

JAMES B. TORRANCE ON THE ALL-INCLUSIVE HUMANITY OF JESUS CHRIST

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Abstract: *This essay considers a particular emphasis that James B. Torrance brought out primarily within his explication of the doctrine of the Incarnation. He coined the phrase "the all-inclusive humanity of Christ" to sum up his biblical and theological synthesis of this aspect of the doctrine he wanted to highlight. It explores the unique contribution Torrance made to illuminating for Christian faith the meaning of the humanity of Christ far beyond simply his being like us in essential attributes and/or having a physical/empirical form. The significance for ontology, anthropology and soteriology is discussed in relationship to creation and redemption and relevant ethical implications are explored.*

James B. Torrance is well-known, especially among his former students like myself, for pointing out and demonstrating the theological significance of the incarnation. The meaning of the incarnation of the eternal Son of God was, in his view, crucial not only in its own right but as a central reality that oriented every other aspect of faithful Christian understanding. Much of JB's teaching showed that an explication of any other theological point that failed to orient itself to the reality of the incarnation would prove to be inadequate if not misleading to Christian faith and worship.

The doctrine of the incarnation, as all Christian doctrines, was not itself to serve as an ultimate object of faith. This doctrine is meant to point beyond itself to the real object of our faith, Jesus Christ himself. More particularly this doctrine is meant to identify who the Jesus of biblical revelation was and is. Accordingly, Jesus Christ is to be identified as the incarnate eternal Son of



God. It follows then, that all that he did and said in his earthly ministry are to be understood as the words and deeds of the incarnate one.¹

Any theological formulation aiming to be true to its subject must be informed and regulated, even determined, by the given revelation itself. In large measure all of Christian theology amounts to just that: finding words, concepts, ideas, illustrations, analogies, narratives that identify clearly and accurately today the subject matter of biblical revelation so that it contributes to a real knowing of the subject. Thus the meaning of the incarnation can only be gained by apprehending again and again the Jesus of biblical revelation in a way that corresponds to the nature of the revelation itself. This means that he himself is the object/subject of our study and the norm for any theological conclusion. A faithful Christology then would direct us to the exact same Jesus referred to in the biblical revelation and worshipped in the Christian church, beginning with his appointed apostles. And JB never tired of reminding us that we do this by maintaining that the central theological question to be addressed was the "who?" question, directed towards God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.²

J. B. Torrance's Particular Concern

The particular concern of JB was to give fresh articulation to the meaning and significance of the humanity of Jesus in a way that at least matched in breadth and depth those creedal and theological affirmations founded upon the biblical revelation that had been formulated down through the ages of the Christian church. A special concentration was needed, he believed, because much contemporary Protestant theology, liberal or conservative, had

1 This means that the object of our faith is actually a subject. The reality, the subject of our faith, exceeds what any doctrine can specify. But doctrinal statements can be faithful to their object/subject if they are formulated *a posteriori* upon an apprehension of the subject. And we can only apprehend the subject of our faith first because of God's own gracious action to give himself to us in revelation, a revelation that culminated in the self-revelation enacted and embodied in Jesus Christ. And second, we may apprehend the actual subject of our faith because the complex of revelation has been handed-down and preserved for us in the apostolic witness and is made actually accessible to us by the continuing gracious work of the Holy Spirit. In this process of faith seeking understanding we do then, by grace, come to know more fully Jesus Christ himself and so respond more fully in faith to him. We also can achieve then faithful articulations regarding who we have come to know him to be.

2 See James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace: The Didsbury Lectures 1994*, (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1996 and Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 83.

neglected or misappropriated its meaning. Corrective was needed. However, I believe that while providing just such a corrective by making considerable use of faithful theological reflection throughout church history, JB actually made his own contribution to the church's ability to bear a more intensive and extensive witness to the truth and reality of the identity of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

The theological gift JB bequeathed to the church is well captured in a simple phrase he coined. More than simply re-affirming an orthodox proclamation of the complete and real humanity that Jesus assumed in the miracle of the incarnation, JB wanted to highlight and more clearly specify the particular nature or character of his humanity. Jesus' humanity was, in his poignant phrasing, an "all-inclusive humanity."³

What did JB mean by this theologically rich phrase? It turns out that the reality to which it points stands at the crossroads where so much of Christian theology as a whole intersects. JB demonstrated how the all-inclusive and vicarious nature of Jesus' humanity⁴ (or human nature) is essential to any faithful apprehension of his particular humanity, which in turn is requisite for

3 JB could also speak of the "all-inclusive vicarious humanity" of Christ. Given the limits of this essay, we will not be commenting much on the very important aspect of vicariousness. The primary references to this phrase can be found in *Worship, Community*, 40–42 and in James B. Torrance, "The Vicarious Humanity of Christ", in *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, A.D. 381*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1981) 137, 140.

4 It can easily be assumed that "humanity" means all of what individual human beings are. But this would be in error. Natures are to be distinguished (although not separated) from persons, whether in Christology or anthropology. The term "humanity," stands for, more properly, human nature. As in all orthodox Christology the Son of God assumed "human nature." Two things are being assumed in speaking and thinking this way. First, the Person of the Son is distinguished but not separated from the natures he has. The person of the Son has the natures but is not simply the natures. So the Son of God remains the same person before and after assuming to himself human nature. Second, this means that the Son of God did not assume individual human persons, that is, human subjects to himself. While no human persons exist apart from human nature, the person or subject can be distinguished from the nature (analogously to Christology). Human beings have in common human nature, but they do not have in common their persons. So the Son of God assumed what all human persons have in common, namely, their human natures. While neither JB (nor Thomas F. Torrance) explicitly asserted the non-assumption of human persons, it is entailed by what they did claim and is consistent with the many other affirmations made regarding Christology and anthropology. Assuming that persons and natures are ontologically identical is at odds with JB's (and TF's) meaning. This must be kept in mind, for if not, then Christology becomes incoherent. So while JB most often spoke of Christ's humanity, I will use interchangeably with it, "human nature."

Christian faith in him and a life lived in joyful worship and service to him. This theological phrase represents, I believe, a fruitful development in Christian theological articulation since it serves as a means of disclosure, extending illumination into a wide area of Christian theology and theological ethics.⁵

An Ontological Connection

By identifying Jesus' human nature as being "all-inclusive" JB was pointing out that Jesus' humanity was vitally and really, that is ontologically, linked to all humanity, to every single human being. The human nature that Jesus assumed was not simply his own individual or autonomous humanity, one relatively independent of all other human beings. No, the human nature he possessed was shared by all humanity. The human nature he assumed he held in common with every human person.

This understanding of Jesus' humanity sums up for JB what is captured throughout biblical revelation. The Apostle Paul's designation of Jesus as the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) and also his identification of him by direct inference as the archetype or original Adam (Rom. 5:14) reveal his unique relationship to all humanity. The effect that Jesus is said to have upon all humanity throughout the New Testament also comports with Jesus' unique place. Jesus' ontic solidarity with all humanity as well as the purpose (*telos*) of his incarnation being "for the sake of" or "on behalf" of all humanity, for instance as its great High Priest and worship leader, conveys the same meaning.⁶ It is likely that Jesus' primary self-designation as the Son of Man also points to his unique location in relation to all humanity. This means that his self-identification as Lord does not simply note his deity over all humanity, but rather that his lordship is established, from the inside, as one of all humanity by his sharing their human nature.

JB was not pointing out simply that Jesus' humanity was revealed to be like ours, another instance of a generically classified aggregate of a certain kind of living beings. In the light of the humanity of Jesus, we cannot think of humankind as nothing more than a conventional way to

5 The idea that true theological development is identified by its serving as a kind of heuristic that discloses aspects of revealed biblical truth heretofore ambiguous, hidden, or obscure was discussed by T. F. Torrance, JB's older brother, in a number of his books and essays, including *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Belfast: Christian Journals Limited, 1980), 125.

6 The entire letter to the Hebrews promulgates these elements but of course the explication of his death being for the sake of salvation and being the basis for the reconciliation of all humanity to God has the same import (2 Cor. 5:14-19).

name the collocation of similar characteristics exhibited by certain relatively autonomous individuals – a theological nominalism. Rather Jesus' incarnation and ministry reveals that humanity or human nature is a feature of created reality that is shared among certain creatures, namely persons, so that persons are actually linked to one another at the most fundamental level of their being, that is, ontically. As some theologians have put it, referring all the way back to Irenaeus, humanity is like a tree, with individuals being the branches or leaves of it. Being a human person means being linked to all other human persons by sharing in one and the same nature. In theological perspective, human nature is actually a shared reality that makes human beings what they are at the most fundamental level. Jesus was human in that his human nature was ontically linked to all other human beings. JB liked to speak of Jesus as the one for the many, the one in the many and the many in the one, reflecting particularly the thought of Paul in Romans 5 and Ephesians 1.⁷

More than Simply Shared Humanity

But what JB meant by "all-inclusive" meant more than simply "shared." In his view biblical revelation indicated that there is a structure to our shared human nature. Human nature has a source or origin represented by the first Adam, off from whom branches every human being. So all human beings are related to and share in created Adam's human nature. We cannot understand our being apart from the origin of our human nature. But humanity cannot simply be grasped in terms of its created origin. For the humanity of Jesus has included all human beings in a way that both subsumes and supercedes our link to the created and fallen Adam of our origin. This Jesus is, first of all the archetype of the first Adam, the created root of all humanity. He is the original source and origin of human nature at its very foundation. But more than this, by his incarnate life, including his death and resurrection, he has overtaken the deadly effects insinuated at the root of humanity by the first Adam so that in and through the one man, Jesus Christ, now come acquittal, righteousness, and life.⁸

⁷ See *Worship, Community*, 39, 40, 56, and "Vicarious Humanity," 137-41.

⁸ Torrance is here following the exposition of Paul in Rom. 5:12-21 and the recapitulation/re-heading up (*anakephalaiosis*) in Eph. 1:10. We will have more to say later on the biblical foundations upon which JB's views are built. Karl Barth's line of thought on Romans 5 goes in the same direction. See Barth's "Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5" *Scottish Journal of Theology* Occasional Papers, no. 5, trans., T. A. Smail (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1956, reprint, 1963). An overlapping account can be found in a rather

Biblical revelation indicates that Jesus' humanity incorporates all humanity, re-connects every human being, and reorients human nature itself. The incarnate Son of God, Jesus, is ontically related to every human being but uniquely so in such a way that the destiny of all humanity, the trajectory of human nature through history, is affected by who he is. Humanity itself, its very nature, has been redirected, reoriented, placed on a new basis through the assumption of it into the life of the Incarnate One. The regeneration and renewal spoken of in Titus 3:5 first occurred to human nature in Jesus. His human nature alone includes, in this definitively ontological way, all humanity.

Corrective to Modern Anthropology

This understanding of not only Jesus' humanity, but of all humanity and every human being, may come as quite a shock to modern hearers. First of all, in modern western culture we largely think of human beings as relatively independent and even leaning towards autonomy. We consider ourselves relatively unaffected by others, especially at the level of our natures. In some quarters the very idea of a shared human nature is actually denied. The idea of a human nature is regarded simply as a social construction. The all-inclusive humanity of Jesus, if regarded as actual and true, will have profound implications for our anthropology and all the related social sciences.

Second, in our contemporary western context Jesus Christ is more and more viewed as being a source of division among people, not a source of unity. This perspective is increasingly found even among those who want to continue to identify themselves in some way as Christian and despite its leading to a form of prescriptive religious pluralism.⁹ But many who otherwise hold to an orthodox faith, even within evangelicalism, have long assumed that common ground with those outside the Christian faith can only be found and established on some basis other than Jesus Christ — since his identity is what people are in disagreement over. This has been especially the case in the area of Christian apologetics, a discipline which seems perpetually to be in search of more adequate common ground than the last tried and largely failed candidate proved to be.¹⁰

surprising source, Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).

9 This is in contrast to a descriptive and/or pragmatic pluralism.

10 This issue brings to recollection the sharp debate between Barth and Brunner over the "point-of-contact" (*Anknüpfungspunkt*).

The all-inclusive humanity of Jesus, if regarded as actual and true, would have profound implications for not only our apprehension of who Jesus is, but for the proclamation of the Gospel itself, not to mention its defense. If the exclusive claim of Jesus Christ is that only in him can all humanity, in truth and reality, be united, then the church's message formulated on that basis could, in turn, perhaps have a significant impact upon our wider culture's perception of Christian faith and worship. The false dichotomy of Christianity being either inclusive or exclusive would be undermined. However, this approach would require that the ultimate foundation for such a claim would not be our beliefs, our doctrines, but the reality of who Jesus Christ really is. He himself is God's appointed point of contact among all humanity at its origin and its destiny. He exclusively is the inclusive one.

Christ's Humanity in Biblical Revelation

The grounds for JB's emphasis on the all-inclusive humanity of the incarnate Son of God is not found simply in the fact that Jesus, as accounted for in the New Testament revelation, has all the characteristics of being a human being in the same way we are. The foundation is laid in the meaning and significance given by the biblical revelation to his humanity in relation to all others. This reaches a high point in Paul's designation of Jesus as the prototypical Adam (the created Adam being the type, Rom. 5:14) and as the last (*eschatos*) or second (*deuteros*) man/Adam (1Cor. 15:45-47). This Jesus is presented in biblical revelation as the actual new life-giving head of humanity, not just in name, but in being and so in actual effect. He is in fact the Lord of all humanity — as one of humanity. Witness to this fact can be found not only in Romans 5 but also in Ephesians 1 where, as Irenaeus saw, the place where all humanity was re-gathered, reunited, re-headed up (*anakephalaiosis*, v. 10) was in the very person of Jesus.¹¹

The epistle to the Hebrews also points to just this same reality. All that Jesus does in his earthly ministry is "on our behalf" and "once for all." And his ministry has the absolute and definitive effect it does because he alone, the Son of God, has "taken on"¹² our identical human nature, not an angelic nature or that of any other sort of creature (Heb. 2:16). He "partook of the same nature" (Heb. 2:14) and "was made like his brethren in every respect" (Heb. 2:17). And this ontic connection is something that other priests, not to mention sheep and

11 See "Vicarious Humanity," 140-41 and *Worship, Community*, 41, 42.

12 The word in Greek is *epilambanetai* and means "to seize" or "take hold of." English translations such as "concerned" or "helps" are very wide of the meaning.

goats, could not accomplish (Heb. 7:20-28). His saving work essentially involves sharing in our human nature in order to transform it from the inside out. His ministry of sanctification is effected by his own self-sanctification in and through his assumption of our human nature. "The one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified [are] all of one." (Heb. 2:11).¹³ The effect of his saving work flows through the ontological channel of our shared human nature.

Likewise, Jesus' prayer in John 17 seems also to point in exactly the same direction. Our sanctification is the product of his self-consecration on our behalf (v. 19). We do not have our own sanctification, but by the Spirit actually receive his and so benefit from it as ours. Salvation involves an exchange at the ontological level so that what was ours became his and what was his becomes ours by the Spirit. This seems to be what Paul was thinking when he spoke of Jesus taking on our poverty so that we could share in his riches (2 Cor. 8:9). Salvation, then, involves a regeneration of our very human natures not just a change in God's mind or in our legal standing or relational status, much less in our spatial location, either in heaven or in hell. And that regeneration of our humanity was an event, the achievement of the incarnate Son that we can benefit from only by being united to him, to Jesus' sanctified humanity. Salvation, then, involves a transformation of our human being, that is, the restoration, reconciliation and perfection or glorification of our human nature.

So JB often summarizes this point by echoing Calvin and saying that our salvation is not just accomplished "by means of Christ" or "on account of Christ," but "in Christ." And of course behind this understanding lies the pervasive language found throughout the New Testament that conveys just that: our salvation is the product of being "in Christ" (εν Χριστω, εις Χριστον or δια Χριστου) not simply "by means of Christ" (κατα Χριστον or δια Χριστον).¹⁴

Another closely related point JB regularly brought out in lectures was that the regeneration (*palingenias*) of our humanity, spoken of in Titus 3:5-6, does not refer to the moment of our response to grace, as important as that is, but rather to what was accomplished "when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared" to "save us...by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the

13 The words "of one Father," "of the same Father," "of the same family," "of one source," or "one origin" found in various English translations are all absent from the original Greek. Sanctifier and sanctified are simply "all of one" (εξ ενος παντες, *ex henos pantes*). The idea of Jesus and his people being united in some third thing is entirely unwarranted. That they are united one to another via the shared human nature is the clearest meaning supported by the context.

14 See "Vicarious Humanity," 136 and *Worship, Community*, 40. See Calvin's *Institutes*, III.11-14.

Holy Spirit” which was subsequently “poured out upon us . . . through Jesus Christ.” Regeneration first took place in Jesus, upon his human nature. We then receive that from him. Jesus does not make the renewal of our humanity possible, only becoming actual and real in the moment of our receptivity. It was accomplished first in Jesus Christ himself in our place and on our behalf as our great High Priest. He shares with us what is first his. JB would at this point refer to Athanasius’ way of explaining Jesus as the great physician of our humanity. He writes:

Christ does not heal us by standing over against us, diagnosing our sickness, prescribing medicine for us to take, and then going away, to leave us to get better by obeying his instruction — as an ordinary doctor might. No, he becomes the patient! He assumes that very humanity which is in need of redemption, and by being anointed by the Spirit in our humanity, by a life of perfect obedience, by dying and rising again, for us, our humanity is healed *in him*.¹⁵

For many the profound depth of the need, the extent of the transformation required for us to have God’s life in us, may be shocking and offensive. The default assumption, perhaps especially in the modern West, is to have a rather superficial notion of what is called for if we are to realize the best of human potential, much less have an eternal fellowship and communion with the living God. We wonder: Can anything more be needed than simply having new information, a better technique, a higher ideal or an improved idea, attitude or will? It is beyond modern imagination that humanity might need to be entirely remade, regenerated in its very nature.

Moreover the means needed to accomplish this radical end may also astound. That the assumption of our human nature was essential to Christ’s work, and that we need to be united in our very natures to him in death so that we might have life, can also press us to the edge of our modern imagination. However, such a means and end also can be apprehended as being absolutely glorious since they show not only the depth of our need but the extent of God’s gracious love toward us. Contemplating such glory and grace, however, will call for the death of human pride. The biblical witness is clear on that count as well.

Early Church Teaching

Of course JB is by no means alone in bringing out the profound meaning of the Incarnation for our salvation. He explicitly brought forward the teaching of the early church found especially in Irenaeus, Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers,

¹⁵ “Vicarious Humanity” 141. Emphasis in original. Cf. *Worship, Community*, 42-43.

and in Cyril of Alexandria, to name just a few of the most prominent ones. The saying circulating throughout the early church that captured this reality was “the unassumed was unredeemed.”¹⁶ This concern was pointedly preserved in the deliberations of the Council of Constantinople (381) and brought forward at Chalcedon (451) to counter the teaching of the Apollinarians by affirming the perfect or complete (*telion*) humanity of Jesus.¹⁷ John Calvin, JB notes, also was concerned to make prominent our union with Christ in relation to his sole priesthood.¹⁸ If Jesus’ human nature is essential to our salvation and not just instrumental or extrinsic to it, then how we understand salvation and the very nature of our relationship to Jesus Christ is profoundly impacted. We can no longer regard Christ as external to ourselves nor his gifts, for example his righteousness, as separable from him. The gift is the giver as JB liked to put it.

Creation and Redemption

The all-inclusive humanity of Jesus has, for JB, further soteriological significance. He consistently gave significant weight to the biblical insight that all human beings were created through the eternal Son of God and for his inheritance (Jn. 1, Col. 1, Heb. 1) and that, in his assumption of human nature itself, he became the new head of humanity, the new Adam. By way of both creation and incarnation all humanity is related to the Son of God. Any grasp of the nature of his atoning work, then, must take both these connections into account. The eternal creator Son of God is the incarnate, atoning, and redeeming one. This Jesus does what he does and can accomplish what he does because of who he is — one in nature with God and one in nature with the whole of humanity that was created through him and for him. The Council of Chalcedon (451), JB reminded us, brought out both these connections by including double statements of the *homoousion* (of identical nature). Jesus Christ is there declared to be *homoousion* “with the

16 See the discussion in “Vicarious Humanity,” 141 and *Worship Community*, 42.

17 See *Worship, Community*, 42.

18 See “Vicarious Humanity,” 137. To avoid misunderstanding it must be emphasized that consistent with orthodox and evangelical theology, union assumes a continuing distinction between what (or who) is united. JB did not mean by union with Christ that we become entirely one in being with him. We remain distinct persons. But, by the Spirit, we can share in all of what is Christ’s, including his responses to the Father on the basis of the human nature he assumed into his person and regenerated. We respond by the gift of the Spirit with our persons on the basis of the assumption of our regenerated human nature in Christ. Of course, how exactly this takes place is beyond human explanation. There is only one instance of it.

Father in Godhead" and also *homoousion* "with us in humanity."¹⁹ These ontic links to his person identify who he is and substantiate his absolutely unique place in relation to all humanity and its destiny.

The Theological Cost of Overlooking the All-Inclusive Humanity of Jesus Christ

While it is more often recognized, especially in evangelical circles, that Jesus' absolutely unique place in the economy of salvation is based upon his unique relationship to God, his divinity, it is often overlooked that his unique relation to humanity as its source and as its new head is just as essential. Failure to give full weight and scope to all of who Jesus is in relation to God *and* humanity, as its ultimate source and as its new head, disengages his work from his person and undermines any claim that Jesus alone stands in relation to humanity as its Savior and Lord. Discounting Jesus' ontic connection to all humanity just as much misrepresents who Jesus is and the nature of his saving work as does a denial of his deity.

If Jesus' humanity stands in no unique relation to all other human beings, but is just one among many individuals, then his humanity serves no essential part in his saving work — any one else's humanity would have served just as well. But this would mean that his saving work would not involve the displacement of Adam as the first head of humanity. Further, without this connection Jesus could not serve as the new link that creates the one new humanity, between all human beings, Paul speaks of in Ephesians 2:14-15. The result of such a truncated Christology, despite its preservation of Jesus' divinity, is the evisceration of this profound aspect of his saving work and the concealment of his full identity as the Lord and Savior of humanity as one of us.

The significance of his human life, in both earthly and heavenly states, is thereby limited to his example and his teachings, just those things that any other human being potentially could have offered by means of their human agency. JB's persistent teaching on the sole priesthood of Christ, grounded in the entire message of the book of Hebrews, was aimed to show that Jesus' mediatorial ministry required his acting in our place and on our behalf as one of us. For his atoning work involved not simply a substitutionary death, but a substitutionary life. Jesus not only mediated the things of God to man but the right responses of humanity to God. Christ's priesthood, in order to complete his mediatorial work, had to involve both a God-manward movement and a

19 See "Vicarious Humanity" 132, 135

man-Godward movement. This double movement of mediation was clearly prefigured in the Aaronic priesthood where the high priest represented not only God to all Israel, but all Israel to God, wearing all the symbols of all the tribes on his ephod as he entered the holy of holies once a year on the Day of Atonement. A one-sided, single movement priesthood would have been incomplete and ineffective. For we need not only to have God brought near to us, but we being brought near to God. This is the message of the book of Hebrews. The entire vicarious nature of Christ's work can be fully appreciated only by highlighting the man-Godward action of his ministry, as one of us, sharing our human nature, in our place and on our behalf.²⁰

The Nature of Salvation Misconstrued

Of course without reference to all of who Jesus is the very nature of his salvation then must necessarily have a different configuration. A salvation that comes from one who is also the source and rightful heir of humanity is very different from a salvation that does not. A salvation delivered by one who is the head of humanity is not the same as one that is not. A salvation that is not accomplished by one who has grasped on to human nature itself so as to regenerate it in himself and gives it back to us offers us a very different kind of salvation than what was given. A salvation in which Jesus' entire life is substitutionary and not just his death, results in a very different depiction of the relationship between the Savior and his people.

The Scope of Christ's Atoning Ministry

Given Jesus' absolutely unique relationship with God and with all humanity, JB saw every reason to let stand without qualification those biblical passages that indicate that the work of Christ was accomplished on behalf of all humanity. He died for all, just as Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:14,15. God's intention was to be "merciful to all" (Rom. 11:32). Jesus was "the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world" (κοσμος, Jn. 1: 29) and "He is the propitiation for ours but also the sins of the whole world" (κοσμος, 1 Jn. 2:2). If what God did in Christ did not apply to all humanity then the atoning and reconciling work he accomplished would be torn asunder from and incongruent with who he was as the creator and new head of humanity. Such a

²⁰ This topic is the burden of his entire article, "The Vicarious Humanity of Christ." See especially 141-144. The chapter "The Sole Priesthood of Christ, the Mediator of Worship" in *Worship, Community* also details the same argument, 32-57.

dislocation requires interpreting his work on some basis other than his person. His person would then be irrelevant to his work and belief/faith in his work would be disconnected from belief in his person. His work would be regarded as external to and independent of his person. In effect then, there would be no essential reason other persons could not be savior. Although in that case the salvation such a one would be able to supply would be of a very different sort because consisting of very different kinds of relationships between God and humanity.

Moreover, an interest in his work and all its benefits could, then, be taken up without any regard for his person or an ongoing relationship with him. A focus on his work and benefits apart from his person means regarding Jesus simply as a means to an end, as an instrument or a tool. And once the job is over, the result achieved, a tool can be dispensed with. Such a view severs the gift from the giver as if salvation consisted of the creation of some kind of stuff (e.g. righteousness) that could be amassed and then distributed to others in separate packets for safekeeping. Martin Luther sternly warned against looking to Christ for his blessings, but taking no interest in Christ himself. Such, he said, are no better than those soldiers who cast lots for the robe of Jesus, leaving him standing there naked and abandoned to crucifixion. There are no blessings, he said, apart from Christ himself. We receive Christ "clothed with his blessings" or nothing at all. Christ cannot be divided into parts. JB regularly noted that Paul's view was that Jesus himself was our wisdom, righteousness and sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). He does not distribute packets of these things and then walk away from us. We cannot have the gifts without being united to the giver.

Torrance also notes from time to time that John Calvin had no problem in his commentaries attributing a universal scope to Christ's atoning work.²¹ In particular Calvin declared in no uncertain terms that, in passages such as John 1:29; 3:15, 16, 17; Romans 5:18, and Colossians 1:14, the biblical writers meant Christ's work applied to "all men." In connection with Matthew 26:28 and the parallel in Mark 14:24, "my blood . . . shed for many for the remission of sins," Calvin says, "By the word many He means not a part of the world only, but the whole human race."

JB's view can be summed up as upholding unlimited atonement but rejecting universalism. Jesus Christ, as the new Adam through whom every human being was created, is indeed the universal (cosmic) Lord and Savior. He is everyone's Savior, he is Lord of all. But not all are necessarily saved (universalism). The full effects of his work do not work mechanically or automatically, impersonally

²¹ See James B. Torrance, "The Incarnation and 'Limited Atonement'" *Evangelical Quarterly* LV, (1983): 83-94, for his fullest discussion. Cf. Thomas F. Torrance, "Universalism or Election?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 2 (1949): 310-18.

or causally. In this Torrance follows closely the coordinated thoughts found in Hebrews: Jesus “tasted death for everyone” (2:9), “but the message they heard [the good news regarding Christ’s rest] did not benefit them, because it did not meet with faith in the hearers” (4:2). The reality of who Jesus is and what he has done for all in our human nature calls for a response, a receptivity, to that which is unconditionally provided. That response comes from our individual persons by the gift of the Holy Spirit operating on the basis of the regeneration of our human natures in Christ.

Why JB Rejects Universalism

Universalism does not follow because neither faithful theological understanding nor valid logical arguments are made by simple logical inferences. When it comes to relating facts no simple logical inference from them is ever necessarily true. Charging that unlimited atonement necessarily means (implies) universalism is logically fallacious. Denying universalism does not necessarily logically require denying that Jesus is in deed the Lord and Savior of all. One may be logically consistent in denying universalism while affirming the unlimited scope and intention of Christ’s work as the new head of humanity.

Furthermore arguing that universal salvation *necessarily* follows from affirming that Jesus is in truth and reality the Savior of all involves also grave theological error. First, it must assume that we are one in being with Jesus Christ, denying the distinction of his person from human persons. Or assume, what amounts to the same thing, that God’s will effectively (casually, mechanically, automatically) displaces (directly or indirectly) human subjects with their wills.

Second, arguing the necessity of universalism must assume that God works effectively in the same way humanity or nature works, namely by causal chains of action. The claim imagines God interacting with creation as if God were a creature and so as if limited to created causal and mechanical means and ways to bring about ends. Such theological reasoning violates the very first principle of any Christian theology: God is not a creature and to think of God as if God were one is to commit mythology, to engage in idolatry and to participate in ungodly and inaccurate speculation — making the same error as did the early church heretic Arius, as Athanasius clearly pointed out.

The truth and reality of who Jesus is as the Son of God incarnate for us and our salvation calls for a response of repentance and faith which, by the gift of the Spirit we receive into ourselves all the benefits of who Christ is. And essential to those benefits is being given a share in Christ’s own faithful responses as our

great High Priest, our representative and substitute, our living mediator. By our response we either affirm and receive the truth and reality of who Christ is and what he has done or we deny it. But our response, our choice, has no possibility to change the truth and reality of who Christ is and what he has done for us.²²

The choice we are given is to affirm and live by reality or to live in denial of reality. We have no possibility of creating *ex nihilo* an alternative reality counter to that established and upheld by God through Christ. "God has made him Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). While there are serious and potentially eternal consequences for individuals who persistently deny the reality, one of the consequences is not undoing or nullifying the reality of who God is in Christ.²³

22 In my view, the alternative to JB's understanding represents the most radical form of theological relativism imaginable. If Jesus does not remain consistently who he is in relation to all humanity, then his essential identity turns out to depend upon the nature of his relationship to different human beings. Whether he is or is not Lord and Savior becomes relative to others. In the case of those who reject him (or whom he rejects) he is not Savior. In the case of those who accept or receive or put their faith in him (or he accepts/elects them) he is Savior. In either case Jesus is construed as having at the root of his being a dual identity. He both is and is not Savior. And what determines which identity he assumes in each case is the divergent nature of his relationship with differing human beings.

A further irony is that within that theological relativist framework those who deny that Jesus is their Lord and Savior end up telling the truth. In their case he isn't Lord or Savior — because either God (the Father?) has made it so (some forms of Calvinism, by divine decree) or individual persons have made it so (Arminianism, by way of foreknowledge). It should also be noted then that his name, Jesus, only faithfully tells us who he is in relationship to some, that is, Savior, Deliverer. His name actually entirely misrepresents who he is in relationship to those he rejects (Calvinism?) or who have rejected him (Arminianism?). We have then no stable and non-relative way to identify who this Jesus is. Who he is remains, then, essentially unknown or unknowable.

Torrance's position cannot be rightly or accurately described as either (high federal) Calvinism nor Arminianism. JB regarded both views to be mistaken. Both operate with *the same* mistaken theological or philosophical assumptions that do not allow for a full account of the relationship of the person and work of Christ. Those who think his view sides with one or the other have yet to benefit from what he actually taught! See his rejection of both in *Incarnation and Limited*, 87.

23 To eliminate speculation, it needs to be said that James Torrance did not think there could be any meaningful answer as to why or how one could reject "the Savior who bought them." There is no biblical revelation in answer to that question. He, like Calvin, regarded all attempts to fill in that gap in our understanding as pure theological speculation that calls in to question what biblical revelation does clearly affirm about the person and work of Christ and his relationship in act and being with the Father and the Spirit. We could say that JB affirmed irresistible grace but not absolutely irresistible salvation.

Ethical Implications and Obligations

Let me explore one final area in which the all-inclusive humanity of Christ has special significance. That is the sphere of ethics.²⁴ James Torrance was well known for introducing certain topics by saying, "Have I told you about the time I was in . . .?" He would often then relate to us a particularly poignant interaction he had when in Northern Ireland, South Africa, or in the South of the United States, all places that at the time were experiencing social upheaval involving tremendous violence. JB felt a special calling to go to these hotspots of desperate conditions bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ not only to the greater society but to the churches in them. He traveled to each of these locales more than once during the 1960s and 70s, taking part himself in the ongoing struggles and on some occasions exposing himself to potential physical harm. But although the situations of apartheid, civil rights, and the Nationalist-Unionist unrest were different in many ways, the upshot of his message remained constant and it was profoundly grounded in the all-inclusive humanity of Jesus Christ.

Who was Jesus Christ and what did he come to accomplish? He was the eternal Son of God, who out of his love and mercy assumed our humanity to make it his own, recreated it in himself, reconciled it to God in order to give us back a healed humanity in right relationship with God and others. Taking on a broken and alienated humanity, he has "made both one" creating "in himself one new humanity" (Eph. 2:14, 15). Salvation, as sharing in the Son's communion with the Father in the Spirit, meant God's purpose for humanity was brought to its *telos*, its final purpose in him, humanity fully alive, as Irenaeus had expressed it. In receiving the gift of sharing in the Son's communion with the Father we receive our healed, forgiven, and reconciled humanity. In receiving our human nature sanctified in Christ, we become fully human as God intended it from the beginning of creation.

JB would then relate to us how on that basis he would challenge the church to take up their proper ministry, one that consists in participating in Christ's own ongoing ministry. He would say that the proclamation of the Gospel could not possibly be reduced to giving people a *message* about Christ, about the potential blessings of heaven if they would repent. No, Christ came to give us a healed restored and reconciled humanity. That was what he held out to us; his own humanity in right relationship to God and in right relationship

24 The following is taken from personal notes and reminiscences of mine from the many lectures I heard JB give at two extension courses for Fuller Theological Seminary in So. California (1986) and in the series of BD courses delivered during my three years at Kings College, Aberdeen, 1987-1990.

to all others. He would ask: How could we in the church attempt to offer anyone the Gospel and still withhold from them their humanity? — if we treated them socially, politically, or individually as less human than we are? — as if we did not share with them the same human nature Christ assumed for the sake of their salvation? Such duplicity constituted a denial of the Gospel not its affirmation. Suffering under the violation of their very personhood, these people were crying out for the healing of their very human being. Faithful to Jesus Christ, whose humanity includes the humanity of all, we must not offer people a message of eternal hope yet deny them their humanity here and now. For the only Gospel there is, is one that offers people Christ, clothed with his all-inclusive humanity. The proclamation of the Gospel must include the offer and effort to participate with Christ in giving them a restored and healed humanity. Only in that way does the church witness to the fact that there is “one new humanity” in Christ.

It was during these extraordinary moments that so many in JB’s courses discovered the deep interconnection between theology and life, between faith and obedience, between personal piety and social justice. The all-inclusive humanity of Jesus holds together what so often falls apart: the person and work of Christ, doctrine and practice, worship and witness. We saw and heard in James Torrance’s life and teaching that a profound Christology does not lead to abstract ontological speculations but to a concrete grasp of who my neighbor is in relationship to Christ and in relationship to me at the deepest conceivable level. It calls me, and even sets me free to act towards my neighbor on the basis of our shared true identity forged and revealed in Jesus Christ, who as Lord and Savior offers us a share in his judged, healed, reconciled, and renewed all-inclusive humanity.