. Torrance referred to this fallen, sinful flesh as the "House of Bondage" which Christ's obedience turned into the "House of God," the place where God dwells.¹⁰

In order to make sense of this point we must, along with Herman Ridderbos, insist that "in approaching the Pauline doctrine of sin, we must not orient ourselves in the first place to the individual and personal, but to the redemptive-historical and collective points of view."¹¹ In light of such Pauline texts as Rom 8:3, 2 Cor 5:21, 2 Cor 8:9, and Phil 2:6, we must view sin as the supra-individual mode of existence in which one shares before we see it as an individual act. By viewing sin in this Pauline way we can more fully see how it was that Christ could "be sin for us" (2 Cor 5:21), that is, assume a sinful human *nature*, and yet remain a perfectly sinless *person*. This goes some way to countering the oft-heard charge reflected by Oliver Crisp, for example, that the notion that Christ had a fallen but not sinful human nature is incoherent.¹² By "sinful human nature," it is clear that Crisp means the person is sinful and thus guilty. This is clearly *not* the way Torrance uses such language.

In Christ's own body, specifically his "body of flesh," God's redemption and reconciliation take place. It is God who reconciles the world to himself "in Christ" (2 Cor 5:18-19). Christ is not only the *agent* of redemption but also the *place* of redemption because in himself he redeemed humanity from the curse and subjection to the Law. This provides the force of Paul's definitive statement, "If Christ has not been raised your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17).¹³ There is something about the now risen and now holy human nature of Christ which is essential for salvation.

In discussing the sinlessness of Christ, Torrance makes it clear that as God, Jesus Christ could not sin. Torrance recognizes a real temptation, but at the same time the assurance that victory was bound to be won. Christ assumed human nature, not a human person (*anhypostasis*). He assumed the possibility

10 Torrance, "The Atoning Obedience of Christ," 73-74.

11 Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 91.

12 Crisp, "Did Christ Have a *Fallen* Human Nature?" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6 no. 3 (2004): 271-272.

13 Branick, "The Sinful Flesh of the Son of God (Rom 8:3)," 260. Branick overstates his position when he posits a case for the Gnostic language of the "redeemed Redeemer" (260-261). It would be better to say that "Christ here is *not only* the agent of redemption *but also* the place of redemption because he himself was redeemed from the curse and subjection to the Law."

of being tempted but he did not assume the corrupted personality spoilt by Original Sin, that is, the necessity of falling in temptation. In agreement with a Cyrillian soteriology Torrance affirms:

There can be no thought here of the Son of God becoming contaminated by our sinful flesh, for while he certainly assumed sinful flesh from the lump of our fallen humanity, he healed and sanctified it at the same time, by condemning sin in the flesh and by imparting to what he assumed the virtue of his own holy life.¹⁴

Which of the traditional positions is then to be adopted concerning Christ, *posse peccare* ("possible to sin"), *posse non peccare* ("possible not to sin"), *non posse peccare* ("not possible to sin"), or *non posse non peccare* ("not possible not to sin")?¹⁵ Like the Alexandrian Christology from which Torrance draws upon so often he finds the answer to lie in a true consideration of the *person* of Christ. The person of Christ is divine and hence what pertains to God eternally applies to Christ temporally. In what would become a hallmark of his theology, Torrance adopts an *a posteriori* approach to this question as early as 1938–39 and concludes that Christ "was not able to sin because we see that he did not sin."¹⁶ This immediately excludes one option: *non posse non peccare* ("not possible not to sin"). Two other views are also immediately ruled out by Torrance, *posse peccare* ("possible to sin") and *posse non peccare* ("possible not to sin"), as they both indicate that Christ approached sin neutrally. This is clearly not the case if the divine person of the Mediator is to be taken seriously (*enhypostasis*). God is not neutral in the face of sin, but is wholly opposed to it!¹⁷

14 Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in the East and West* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 169 (see n.3 for bibliographical details to Cyril's work).

15 Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 125. For definitions see Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 136–138, 176; 200, and 230.

16 Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 126. Wiles shows how the Greek Fathers worked with this same methodology specifically in formulating this phrase: "The logical connection is presumably that 'assuming' is a necessary causative factor in producing 'healing;' but in at least its initial employment in theology, the epistemological order was the other way round. It was rather the conviction of full salvation which came first and which (on the basis of this principle) led on to the conviction of the divine Son's assuming a full humanity." Maurice Wiles, "The Unassumed is the Unhealed," *Religious Studies* 4 (1968): 48.

17 Torrance points out that a neutral freedom would amount to caprice. Torrance also includes at this point a brief discussion on the "freedom" that bondage to God brings and entertains a Reformed perspective on the freedom and bondage of the will. Torrance, *The*

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Only one option remains possible according to the logic of Torrance's argument, *non posse peccare*, that Jesus was unable to sin: "not only because he did not sin but because he was of such a nature, in being One with the Word, that he would not have sinned."¹⁸ Sin is a turning away from God, it is rebellion against the love of God, and it is the autonomy of self in contradistinction to reliance on the Creator.¹⁹ As Jesus is the Word Incarnate, and God cannot turn against God, so the Son cannot be autonomous from the Father or the Spirit. Hence, according to Torrance, the temptations of Christ were real, indeed more real than for any other human being, but the victory was certain.²⁰

Up to this point the Spirit has been mentioned in relation to the virgin birth, and briefly in contradistinction to the theology of Edward Irving, but not in relation to the doctrine of Christ's sinful humanity.²¹ To date Torrance has relied solely on the Athanasian-Alexandrian line of reasoning that the divinity of the person of the eternal Son is holy and sinless and so this is how Christ could assume fallen humanity and yet remain personally sinless.

Torrance consistently maintains, with Cyril, that Christ came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" but not in sinful flesh. By such a statement he does not mean to imply that Christ's identification with fallen humanity is merely external or accidentally related but rather, the Son took up *our* human nature into a real or physical and hypostatic union with himself so that "it was precisely one who was unlike us who was made like us, so that in being made like us he remained one who is also unlike us."²² Christ became one with us (*henosis*) in the depths of our fallen human condition yet without ceasing to remain perfect

Doctrine of Jesus Christ, 127–128.

18 Ibid., 128.

19 For Torrance, autonomy of the self is the very antithesis of humanity. It is inhumanity. As Jesus was the True Human, the Real Man, then rebellion and sin has no place in his being. The same thought is offered by Daniel M. Rogich, *Becoming Uncreated: The Journey To Human Authenticity* (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing, 1997), 168, when commenting on Palamite Christology. He writes, "Jesus does not have to sin in order to prove his metal as a human being. To sin means that a human being is inhuman, not more authentically human."

20 Similar conclusions are drawn by such eclectic sources as Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 208; Leon Morris, *Lord from Heaven: A Study of the New Testament Teaching on the Deity and Humanity of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 51–52; and John F. Walvoord, "The Impeccability of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 118 (1961): 195–202.

21 Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 118–122.

22 Torrance *Theology in Reconciliation*, 169. This answers some of the criticisms of this phrase and its development put forward in the latter half of the essay by Wiles, "The Un-assumed is the Unhealed," 47–56.

in his divinity in order to make us one with the Father as Christ is one with the Father.²³

Torrance incorporates into this discussion a specific stress on the notion of an incarnational atonement, as we would expect, when he makes explicit the link between incarnation and atonement.²⁴ Torrance argues strongly that if the incarnation of the Son was not an assumption of sinful, fallen human nature, then it has no salvific power. At best, if the Son assumed a perfected or “ideal” human nature, then the doctrine of atonement could only be formulated in terms of an “external transaction of a merely judicial and legalist kind.”²⁵ This is the result, if Torrance is to be believed, of an instrumentalist reading of the incarnation in which the vicarious human life of the Word is discounted or given minimal treatment.

I believe that it is very crucial for us to hold this truth, that the Savior took our fallen Adamic humanity upon him, but we must add that in the very act of taking it he was at work redeeming and sanctifying it in himself . . . Hence we must think of his incarnating and atoning activities as interpenetrating one another from the very beginning to the end of his oneness with us. Otherwise the humanity of Christ has to be thought of only in an instrumentalist way, and the atonement can be formulated only in terms of external moral relations or legal transactions.²⁶

This view can be seen, according to Torrance, throughout Latin theology, the view that in the incarnation the Son took, not our actual nature, but a human nature untouched by sin and guilt, which gave rise to the notion of the Immaculate Conception, and to a doctrine of atoning transaction thought out in external terms.²⁷ Torrance has committed himself to rooting out any merely external or wholly forensic categories in his Christology, and this discussion is no exception

23 Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 173, and Thomas F. Torrance, “Incarnation and Atonement: *Theosis* and *Henosis* in the Light of Modern Scientific Rejection of Dualism,” *Society of Ordained Scientists*, Bulletin No. 7, Edgware, Middlesex (Spring 1992): 8–20.

24 Crisp’s real difficulty with the notion of the Son’s assumption of a fallen human nature is found in his rejection of the idea of an incarnational/ontological atonement. See Oliver D. Crisp, “Kathryn Tanner (1954–): On Incarnation as Atonement,” in *Revisioning Christology: Theology in the Reformed Tradition* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 111–132. Such an *a priori* commitment necessitates Crisp’s rejection of any notion of the Son’s assumption of a fallen human nature.

25 Torrance, “Incarnation and Atonement: *Theosis* and *Henosis* in the Light of Modern Scientific Rejection of Dualism,” 13.

26 See Thomas F. Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 59.

27 Torrance labels this a dualistic, anti-Pauline approach. Torrance, “The Atonement the Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross,” 238–239.

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and in fact provides a good framework from which Torrance can launch his attack upon "the Latin heresy."

Greek theology, according to Torrance's reading of the tradition, rejected all notions of an external or instrumental atoning transaction and took to heart Paul's non-dualist approach insisting that in the incarnation the Son of God took upon himself our actual sinful existence and redeemed and healed it from the inside out, so to speak. "In Christ our fallen Adamic humanity was recreated and through his vicarious obedience as the Son of God become man it was restored to perfect filial relation to the Father."²⁸

What Torrance asserted throughout his career is that the incarnation and atonement inhere in one another completely.²⁹ If this is truly taken seriously, then the Word had to have assumed an identical human nature to the heirs of Adam *after the Fall*. This results in the saving work of Christ being seen in a two-fold way, as the act of God *toward* humanity, and as the act of humanity *toward* God but, and this is crucial, within the *one person* of Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of God. It is this that compels Torrance to forcefully assert the Son's assumption of a fallen human nature.

In order to explain the humanity the Son assumed Torrance writes:

He was very man, our Brother. In him the Holy Son of God was grafted on to the stock of our fallen human existence, and in him our mortal and corrupt human nature was assumed into union with the Holy Son of God, so that in Jesus, in his birth and sinless life, in his death and resurrection, there took place a holy and awful judgment on our flesh of sin, and an atoning sanctification of our unholy human existence. It was through such atonement that God in all his Godness and holiness came to dwell in the midst of mortal, sinful man.³⁰

The assumption of a fallen human nature is considered to be essential to a full doctrine of atonement. Because union with God is through the human nature

28 Ibid., 238.

29 In this Torrance is at once being thoroughly patristic and thoroughly Reformed. In his essay "For Us and Our Salvation: Incarnation and Atonement in the Reformed Tradition," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 43 (1998): 281–316, Bruce L. McCormack helpfully surveys the history of Reformed thought and shows the parallels between 16th and 17th century Reformed Christology to that of the Seventh Ecumenical Council and patristic Christology. While heavily reliant on Barth, McCormack's one reference to Torrance could have been multiplied many times to highlight the same point. Torrance undoubtedly understands and stands within Reformed orthodoxy, perhaps nowhere more strongly than in his articulation of the implications of the anhypostasia/enhypostasia, and the two natures–one person doctrines within Christology.

30 Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 241.

of the incarnate Christ, then Christ's nature had to be fallen in order to redeem fallen nature for human persons to participate in him. This is possible, according to Torrance, because of the atonement that took place in Christ, for having redeemed fallen human nature the Holy Spirit may dwell in the midst of mortal sinful humanity. "This is the way that the divine love has taken to redeem man, by making him share in the holy power in which God lives his own divine life."³¹ Finally Torrance introduces the Holy Spirit into the discussion, but at this point only as an appendix in the traditional fashion, to assert that the Holy Spirit applies to us what Christ won for us in his life, death, and resurrection.

It will be recalled that Torrance adopts the patristic soteriological axiom "The unassumed is the unhealed."³² By this phrase Torrance intends that Christ assumed a sinful, fallen humanity and redeemed it in his life, death, and resurrection. The question to be asked is this — has Torrance interpreted this phrase correctly? While the phrase is common among the early Fathers of the Church, for example, Hippolytus, Tertullian, and Origen,³³ it was Gregory Nazianzen who gave it its classical and definitive form.³⁴ By means of this axiom the Church has consistently proclaimed and defended the full humanity of Christ. Originally a defense against Apollinarianism, the phrase states that Christ took upon himself a true material body, human soul, mind, and will.³⁵

Apollinarianism rejected the idea that Christ possessed a human will, for the will or mind was thought to be the controlling seat of sin. By rejecting Apollinarianism Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and Torrance himself contend that Christ assumed a human will subject to the fall and redeemed the human mind by means of this

31 Ibid.

32 Torrance, "Incarnation and Atonement: *Theosis* and *Henosis* in the Light of Modern Scientific Rejection of Dualism," 12. Torrance treated this again in another 1992 publication, "The Atonement the Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order," 237–239; and in his 1996 work *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 250. In addition, Torrance works this theological phrase into numerous articles and chapters, especially *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 103–105, 160, 202–205, and 231–234.

33 See Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1 (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 52, 115, 148.

34 See *Epistolae*, 101, and *Orations* 1.13; 13.21. The phrase was of course used by Athanasius and after him Cyril of Alexandria. Torrance provides extensive references to all these thinkers throughout chapter four of his *Theology in Reconciliation*, 139–214.

35 Torrance makes much of the mind of Christ especially in worship. See his 1972 lecture to the Church Service Society of the Church of Scotland, "The Mind of Christ in Worship: The Problem of Apollinarianism in the Liturgy," in Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 139–214.

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assumption.³⁶ The conclusion Torrance comes to is that this can only equate to a sinful or fallen human nature being assumed by the eternal Word. The Word became all that we are in order to make us all that he is.³⁷ The comment by Stephen Holmes on this phrase is certainly reflective of Torrance's own position, ". . . the derivation from this of Christ's assumption of fallen human nature is uncomplicated."³⁸

In response to the claims of Apollinaris that the Logos became flesh without assuming a human mind, for a human mind is the locus of sin, Athanasius contended that if Christ did not have a human mind then he had not assumed complete or real human nature for it would deprive Christ of our human experiences of birth, growth, death, pain, anguish, distress, and temptation.³⁹ This would disqualify Christ from being a priest and so his mediatorial office is undermined if not utterly contradicted. Athanasius also considered this to be a rejection of the *homoousion* doctrine — if Christ was not man in the wholeness of our humanity then he was something else and as something else could not atone for our sins.⁴⁰ Torrance is convinced that in rejecting Apollinarianism Athanasius, by means of the phrase we are considering, affirms that true emancipation from sin and the power of death were taken up into Christ and so were defeated and atoned for.⁴¹

36 Torrance traces this idea immediately back to Barth to whom he attributes this as one of the most significant contributions which he reintroduced into evangelical theology. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian*, 104, 202–205, citing in support Barth, *CD*, I/2, 151.

37 Torrance considers the Cappadocians as taking even more seriously than Athanasius the Pauline teaching that Christ took upon himself fallen human nature, "the flesh of sin," "the body of death," while at the same time sanctifying and recreating it. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 155.

38 Stephen R. Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 137.

39 This is all developed in Athanasius, *Contra Apollinarium*, 1.2, 5, 10, 15; 2.8, 17.

40 Torrance is so committed to an incarnational atonement that he can write of Christ's assumption of a human soul and mind that "it is indeed precisely in this area that the essential work of redemption took place, where the inward and outward man are one and inseparable, and where Christ's redeeming work was no less a work of his soul than a work of his body." Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 149.

41 Torrance insists that Christ did not assume original sin on the predication, I believe, of a certain view of what original sin is, namely, an Augustinian view that equates to original guilt. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 122. This is not, however, the only definition available to us. On various notions of original sin see Crisp, "Did Christ Have a Fallen Human Nature?" 272–84. Crisp rightly maintains that any articulation of Christ's assumption of a fallen human nature necessarily entails a reformulated doctrine of original sin that accounts for the place of original guilt. Torrance never enters into the details of this aspect

Torrance considers Apollinarianism, both ancient and modern, to be “another gospel,”⁴² primarily because it cuts away the atonement as the “reconciling exchange” of Christ.⁴³ That is, Apollinarianism is nothing other than a rejection of salvation according to Torrance, and the consequence of this rejection is the destruction of true worship because there is no real relation between God and the human soul, or between the will of God and the will of humanity, in and through the rational soul and will of Christ. Torrance summarizes the situation as follows:

In allowing no room for the mental and moral life of Jesus as man and in denying to him authentic human agency in his saving work, it left no place for the vicarious role of the human soul and mind and will of Jesus in the reconciling ‘exchange’ of like for like in the redemption of man. And by destroying his representative capacity, it had no place for his priesthood or human mediation in our worship of the Father, and by the same token it took away the ground for any worship of God with our human minds. A mutilated humanity in Christ could not but result in a mutilated Christian worship of God.⁴⁴

What Torrance sees as evident within patristic Christology is that the phrase “the unassumed is the unhealed” equates to the following: to be healed is to be deified, therefore humanity must first have been “assumed” into special hypostatic relation with the Word and in that act divinized.⁴⁵ The phrase is intimately linked to the doctrine of *theosis* in the early church and was seen as a central formula for accounting for how *theosis* occurs. The logic runs as follows: divinization is thought to be the ultimate goal of humankind⁴⁶ and thus provide an understanding of salvation in terms of which it can be shown that a prior divinization of human persons by the assumption of humanity itself into a relationship with God of a distinct, hypostatic nature in Christ is a logically

of the argument, however, it is clear that, according to Torrance, Christ did not inherit or assume any original guilt, just original corruption in his human nature. For a complementary account of original sin see Myk Habets, “‘Suffer the little children to come to me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven:’ Infant Salvation and the Destiny of the Severely Mentally Disabled,” in *Evangelical Calvinism: Essays Resourcing the Continuing Reformation of the Church*, ed. Myk Habets and Robert Grow (Eugene, OR.: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 287–328, especially 308–315.

42 Torrance *Theology in Reconciliation*, 148.

43 Ibid., 150. Torrance is reliant upon a theological exegesis of Athanasius’ work, especially *Contra Apollinarium*, I.17.

44 Ibid., 150.

45 This is the conclusion Wiles, “The Unassumed is the Unhealed,” 55, comes to in regard to the patristic theologians.

46 Torrance, “The Mind of Christ in Worship: The Problem of Apollinarianism in the Liturgy,” in Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 139–214.

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necessary first step.⁴⁷ This is precisely the way Torrance constructs his accounting of salvation as the following highlights:

If the incarnate Son through his birth of the Virgin Mary actually assumed our flesh of sin, the fallen, corrupt and enslaved human nature which we have all inherited from Adam, then the redeeming activity of Christ took place within the ontological depths of his humanity in such a way that far from sinning himself, he condemned sin in the flesh and sanctified what he assumed, so that incarnating and redeeming events were one and indivisible, from the very beginning of his earthly existence to its end in his death and resurrection.⁴⁸

In his early theology, Torrance maintained that Christ has entered sinlessly into our corrupt and fallen humanity in order to redeem us. He maintains that there are not two *separate* persons in Christ (a Nestorian mistake), there are two natures, but they are united *hypostatically* in the one incarnate Person.⁴⁹ As a result, the human nature of the incarnate Word is Holy, and not in any sense corrupt. So while the human nature was derived from Mary, from the stock of fallen humanity, it was a *vicarious* humanity that Christ assumed. "In this Union the flesh of Christ becomes Holy though it is a member of humanity under the curse of the law, under the ban of God's wrath. Thus we are to think of Christ's flesh as perfectly and completely sinless in his own nature, and not

47 Wiles, "The Unassumed is the Unhealed," 47–56, recognises the logic of this early Christology but rejects its use today arguing that *φάρμακον* or healing/medicinal imagery is merely one of a number of analogies used for salvation and as an analogy it is useful, but only to a point. Analogies he briefly mentions other than the medical include the juridical and the sacrificial. Wiles does not appear to give enough weight to the uniqueness of Christ and his relationship with both God and humanity and so the vicarious and mediatorial ministry of Christ is downplayed. For a contemporary elaboration on the analogy of healing as salvation see John de Gruchy, "Salvation as Healing and Humanization," in *Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World: Essays Presented to Professor James Torrance*, ed. T.A. Hart and D.P. Thimell (Exeter: Paternoster, 1981), 32–47.

48 Torrance, "Incarnation and Atonement: *Theosis* and *Henosis* in the Light of Modern Scientific Rejection of Dualism," 12.

49 This form of reasoning has a long history within the Reformed tradition, arising out of the initial debates with the Lutheran construction of a *communicatio idiomatum*. As with the best of Reformed scholarship, Torrance knows the distinction between persons and natures and how to hold the two together in a thoroughly Chalcedonian way. McCormack is helpful here in presenting two points about Reformed orthodoxy: "The first is that for a Christology to be 'Reformed,' it must affirm the principle that the two natures remain distinct and their properties unimpaired after the union . . . Secondly, we have established that the Subject who worked out our redemption is the God-man in his divine-human activity." McCormack, "For Us and Our Salvation," 294.

simply in virtue of the Spirit as Irving puts it.”⁵⁰ Here Torrance clearly eschews Irving’s unique contribution to this discussion — the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit on Jesus completely at conception, without reference to the Logos who assumes human flesh in the first place. We also witness an affirmation that Torrance would later repudiate, that the assumed nature of Christ is Holy and “not in any way corrupt.” In his later theology Torrance will argue that the humanity assumed by Christ was corrupt, but due to the vicarious assumption of the flesh, this does not make Christ a sinner nor does it incur guilt. It does require, however, a stress upon the sanctifying work of the Spirit throughout Jesus life.

According to Torrance, Christ did not have original sin because his *person* was Divine. That means, he was not a sinner and had no guilt that needed to be atoned for.⁵¹ However, he entered fallen humanity, and chose to live within the confines and conditions of corrupt humanity: in other words, he did assume a human nature affected by original sin.⁵² He freely came under the same judgment and condemnation as we are, not because he sinned, but because in his union he loved us even unto death and did *not* sin. On the surface this appears to be a contradiction, namely, that Christ does and does not have original sin. At this point Torrance is not sufficiently clear. In order to clarify

50 Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 122.

51 Crisp’s otherwise excellent article, “Did Christ Have a Fallen Human Nature?” 270–288, limits discussion to *natures* rather than opening it up to *persons*. Torrance’s construction of the doctrine moves from nature to person and it is this movement which lends coherence to his thought and distinguishes his own point of view from that of Irving.

52 Once again, Torrance is echoing a staple of Reformed orthodoxy, that “to be made sin” in 2 Cor 5:21 means that the sin and guilt of the world is *imputed* to the Son, a judicial act whereby the God-man is made liable for our sins and judged in our place. See Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.16.5–6. While Torrance would not stress the juridical aspects of this exchange, the imputed or vicarious nature of it is certainly highlighted.

Luther himself asserted in more direct fashion that Christ assumed a sinful human nature, not some neutral humanity. He spoke of Christ as the “greatest sinner” (*maximus peccator*) because he bears the sins of all human beings *in a real manner* in the human nature he has assumed. Luther goes beyond Reformed orthodoxy at this point and insists that the real manner equates to more than a mere imputation of sins to Christ but his real assumption of these sins. While Christ himself is innocent, he assumes the sins of all humans. Corresponding to Christ as the greatest sinner is the corollary, Christ as the “Greatest Person” (*maxima persona*). Christ is every sinner. This leads Luther to posit Christ as the “only sinner,” an idea which is foundational for his doctrine of atonement. See Luther’s *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, *Luther’s Works*, 25:277; 40 I, 433, 26–434, 12. Cited in Tuomo Mannermaa, “Justification and *Theosis* in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective,” in *Union With Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. C.E. Braaten, and R.W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 29–31.

his position we might say that Torrance's argument hangs on the concept of a vicarious assumption of human nature in its fallenness and sin. Christ did not, according to this logic, inherit sin *personally* (as the human nature assumed by the Word was anhypostatic). However, through an assumption of human nature in its post-lapsarian condition, Christ remained guilt-free while still *vicariously* assuming a fallen and sinful human nature which existed under the conditions of original sin.⁵³

If we adopt this as Torrance's position, Jesus Christ incurs no guilt and is not therefore, at enmity with God. However, the *person* of the eternal Son took to himself a post-lapsarian human *nature*, and he did so freely and vicariously, and lived under the conditions of corrupt humanity (with a human mind, will, and emotions), and in that very humanity, like ours, he redeemed the flesh, defeated the curse, and restored human nature to a right standing with God in the power of the Holy Spirit. This stress on vicarious assumption is an innovation in the debate that Torrance contributes and one which has little weaknesses in its basic orientation. It is also the point that is not addressed in critical accounts of the issue offered by recent works including that of Kevin Chiarot.

Torrance further articulates how Christ remained sinless despite vicariously assuming a fallen human nature in his 1976 work *Space, Time and Resurrection* when he writes:

Although he assumed our fallen and corrupt humanity when he became flesh, in assuming it he sanctified it in himself, and all through his earthly life he overcame our sin through his righteousness, our impurity through his purity, condemning sin in our flesh by the sheer holiness of his life within it.⁵⁴

Torrance goes on to say that this is precisely why death could not hold him, "for there was no sin in him which allowed it to subject him to corruption. Death had nothing in him, for he had already passed through its clutches by the perfection of his holiness."⁵⁵ In short, "He triumphed over the grave through his sheer sinlessness."⁵⁶ He then concludes with the clear statement that "The

53 Torrance is here thoroughly patristic and in-line with the Fathers when he attributes sin to the person-hypostasis, not as Augustine (and the Western tradition since) did, to essence or nature. This accounts for why Christ could assume the likeness of sinful flesh (nature) and yet remain sinless (person). Again the *an/enhypostatic* couplet is playing its part in the hinterland of Torrance's Christology.

54 Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1976), 53.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., 53-54.

resurrection is thus the resurrection of the union forged between man and God in Jesus out of the damned and lost condition of men into which Christ entered in order to share their lot and redeem them from doom."⁵⁷

In Torrance's theology, atoning mediation is understood to be achieved first within the hypostatic union itself and then applied to fellow human beings. We participate in what Christ has already achieved, not independently of him. Christ is not simply a moral trailblazer, or external example, but the Mediator, Immanuel — God with us and us with God.⁵⁸ Christ "took upon himself our twisted, lost, and damned existence, with all its wickedness, violence, and abject misery, and substituted himself for us in the deepest and darkest depths of our perdition and godlessness, all in order to save and redeem us through the atoning sacrifice of himself . . ." ⁵⁹ At this point in Torrance's essay he again echoes the *mirifica commutatio*: "And such is the astonishing grace of the Lord Jesus Christ who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor that we might be made rich in him — the blessed reconciling exchange summed up in the New Testament term *katallage*."⁶⁰

3. Critique

The doctrine of the *non assumptus*, and Torrance's specific theology on this, have not escaped criticism. In a study on Torrance's theology, Kevin Chiarot believes there are "critical problems in Torrance's presentation of the doctrine that call into question its intelligibility."⁶¹ While I think that is too strong, nonetheless his interaction with Torrance is well-worth considering given it is the only book length study of the doctrine as utilized by Torrance. Specifically, Chiarot drafts a number of objections which I have grouped together under four interrelated heads.

Torrance's biblical exegesis is questioned, especially around a reading of Romans 8:3.

57 Ibid., 54.

58 This is the common theological tension between the One and the Many. See for instance Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

59 Torrance, "The Atonement the Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order," 236–237.

60 Ibid., 237. For a Reformed background to the link between incarnation and atonement on the one hand, and the *mirifica commutatio* and theosis on the other hand consult McCormack, "For Us and Our Salvation," 281–316.

61 Kevin Chiarot, *The Unassumed is the Unhealed: The Humanity of Christ in the Christology of T. F. Torrance* (Eugene, OR.: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 21.

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Chiarot is unconvinced that in Torrance's account, Jesus isn't a sinner.

Chiarot questions the utility of Torrance's contention of an abstract human nature; a human nature that Christ assumes in the incarnation.⁶²

Chiarot shares Kelly Kopic's reservations around the conceptual clarity of Torrance's dogmatic exposition on the *non assumptus*; specifically regarding what he sees as an inadequate definition of theological anthropology — especially the exact nature of Christ's humanity.⁶³

In Chiarot's opinion, Torrance's use of enhypostasia is "devastating for the non-assumptus. It means that no concrete *personal* instance of fallen humanity is assumed, only fallen human 'nature' — whatever that is — dissociated from fallen human persons."⁶⁴

The status of Jesus' humanity after the virginal conception is, in Chiarot's mind, ambiguous.

His silence on the nature of 'initial' sanctification in the decisive moment [of] the virgin birth results in a lack of clarity about the fallen nature of the assumed humanity . . . this raises the question of the clarity of the state of Christ's will.

That is, precisely how does the fallen human will of Christ get 'bent back' into conformity with the divine will by the vicarious *humanity* of Christ?⁶⁵

Torrance's theology of a sanctifying of the human nature at conception is found to be in ambiguous relation to his equal stress on the dynamic and gradual sanctifying of the humanity of Christ throughout his life, especially as that culminates in the ultimate struggle over sin at Gethsemane as precursor to the cross.⁶⁶

Taking a specific example of Torrance's Christology — the will of Jesus — Chiarot illustrates the basis of his critique of Torrance's theology, if, as Torrance contends, the will of Christ is perfectly obedient, perpetually condemned, progressively sanctified, and increasingly in conflict with the will of God, then it is incoherent.⁶⁷ In relation to Torrance's account of the cross of Christ Chiarot concludes, "While we would not accuse Torrance of trithelicism (two human wills, plus one divine), much of his account of Jesus' human obedience being personally resisted, of his obeying where we are disobedient, or *in the midst* of our impurity, casts a shadow which, particularly at the cross, begs for clarification."⁶⁸

62 Ibid., 160.

63 Ibid., 159.

64 Ibid., 163.

65 Ibid., 102.

66 Ibid., 161.

67 Ibid., 202.

68 Ibid., 220.

Chiarot sees implicit and, as a fundamental result of Torrance's Christology, the Nestorian heresy (and by implication, therefore, an equal and opposite danger of Docetism). Either the incarnate Son is a different person from the Logos (Nestorianism), or the humanity the Son assumes is not personal, hence not real (Docetism). Either way Chiarot sees the *non assumptus* as theologically unacceptable and Torrance's account as incoherent.⁶⁹

At the heart of each of these points of critique is an underlying issue — namely, that in Chiarot's reading of Torrance, the idea of a universal ontological solidarity with all humanity is a fiction, and that even if such a thing were possible, it could not be rendered intelligible, especially if such humanity is fallen, thus Torrance's theology at this point, in Chiarot's words, "gives us reason to doubt the coherence of the non-assumptus . . ."⁷⁰ Chiarot's 'solution' to these problems in Torrance's account is to move the whole discussion back into forensic categories with ontological implications, rather than the ontological account Torrance presents, which have forensic implications. Clearly, Torrance scholars will not want to follow Chiarot's direction, for fear of what Torrance called the Latin Heresy. So if forensicism is not the way forward in making more coherent Torrance's contention of the *non assumptus*, what is?

In an article addressing the imbalances of both Alexandrian Christology and attempts to find the "Historical Jesus," Colin Gunton made the statement that "the need is for an incarnational christology which will yet do full justice to the historical particularity of Jesus and the detailed lineaments of his story."⁷¹ His solution: "I want to suggest that the area where we should look is our understanding of the place of pneumatology in Christology."⁷² Bruce McCormack suggests the same solution when he writes: "The 'sin nature' each of us has is a function of our primal decision to agree with Adam's rebellion. Through his life of obedience, Christ refused to make that primal decision his own. That he did not do so cannot be explained on the basis of the hypostatic union alone; the work of the Spirit has to be appealed to in order to make the conception fully coherent. That is, the Spirit who brought together divine and human nature in the Virgin's womb was the One who continually empowered the God-man in his life of obedience."⁷³ Gunton and McCormack couldn't have been more correct.

69 Ibid., 162.

70 Ibid., 164.

71 Colin E. Gunton, "Two Dogmas Revisited: Edward Irving's Christology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41 (1988): 361.

72 Ibid.

73 McCormack, "For Us and Our Salvation," 314, n.53. McCormack sees in the theology of Karl Barth this understanding of Christ's assumption of a fallen human nature. It is

This suggestion is not to displace the Word with the activity of the Spirit but, rather, to provide a more comprehensive account of how the Word and the Spirit participate in the life of Christ in ways appropriate to their distinctive properties.

While I can accept much of Chiarot's criticism above as having *some* validity, it is only because Torrance himself doesn't develop the pneumatological dimensions of incarnation and atonement which lie implicit in his Christology. Athanasius and Torrance both make significant space in their respective theologies for the Holy Spirit at the trinitarian level; however, they fail to fully develop their pneumatology into Christology and soteriology; all the pieces are arguably there, but they need to be put together. It is in this direction I suggest Torrance scholarship must move — towards illustrating something like the Spirit Christology implicit in Torrance's work, and then to defend a more robust form of this Christology against its major objections. The following thus rehabilitates Torrance's implicit Spirit Christology and then uses that theological trajectory to address some of the more trenchant criticisms put up against the doctrine of the *non assumptus*. In the process, deficiencies in Torrance's own theology will also be addressed.

4. A Pneumatological Clarification

Having already pointed out some deficiencies in Torrance's account of the life of Christ, we should not conclude that Torrance's Christology neglects the Gospel portraits of Christ's life and ministry, or that his theology is devoid of the Spirit. In his narrative of the life of Christ, in fact, we find some of the more suggestive areas of his Christology. In Torrance's theology we read of the dynamic human life of Christ, of his assumption of a fallen, twisted, and perverse humanity under the conditions of the curse, of Christ's sinless personality, and of the internal battle that rages throughout Christ's public ministry. In our fallen flesh we read that Christ "condemned sin in it; he overcame its temptations, resisted its downward drag in alienation from God, and converted it back in himself to obedience toward God, thus sanctifying it . . ."74

Torrance speaks often and with great passion about Christ "bending back" our fallen will into conformity with the will of God.⁷⁵ It is here that Torrance puts

precisely the weakness of Torrance's own theology that he did not allow enough space for a consideration of the place pneumatology should play. Had he followed his *Doktorvater* Karl Barth in this matter also, his position would have been more coherent and convincing, despite the fact that even Barth did not go far enough either!

74 Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove: IVP Academic/Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 205.

75 Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian*, 104; "Karl Barth

to good effect Luke 2:52 (NIV): "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man," in which Torrance translates "grew" or *proekopten* as "beat his way forward," blow-by-blow as it were. Jesus learned obedience through the things he *suffered*, and such suffering was not limited to the physical but was the internal struggle of bending fallen human will back to obedience to the Father.⁷⁶ Christ thus "cut his way forward" through the vicissitudes of life, turning humanity back to the Father in the ontological depths of his being.⁷⁷

In order to make sense of such an account of the life of Christ Torrance, as one might expect, turns to pneumatology to flesh out his account. In a précis of the life of Christ by means of what I have elsewhere termed the Messianic *kairoi*, or disclosure episodes in the life of Christ, Torrance explains the virginal conception, his baptism in the Jordan, his ministry, gethsemane, and the cross of Christ all by means of the working of the Son and Spirit in the incarnate constitution of Jesus.⁷⁸ The baptism proves especially significant in this narrative, as, from the baptism onwards, Jesus lived only as the Son of Man — that is, he lived as true man in utter dependence upon the Holy Spirit.⁷⁹ We are told that "we must never think of the Word apart from the man Jesus, with whom the Word is forever united, and from whom the Word is never apart."⁸⁰ Torrance uses the *communicatio gratiarum* — the communication of graces — as a way to make sense of this.⁸¹ He tells us that from conception to baptism the communication of the properties of his divine and human natures entered into operation step by step with his developing human life — that is knowledge, will, and power. After the baptism, Jesus thus lived only in dependence upon the Spirit and never out of his divine nature *simpliciter*. Immediately after baptism Jesus is tempted by Satan in the wilderness with a temptation supremely not to be man; and all resistance of temptation is achieved by the man Jesus (the Word incarnate), full of the Spirit.

and the Latin Heresy," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986): 476; *Theology in Reconstruction*, 126, 157, etc.

76 Torrance, *Incarnation*, 64, 106.

77 Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 132.

78 See especially Torrance, *Incarnation*, 135–37.

79 Torrance is explicit that from his baptism onwards Jesus lived "only as the Son of Man," in Torrance, "The Atoning Obedience of Christ," 76. While Torrance is inconsistent on this point (a critique Chiarot rightly makes), he argues that after his baptism Jesus lived "not simply as Son of God but as Son of God become *man*, as Son of Man, that is to live it out from beginning to end within the limitations of our creaturely humanity, and within the limitations of our humanity in the house of bondage," Torrance, *Incarnation*, 123.

80 Torrance, *Incarnation*, 220.

81 *Ibid.*, 225.

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Torrance's Christology turns on the fact that there is a vicarious reception of the Spirit by Jesus which ranges across his entire life. His Spirit conception, Spirit baptism, Spirit-anointed ministry, Spirit given power for miracles, for oracles from God, and for death, and ultimately resurrection. In a comprehensive citation we read:

Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary into our human nature through the power of the Spirit; at his Baptism the Holy Spirit descended upon him and anointed him as the Christ. He was never without the Spirit for as the eternal Son he ever remained in the unity of the Spirit and of the Father, but as Incarnate Son on earth he was given the Spirit without measure and consecrated in his human nature for his mission as the vicarious Servant. He came through the temptations in the wilderness clothed with the power of the Spirit and went forth to bring in the Kingdom of God by meeting and defeating the powers of darkness entrenched in human flesh. He struggled and prayed in the Spirit with unspeakable cries of agony, and bore in his Spirit the full burden of human evil and woe. Through the eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot to the Father in sacrifice for sin; according to the Spirit of Holiness he was raised from the dead, and ascended to the right hand of the Father to receive all power in heaven and earth. There he attained the ground from which he could pour out the Spirit of God upon all flesh.⁸²

In short, Jesus' advance in obedience as he turns back our fallen human flesh — its knowledge, will, and power; Jesus' *prokope* — is an operation of the Spirit, says Torrance, "for since he came to share our human nature and we are united to him through the Spirit which he gives us, it is through the power of the same Spirit that we participate in *prokope*, and so rise through the Son to true knowledge of, and communion with God the Father."⁸³ Thus there is a vicarious activity of the Spirit which matches the vicarious work of the Son, such that the Spirit unites believers to Christ enabling them to participate in what he has accomplished once for all in the incarnation — the healing of fallen humanity.⁸⁴

82 Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 246.

83 *Ibid.*, 39.

84 Torrance uses the language of the vicarious activity of the Spirit in numerous places, but does not develop the theme at any length, other than to be clear that the work of the Spirit is not separate to that of the Son. See The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection. Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 56, "The Vicarious Activity of the Holy Spirit," Lecture to The Edinburgh Theological Club, June 7, 1978, 1–5; and in *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 249–250, where Torrance speaks of the "vicarious activity of the Spirit" which corresponds to the vicarious work of Christ in relation to Romans 8.

Chiarot, as with critics of a Spirit Christology, aver at this point that “this would seem to leave only the Spirit, and not the divine nature of the Son, as the means by which the human will of Jesus is ‘bent back’ into obedience.”⁸⁵ Likewise, Oliver Crisp offers an appreciative critique of Spirit Christology (specifically of Owenite Christology, but it applies to all Spirit Christologies), a critique which applies in part to Torrance’s Christology as well, structured as it is around the *non assumptus*. Thus Crisp’s work is especially apt to focus on in this section as it is representative of other critiques and offers the most robust challenge to date.

Crisp’s central objection against a Spirit Christology is “that it introduces a theologically damaging cleavage between God the Son and his human nature.”⁸⁶ More specifically, this form of Christology “. . . seems to generate a distinction between [sic] God the Son and his agency ‘in’ or ‘through’ his human nature at all moments after the first moment of the assumption of human nature in the very act of becoming incarnate.”⁸⁷ For Crisp, this seems theologically dubious. According to Crisp’s analysis, a Spirit Christology of this kind threatens the integrity of the hypostatic union as it posits the necessary agency of the Holy Spirit in addition to that of the Son, the one who assumed the human nature in the first place being one step removed from it.⁸⁸

Crisp considers the likely counter-argument, that an endorsement of the principle *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* negates the lack of proximity of the Son in the incarnation given the united work of the Trinity in all actions *ad extra*. But this is not convincing either, for Crisp, for the reason that a human’s actions are personal, not merely instrumental, thus the Son would have to act immediately in all incarnate actions.⁸⁹ If this is correct, then on Crisp’s account “there appears to be no metaphysical room for the interposition of another divine person between the intentions of God the Son (i.e. his agency) and the intentional actions brought about in his human nature.”⁹⁰

Furthermore, according to Crisp’s critique, Spirit Christology (especially that of John Owen) amounts to a denial of the efficacy of the Son’s assumption

85 Chiarot, *The Unassumed is the Unhealed*, 177.

86 Oliver D. Crisp, *Revisioning Christology: Theology in the Reformed Tradition* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 92.

87 Ibid., 100.

88 Ibid., 100–101. Crisp uses a thought experiment to illustrate his point: the case of the relationship between an astronaut and their spacesuit.

89 Ibid., 103–105, relates this to both a substance-dualist conception of being human and to a Cartesian approach to illustrate his point.

90 Ibid., 105.

of human nature and appears to posit a cleavage between the immediate agency of the Son and his human nature such that the hypostatic union itself is threatened.⁹¹ Crisp's central critique is that a Spirit Christology is untenable on the grounds that once the Son has assumed human nature he steps back and lets the Holy Spirit act in all future works. The direct agency of the Holy Spirit is then thought to trump the agency of the Son, and this is what is finally unacceptable in such accounts.

I concede Crisp's point here, *if* this is what Torrance is suggesting. To replace the Son with the Spirit as the active *subject* of the person of Jesus Christ would be a denial of the incarnation of the eternal Son. And of course, Torrance is clear that it is the Word that has assumed fallen human flesh, so he doesn't wish to make this move. But given his argument that all subsequent acts of the Son on the human nature are voluntary and mediated by the Spirit, at least from the Baptism in the Jordan onwards, is Crisp correct in his central critique were we to focus this upon Torrance's theology?

Contemporary proposals for Spirit Christology which are conducive to Torrance's theology affirm that in the one simple being of the triune God all three persons mutually indwell the other such that the threeness of the persons is the oneness of the essence (*perichoresis*). The doctrine of personal subsistence clearly articulates the relational being of God as involving three co-equal persons in one undivided (relational) substance. In the immanent Trinity the Father begets the Son in or by the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit simultaneously proceeds from the Father as the one in whom the Son is begotten.⁹² The Father too is simultaneously personed in the begetting of the Son (in the Spirit) and the spiration of the Spirit (through the Son). In the economy, the missions of God are coordinated with the eternal processions such that we might be led to think that while the Son is the *subject* of the incarnation, this is not without the Father and the Spirit.

Personal agency in God is more complex than it is with human creatures, and especially so when the actual human being we are considering — Jesus Christ — is unique in having two natures “unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, and inseparably” (as per Chalcedon).⁹³ Add to this the actual scriptural accounts of

91 Ibid., 107.

92 This trinitarian account is drawn from Thomas G. Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995); Weinandy, “The Filioque: Beyond Athanasius and Thomas Aquinas: An Ecumenical Proposal,” in *Ecumenical Perspectives on the Filioque for the 21st Century*, ed. Myk Habets (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 185–197.

93 Here Chalcedon has to be interpreted through the dynamic Christology of Cyril of

Jesus' life lived in the dependence of the Spirit — his conception, baptism, vocation, passion, exaltation — and a more complex picture emerges than that of simply a Logos Christology. In fact, Christ's mission is specifically situated within the prior mission of the Spirit and can only adequately be understood in that light.⁹⁴

A contemporary Spirit Christology in accord with the Torrance's theology makes clear that the divine agency in the incarnation is that of the Son *and* the Spirit, in their respective ways. The Son is the active willing subject, if we might speak that way; the Spirit is the active *paraclitos*, no less personal or involved. Philip Butin speaks of Calvin teaching a "perichoretic empowerment of the Son by the Spirit," in his commentary on Matthew 3:16, where Calvin writes: "in the fullness of time, to equip [Christ] for the fulfillment of the office of Redeemer, he is endowed with a new power of the Spirit . . . He comes forth as a divine man, under the royal power of the Holy Spirit. We know that he is God, manifested in the flesh, but his heavenly power is also to be thought upon in his Person as a minister, in his human nature."⁹⁵

It is just this kind of theology which prompts David Coffey to speak of an "incarnation of the Holy Spirit" in the incarnation of the Son.⁹⁶ While the language is clearly wrong — there simply was no incarnation of the Spirit

Alexandria. The argument is too big to rehearse here but see Anthony N. S. Lane, "Cyril of Alexandria and the Incarnation," in *The Spirit and Christ in the New Testament and Christian Theology*, ed. I. Howard Marshall, Volker Rabens, and Cornelis Bennema (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 285–302.

94 Outside of the gospels, Gunkel noted long ago that "the teaching regarding the *nveupa* did not arise under the influence of Paul's teaching about Christ. Rather, the teaching about Christ is the peculiarly Pauline expression of what the apostle is contending for in his doctrine of the *nveupa* which is borrowed from the views of the Christian community." Hermann Gunkel, *The Influence of the Holy Spirit: The Popular View of the Apostolic Age and the Teaching of the Apostle Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 115. Earlier Gunkel had made the fascinating observation that "Paul's first pneumatic experience was an experience of the Christ," *idem.*, 114. While Son and Spirit may have distinct missions, they are in an inseparable relationship nonetheless.

95 Philip W. Butin, *Revelation, Redemption, and Response: Calvin's Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship* (New York: Oxford, 1995), 65–66, in Telford C. Work, "Jesus' New Relationship with the Holy Spirit, and Ours," in *Christology Ancient and Modern: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 180, n.32.

96 David M. Coffey, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 39. Admittedly, Coffey speaks of the "incarnation" of the Spirit in inverted commas, but this is still too much. Coffey's views have been robustly refuted by Paul Molnar, "Deus Trinitas: Some Dogmatic Implications of David Coffey's Biblical Approach to the Trinity," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 67 (2002): 33–54.

— the intent behind the unacceptable language can be said to *approximate* Torrance’s talk of the vicarious activity of the Spirit. It is not the case that after the assumption the Son walks away, steps back, or is not intimately involved in the incarnation. I concede that would be absurd. Human persons are suffused with Spirit, they are spiritual beings. After the eternal Son takes to himself a human nature (*anhypostatic*) and becomes a *human* person (*enhypostatic*), it is the Holy Spirit who is now active in mediating human nature to the eternal Son in a *communio idiomatum*.⁹⁷ If the Son acted on his human nature immediately, then it would not be an incarnation, one would not be dealing with God *as* man but God *in* a man, as Athanasius was fond of saying.⁹⁸ In short, without this understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation we would simply be back to a Logos Christology, with all of its Docetic entrapments.

Crisp is concerned that all such accounts of Spirit Christology posit agency to the Spirit to the mutual exclusion of the Son.⁹⁹ For Crisp, this is an insurmountable objection to all such Christologies, and of Torrance’s by implication. But has Crisp got it right? It is clear from Torrance’s work that he is not suggesting anything like the thought that the Son takes a back seat to the Spirit in the incarnation. He is, rather, providing an account of the incarnation in which there is dual agency at work, that of the Son and the Spirit, and both in personal and appropriate ways.

Ian McFarland helpfully outlines the sort of pneumatic Chalcedonianism Crisp is after, but does so in a way which is compatible with an orthodox Spirit Christology as is being argued for here through Torrance. McFarland recognizes that Jesus has to be a genuine human, but that he is nonetheless *unlike the rest of us* in some way (he is sinless for one thing and has a Divine

97 A Reformed account of the *communio idiomata* (communion of properties) differs substantially from a Lutheran account of a *communicatio idiomata* (communication of properties), in that in the former, the idioms of each nature are now true of the one Person of the incarnate Son, whilst in the latter account, attributes of the two natures are transferable across those natures. In a constructive attempt to retrieve Spirit Christology, Telford C. Work suggests an alternate way of interpreting Chalcedon by rejecting any notion of a *communicatio idiomata/idiomatōn koinōnia* in favour of a “concurrency of divine and human relations (“Jesus’ New Relationship with the Holy Spirit, and Ours,” 171–183). While highly suggestive and deserving a fuller treatment, the proposal still looks to be Nestorian-like in its orientation as it posits two person-like entities in the incarnation, and Adoptionistic-leaning in that it elides the place of the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit in favour of his baptism being a quasi-ontological event. Torrance’s account is more accurate. Torrance, *Incarnation*, 209–210; 221–29.

98 Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 3.29 (NPNF, 2nd series, vol. 4. pp. 1002–3).

99 Crisp, *Revisioning Christology*, 107.

nature for another), and framing the Spirit's role in Chalcedonian terms does a better job of honoring the integrity of Jesus' humanity than non-Chalcedonian alternatives. In the terms of Spirit Christology, this is an account which seeks to complement Logos Christology with Spirit Christology, even if the emphasis is given to inspiration. McFarland's contention is that "an emphasis on the incarnational role of the Spirit enables this Chalcedonian insight to be developed more consistently than has often been the case by allowing Christ's humanity to be construed holistically: as a complete nature that, although at every point moved and shaped by the Spirit, remains in both being and act utterly distinct from divinity."¹⁰⁰ And this is, I believe, what Torrance is after in his own account of Christology, as long as "distinct" means that and not "independent" or "separate." The human nature does not literally act independently of the eternal Son, as that would deny the hypostatic union.

A Chalcedonian Christology has to maintain that Christ's human nature is exactly like that of other humans, Christ fully shares our human nature, but he is a different *hypostasis*, a different person, and therein lies his uniqueness. According to Chalcedonian logic, Jesus' divine hypostasis is not the power behind his human attributes, something tantamount to monothelitism, a single divine will or monergism, a divine mode of activity. Whereas Crisp can't see how the Holy Spirit can have personal agency in the human acts of Christ, it would appear that McFarland thinks this is actually necessary according to catholic Christology. The Holy Spirit, however, is not an impersonal field of force through which the eternal Son acts on the human nature. Rather, the *perichoretic* being of the triune God is equally at work in the incarnation as Word and Spirit work together on the human nature. Thus the Word is the subject who wills and acts, but does so within the conditions of human nature, and that necessitates that he works by or through the Holy Spirit. This is merely another way of saying that the economic activity of the Spirit in the incarnation of the Word needs to be emphasized as much as the economic activity of the Word; something that has not often been the case.

Truer to Chalcedonian Christology, McFarland argues that "the confession that the Word is the *subject* of Jesus' thoughts and actions . . . must be distinguished from the claim that the Word is the *cause* of Jesus' human operations . . . On biblical no less than Chalcedonian terms, however, it is much more profitable to ascribe this divine activity to the Holy Spirit."¹⁰¹

100 Ian A. McFarland, "Spirit and Incarnation: Toward a Pneumatic Chalcedonianism," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16 (2014): 144.

101 *Ibid.*, 153.

McFarland might rightly be accused of going too far in the assertion of an exclusive work of the Spirit here, whereas, a more nuanced expression of the case might be to say that the coordinated activity of the Word and the Spirit in the incarnation needs to be acknowledged, but due to an oversight on the part of classical theology of the Spirit's unique work in Jesus, his vicarious activity needs to be emphasized in order to correct the ballast. In short, this is the claim of contemporary Spirit Christology and is a way to make full sense of Torrance's Christology.

With Torrance, and the growing host of contemporary advocates of a trinitarian Spirit Christology, McFarland not only highlights the biblical veracity of this account of the incarnation but also shows the practical benefit this Christology offers, namely, "the role of the Spirit in Jesus' life is parallel with other human beings rather than something which distinguishes him from them. Whether the person in question is Jesus, the Word made flesh, or the least distinguished of the saints, it is the gift of the Holy Spirit rather than any intrinsic property of human nature that makes possible human life active in faith and love."¹⁰² As long as this is predicated upon the miracle of Pentecost, in which the risen and ascended Christ sends the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, into the world as a new action of God upon the community, and it is this presence of the Spirit of the Son which is the enabling condition of human faith and love, then there can be no suggestion that such a theology espouses the view that human nature itself acquires an intrinsic ability, apart from Christ and the Spirit, to rightly respond to God.

The eternal Son is the active subject of the incarnation, but as true man he also had to learn obedience in the power of the Spirit. Commenting on McFarland's work, Oliver Davies makes the comment that this "opens a space for the Holy Spirit to be the dynamic presence of God within the human life of Jesus Christ himself. It is the Spirit who is the point of contact between the divine hypostasis and the humanity of Jesus . . ."¹⁰³ This does not have to mean that the Spirit is the *only* point of contact, for we do want to insist upon the fact that in the incarnation the Word assumes human nature. It is to affirm, however, that the assumption of a human nature by the Word such that the Word lives as a man, is not without the Spirit, and when the role of the Spirit in the hypostatic union and in the life of obedience lived to the Father is considered more precisely, a clearer explanatory account of the

102 Ibid., 155.

103 Oliver Davies, "Holy Spirit and Mediation: Towards a Transformational Pneumatology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16 (2014): 165.

Incantation results. As with other believers, Jesus' life is lived in dependence upon the Spirit of God; it is not a mere appearance of humanity.¹⁰⁴

Such a clarification of Torrance's theology, one in which the work of the Holy Spirit is more prominent, offers a dogmatic and pastoral advantage over most text-book approaches to theology; and also provides a way in which to address the critique Torrance's doctrine of the *non assumptus* has attracted.

104 As Crisp admits, this is where several of his own analogies for the hypostatic union break down. Crisp, *Revisioning Christology*, 100–101. While the human nature the Word assumed is *anhypostatic*, once assumed it is *enhypostatic*: Jesus is the person of the eternal Son.