THE UNASSUMED IS THE UNHEALED:

The Humanity of Christ in the Theology of T. F. Torrance

Kevin Chiarot

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This book is an exploration and critique of T. F. Torrance's understanding of the doctrine of Christ's assumption of fallen humanity. In this book, a revised Ph.D. dissertation, Kevin Chiarot offers a welcome contribution to the growing body of secondary literature on Torrance. He offers a good and clear summary and overview of the role of Christ's humanity in Torrance's theology, helpfully articulating some of the roots of Torrance's theological conceptions in this area. In the book Chiarot argues that Christ's assumption of fallen humanity drives Torrance's Christology and therein his greater theology, but that it ultimately collapses because Torrance needs forensic categories to do what he is trying to do, and he only works with ontological categories. Chiarot's overall argument, however, falls short in that he attempts to place Torrance in federal categories which are entirely at odds with Torrance's theology, failing to understand Torrance on his own terms.

Chiarot summarizes his attempt as twofold: "to demonstrate the pervasive role of the non-assumptus" (p. 225) and "to criticize Torrance's theology of the non-assumptus" (p. 226). Chiarot succeeds in his first attempt in that he articulates well the importance of the non-assumptus for Torrance's Christology. The primary strength of this book is its excellent overview of the full scope of Torrance's understanding of the role of the humanity of Christ in theology.

In the introduction (p. 1–22), Chiarot clearly situates Torrance in general and Torrance's understanding of Christ's assumption of fallen humanity in particular in the "genealogy" (p. 10) of the Nicene Fathers (particularly Gregory Nazianzen), the Reformation (particularly John Calvin), the Scottish tradition (particularly Edward Irving, John McLeod Campbell, and H. R. Mackintosh), and Karl Barth. At least this prominent stream of the theological tradition has affirmed Christ's assumption of fallen humanity, Chiarot notes for Torrance, even though the assumptus is not the normative belief in Christian history.

Throughout the introduction, and this is drawn out throughout the rest of the book, Chiarot suggests that Torrance is offering a creative reading of the

theological tradition (e.g. see p. 6: "the correctness of his historical reading will not concern us").

In chapter 2 (p. 23–86) Chiarot highlights and explicates the important role that Israel plays in Torrance's Christology, and therein in his greater dogmatic theology. In this chapter Chiarot contributes a stellar summary of Torrance's theological view of Israel to contemporary Torrance scholarship. Torrance's understanding of Israel is a central aspect of his theology, yet Torrance's discussion of this element of dogmatics is spread throughout his great corpus of literature, rather than being treated in full-length monographs such as he does with the doctrine of the Trinity, save for portions of *The Mediation of Christ*. Chiarot successfully synthesizes Torrance's views on Israel into one chapter and as such offers an excellent source for anyone wishing a succinct statement of Torrance's understanding of the role of Israel in the Christological narrative of salvation.

In chapters 3 (p. 87–102), 4 (p. 87–102), and 5 (p. 103–164), Chiarot examines Torrance's conception of the union between God and man in Christ, emphasizing (as would be expected) the role of Christ's assumption of fallen humanity. In chapter 3, Chiarot articulates Torrance's understanding of the incarnation and the virgin birth of Christ. In chapter 4, Chiarot examines Torrance's use of the Nicene doctrine of *homoousion* as well as the patristic doctrine of the *hypostatic union.* In chapter 5, Chiarot examines Torrance's view of the vicarious humanity of Christ. These chapters offer helpful summaries and as such will serve those unfamiliar with Torrance wishing for a concise overview. Chapter 5 in particular synthesizes Torrance's conception of the vicarious humanity of Christ, drawing out the various ways in which Torrance understands Christ to represent humanity vicariously.

Chapter 6 (p. 204–223) examines Torrance's doctrine of the atonement and the conclusion (p. 224–226) offers a 3-page summary of the arguments and critiques from the book. As stated, the real strength of the book is its succinct synthesis and summary of Torrance's understanding of the role of the humanity of Christ in dogmatic theology. Chiarot's arsenal of sources from the Torrancian corpus is impressive and he draws upon works from the very beginning of Torrance's career through to secondary literature written only recently.

Throughout the book Chiarot aims to "demonstrate the pervasive role of the non-assumptus" (p. 225), and whilst he certainly articulates the content of Torrance's view clearly, he fails to argue successfully that Christ's assumption of fallen humanity is central to Torrance, and so he misses the mark somewhat on this goal. While clearly important for Torrance, surely Torrance would say that the lynchpin of theology is the Nicene *homoousion,* not the non-assumptus

(e.g. Torrance says the *homoousion* is "the organic pattern integrating all the doctrines of the Christian faith" in *Theology in Reconciliation*, 264). Chiarot engages Torrance's use of the Nicene *homoousion* but he places in the context of the non-assumptus, rather than the other way around, which is how Torrance places it.

What is also disappointing is that Chiarot attempts to place Torrance in western, forensic, and Westminster categories and critiques Torrance for not fitting these categories. This is not to suggest that Chiarot's argument here is by necessity invalid, but in order to critique Torrance on these grounds, Chiarot needs to articulate the validity of the western, forensic, and Westminster understanding of the atonement, which simply seems to be assumed in the background of the book. Rather than stating this argument outright, Chiarot argues that Torrance's doctrine of Christ's assumption of fallen humanity collapses in upon itself and "it is not at all clear that the non-assumptus, as narrated by Torrance, can be salvaged" if not put in forensic categories (p. 226). The very nature of this argument is unfair to Torrance because Chiarot fails to engage Torrance in the Reformation and Greek Patristic categories Torrance is using, instead engaging Torrance in Westminster Calvinist categories.

For example, in his discussion of Torrance's doctrine of the atonement in chapter 6, Chiarot engages Torrance only on the classic Reformed concepts Torrance uses: the passive/active obedience of Christ and the limited/unlimited extent of the atonement. These are certainly categories that Torrance uses, and as Chiarot notes Torrance takes these classic Reformed formulations and reshapes them in a Torrancian fashion, however a glaring omission from this discussion of Torrance's discussion of the atonement is the Greek Patristic doctrine of *theosis*. Without the Greek Patristic *theosis*, the Reformed doctrines above do not make sense for Torrance (and vice versa). Torrance's doctrine of the atonement and his doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ, understood in terms of *theosis* (which is how Torrance means them to be understood) rather than in terms of substitutionary atonement (which is seemingly how Chiarot understands Torrance), draws out Torrance's emphases in atonement such as that immediately upon assuming fallen humanity, Christ begins to sanctify, heal, and redeem it. This in turn clarifies one of the major problems Chiarot has with Torrance, namely that for Torrance it seems Christ himself is in need of saving (Chiarot puts this in terms of Christ having the same redeemed sub-eschatological humanity as the rest of humanity).

Another notable example of this issue is Chiarot's focus upon the problem of the will of Christ. A major critique in chapter 5 is that by assuming fallen

humanity, Christ must have assumed a fallen will, and therefore must have been tempted to sin in the same way the rest of humanity is tempted to sin (Chiarot concludes that this does not seem to be the case in the Bible). This emphasis upon the noetic effects of the fall sees Chiarot failing to engage Torrance on Torrance's terms. To be sure, Torrance does discuss the role of the will in Christ's assumption of fallen humanity, but this is placed under the auspices of Christ's assumption of the *whole* man (to use Athanasius' language, as Torrance does). The very title of the book, taken from one of Torrance's favorite patristics quotations, comes from Gregory Nazianzen's *Letter 101: To Cledonius the Priest*, "the unassumed is the unhealed." It is impossible to understand Torrance's understanding of *fallen* humanity without understanding the Greek Patristic conception of *fallenness*. In short, the Greek Fathers work more in ontological categories of fallenness ("mortality") and the West traditionally works with forensic/legal categories of fallenness ("guilt"). Chiarot seems to assume Torrance is working with the latter, when it is necessary to at least engage Torrance's use of Gregory and the other Greek Fathers on the Greek Patristic terms of ontological, rather than forensic, fallenness in order to understand what Torrance is doing.

In conclusion, *The Unassumed is the Unhealed* offers succinct and clear summaries of the different elements of Torrance's doctrine of Christ's assumption of fallen humanity, but it fails to argue successfully that Torrance's view is faulty. The crux of Chiarot's argument is that Torrance's ontological categories fail to successfully articulate Christ's fallen humanity, and therefore forensic categories are needed. This may be so, but the canon that Chiarot is using is the forensic categories of Westminster Calvinism and Chiarot does not clearly articulate why this barometer is a better one than Torrance's ontological categories. Ultimately, Chiarot fails to engage Torrance on Torrance's own Greek Patristic and Reformed synthesis on its own terms, and thus fails to engage Torrance's work successfully.

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