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The Relationship between Incarnation and Atonement in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance

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I. Introduction

1. For Thomas F. Torrance the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed with its central place accorded to Jesus Christ seems to be the prime and most valid starting-point for a discussion in Christology. As a realist, Torrance stands firmly in the tradition of this creed and the theology of the Greek Fathers which resulted in and surrounded this confession of the Catholic Church in the fourth century A.D. In this article I will explore how Torrance perceives the relationship between incarnation and atonement springing from his understanding of Greek patristic theology.
2. One could say that most of Torrance's discussion of Christology is shaped and fashioned by patristic theology. However, he is mostly fascinated by and indebted to Athanasius and expounds at great length how the thoughts, insights and faith of the fourth century Bishop of Alexandria helped to shape Nicene theology. The soteriological emphasis of Nicene theology in order to defend the complete reality and integrity of the humanity of Christ against Arian and Apollinarian heretics and the soteriological orientation of Athanasius¹ in his whole approach to the doctrine of the Son and his consubstantial relation to the Father are central points in Torrance's Christology, and they will also be the main pillars of this article.
3. Inseparably linked with and preceding this soteriological emphasis is what Torrance calls the "king-pin of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed" - the *homoousion* which affirms the oneness in being between the incarnate Son of God and the God the Father. This being "of one substance with the Father," as the Latins expressed it, is of most vital importance because without that ontic unity there is no Mediator between God and humanity. Without the *homoousion* the identity of Christ has nothing to do whatsoever with any self-giving or self-revealing from the side of the eternal God. Without it, according to Torrance, the whole structure of the Creed and the Gospel itself would disintegrate and collapse.
4. I have chosen to structure most of this article according to the various aspects of atoning redemption that underlie the Gospel but are essentially rooted in the Old Testament. These concepts are all present in the patristic doctrines of atonement although they are not used systematically. They are also acknowledged by Torrance. I believe that they can expound and demonstrate in a profound way the different aspects of the relation between atonement and incarnation in Torrance's patristic theology.

II. God as human being

5. Let us start with a very basic or general clarification of Torrance's view of the incarnation, which he sees most adequately described in the Nicene *homoousion*, and its relation to atonement. It is obvious that he shares the same view as the Greek Fathers and their non-dualistic theology in which the Incarnation and Atonement are inseparably one.
6. In his first Epistle to Timothy Paul writes that "God our Saviour desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one Mediator between God and men, the man being Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:4-6). Torrance points out with Athanasius that this indicates a twofold movement from God to humanity and from humanity to God involved in the mediation of Christ. Christ's divine as well as his human activity must be considered as issuing from one Person. This shows us clearly the soteriological significance of the Nicene *homoousion*. On the one hand, since only God can save, we are only saved if Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son, is true God from true God; on the other hand, in order to touch our human existence and condition he also has to be truly human. The Gospel message makes clear that Christ embodies both elements in Himself: the personal presence and activity of God in His human actuality. Jesus Christ is God really having become human like us. Torrance writes: "Only God can save, but he saves precisely as man - Jesus Christ is God's act, God acting personally and immediately as man in and through him, and thus at once in a divine and in a human manner" (The Trinitarian Faith 149).
7. Torrance expounds the basic Nicene principle as follows. In his incarnate Person, Christ is Mediator in such a way that he contains both sides of the mediating relationship. Being God of God and human of human in one and the same Person, he does not combine two realities, divine and human, joined together but is **one** Reality, being both God and human. We cannot think of Jesus Christ as God *in* human, something which could, for example, be said of a prophet, or as the appearance of God in human life. Both fall short of what the Incarnation of Christ really was. We must rather think of Christ as God coming to us *as* human. The Nicene *homoousion* signifies that in the Incarnation the Person of Christ was One who really was God of the nature of God and human of the nature of humanity - One being wholly God having come as true human. The staggering nature of this truth becomes evident when we realize that God the Creator has come into his creation as one of the creatures he has made, yet he remains the Creator, the creating and sustaining force behind everything. Although he has become one of his creatures he did not cease to be the divine being he eternally is.
8. Consequently, so Torrance, Christ has to be seen as mediating divine revelation and atonement "in virtue of what he is". He is not just an agent of that mediation to us but is the Mediator of a divine revelation and reconciliation that is not other than what he is in his own personal Identity and Reality. What He is and what He mediates are one and the same. It is due to this that the Gospel witnesses to us of Jesus Christ not just as bearing the Word of God but as *being* the Word of God. He is God's Truth personally addressing us human beings as one of us. For that reason Christ is also pronounced in Scripture as *being* the propitiation for our transgressions mediating atonement between God and humanity and humanity and God. He does not just work it out in some external way for us and then brings it to us, but He is the propitiation in His own personal Being²
9. It is precisely this oneness of Mediator and Mediation in the Person Jesus Christ which is of ultimate importance for us to comprehend because "the very essence of the Gospel is bound up with it." Torrance points out that if we allow the separation of the Person and the Word or Work of Jesus Christ our understanding of the Gospel will crumble and finally break down altogether.
10. Again following the lead of Athanasius, Torrance understands atoning redemption to happen **within** the meditorial life and Person of the Incarnate Jesus Christ. In the same way Athanasius conceived the *logoj* to be internal to the Being of God, he also thought of atonement as occurring not simply in the external relations of Jesus Christ with sinful humans but in the *inner relations of the Mediator* (mesithj). It was the whole human being, body and soul including human affections and mind, that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, came to redeem by becoming fully human himself, effecting our salvation in and through the very humanity he appropriated from us. Torrance points out that "a realist approach to the fact that in Jesus Christ God the Son has united himself with us in our actual existence, combined with the view that atonement takes place within the incarnate life and being of the Mediator, led Nicene theology to give full place to the teaching of St Paul about the way in which God in Christ has substituted himself for us in making our sin and death his own that we may partake of his divine life and righteousness" (The Trinitarian Faith 161). However, if His inhumanity (enanqrwpsij), in which He appropriated from us our body and soul making them His own, were in any way incomplete or inferior, everything that Jesus Christ is said to have done offering himself in sacrifice "for our sakes," "on our behalf" and "in our place" would be absolutely meaningless.³
11. We can see that, like the Greek Fathers, Torrance closely links the personal and the ontological in his account of incarnational redemption.⁴ By making himself one with us through the Incarnation, the Son of God did not only appropriate our human nature to himself but also took on Himself our lost condition which is subject to condemnation and death. He did all this to substitute himself in our place, thus discharging our debts, and presenting Himself in atoning sacrifice to God for us. Since the actual nature of death (as we experience it) is affected by sin and its judgement, Christ, by making our death and fate his own, took on himself the punishment due to all in death. Thus He crushed the "power of sin and its stronghold in death" and redeemed humanity from its domination.
12. Torrance points out that the approach to an understanding of the atonement from the position of "oude swmatoj monou, alla kai yuchj en autw tw Logw swthria gegonen" is of great importance. This principle, which is essential to Nicene theology, shows how the Greek Fathers rejected dualist forms of thought not allowing them to determine the meaning of atonement. They insisted, so Torrance, that the Incarnation and the atonement have to be thought together "in terms of their intrinsic coherence in the divine-human Person of the Mediator." Thus the Incarnation has to be seen as essentially redemptive, and redemption has to be seen as inherently incarnational or ontological. The effect of this understanding for Christian theology was (and is) that it provides a unifying centre for the believer to comprehend the saving work of Christ.⁵

III. Life or death

13. Torrance has been interpreted as or accused of reducing soteriology to Christology by identifying the Work of Christ with his Person.⁶ This seems, however, to be a misinterpretation of his emphasis of the Person of Jesus Christ in his soteriology which undoubtedly stems from the great influence of patristic theology on him. Nevertheless, this is an important issue and has to be addressed. Narrowed down, we could express it as the question whether atonement takes place in the incarnate life and person of Christ or in his death. At closer inspection we will, however, see that here we are not dealing with an either/or question but with an issue which goes deeper than that.
14. The Son of God embodies in his Incarnation the "creative source and ground of all human being" in himself as human being. Internal to the being of God and as the Head of creation, he is the only one who can act on behalf of all and save humanity. In complete somatic unity with humanity by taking human nature upon himself he offered himself for us in atoning sacrifice. In doing so he acted instead of and on behalf of all. Thus, as Torrance points out, "the redemptive work of Christ was fully representative and truly universal in its range. Its vicarious efficacy has its force through the union of his divine Person as Creator and Lord with us in our creaturely being, whereby he lays hold of us in himself and acts for us from out of the inner depths of his coexistence with us and our existence in him, delivering us from the sentence of death upon us, and from the corruption and perdition that have overtaken us" (The Trinitarian Faith 155-156).

15. Some have understood Torrance to connect the Incarnation with redemption in a way implying that atonement is achieved simply through the hypostatic union of divine Logos and "decaying humanity."⁷ However, to understand the Athanasian statement, "He became man that we might be made divine" in such a way is a serious misinterpretation for Torrance. In order to grasp his position better, it might prove beneficial to look at his understanding of the doctrine which Reformed theology has called the *Active and Passive Obedience* of Christ.

16. The positive fulfilment of his Sonship in the whole life of Jesus is denoted as *active obedience*. Maintaining a perfect filial relationship his own loving self-offering to the Father for and instead of us was his active obedience as well as his own faithful appropriation of his Father's will and Word for us. Christ's willing acceptance and submission to the Father's judgement of sinful humanity which He Himself had assumed is denoted as *passive obedience*. It is manifested above all "in the passion he endured in the expiation of our sins" unto the death on the Cross. However Calvin conceives Christ's passion as having begun with his birth for his whole life was in a way a bearing of the Cross which found its telos in the Cross on Calvary.

17. Torrance points out that the distinction between the two kinds of obedience in Reformed theology serves not to divide them but to emphasize that both are absolutely integral to Christ's work of reconciliation and that, as some have done, atonement cannot be limited only to his passive submission to the death penalty for our sins. Calvin points out that right from the outset of his incarnation Christ started to pay for the salvation of humanity. In light of the Nicene *homoousion* it becomes evident that with the Incarnation in the one Person Jesus Christ there took place an ontic union of the one judging, God, and the one being judged, the human being. "All through his life, but especially in his death, Jesus bore in himself the infliction and judgement of God upon our sinful humanity, and wrought out in his life and death expiation and amendment for our sin" (Theology in Reconstruction 155). The mutual unity of Christ's active and passive obedience in his whole life is important to note for it means that in our justification both of them are imputed to us: Christ's passive righteousness in which our sins are satisfied for in him suffering God's judgement in his death, and his active righteousness in which the holy will of the Father is fulfilled in his obedient life.

18. What this means for Torrance's doctrine of atonement is this. Justification is not just the non-imputation of our sins through Christ's pardon but it also means that we positively share in his divine-human righteousness. "We are saved, therefore, not only by the death of Christ which he suffered for our sakes, but [also] by his life which he lived in our flesh for our sakes and which God raised from the dead that we may share in it through the power of the Spirit. It is in that light, of his atoning and justifying life, that we are to understand the Incarnation of the Son in the whole course of his obedience from his birth to his resurrection" (Theology in Reconstruction 155).

19. However, Torrance also points out that it is not only Christ's active and passive obedience that is referred to when we speak of the sanctification of our human nature, including our estranged and rebellious mind, that was achieved by him, but also the union he established between our human and his divine nature in his birth, life, death, and resurrection. As we have seen before, following biblical and early patristic tradition, Torrance believes that the Incarnation and the atonement are linked internally for it is in the "ontological depth of human being and existence" that atoning expiation and propitiation are worked out. That Christ the Son of God penetrated into our human being and existence as the son of Mary is, for example, shown in his genealogy recorded in the Gospel according to St Matthew which shows that he was incorporated into generations of sinners. However, when he made these generations of humanity his own, he united his divine nature with our sinful nature, "precisely to forgive, heal and sanctify in himself."

Thus atoning reconciliation began to be actualized with the conception and birth of Jesus of the Virgin Mary when he identified himself with our fallen and estranged humanity, but that was a movement which Jesus fulfilled throughout the whole course of his sinless life as the obedient servant of the Lord, in which he subjected what he took from us to the ultimate judgement of God's holy love and brought the healing and redeeming power of God to bear directly upon it in himself. From his birth to his death and resurrection on our behalf he sanctified what he assumed through his own self-consecration as incarnate Son to the Father, and in sanctifying it brought the divine judgement to bear directly upon our human nature both in the holy life he lived and in the holy death he died in atoning and reconciling sacrifice before God. That was a vicarious activity which was brought to its triumphant fulfilment and which received the verdict of the Father's complete approval in the resurrection of Jesus as God's beloved Son from the dead and the rebirth of our humanity in him (The Mediation of Christ 50-51).⁸

20. This essential element in the obedience of the Son is of supreme importance because solely through the hypostatic union Christ gives us not only his negative righteousness, which is the remission of our sins, but also his positive righteousness, which is his life in perfect love, obedience, and filial relationship to the Father from his cradle to his grave. Torrance warns that if this is neglected not only would Christ's active and passive obedience disintegrate in our understanding and doctrine, but we would come to see justification simply as a forensic non-imputation of sin. Furthermore, we would not be in a position to see Christ's humanity in its saving significance, that is, to give "the whole life of the historical Jesus its rightful place in the doctrine of the Atonement." Thus it is of utmost importance to give fullest attention to the place of the union of human and divine natures in the one Person Jesus Christ.

21. Torrance argues that to start from a statement like Melancthon's, "This is to know Christ, to know his benefits," which is to set off from the saving work of Christ and from what he means to you in your experience, results in Christ himself disappearing behind his benefits. Torrance strongly rejects such a viewpoint where the incarnation and the incarnate life of Christ the Son of God is simply seen as a "prelude or necessary means of atonement," thus limiting atonement to what Christ did in his death on the Cross. Atonement which is not itself ontologically rooted in Christ or in God is what Torrance calls "Ereignistheologie."

22. It is evident that what is required is an understanding of justification and atonement where Jesus Christ really occupies the center. In this way interpretation of everything is made by reference to who he was and is.

After all it was not the **death** of Jesus that constituted atonement, but Jesus Christ the Son of God offering Himself in sacrifice for us. Everything depends on **who** He was, for the significance of His acts in life and death depends on the nature of His Person. It was He who died for us, He who made atonement through His one self-offering in life and death. Hence we must allow the Person of Christ to determine for us the nature of His saving work, rather than the other way round. The detachment of atonement from incarnation is undoubtedly revealed by history to be one of the most harmful mistakes of Evangelical Churches (God and Rationality 64).⁹

23. Thus we see that the question is not whether atonement took place in the earthly life of Jesus Christ or in his death on the Cross. The crucial question of atonement is who Jesus Christ was. If this essential question is then considered, as we have just done, and answered in the light of the incarnation (or the *homoousion*), then we will see that neither the earthly life nor the death on the Cross play a primary role nor does one supersede the other, but both assume a role significantly "side by side," where one is in need of the other in order to portray a whole and complete picture of the doctrine of incarnational atonement.

IV. Old Testament conceptions of atoning redemption

24. Jesus Christ himself explained that he had come as a servant to give his life in an act of sacrifice for us. Thus resting on Christ's own self-interpretation, Torrance points out that the New Testament concept of atoning redemption (*apolutrwsij*) assumes a central role in the doctrine of atonement. In order to clarify the term, we have to turn to the Old Testament. Modern research has shown that behind the Old Testament conception of redemption there are three basic terms and their cognates. Although all three denote different aspects of divine redemption they are all profoundly interrelated.

A. hdp

25. The first term is hdp. Together with its cognates it is applied to express the aspect of the "mighty acts of God" in the Old Testament concept of redemption. Significantly these acts bring immediate deliverance from oppression of evil and out of God's judgement upon it. It also carries the notion of offering a life in substitution for another as the cost of redemption and, according to Torrance, emphasises the "dramatic nature of the redeeming act as a sheer intervention on the part of God in human affairs."

B. rpk

26. The second term is rpk. Together with its cognates it is applied to express the "expiatory form of the act of redemption" in the Old Testament. It speaks of the barrier of sin and guilt which exists between God and humanity as being done away by the sacrifice and of the propitiation made between the two factions. Calling it a primarily priestly or "cultic" concept of redemption, Torrance emphasises that the subject of the atoning act is always God. Thus even though in the Old Testament it is liturgically carried out by a high priest, the human act has to be seen as only a witness to the fact that God himself makes atonement and blots out sin by his own "judicial and merciful act." Both God's judgement of wrong by offering an equivalent and the act of restoration to holiness before Him are involved here in the understanding of atonement.

C. l)g

27. The third term is l)g. Together with its cognates it is used to express the aspect of someone redeeming another person out of a situation of bondage or forfeited rights. The "redeemer" or l)g, upon whom the emphasis is placed in this type of redemption, possesses some kind of kinship or relationship or bond of affinity or love to the person in need, and thus he can claim the cause for these needs as his own and stands in for his kinsman who cannot free or redeem himself. This "ontological" concept of redemption is applied in the Old Testament to God acting on behalf of Israel by virtue of its special covenant relationship.

28. As mentioned before, these three concepts of redemption not only overlap each other in the teachings of the Old Testament but they also modify each other "within the unique relations of God with his people." Thus they are quite different from secular concepts of redemption. It is significant that all three concepts are applied in the Old Testament paradigm event of divine redemption - Israel's redemption from Egypt in the Passover and the Exodus. Torrance also points out that in Deutero-Isaiah these three concepts are also applied to God's servant - the Holy One of Israel - who offers himself for the transgressions of Israel and intercedes for them. However, the Israelites did not identify this servant with the divine l)g because the idea of God becoming incarnate within the existence of his people seemed impossible for them. This identification was left to be made in the New Testament in God's incarnate Son. However, Torrance explains that in doing so the New Testament reinterpreted this Old Testament conception of redemption "in terms of what the Son of God had actually become and had actually done in the flesh."

29. Neither Old nor New Testament make systematic use of these three aspects. Nevertheless, modern research shows that in both parts of the Bible all of them are taken for granted, and so they are found woven together in the New Testament in the "apostolic understanding and presentation of the vicarious life and death of Christ" in such a profound way that they seeped into the mind and understanding of the primitive Church. Thus it shaped the early Church's preaching and teaching about Christ, the priestly ministry of the servant and the "atoning sacrifice which he offered in and through himself" for us.

V. The significance of the Incarnation within the three aspects of Atonement found in the Old Testament conception of redemption

30. The three aspects of redemption which we have just considered indicate that the doctrine of atonement can be seen as being composed of three elements represented by these three aspects: the dramatic aspect of atonement, the cultic or priestly aspect of atonement and the ontological aspect of atonement. Thus, since all three aspects of atoning redemption overlap and essentially contribute to each other, it is obvious that a

sound biblically based doctrine of atonement has to include and incorporate all of them. Torrance points out that if one of them were removed or made the sole basis of a doctrine of atonement, it would lead to a serious distortion of the doctrine of atonement and a dislocation of the structure of these three concepts or aspects "within the incarnate constitution of the Mediator." Since I am dealing in this article with the relationship between atonement and incarnation, I want to show now the significance of the incarnation within each of these three aspects of atonement or atoning redemption seen from the perspective of T.F. Torrance's patristically influenced theology (or Christology).

A. The significance of the Incarnation within the ontological aspect of atoning redemption

31. Torrance explains that in the thinking of Irenaeus, who produced a rich theological development of this biblical concept of atoning redemption, it was the ontological mode which provided the general frame. The "powerful significance" of the other two modes was found within the IJg-frame. In the ontological mode the emphasis is on the Redeemer, the Person of Jesus Christ. As the IJg, the Son of God actualises kinship with humanity and through his incarnational union with us reconciles the human race to God and brings us into union and communion with his Father. As we shall see the ontological aspect of the IJg is of greatest importance for the doctrine of atonement.

32. In his incarnation the IJg of God came to his own, but they did not receive him. Humanity had rebelled against the One from whom they derived their being and had lapsed into the darkness of enmity. Thus, according to Torrance, the IJg had not only to penetrate into the "contingent and finite condition" of our existence but also into our sin, our alienation, our guilty existence under the sentence of divine judgement and the "disintegration of our human being in death." This means, therefore, that he came and shared our lost and deprived existence. He entered

into the disordered state of our created rationalities in which finite distinctions are damaged and distorted into contradictions, in order to engage with the inhuman forces of darkness that had encroached upon the bodies and minds of men, to struggle with the perverse nature of an alienated creation, to meet the full hostility of evil by accepting and bearing it in Himself, and to make an end of it in His own vicarious life and death (God and Rationality 143).

33. But Jesus Christ, although he had assumed the fallen Adamic nature of men from the Virgin Mary, lived a holy, trusting and loving life of complete filial obedience to the Father in heaven and carried the human nature into new being through his resurrection. Thus it was from within our estranged and impaired existence that the incarnate IJg was able to redeem the human race from its subjection to futility and negation. From within He recreated the relation of humanity to God and realized "perfect humanity on earth." From within our estranged and impaired existence he offered the true response of humanity in "person, word and act" to God. The Evangelists make clear that exclusively through taking part fully in our human creaturely existence can the Creator issue atonement in the restoration of what he has created.¹⁰ In the incarnation the Creator IJg once and for all penetrated into the existence of his creation binding "it up with his own eternal Being and Life." Thus what was the ground of our existence as creatures from beyond our existence before became through the union of the Creator IJg with his creation the ground of our existence from within. And so through this ontological union the IJg undergirds and sustains his creation "from within its natural process in such a way as to establish his reality and meaning as human being and to realize his distinctive response toward God in the fullness of his creaturely freedom and integrity" (God and Rationality 144). Torrance makes it very clear that the IJg achieved all this by his "condescension to participate in the finite being" of mankind with its limitations and struggles and not by direct fiat. Thus He fulfilled the Father's saving purpose for creation from within his incarnate existence and life on Earth in the space and time of his own creation.

34. In order to have a better grasp of the deep significance of the incarnation in terms of the ontological aspect of atoning redemption, I will highlight this fundamental truth from two different perspectives.

35. (1) As we have pointed out before, Jesus Christ is God incarnate uniting divine and human nature and thus atoning reconciliation takes place within the personal Being of Christ. Thus there can be no separation of His Person and Work - they are one. What he is is what he does. His own incarnate Person is not something separate from the "mighty Acts of God's love for our salvation." Jesus Christ is, brings, actualises and embodies the Gospel of at-one-ment or reconciliation. Thus the Gospel and Christ are inseparable and belong ontologically together. Christ's atoning sacrifice is not some kind of superficial socio-moral or judicial transaction between God and humanity, which would be the case if he were a created and temporal center ontologically external to God. But since atoning reconciliation took place within the personal existence of Christ as the Mediator between God and humanity, it must be understood as having taken place within the ontological roots and actual condition of the human creaturely existence he assumed to save humanity. Torrance makes this most clear when he writes: "In him the Incarnation and Atonement are one and inseparable, for atoning reconciliation falls within the incarnate constitution of his Person as Mediator, and it is on that ground and from that source that atoning reconciliation embraces all mankind and is freely available to every person" (Mediation 73). Thus, Torrance points out, atonement is not an act of God "done *ab extra*" upon humanity, but an act done *ab intra* in humankind's stead and on its behalf by God having become human. As an act of reconciling atonement, it is at the same time an act from God to humanity and an act from humanity to God.

36. If we look at the Nicene theologians we see that while they recognised humanity's basic inability to comprehend the concept of God's atoning self-identification with sinful humanity they, nevertheless, felt compelled to declare their conviction that Christ bore our infirmities, sins and judgement not in some external way but within himself. Otherwise, they were convinced humanity would not be able to benefit in any way from his "saving, healing and sanctifying activity." They also felt the necessity to express their conviction that Christ had taken up the whole human being, body and soul, into himself, otherwise humanity could not be saved in the completeness and integrity of his human being. This conviction was rooted in the soteriological principle that only what the incarnate IJg has taken up from us into himself is saved. This point was stressed especially after the rise of the Apollinarian heresy.¹¹

37. The Nicene theologians pointed out that since it is in his rational human soul that humanity has fallen and become enslaved to sin Christ had to redeem the human mind as well. Both Athanasius and Apollinarius insisted that it is in the mind, and not only in the flesh, that sin is entrenched. However, this led them to different notions of incarnation. Apollinarius insisted on a notion of incarnation where Christ had not assumed the human mind, while Athanasius saw it to be of vital importance that Christ assumed our alienated and fallen human mind or soul in order to "redeem it and effect reconciliation deep within the rational center of human being." Otherwise, in the view of Athanasius, redemption would be empty of any saving significance for us. Thus we have the stress of the Nicene and Cappadocian theologians on the redemption of the whole human in the whole Christ.¹²

38. Torrance uses statements like Athanasius' "The salvation not of the body only but of the soul was worked out *in the Logos himself*" (*Ad Ant.* 7) to show the approach of Nicene theology to the understanding of atonement. The Nicene Fathers, as mentioned before, refused to let the meaning of the atonement be determined by dualist forms of thought, which meant that the incarnation and the atonement were allowed to be "thought together in their intrinsic coherence in the divine human Person of the Mediator." Consequently "the incarnation was seen to be essentially redemptive and redemption was seen to be inherently incarnational or ontological. Union with God in and through Jesus Christ who is of one and the same being with God belongs to the inner heart of the atonement" (The Trinitarian Faith 159).

39. The incarnate Christ who claimed kinship with us assumed our fallen, guilt-laden humanity and thereby really took upon himself the sin, guilt, violence and wickedness of humanity. Then through his atoning self-sacrifice and self-consecration the IJg Jesus Christ redeemed us by doing away with our evil and sin, healing and sanctifying our human nature from within. Thus he could present us to the Father "as those who are redeemed and consecrated through himself." All that he did as Mediator who brought God and humankind together in the ontological union of his own Person actualising the reconciliation and recreation of humanity within the "holiness and perfection of his own sinless human life, crucified for our sins and raised again for our justification."

40. (2) The relation of Christ to God belongs to the inner relation of God's own life and love, to the union and communion of love which God is "in his own being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Thus it was in the form of the "hypostatic union" that God gave himself in the incarnation of his Son, uniting divine and human nature in this one Person. Torrance points out that this is the "immediate ground" for the whole work of reconciliation and mediation of Christ in our human existence. In this hypostatic union, divine and human nature have to be thought of as being united in the one Person of Christ in such a way that they are neither separated from nor confounded with one another. Neither nature suffers loss or change or is diminished or impaired through the relation to the other. In the hypostatic union the human nature of Jesus Christ is taken up, established, secured and anchored for ever in its undiminished integrity in the Son of God.

41. This hypostatic union, however, is actualised in the fallen condition of our estranged humanity, which means that it operates at the same time as a reconciling union in which our sinful human nature is redeemed, healed and

brought into perfect sanctifying union with divine nature in Jesus Christ. Embodied with the deep tensions and contradictions of our rebellious humanity, the hypostatic union took on the form of a dynamic atoning union which steadily worked itself out within the structures of human existence all through the course of our Lord's vicarious earthly life from his birth to his crucifixion and resurrection. Incarnation and atonement were internally and essentially intertwined in all he became for our sake and all he underwent in paying the price for our redemption (Mediation 76).¹³

42. Torrance explains that one should be able now to see that Christ's hypostatic union and atoning union implied and interpenetrated each other in his mediation of reconciliation to humanity. The actualization of the hypostatic union within the conditions of our estranged human nature would have been impossible without removing the sin and guilt of fallen humanity "through atonement and the sanctification of human nature" which Christ assumed into union with his divine nature.

On the other hand, atoning union could not have been actualised within the depth of ontological human existence where human beings are alienated from God without the profound penetration into those depths that took place through the Incarnation and the hypostatic union between divine and human nature that it involved. That is what came about in Jesus Christ, the Mediator, in whom atoning union and hypostatic union served each other (Mediation 76-77).

43. Thus we can say that through the interpenetration of hypostatic and atoning union Christ took hold of both sides of the split and reconciled them or made at-one-ment in his own Person by removing that which had perpetuated the split - our sin and guilt. This reconciliation of humanity to God and God to humanity set the whole moral order upon a new basis. The understanding of the atonement in terms of the inner ontological relations of the hypostatic union implies that the very basis for a merely moral or legal account of atonement is itself part of the actual state of affairs between the two sides that need to be set right. The discrepancy between what we are and what we ought to be seems to lie at the root of the moral order that obtains in our fallen world. However, Christ's new moral order was embedded in himself for he was the one person who truly was and is the one he ought to be. Thus throughout his whole life Christ was healing, sanctifying and humanising the estranged human nature he had assumed from us and converted it "from its estrangement from the Creator back to its proper relation to him."

44. We can see the significance of the incarnation in the ontological or IJg mode of atonement. Christ, by uniting our fallen human nature and his holy divine nature, claimed our predicament of sin and guilt as his own and provides in and through his own Person the means of redemption or atonement for us, bringing us into union and communion with God. Thus it is the ontological aspect of atonement that is utmost, as in the doctrine of saving recapitulation and its restoration through his vicarious obedience.

B. The significance of the incarnation within the dramatic aspect of atoning redemption

45. Again following the lead of Irenaeus, Torrance sees the hdp mode of atoning redemption operating within the atoning ontological union of Christ with us as we have seen in the l)g mode. That is to say, we start at the point where the sonship of Jesus Christ belongs to the inner relations of God's own eternal Being. This means not only that what Jesus Christ reveals of God to us is real knowledge of God as he is in himself, but also that while our status of children of God falls outside His Being, for we are only his creatures and utterly distinct from His Being, Jesus Christ is Son of God within the Being of God. What he is and does falls within the eternal Being of the Godhead. It is within this doctrine of the Mediator, the doctrine of the incarnate Son who is of one and the same being with the Father which constitutes the central point of the Nicene Creed, that we have to start with the dramatic aspect of atoning redemption. The crucial point for the hdp mode of atoning redemption lies in the "fact that he who becomes incarnate in Jesus Christ, he who mediates divine revelation and reconciliation to mankind in and through himself, is God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God - that is to say, Jesus Christ is to be acknowledged as God in the same sense as the Father is acknowledged as God, for it is in virtue of his Deity that his saving work as man has its validity" (Mediation 64).

46. Thus regarding the Incarnation of Jesus Christ as falling within the Reality of God himself, we also have to see everything he said and did, his whole work of atoning reconciliation, as being within the Being of God. We can say, therefore, that atoning reconciliation and redemption in Jesus Christ must be understood as act or movement of God in his love toward humanity delivering us from evil and death and drawing us into the eternal Communion of love which He is in Himself. Expressed in another way, through the incarnation of Jesus Christ the "fullness of God in his own divine light, life and love" has been projected into the human existence of our world, "so that the complete Being of God dwells in him and is embodied in him," and as such the atoning redemption from sin, guilt and death and reconciliation and justification achieved through atoning expiation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ constituted (or was) a mighty and victorious act of intervention of God on our behalf. The mighty hand or victorious act of God, states Torrance, "was the holiness of Jesus Christ, his obedience unto the Cross" and his victory over evil.

C. The significance of the Incarnation within the priestly or cultic aspect of atoning redemption

47. Interpenetrating both the ontological (l)g and the dramatic (hdp) mode of atoning redemption is the priestly or cultic (rpk) mode of atoning redemption. Gregory Nazianzen explained: "In the character of the form of a servant, he condescended to his fellow servants and servants, and assumed a form that is not his own, bearing all me and mine in himself, so that in himself he may consume the bad, as fire does wax, or as the sun does the mist of the earth, and that I may partake of what is his through being conjoined to him" (Gregory Naz.: Or. 30.5-6). In other words, the priestly self-sacrifice and self-oblation of Christ throughout the whole of his earthly life unto the Cross, his intercession and self-substitution for us have to be thought of as belonging to the inner heart of atonement and its mediation which he fulfilled between God and humanity.

48. Torrance points out that according to Nicene theology Jesus Christ's vicarious redeeming and reconciling work on our behalf in virtue of his kinship with us "takes place within his incarnate constitution and earthly life as the Mediator" between God and humanity. Thus Christ's activity has to be thought of in terms of "representation" and "substitution." In trying to explain more precisely what this vicarious activity of Christ involved, the Nicene theologians applied terms like ransom, sacrifice, propitiation, expiation and reconciliation. Clearly, in the application of these terms they referred not to an external transaction of Christ between God and humanity but to that which took place within the incarnate union of divine and human natures in the one Person Jesus Christ. Seen and interpreted in this way, these terms denoting various aspects of Christ's vicarious activity of atoning mediation reveal a coherent pattern which is dominated by the "underlying unity in the Person and work of Christ."

49. This coherent pattern with its unifying ground in the incarnational assumption of sinful humanity was undoubtedly perceived by the early church from the Lord's own interpretation of his passion, and thus his words shaped its understanding of atonement. With words such as those spoken at the institution of the Holy Supper he provided in himself a "permanent centre of reference" for his followers to which they could refer. The words recorded in Mark 10:45 refer more to the "actual event of redemption," while in Mark 14:24 Christ refers rather specifically to the means of redemption, explaining the mode of atonement which is the shedding of his own blood. The meaning becomes quite clear when we take these statements in conjunction with others about salvation and redemption. Christ has done what no one could have done, that is to provide the means of salvation for all humanity by living a life in complete filial obedience (active and passive) and supremely by giving his life as a sacrificial propitiation or ransom. With this, Jesus Christ himself interpreted his life and death in terms of both priestly or cultic atonement and the suffering servant. It was the whole vicarious earthly life of the incarnate Son of God and his supreme sacrifice on the Cross "that made atonement for sin and constituted the price of redemption" for humankind.

50. Torrance also points to Athanasius who gives Jesus Christ's vicarious sacrifice, which he made in virtue of his kinship with us, a central place in his soteriology. Athanasius emphasises the Jesus Christ who on the one hand is Servant-Son and High Priest and on the other hand offers himself at the same time as propitiatory sacrifice to the Father "anq hmwn kai uper hmwn." In combining the incarnate Sonship of Jesus Christ with his priestly office, Athanasius maintains the overall "framework of vicarious humiliation and exaltation, but within this framework the self-abasement and self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ is seen as the central act of atonement and means of redemption from sin. As our High Priest Jesus, Christ cleanses us from our sin and guilt in his life and supremely in his sacrifice of death on the Cross, and then in and through his ascension he presents us in mediation to the Father appearing on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary.

51. In this priestly or cultic mode of atonement, the significance of the incarnation

can be made apparent by bringing together and thinking into each other the concepts of representation and substitution. It will not do to think of what Christ has done for us only in terms of representation, for that would imply that Jesus represents, or stands for, our response, that he is the leader of humanity in humanity's act of response to God. On the other hand, if Jesus is a substitute in detachment from us, who simply acts in our stead in an external, formal or forensic way, then his response has no ontological bearing upon us but is an empty transaction over our heads. A merely representative or a merely substitutionary concept of vicarious mediation is bereft of any actual saving significance. But if representation and substitution are combined and allowed to interpenetrate each other within the incarnational union of the Son of God with us in which he has actually taken our sin and guilt upon his own being, then we may have a profounder and truer grasp of the vicarious humanity in the mediatorship of Christ, as one in which he acts in our place, in our stead, on our behalf but out of the ontological depths of our actual human being (Mediation 90-91).

52. Thus by taking upon himself in the incarnation our sins and the judgement upon them and offering himself as a ransom in reparation for us and on our behalf, Jesus Christ is both the High Priest and the Victim. Through his blood Christ expiated our sin and guilt and removed the "barrier of enmity" between God and humanity. Thus in this priestly concept of redemption, forensic and cultic factors are inseparably intertwined. Seen in this light we can clearly comprehend its focus on the "intercessory mode of the atoning act" within the incarnation and the "restoration to fellowship with God which it brings about."¹⁴

VI. What if not...

53. As we have seen, the very ground of His significance is that Jesus Christ was and is acting out of an unbroken oneness between himself and the Father. Torrance points out that in His miraculous works Christ carries on "the divine work of creation." By forgiving sins Jesus Christ employs a prerogative that belongs only to God. Because Jesus' acts are divine acts they are saving acts. In order to show the importance of this doctrine of the Mediator and the oneness of Incarnation and Atonement, Torrance works out the implications of what would happen to our understanding of this doctrine if we assume the oneness in being and agency between Jesus and God to be separated, if there were no hypostatic union. He tries to show what is really at stake by supposing that the Father/Son relation falls outside the inner Being of God and is nothing more than the relation of a human being and his heavenly Father. Suppose Christ in his own being is not the Mediator between us human beings and God but only a created "temporary go-between." What would become of the Gospel?

54. Torrance starts by showing the deeper implications of this if applied to the cases when Jesus pronounced someone's sins as being forgiven. How are the words "Your sins are forgiven" to be understood given such an assumption? These words have to be seen merely as the words of one creature, even the best and greatest of creatures, to another. But here we have to ask the question with the Jews about how a human can speak like this.¹⁵ To the Jews with their understanding of the Old Testament it was clear that really to forgive sin was to blot something out completely as if it had never happened. However, to undo an event and the time with which it is bound up is something which only God can do and thus the words of the one they saw to be only a creature were blasphemy to them. The point here is that if Jesus Christ is separated from God and entirely becomes a creature, the word of forgiveness spoken by him to another creature is no more than an evanescent linguistic event. Thus, argues Torrance, all it does is to "express a kindly sentiment" but in actual fact does nothing. It is a word of empty promises, void of validity and with no enduring reality.¹⁶

55. Another line which Torrance pursues is that of the fourth century Arian heretics, which is rooted in the same basic assumption that the Son/Father relation does not belong to the inner Being of God. Arius believed that the one who became human in Jesus Christ was the first and thus supreme being God had created. In his incarnate form this created intermediary, which Arius also called the Logos, mediates God's love and salvation to humankind. Suppose this was the case, what would it imply for our understanding of the Gospel?

56. Torrance expounds that this separation between Jesus, the first of creation, and the eternal God results in a radical dichotomy between the phenomenal world of the sensible and the real world of the intelligible, in an absolute dualism between God and this world. On this basis it is impossible to perceive any direct intervention of God in this-worldly or human affairs, let alone to think of the possibility that God could become incarnate as a human being in space and time. The devastating effect of this is that revelation is emptied completely of any objective content. Faith is reduced to a non-cognitive relation to God and Christ is no more than "a tangential point within the world" only externally touched by God. Torrance puts it this way:

If the Word of God is not grounded in the eternal Being of God but is divided or separated from him (*diaretos, choristos*), ... [it is] mutable and changeable (*treptos, alloiomenos*). This means that the imagery and conceptuality of God, mediated to us through the Word or Son of God, is correlated to man's own powers of conceiving (*epinoein*), and not of the nature (*physis*) and reality (*aletheia*) of God in himself. We think of the Son or the Father only '*kai' epinoian*', i.e. in a purely noetic or putative way. Since in all our thinking of God through the Son we are faced with a dichotomy (*chorismos*), the conceptions we form have no objective truth corresponding to them; they are correlative to the creaturely world and are inevitably changeable, relative, and numberless. They express the view taken by the human mind in its own understanding of divine things (Theology in Reconstruction 47-48).

57. Following this assumption that Christ is not the Incarnate Son of God but just a created being "entirely outwith the Being of God," we can see its far-reaching consequences affecting our understanding of the Gospel and the doctrine of atonement as well as the essential verities of the Christian Faith by the obvious conclusion that the relationship of Jesus Christ and God in this case is only in moral terms. If Christ is not himself of the very Being of God but outside the Person of God, he is not himself our Saviour; consequently, atoning reconciliation has to be seen only as externally related to Christ for only God can save fallen humanity. However, if Christ's relationship to God is only on a moral basis, the best he can possibly be for humanity is sort of a moral leader who points to a better moral relationship with the heavenly Father by virtue of his own example in love and righteousness. The atoning sacrifice made on the Cross¹⁷ assumes its meaning, then, rather in terms of an external moral relationship, a demonstration of God's love or as some kind of "judicial transaction between God and Jesus" for the sake of humanity.

58. If all these assumptions are true, states Torrance, the saving essence completely goes out of the Christian Gospel, because then divine salvation does not take place in the ontological depth of human being and the atonement does not penetrate into the underlying structures of human existence. As a result, the proclamation of the Gospel concerning a radical transformation or rebirth of human being in Christ and of a profound cleansing of the roots of the human conscience through his blood and the hope of a renewed creation due to his resurrection from the dead have no real validity. A Jesus Christ who is proclaimed as Saviour or Healer on these grounds can only fulfil his ministry through external relations and means. If these assumptions are true Jesus is nothing more than a human doctor, a moralist or a social worker.

59. However, Torrance argues,

put God on the Cross, let Jesus Christ be God himself incarnate, who refused to be alone or without us, but insisted on penetrating into the heart of our sin and violence and unappeasable agony in order to take it all upon himself and to save us, and the whole picture is transformed. Then Jesus Christ, even in the midst of our death which he made his own, even in the midst of our betrayal of him, is the Word and Hand of God stretched out to save us, the very heart of God Almighty beating with the pulse of infinite love within the depth of our lost humanity in order to vanquish and to do away with everything that separates man from God. That is the saving import of the homoousios applied to Christ who, for us and our salvation, was made man and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate (The Incarnation XV).

VII. Conclusion

60. In this article I have explored how Thomas F. Torrance perceives the relationship between incarnation and atonement. We found that Torrance's theology (and especially his Christology), which stands in the tradition and succession of Greek patristic theology, gives a supreme place to the Nicene *homoousion*. Interpreting from this foundation, Torrance sees atonement as taking place **within** the incarnate being of Jesus Christ.

61. We have examined the modes of atoning redemption which underlie the scriptural account as well as early patristic theology and have seen their significance concerning the relation of incarnation and atonement. We have seen that the ontological mode of atoning redemption, when seen in the light of the incarnation, lays emphasis on the full humanity of the Redeemer Jesus Christ and that he actualised kinship with us through the incarnation and claimed our sins and guilt and provided atoning redemption in himself bringing us back into union and communion with God the Father. Whereas this mode could be seen as countering and refuting such heretic ideas as Arianism and Apollinarianism, the dramatic mode of atoning redemption speaks against ideas like Deism, where God is too far removed from our world to intervene, or such notions of God and our world as we find in Isaac Newton and his closed system. While the former stresses to some degree the complete humanity and thus the kinship of the Son of God with us and the latter the complete divinity of the human Jesus Christ, the priestly or cultic mode of atoning redemption interpenetrates both of the others by emphasising the significance of the divine and human natures being in union in the incarnate logos. All three modes are, therefore, essential in the understanding of atonement in relation to the incarnation.

62. Torrance is clearly in line with Nicene theology by arguing that salvation was worked out *in the Logos himself*. In his objective realism he enhances the "refusal to let dualist forms of thought determine the meaning of the atonement." Thus for him "the incarnation and the atonement [have] to be thought together in terms of their intrinsic coherence in the divine-human Person of the Mediator - [which means that] the incarnation [is] seen to be essentially redemptive and redemption [is] seen to be inherently incarnational or ontological. Union with God in and through Jesus Christ who is of one and the same being with God belongs to the inner heart of the atonement" (The Trinitarian Faith 159).

Endnotes

¹ Athanasius repeatedly insisted that the Saviour came "not for his own sake but for our sake and for our salvation" (e.g., Athanasius: Con. Ar. 2.55.). Other dominant concepts were: "the economy of the incarnation"; "the economic condescension" of God the Son; "the advent of the flesh"; "the divine and loving condescension and becoming human"; and God's loving assumption of our actual human nature and condition in space and time, all for our sake.

² Torrance follows Athanasius who seeing Christ not as God *in human* but as God *as human* understands Christ's humanity in a profoundly *vicarious manner*. Torrance writes that Athanasius "understood the humanity of Jesus Christ as the humanity of him who is not only Apostle from God but High Priest taken from among men, and the saving work of Christ in terms of his *human* as well as his divine agency - it is the human priesthood and the saving mediatorship of Jesus Christ in and through his human kinship with us that Athanasius found so significant" (Theology in Reconciliation 228).

³ A clear expression of this can be seen in a letter of Athanasius to Epictetus; "The Saviour having in very truth become man, the salvation of the whole man was brought about ... Truly our salvation is no myth, and does not extend to the body only - the whole man, body and soul, has truly received salvation in the word himself" (Athanasius: Ad Epict. 7).

⁴ The patristic principle that *it is what the Incarnate Son has taken up into himself from us that is saved*, which was early enunciated in different forms by Irenaeus and Origen, plays a fundamental and essential role in the soteriology of Athanasius and is also fundamental for Torrance. "After the promulgation of Apollinarian ideas it had to be stressed more explicitly, as indeed it was especially by Gregory of Nazianzus and Cyril of Alexandria. This is a point where the teaching of the Eastern Church diverges somewhat from that of the Western Church - and incidentally helps to explain why Western scholars are so often found interpreting the theology of the Greek Fathers within an alien conceptual scheme (e.g. a dualist body/soul anthropology). In the Western Church, owing partly to the reintroduction of dualism into theology through St Augustine, and partly to the anthropocentric and forensic cast of mind from Tertullian, the doctrine of redemption tends to be expounded in terms of external relations between Christ and sinful people, and so the judicial element assumes a role of predominant significance. This is even more pronounced in Protestant theology, where the rehabilitation of Augustinian dualism, in the new dynamic outlook of the post-Reformation world, led to an increasing number of monographs on the atonement" (Theology in Reconciliation 230).

⁵ Apart from this understanding, the interpretation of the various aspects of Christ's death in terms of external relations can only break up into different "theories of atonement" - something which according to Torrance has regularly happened in Western Theology.

⁶ See Francis Watson, "Did Christ die as our Substitute? Reconstructing the Logic of Atonement," a paper presented in a seminar of the Research Institute in Systematic Theology, Kings College London (1993). Watson cautions against such an approach, as he sees in Torrance, because a reconciliation stemming immediately and directly from the hypostatic union is difficult to unite with the necessity of his passion, a work marked by suffering and death, as narrated in the Gospels.

⁷ This has sometimes been denounced as "physical theory" of redemption.

⁸ "Atoning reconciliation [has] to be regarded as including the whole of our Lord's incarnate life from his cradle to his grave in which, as one of us and one with us, he shared all our experiences, overcoming our disobedience through his obedience and sanctifying every stage of human life, and thereby vivified and restored our humanity to communion with God. He sanctified himself for our sakes that we might be sanctified in him. This was expounded by the Nicene theologians in terms of our Lord's vicarious obedience in the form of a **servant** and his priestly self-offering to the Father in life as well as in death in our place, with reference to the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews" (The Trinitarian Faith 166-167).

⁹ "The priestly self-consecration and self-offering of Christ throughout the whole of his earthly life are to be regarded as belonging to the innermost essence of the atoning mediation he fulfilled between God and mankind. Reconciliation through the life of Christ and reconciliation through the passion of Christ interpenetrate each other" (The Trinitarian Faith 167).

¹⁰ "Without the incarnation of the Creator Word the fallen world would crumble finally and irretrievably into nothingness, for then God would simply be letting go of what he had made and it would suffer from sheer privation of being" (God and Rationality 144).

¹¹ Athanasius wrote: "The Saviour having in very truth become man, the salvation of the *whole man* was brought about ... Truly our salvation is not merely apparent, nor does it extend to the body only, but the whole body and soul alike, has truly obtained salvation in the Word himself. This was held to include the redeeming and sanctifying by Christ of the mind and affections of 'the inward man,' for they have been appropriated and renewed in the self-sanctification of Christ for our sakes" (Ad. Epict. 7).

¹² "This was a point which had been stressed by St. Paul at the very beginning of Christian theology. Divine salvation and reconciliation had to do with human beings, not only in the corruption of their physical nature, but in the depravity of their spiritual nature in which they had become alienated and enemies in their minds so that they turned the very truth of God into a lie. Thus the Incarnation had to be understood as the sending of the Son of God in the concrete form of our own sinful nature and as a sacrifice for sin in which he judged sin within that very nature in order to redeem man from his carnal, hostile mind. But St. Paul also taught that in the very act of God's incarnational assumption of our fallen human nature he cleansed and sanctified it in Jesus Christ" (Mediation 49).

¹³ "The hypostatic union of divine and human nature in the oneness of his Person, far from succumbing to the onslaught of the evil one, triumphed over them all, until through atoning expiation for sin Jesus Christ broke through the ultimate barrier of death and condemnation that separates man from God, and completed his mediation of reconciliation in his resurrection from the grave" (Mediation 76).

¹⁴ "Thus redemption through Christ and knowledge of Christ as the incarnate *Logos*, redemption and knowledge, regeneration and illumination, were closely interconnected in Greek patristic thought, not least in early Alexandrian theology. An unbalanced stress upon *gnosis*, particularly when detached from the incarnation and saving Person and work of Christ, could easily give rise to serious distortion of the Gospel as in the Gnostic movement. Nevertheless, since knowledge of the truth of God in Christ, and the vision of God in and through him, bring light and life, freedom and salvation, the prophetic office of Christ cannot be separated from his priestly office, so that the teaching of Jesus handed down to us in the Gospels cannot but be regarded as an essential ingredient in his saving work. On the other hand, there is no mediation to us of saving and life-giving knowledge of God apart from 'union and communion' with him through the incarnation of his Son" (The Trinitarian Faith 166).

¹⁵ "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7); "The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, 'Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?'" (Luke 5:21).

¹⁶ "Nor does it help matters, as some people thought in the Early Church, to say that Jesus Christ is like God, even similar in being (homoiousios) or in nature to him, for the only kind of similarity that could give saving substance to the words and deeds of Christ would be one in which he was *really* like God in being and nature, and that would mean being really *equal* with God and of the *same* nature as God. That is precisely what *homoousios* was intended to declare" (Mediation XIV).

¹⁷ "What would become of our understanding of the Cross if at that supreme point Christ remained ultimately separate from God in being and nature: Christ a mere man on the Cross wholly other and alone in his Deity? It would then be impossible to believe either in God or in man. We could not believe in such a God who, when the finest man there ever was emerged in the human race, did not lift a finger to save him; nor could we believe in man who in the face of such perfection and love in Jesus rose up, spat in his face and hounded him to death on a Roman gibbet. To leave God in his heaven and put Jesus a man only on the Cross leaves us in utter darkness and despair" (Mediation XIV-XV).

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