

INCARNATION AND RECREATION:

The Fallen Nature of Christ and the Re-creation of Humanity

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Abstract: *This paper seeks to examine the way in which T. F. Torrance argues for Jesus' assumption of a fallen human nature in the Incarnation as essential to the recreation and personalization of our humanity. In the fall, our human nature was corrupted in such a way that we are alienated and estranged from God and are subject in every way to the effects of this fallen life. However, in the Incarnation Jesus assumed not just some abstract form of a human nature but rather the very human nature that needed healing, that is, a fallen human nature. In the act of joining this fallen nature to himself and carrying that with him throughout his entire incarnate life, Jesus heals that fallen nature and offers us a new way to be human. Thus, the assumption of the fallen nature is essential for its healing and for creating this new way to be human.*

In the 1800s, Scottish theologian Edward Irving was declared a heretic by the Church of Scotland for teaching that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature in the incarnation. Irving's insistence that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature in the Incarnation did not end because of this declaration; but rather, according to some

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scholars like Donald Macleod, this Irvingite way of viewing Jesus' human nature has been passed down to theologians that have come after him such as H. R. Mackintosh, Karl Barth, Thomas F. Torrance, and James B. Torrance.¹ I have argued elsewhere for the validity of this viewpoint and it is outside of the purview of this article to make this argument yet again.² The purpose of this article is to examine the relationship between T. F. Torrance's theology of the Incarnation and his anthropology. More specifically, in this paper *I will argue that Jesus' assumption of a fallen human nature is essential to the recreation and personalization of our humanity in Torrance's thought.* As Torrance argues, "That which really makes man man is the bond between man and God."³ Thus, to help clarify our understanding about what it means to truly be human is to understand the relationship between God and humankind which was restored through the Incarnation and atonement of Jesus as he assumes our fallen nature to himself in order to redeem it and restore it into fellowship with God. To accomplish the stated thesis this paper will take the following format. First, the effect of sin on our humanity will be explained in order to understand what it is that needs to be restored. Second, it will be crucial to define terms and give a clear explanation of Torrance's view of Jesus' fallen nature to lay the theological groundwork. Third, and finally, the relationship between the Incarnation and atonement will be examined to make the case that Jesus' assumption of a fallen human nature is essential to the recreation of our humanity through the atonement.

¹ Donald Macleod. "The Doctrine of the Incarnation in Scottish Theology: Edward Irving," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 9, no. 1 (1991): 40–50.

² See Daniel J. Cameron, *Flesh and Blood: A Dogmatic Sketch Concerning the Fallen Nature View of Christ's Human Nature* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), and Daniel J. Cameron, "The Fallen Humanity of Christ and the Work of the Spirit in the Thought of Edward Irving," in *The Doctrine of the Incarnation Opened: An Abridgment with Introduction and Response* ed. Alex Irving (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 205–220. See also Daniel J. Cameron "What It Means That Jesus Was Without Sin," *Christianity Today* (8 September 2021): <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/november-web-only/what-it-means-that-jesus-was-without-sin.html>.

³ Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 39.

The Fallen Human Nature

The place that we must begin, in attempting to understand the connection between the fallen nature that Christ assumed in the Incarnation and his recreation of our humanity, is with establishing an understanding of the problem of sin. That is, we must begin by establishing a clear understanding of our fallen nature. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve rebel against God and plunge the entirety of humanity into a state of sinfulness. This idea of sinfulness in modern language has been described as simply disobedience, or “missing the mark,” that is breaking the law. This external way of thinking about sin suffers from what Torrance calls the “Latin heresy.” This Latin heresy is a way of thinking in terms of “external relations” which has infected Western theology. It is known as the Latin heresy “for in theology at any rate its roots go back to a form of linguistic and conceptual dualism that prevailed in Patristic and Mediaeval Latin theology.”⁴ It developed through a Western way of thinking in terms of “formal relations” which was accentuated through a Cartesian way of thinking in terms of “external relations,” as in a system of laws, which grew out of a Kantian understanding that things could not be known in terms of their “internal relations,” as in dynamic interpersonal relations.⁵ He traces this back to Arius at the council of Nicea in which he was “operating with the axiomatic assumption of an epistemological and cosmological dualism which shut God out of any direct interaction with the world.”⁶ Thus, Jesus could not be God and was therefore simply a created human. The teaching of the New Testament in which Jesus is *homoousios* with the Father was in direct contradiction to the teaching of Arius and conversely, indicated that there was an unbreakable internal relation between the Father and the Son in which both are fully God.

This way of thinking in external relations snuck into Western theology in a way in which all Christian theology was affected. Torrance is concerned to recover the thinking of Karl Barth and Athanasius such that their teaching gave space to “internal relations in the coherent structure of Christian theology, and of the way in

⁴ Thomas F. Torrance “Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986): 463.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

which he exposed and rejected the habit of thinking in terms of external relations which had come to characterise so much of Western theology.”⁷ Ultimately, Torrance utilizes this phraseology in order to identify the way in which Western theology thinks only in terms of these external relations.⁸ This has affected the way in which we understand the way Jesus’ Incarnation and atonement affect who we are as sinners. We must avoid “understanding Christ’s saving work in a way which detached that work from his person as the Incarnate Word.”⁹

To understand what it means to say that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature in the incarnation, it is important that we first understand how the problem of sin affects us. If we are to move away from this external way of thinking in which sin is simply the missing of the mark or simply our disobedience to God, we have to define this problem of sin. In scripture sin is described in its three senses: a state of being (corruption of nature), the path we walk (life of estrangement and rebellion), and our guilty standing before God (morally subjugated to the wrath of God). If we were to put scriptures’ way of describing sin into a pie chart, the second two aspects — the path we walk and our guilty standing — would take up the majority of the pie chart while the first aspect of our state of being would take up a sliver of the pie. However, this is backward thinking. Our sinful actions, the path we walk, and our guilty standing before God are ultimately the symptoms of our corrupt state of being. Sin at its essence must be understood as a corruption of our human nature which therefore corrupts our human relations. The prophet Jeremiah cries out for a “Balm in Gilead.” This metaphor would have been very familiar with the people who were listening to Jeremiah. Gilead was a region just east of the Jordan River and north of Moab which was “was famous for its healing ointment made from the resin of a tree whose identity is uncertain.”¹⁰ But the prophet goes on to ask why there is no healing then for his people. This word here for healing is literally

⁷ Ibid., 464.

⁸ C.f. E. Jerome van Kuiken, *Christ’s Humanity In Current And Ancient Controversy: Fallen Or Not?* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 43.

⁹ Paul D. Molnar “Thomas F. Torrance and the Problem of Universalism,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68 (2015): 184.

¹⁰ F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, vol. 16, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 117.

“new flesh.”¹¹ The prophet is crying out for healing for a sickness that is infecting the people. This sickness is sin. This is echoed and expanded in Paul’s writing in Ephesians 2 when he declares that we are “dead in our transgressions and sins.”¹² The remedy of this sickness is what is promised in the New Covenant in Ezekiel 36:25-27 which says,

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.¹³

What God promises is a new nature in which we will walk the right path and stand innocent before God. But, for the totality of sin to be dealt with, we need more than simply the forgiveness of our wrongdoings or a good moral example. We need a gut rehab, that is, a heart that has been completely made new by the Spirit and the love of God. in which the entirety of what it means to be a postlapsarian human is gutted and remade from the inside out.

In the Old Testament, atonement was made through participation in the sacrificial system in which a lamb was sacrificed providing temporary propitiation and right standing before God. However, a lamb could never recreate human nature and was thus only a temporary solution to the problem of sin. The Old Testament sacrificial system pointed forward to the day in which God would remove our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh, as the prophet Ezekiel prophesied. In Galatians 4:4-5, Paul argues that “when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.”¹⁴ While the temporary solution to sin began in the OT sacrificial system at the Tabernacle and the Temple, the ultimate solution to

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ephesians 2:1 (NIV).

¹³ Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NIV).

¹⁴ Galatians 4:4-5 (NIV).

sin begins to take place when Jesus “tabernacled” among us.¹⁵ In other words, the solution to sin is tied directly to the Incarnation of Jesus.

The Fallen Human Nature and Jesus

As we begin to examine the Incarnation and the reality that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature in the incarnation, it is important to note that the Incarnation is not simply a “prelude” or the “necessary means for atonement,” as if Jesus became human so that he could die or to make him mortal.¹⁶ The person and action of God cannot be abstracted from one another. Key to understanding this is the idea carried about by the word *homoousion*. This word was used at the Council of Nicaea to describe the relationship of the Father and the Son confirming that they are of the same nature. This word is of “staggering significance” because it is the “heart and substance of our Christian faith.”¹⁷ At its very core, this word is describing the ontological reality that God and Jesus are one in nature. Therefore, what God is in his very nature he is in action towards us in Jesus Christ. For “what kind of God would we have, then, if Jesus Christ were not the self-revelation or self-communication of God, if God were not inherently and eternal in his own being what the Gospel tells us he is in Jesus Christ.”¹⁸ This is crucial, for if Jesus is not God then we are not saved, “for it is in virtue of his Deity that his saving work as man has its validity.”¹⁹ Elmer Colyer describes the importance of this doctrine well in his book *How To Read T. F. Torrance* saying,

The *homousion* is vital, for if the homoousial bond between Jesus Christ and God is cut, the bottom falls out of the gospel, because only God can atone for sin and save. Yet it is also critical that Jesus Christ is of one and the same being and nature with humanity, for if the

¹⁵ See John 1:14.

¹⁶ Thomas F. Torrance, *God and Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 263.

¹⁷ Torrance, “The Evangelical Significance,” 165.

¹⁸ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 134.

¹⁹ Thomas F. Torrance *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard Publishers, 1992), 54–55.

incarnate Son is not fully human, the gospel is also emptied of soteriology significance.²⁰

It is on these grounds that Paul can say in 1 Timothy 2:5 (NIV) that there is "one mediator between God and mankind, the man Jesus Christ." This, however, is not to be understood in such a way as Jesus is simply the means to an end. That is, Jesus is not simply the bridge that we walk over to get to God, no longer needing it once we are across. But rather, Jesus stepped into a situation of intense conflict between "the covenant faithfulness of God and the unfaithfulness of man and took the conflict into his own flesh as the incarnate Son and bore it to the very end."²¹ This means that the act of atonement began to take place before the crucifixion of Jesus. It began in the incarnation.

The homoousion cannot be fully understood without also bringing into the conversation the hypostatic union. That is, the "internal relation of the atonement to the incarnate Person of Christ" because of the union of God and man within the one person of Jesus.²² This way of thinking is what Torrance refers to as "onto-relations" or a doctrine of internal relations. It is in the person of Christ that God and man are united within the incarnate person of Jesus Christ. Jesus' person and work cannot be separated from each other for his "humanity is not just a means to an end."²³ Thus the Incarnation and atonement must be thought of not as two distinct and unconnected realities, one simply the means to the end, but rather they must be understood in terms of their "internal relations within the incarnate constitution of Christ."²⁴ In other words, "His person and work are one ... Jesus

²⁰ Elmer Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian and Scientific Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007), 81.

²¹ Thomas F. Torrance, "Atonement and the Oneness of the Church," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 7 (1954): 251.

²² Thomas F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1980), 165.

²³ Thomas F. Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today: The Gospel and Scientific Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 58.

²⁴ Ibid.

Christ is redemption, he is righteousness, he is eternal life.”²⁵ Before we can begin to explain and give clear definition to what it means that Christ assumed a fallen human nature, it is important to explain the nature of the Virgin birth for it is from his mother that Jesus receives his humanity.

In Roman Catholic theology it is believed that Mary was immaculately conceived. Reynolds argues that “The Virgin Mary was preserved entirely free from original sin from the instant of her conception through a special prevenient grace, received in view of the merits of her Son in anticipation of the Redemption.”²⁶ Thus, Mary was considered to be free from original sin and, according to the Council of Trent, Mary was considered to be free from personal sin as well.²⁷ Protestants, however, rejected this teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.²⁸ While Protestants and Roman Catholics disagree on the immaculate conception of Mary, both are concerned with Jesus’ assumption of an unfallen nature. While Roman Catholic theology states that Mary was free from both original and personal sin in order to be a pure vessel from which the Savior was to come, Protestants get to the same place, that is, the purity of Jesus’ human nature, in how they discuss the doctrine of the virgin birth. Jesus assumed an unfallen and pure human nature in the Incarnation due to the virginity of Mary. This, however, takes a rather strong Augustinian interpretation of the transmission of sin in which “concupiscence constitutes the essence of original sin inasmuch as it dictates the process of reproduction, by which the corruption that took control of Adam’s body and its seminal capacity is passed down in an uninterrupted fashion through the chain of all human generations.”²⁹ This transmission does not take place in some external forensic or juridical sense but rather, “based on the specific relationship, affected by

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Brian K. Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven: Marian Doctrine and Devotion, Image and Typology in the Patristic and Medieval Periods* (New York: New City Press, 2012), 330.

²⁷ See Robert Fastiggi, “Mariology in the Counter-Reformation,” in Chris Maunder, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Mary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

²⁸ See Carol Engelhardt Herringer, “Mary as a Cultural Symbol in the Nineteenth Century,” in Ibid.

²⁹ Pier Franco Beatrice and Adam Kamesar, “The Essence and Transmission of Original Sin,” in *The Transmission of Sin* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 68.

human semen, that connects children to their parents and allows the substance of which bodily flesh is composed to be transmitted from the latter to the former.”³⁰ This then means that it is in Adam that all humanity was contained in his loins and upon sinning all people are then corrupted with original sin. As Beatrice argues,

The consequence of this situation is that, if the reproductive processes are deeply corrupt, if the male seed is defective, and if sexual desire is the exclusive driving force of everyone’s physical birth, then all of human history turns into a painful scene of sin and corruption. And this sin is none other than original sin, a sin that multiplies uninterruptedly through the course of centuries by the inescapable laws of heredity, as long as flesh reproduces into flesh, continuously compelled to do so by the diabolical goad of concupiscence.³¹

Thus, since Jesus was not born of the seed of a man he is preserved from the stain of sin and lives in a perfect human nature. However, this does not seem to be what the doctrine of the virgin birth is really about. As Torrance argues, the purpose of the Virgin birth is to teach us three things. First, the virgin birth grounds the true humanity of Christ. That is, Jesus was “really born of Mary, born through all the embryonic processes of the womb as any other human being.”³² There is a difference though in the birth of Jesus and any other real human birth and this leads to the second thing that the virgin birth teaches us about Jesus. Second, the virgin birth shows a fracture in the sinful autonomy of humanity. This means that Jesus was not born “as other men are of the will of the flesh.”³³ Jesus was born not of the will of man but of the will of God contra *adoptionism*. Third, the virgin birth reveals the divine origin of Christ. This has to do with the idea of *kenosis* in Philippians 2:7 in which Christ “emptied” himself. The word used here is the Greek word ἐκένωσεν which carries with it not the idea that Jesus lost anything in himself but rather that he “emptied himself out of heaven on to earth, out of eternity into

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 69.

³² Torrance, “The Doctrine of the Virgin Birth,” 18.

³³ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 100.

time.”³⁴ Jesus did not then lose anything of what it means that he is God, but rather this should be thought of as a “veiling of his divine nature” which was to be unveiled at the resurrection.³⁵ Thus, while the virgin birth speaks to us regarding the humanity of Christ, it is not attempting to argue for the unfallen human nature of Christ but that the Incarnation is of the will of God and not of the will of man. As Edward Irving argued, Jesus “was of the seed of David; that He was the seed of Abraham, as well as the seed of the woman; yea, that He was the seed of the woman after she fell, and not before she fell.”³⁶

What does it mean then to say that Jesus assumed a “fallen” human nature in the incarnation? The argument for Christ having a fallen human nature in the Incarnation is not for the purpose of arguing that Jesus was fully human for fallenness “is not an essential property of a particular human nature.”³⁷ Rather, it is argued that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature in the Incarnation for the purpose of atonement for it was fallen humans that need to be recreated and given a new way to be human. Clarity is essential in describing this fallen nature lest we end up with a Jesus who is a sinner in need of a savior himself.³⁸ So what does a “fallen” human nature entail?

A quick glance at the writings of T. F. Torrance can come across as inconsistent in that he appears to argue for a fallen nature that entails original sin and at the same time a fallen nature that does not entail original sin. However, Torrance is not being inconsistent; rather, what we are seeing is the maturing of his theology over time. His position that the fallen nature does not entail original sin is

³⁴ Thomas F. Torrance. *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 118.

³⁵ Ibid., 110.

³⁶ Edward Irving, *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, vol 5 (London: Strahan Publishers, 1865), 5, 116.

³⁷ Crisp, “Did Christ Have a Fallen Human Nature?,” 272.

³⁸ Whereas, in the past, Oliver Crisp has denied the fallen nature view as plausible and theologically defensible he has come to change his mind regarding the defensibility of this position due to conversations with theologian Michael Rea. He now defends the idea of Jesus’ assumption of a fallen human nature in the sense that he experienced the effects of the fall without himself assuming a nature tainted by sin. See Oliver D. Crisp “On the Vicarious Humanity of Christ,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 21 (2019): 235–50.

in his earlier writings³⁹ while he holds to a position that does entail original sin in his later writings.⁴⁰ For the sake of space, this article will focus on a definition of fallen nature according to Torrance's more mature views.

To say that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature is to argue that in the Incarnation "Christ sinlessly and vicariously assumed, not only the physical consequences of sin ... but assumes our original sin and guilt and our twisted, distorted, bent mind contained in our actual human nature, and in assuming it right from the very beginning our Lord converted it, healed it, and sanctified it in himself."⁴¹ This internal/ontological way of thinking about atonement is crucial for the very nature of sin is personal and ontological. Thus, since the problem of "sin is an act of man going down to the roots of human nature ... then it is in the inner depth of their personal being that humanity must be reconciled to God and we must be healed of our enmity and contradiction to God."⁴² Thus, since the problem of sin is at the root of our very being, that is our ontology, atonement is not something that can be done *externally* to us and our humanity but rather

It must be worked through the heart and mind of men and women, until they are brought to acquiesce in the divine judgment on sin and are restored in heart and mind to communion with God. Reconciliation ... is not just the clearing up of a misunderstanding, but the eliminating

³⁹ His early lectures at Auburn can be found here Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001). In these writings a weaker view of the fallen nature is argued. According to these writings the fallen nature can be understood in that "in the incarnation God comes near to sinful man, inasmuch as he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, and in doing so he assumed the suffering of infirmity and temptation, the enmity of God against sin, and the enmity of Satan against sinners," Cameron, *Flesh and Blood*, 16.

⁴⁰ See Torrance, *Incarnation*. See also Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014).

⁴¹ Cameron, *Flesh and Blood*, 20. Torrance seems to be inconsistent, or at the very least unclear about when in fact the sanctification of this nature takes place, for he makes comments that the nature was sanctified upon assumption, and then his comments on Luke 2:52 and John 17:19 say that he sanctified it throughout his life. In conversations with other Torrance scholars, we were unable to come to a clear conclusion regarding Torrance's official stance.

⁴² Torrance, *Atonement*, 159.

of a lie that has its roots in our natures as fallen and as perverted personal being. Hence the incarnation entailed a physical or ontological union, as well as a Logos-union with man (that is, a union with man in being as well as in word and mind) as the means of reconciliation to God.⁴³

Atonement, thus, is something accomplished *from within* our fallen nature as Paul argues in Romans 8:3 "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh" (NRSV).

Jesus condemns sin in the flesh by taking our fallen nature upon himself. This is what 2 Corinthians 5:21 is arguing when it says "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (NRSV). When Paul says that he was made "to be sin" (ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν) some have interpreted this to mean that Christ was made a "sin offering."⁴⁴ While the word ἁμαρτίαν is used in the LXX for "sin offering" it is not used in the New Testament with this meaning.⁴⁵ Garland notes that there are problems with interpreting ἁμαρτίαν as "sin offering" in 2 Corinthians 5:21. He argues that, "The word *hamartia* does not have the meaning 'sin offering' elsewhere in the New Testament, and if Paul intends that meaning here, then he uses the word with two quite different meanings in the same sentence."⁴⁶ You see, Paul argues that Jesus "knew no sin" (μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν) and that Jesus was "made to be sin" (ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν). It does not make sense that Paul would be using the same word in the same sentence to mean different things. Garland argues that if Paul had intended to mean use ἁμαρτίαν in "sense of 'sin offering,' it would have been more fitting to use the verb 'presented' or 'offered' rather than 'made.'"⁴⁷ To interpret this phrase as

⁴³ Ibid., 158, 161.

⁴⁴ See S. Lyonnet and L. Sabourin, *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice: A Biblical and Patristic Study*, AB 48 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1971) 185–296.

⁴⁵ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 300.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

“sin offering” also does not take into account the parallelism in the passage between sin (ἁμαρτίαν) and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη). Thus, it can be argued that Paul intended to communicate the reality that Jesus truly became sin though, and of extreme importance, he maintains the reality that Jesus “knew no sin.” Jesus, in assuming the fallen nature, remains personally sinless. In other words, “by saying it was ‘for us,’ he protects Christ’s sinlessness.”⁴⁸ In assuming this fallen nature and living out a life of perfect obedience, he sanctifies and heals our nature throughout the whole course of his life. Jesus then carries our distorted mind into his struggle on the cross and descends to the realm of the dead, thus bringing our fallen nature under the judgment of God, in order to get at the very root of sin and redeem us from it.⁴⁹ To further help our understanding of how this is possible, an explanation of the ideas of *an-hypostasia* and *en-hypostasia* is necessary.

An-hypostasia can be defined in the following way: “Christ’s human nature has its existence only in union with God, in God’s existence or personal mode of being (*hypostasis*). It does *not* possess it in and for itself — hence *an-hypostasis* (‘not person’, i.e. no separate person.”⁵⁰ *En-hypostasia* makes the claim that in the act of the Son assuming a human nature that human nature is given existence “in the existence of God, and co-exists in the divine existence or mode of being — hence *en-hypostasis* (‘person in,’ that is, real human person in the person of the Son).”⁵¹ *An-hypostasis* argues that Jesus assumed a human nature that is in continuity with all other humans, that is, he assumes a general human nature which is then brought into the person of the Son (*en-hypostasis*) in which he has real individual personhood. In other words, the person of the Son personalizes the *an-hypostatic* human nature. What does this mean when it is said that he personalizes the *an-hypostatic* human nature? What this means is that Jesus assumes a human nature “void of a hypostasis of its own” which was brought into union with the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 301.

⁴⁹ Torrance, *Atonement*, 440.

⁵⁰ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 84. For an extended dialogue on these two terms see Robert Walker, “The Innovative Fruitfulness of An/En-Hypostasis in Thomas F. Torrance,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*, ed. Paul D. Molnar and Myk Habets (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2020), 189–206.

⁵¹ Ibid.

person of the Son in order that there might be “one and the same hypostasis of the Logos and of the human nature assumed, outside of which neither ever subsists, nor can subsist.”⁵²

The doctrines of *an/en-hypostasia* are important for understanding how and why Jesus can maintain his sinlessness in the assumption of a fallen nature. *An-hypostasia* communicates to us the fact that, in the incarnation, Jesus did not assume an independently existing human person, but rather that the Son of God “took possession of human nature, [so] as to set aside that which divides us men from one another, our independent centers of personality, and to assume that which unites us with one another, the possession of the same or common human nature.”⁵³ That is, Jesus did not assume a fallen person in the Incarnation but only a fallen human nature and thus has ontological solidarity with us in our fallen natures. It is with his *en-hypostatic* assumption of this nature that Jesus finds “solidarity in terms of the interaction of persons within our human and social life, in personal relations of love, commitment, responsibility, decision, etc.”⁵⁴

It is crucial to have both doctrines working with each other to gain a full understanding of the Incarnation and atonement. For, if Jesus had simply brought about atonement in his union with us there would be no need for the cross and the resurrection for his “atonement had already been accomplished fully and entirely in the birth of Jesus, in the bare assumption of our human nature into oneness with the Son of God.”⁵⁵ The Incarnation and the atonement are essentially tied together in his work to recreate our human nature. The teaching that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature in the Incarnation was never to argue that he was fully human, but rather that it was a necessary part of rooting out the corruption of sin from within our fallen natures. It was for the sake of atonement.

⁵² Ibid., 228–229.

⁵³ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 231.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 232.

⁵⁵ Torrance, *Atonement*, 163.

The Fallen Human Nature Recreated and Personalized

Jesus' *en-hypostatic* union with us is a personalizing union. This personalizing union results in the reality that "Jesus Christ is now the fount of all that is truly personal among us; we are not personal in virtue of some personal substance inherent in ourselves, but only through what we received from Jesus Christ ... to be personal, therefore is to be in Christ."⁵⁶ What this means is that when we share in Jesus' justification, sanctification, reconciliation, etc. we are "personalised or humanised as persons who are in true relations with God and other persons and we live out a new moral life and order before God and others."⁵⁷ For Torrance, this comes about through Christ's atoning reconciliation in which he exchanges our sin and corruption for his holiness and righteousness. Reconciliation is the "exchange affected by substitution or expiation, that is, atonement or reconciliation through atonement."⁵⁸ This reconciliation takes place within Jesus Christ in the hypostatic union of divinity and humanity and thus his humanity is essential for the recreation of our human nature.⁵⁹ This is all grounded in Torrance's understanding of the soteriological significance of the hypostatic union and the homoousion as previously discussed. Kim notes in agreement,

his humanity also underlies the onto-relational reconciliation between God and humanity which is evident in the two doctrines: of the homoousion and the hypostatic union. Torrance derives the soteriological significance of the humanity of Christ from the two doctrines, for the two together expound how Jesus Christ mediates reconciliation (or the actuality of atonement) not in an external but in an internal act, as it were, in our estranged and sinful humanity.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Thomas F. Torrance, "The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition," *Modern Theology* 4 (1988): 318.

⁵⁷ Hakbong Kim, "Person, Personhood and the Humanity of Christ: Christocentric Anthropology and Ethics in Thomas F. Torrance" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh. June 29, 2020), 80.

⁵⁸ Torrance, *Atonement*, 138.

⁵⁹ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 186.

⁶⁰ Kim, "Person, Personhood and the Humanity of Christ," 89.

The fallen nature of Christ is thus key in understanding the anthropology of Torrance in which the new humanity is discussed for it is only within the human nature of Christ that reconciliation and atonement are achieved. That is, reconciliation and atonement are achieved from *within* our fallen human nature not because it is what ensures his *full* humanity but because that fallen humanity is the humanity that needs to be healed. This, reconciliation and atonement, is achieved vicariously, that is on our behalf. As Colyer notes, this act of atonement takes place “within *our* actual humanity from birth, through life, death and resurrection” which then in turn becomes “all of *our* basic responses to God.”⁶¹

The fallen and vicarious humanity of Christ is thus essential for the recreation of that fallen human nature. Torrance argues,

It is only in Jesus Christ, however, that the Word or Son really becomes flesh, but in becoming flesh of our flesh he entered into our Adamic existence as a man made of a woman, made under the law. Within that continuity of Adamic existence, fallen existence, he is nevertheless true man, and true Son of God in true union with the Father. In his truth and obedience Jesus Christ breaks through the continuity of Adamic existence and opens up a new continuity in a new Adam, in a new humanity.⁶²

Because Jesus came in solidarity with fallen humanity by assuming a fallen human nature it is possible to recreate that nature and, thus, for Jesus to be the second

⁶¹ Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance*, 138. Emphasis mine. Kim helpfully points out the twofold significance of the vicarious humanity saying, “In the concept of Christ’s vicarious humanity, we find two points of extreme theological significance for Torrance: (1) human faith is grounded in the vicarious faith of Christ which underlies the doctrine of justification and (2) the vicarious humanity of Christ does not undermine individual and personal faith and response to God, but rather undergirds and intensifies them.” Kim, “Person, Personhood and the Humanity of Christ,” 96. Or to put it in the words of Torrance himself: “Jesus steps into the actual situation where we are summoned to have faith in God, to believe and trust in him, and he acts in our place and in our stead from within the depths of our unfaithfulness and provides us freely with a faithfulness in which we may share ... That is to say, if we think of belief, trust or faith as forms of human activity before God, then we must think of Jesus Christ as believing, trusting and having faith in God the Father on our behalf and in our place,” Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 82.

⁶² Torrance, *Incarnation*, 94.

Adam. Sin has dehumanized us and it is in this dehumanized humanity that the eternal Son joins himself to us to heal us. In other words, it is "in and through him, therefore, [that] humanity which has been dehumanised through sin, finds its true being and true human nature in union with God."⁶³

It is on the grounds of Jesus' obedient life, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension that our humanity is *personalized*. What this mean is that

in virtue of the fact that the Person who became incarnate in Jesus Christ is the creator Word of God by whom all men are made and in whom they consist, and is therefore the Person from whom all creaturely personal being is derived, the Incarnation must be regarded as creative, personalising activity.⁶⁴

In order to understand what it means that our humanity was personalized, it is necessary to explain how it is that sin depersonalized our humanity.

Sin depersonalized our humanity in the sense that our person suffers from "a deeply set schizoid condition which regularly ... gives rise to insincerity and hypocrisy in us" in which we "become detached from what we actually are, so that it becomes a deceptive mask."⁶⁵ This problem results in a self-centered way of existence in which we are "cut off from genuine relations with others, so that the very personal relations in which persons subsist as persons are damaged and twisted."⁶⁶ It is into this dehumanized way of existence that Jesus becomes incarnate in such a way that he himself does not fall prey to this depersonalized way of existence, but rather he takes that way of existence and he "healed the ontological split in human being through the hypostatic and atoning union which he embodied within it."⁶⁷ In doing this he then "reintegrated image and reality in and

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 67–68.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 68–69.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 69.

through a human life" of perfect obedience and love.⁶⁸ Thus, our human persons are re-humanized in Jesus in the sense that "he redeems us from thralldom to depersonalising forces, depersonalising our human being in relation to himself and to other human beings."⁶⁹

Conclusion

It has been argued in this paper that Thomas F. Torrance's understanding of Jesus' assumption of a fallen human nature is essential to his understanding of the recreation and personalization of our human nature and person. I showed what Torrance means when he argues that Jesus assumed a fallen nature by giving clarity to definitions regarding the fallen nature and by clarifying the purpose of this assumption as atonement and not simply as a grounding for Jesus' full humanity. I then showed how this assumption of the fallen nature grounds the recreation of our human nature through the obedient life of Jesus. I concluded by showing how this act of atonement grounds the personalizing of our person in and through the personalizing person of Jesus Christ. This is not intended to be the end of this conversation by any means but is offered in a spirit of clarity and application as often this discussion of the fallen human nature is debated solely with respect to the plausibility of this view. I have attempted to show how this view is crucial to our understanding of anthropology and particularly the new humanity that Jesus created in his Incarnation and atonement.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid. This has many ethical implications that are outside of the purview of this project. Jesus re-personalized us in both our vertical relations and horizontal relations. That is, our relations with God and our relations with each other. It is on these grounds that Torrance discusses the doctrine of the Church. He argues, "in light of the fact that as the Mediator between God and man Jesus Christ is the personalising Person and the humanising man, we look back at the doctrine of the Church, we may be able to see more clearly why the Church is not merely a society of individuals gathered together on moral grounds and externally connected with one another through common ethical ideals, for there is no way through external organisation to effect the personalising or humanising of people in society or therefore of transforming human social relations," *ibid.*, 71.