

## INTRODUCTION

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My father thought about Christian theology continually — almost obsessively. It could be exhausting! After a lecture tour with him around South Africa during the apartheid years, Alan Lewis commented that my father was so preoccupied with the theological fallacies underpinning apartheid, that he failed to notice signage or follow map directions. Had Alan not taken vicarious responsibility for this they would have become completely lost. Even in the midst of having his documents checked by airport security, he turned to Alan to make a theological point. Phone calls and visits from my father invariably involved sustained discussions of theology and points of Biblical interpretation. The only times when my father was able to switch out of theological mode was when he was body-surfing in the ocean or fly-fishing on his beloved Scottish lochs — when his quest for a *Horizontverschmelzung* switched from the Biblical authors to the fish.

So what was the key to this all-consuming passion? It was considerably more than intellectual fascination with a system of thought or ideas. Although he was excited by the unparalleled explanatory power of Christian theism, it was no abstract religious commitment that motivated this passion. Rather, he was driven by an all-absorbing commitment to serving the living Jesus Christ and an unwavering conviction that there is and, indeed, could be no more significant Reality than the One who is the risen, ascended Lord over every facet of created reality. The incarnation of the eternal Son *as* (and not merely *in*) the human Jesus constituted the all-transforming Reality in the light of which every area of life (individual, social, and political) required to be conceived, reconceived, and, indeed, “reschematised.”

But the incarnate Word was no mere static or formulaic “reference point” for JB the Christian life meant that we are oriented by a dynamic Reality that is irreducibly *personal* in nature. Although this relationship commands our intellect, it is emphatically not one of mere intellectual acknowledgement. He saw it as constituting an event of communion. For this reason, he was no less



passionate in his commitment to the Body of Christ in all its concrete forms. The perception of God's radically inclusive love for humanity found expression in a radically inclusive and, as anyone who knew him will confirm, utterly genuine love for other people — whatever their background, status, ethnicity, abilities or inabilities, mistakes or struggles. Again, what grounded this was neither a liberal inclusivism nor an abstract personalism. As he continually emphasised, to know who Jesus Christ *is* is to see everyone, not least our enemies, as embraced and forgiven *en Christo!* This inclusive orientation toward others explains the oft-made comment that he never ceased to be a pastor at heart. What must be recognised is that his commitment to the church stemmed from his faith in the one who is the cornerstone of its existence.

JB was and remained an evangelical. His passion for theology stemmed not from a passion for its intellectual coherence and unparalleled explanatory power but from his perception of who God is toward us as the person of Jesus Christ — a perception that, as he saw it, was given in and through the transforming and creative presence of the Holy Spirit. Generations of students heard him emphasise the priority of the "who question" over the "how question" in Christian theology. His whole approach to the task of theology, as also his engagement with political issues (be it civil rights, the tragedy of the apartheid regime, the struggles in Northern Ireland, or the problem of deprivation in the two-thirds world), was motivated, informed, and moulded by his concern with the "who question" — *who* God is and, therefore, *whose* we are!

His passion was neither fearful nor driven. He continually reminded me personally that we need not "tremble for the ark." He was refreshingly free of any driven or Pelagian sense of commitment to communicating the Gospel. His theological engagement combined passion with a sense of *shalom*. What captivated him was the perception of unconditionally good news — the all-inclusive affirmation of our dignity and humanity that stemmed from the person of Jesus Christ and this, as he would often stress, sets us free, free to trust. "Take no anxious thought for the morrow!" was a favourite quote. The effect of his manner was to generate enthusiasm in his students. Despite facing heavy criticism from liberal and conservative alike and despite frustration with church politics and casual attitudes to the gospel, he never doubted that his calling to serve the church was the highest possible vocation.

JB placed a surprising amount of weight on the relevance of Christian "experience." Although he did not see himself as a "charismatic" (though he was more positively disposed toward it than his elder brother), he attached a great deal of significance to "evangelical experience." There was clearly, for JB,

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a significant “knowledge by acquaintance” that was mediated by the Holy Spirit and through which one was presented with the reality of God’s grace in the person of Jesus Christ. If people had not come to faith, for whatever reason, or were casually “liberal” in their views, he put it down to the fact that they simply had *not yet* been privileged to have had that “evangelical experience.” Far from making him judgemental, it generated a compassionate attitude to those who had not yet been addressed and set free in this way. Significantly, there was nobody for whom he did not desire that experience — and, far more importantly, he believed that there was nobody for whom *God* did not desire this transformative event of recognition.

Clearly, this evangelical experience does not take place in a vacuum. For JB, although God’s work was not contingent upon the effectiveness of the church, the Spirit actively transformed people by the witness, proclamation and outreach that characterised the life of the Body of Christ. For JB, the agent was categorically not the church *per se as an institution*, but God’s triune mission to the world in which the church was given to share. It was imperative, therefore, that the life of the church was true to the inclusive love and forgiveness that characterised the Triune mission of God to humanity in which the church participated. For this reason it was also imperative that the church be true to what it is in Christ — one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. For JB, to be an evangelical is to be radically ecumenical. It is both to recognise and to witness to the fact that this oneness is *ontological* — and certainly not simply “federal.” The divisions of the covenant community whereby our acceptance of others was conditional (contractual) upon their acceptance of “our” formulations of the truth tragically undermined the witness of the church, in JB’s view.

It was in and through an evangelical witness that was united, inclusive, affirmative, and liberating for the hearer that the Spirit transformed those who heard the Gospel. This transformation was motivated neither by fear (fear of Hell) nor self-interest (hope of Heaven or earthly benefits), but by perceiving the concrete love of God in Jesus Christ addressed concretely and specifically to every individual hearer as a “thou” — “Thou art the person . . . !” The whole orientation of the hearer both to God and to their neighbour, the world, was reschematised in and through their being presented with the fact that their humanity had been assumed, redeemed objectively *en Christo*, and was now being handed back to them by pure grace as a new/renewed humanity. All that is required is for them to recognise that fact, say “Amen!” to it, and, thereby, be set free to live out of the reality of their objective sanctification in Christ.

## **Significant Factors in JB's Upbringing and Theological Development**

It is neither my task nor intention to provide a biographical account of JB's development. Any attempt to couch a person's theology in the circumstances of their life can all too easily serve to relativise a person's faith by providing an explanation of it with reference to the circumstances of their life. I have already attempted to provide what I believe would be his perception of the impetus, warrant and grounds of his passion for theology. Its source lies, quite simply, in his perception of the inconceivably gracious embrace of humanity by the "Triune God of grace" — a perception that was grounded in his deep devotion to the scriptural witness.

Several features of his life shed light on his appreciation of the nature and character of this embrace — as also of its implications. First, he was born in China and lived there with his parents and five siblings until he was six years old. When life became too dangerous for the family, his mother brought her six children home to Scotland sailing down the Yangtze River in extremely dangerous circumstances. My father vividly remembered the family watching bandits playing cards as he hid with his mother and siblings in a small boat in a reed bed having said farewell to his father. He also remembered crouching on the deck of a gunboat they boarded further down the river hearing bullets hit the low sides of the decking. What was to have the greatest impact of all, however, was leaving his father. Such was his father's commitment to the Gospel that he stayed behind in China and my father and siblings didn't see him again for seven years. The impact of this on the family was unquantifiable. The degree of commitment they had witnessed in their parents and the cost that the family had had to pay generated a profound sense of how much we should be willing to sacrifice for the Gospel. It is important to see the commitments of JB and also TF in that context. Their disillusionment and impatience with casual theological liberalism and with theological approaches driven more by a desire for academic recognition than faithfulness to the Gospel require to be seen against that background. Moreover, the extent of their parents' love for their enemies and longing for the conversion of the Chinese they sought to reach testified to their conviction as to how much all these people meant to the Lord. To question the extent or to imply limits to God's love for them was anathema — it could only undermine every facet of their outreach.

Second, the poverty they faced as a family also had an impact. Not only did it serve as a reminder of what discipleship entails, it meant that JB and his siblings had to remain among the top three students in their year in order to have their

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fees covered. JB excelled at school but even more so at university. He took a four year honours degree in philosophy under two of the greatest Scottish philosophers of the twentieth century — Norman Kemp Smith and John Macmurray. Both considered JB the brightest student they had ever taught. After a spell in the air force, he was no less successful in theology receiving an unprecedented one hundred percent in two different essays from two different professors.

Third, there was his “black day.” JB was profoundly involved in evangelical circles and he never ceased to regard himself as an evangelical. He was president of the IVF while studying philosophy in Edinburgh and went on to lead the largest mission ever organised by the Christian Union in Scotland. While in London, he worked alongside Martin Lloyd Jones as his youth pastor. All of this culminated in what he described as possibly the most influential (and distressing) experience of his theological development. He was invited to be a keynote speaker at a massive evangelical conference in London alongside James Packer and Martin Lloyd Jones. At this event, the subject of limited atonement came up — a topic that had been little discussed in post-war evangelical circles. My father found himself outnumbered on the platform when he offered an emphatic rejection of limited atonement, insisting that the God who became human loved and forgave his enemies just as he told us to love and forgive our enemies — seventy times seven, that is, unconditionally. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself and those who deny Christ “reject the Lord who bought them.” What distressed him most was the fact that Martin Lloyd Jones supported limited atonement. As he once explained to me, it was this event that led him to devote most of the rest of his career to analysing the elements that had led to the emergence of a doctrine that he, like his missionary father, regarded as a heresy — one that tragically misrepresented the character of God, the integrity of the incarnation and the nature of God’s mission to the world in Jesus Christ. It meant that we could no longer tell people that God loved them or that Christ died for them. Indeed, ultimately, on this understanding, no-one could ever be sure, this side of the *eschaton*, that they were loved by God or that Christ died for them.

The extensive notes in JB’s substantial, personal library of Scottish and Puritan theology (now to be established in his name in the John Richard Allison Library, Regent College, Vancouver) is testimony to the care with which he read the substantial corpus of Scottish theology and, indeed, Puritan works. Throughout, he was driven by a desire to understand the dynamics and emphases that could generate what he perceived to be such doctrinal confusion — a confusion that had led such a high proportion of the Scottish population to walk away from their reformed heritage.

Fourth, it was not only in Scotland, however, that he witnessed the devastating effects of what he saw to be the misappropriation of Calvin and the nature-grace model. JB's perception of the all-inclusive humanity of Christ, that is, the one in whom people of all races and colours found their humanity assumed, redeemed, and sanctified, meant that he was radically opposed to all forms of racism. To see one's neighbour *en Christo* was to see that person loved and their dignity affirmed. It was a further cause of profound distress to see his fellow reformed theologians in South Africa either endorsing racism or suggesting the church should not allow its christological affirmations to shape its interpretation of nature, the orders of creation, and the role of the state. In that tragic context, the "nature-grace model" (which he also saw as driving the Calvinist doctrine of limited atonement) served to underpin the endorsement of separate ethnic development by certain Christian leaders. It also served to challenge any attempt to critique a political endorsement of apartheid on theological grounds by appealing to a creation-redemption and related state-church dichotomy. The perception of God's purposes in Christ should not influence political decisions because Christ's work had to do with salvation and not creation and related exclusively, therefore, to the life of the Church. It concerned the spiritual realm and not to the political realm. JB insisted, however, that Jesus Christ is Lord not just of the church. He is Lord and Head of the whole human race. He is, moreover, the one through whom and for whom all things were *created*. It is by looking to him that we perceive God's inclusive purposes for creation, for humanity *per se* and not just for the church. Moreover, to see a person as loved and died for by Jesus Christ is to be committed to recognising and affirming their humanity.

JB vehemently opposed the apartheid regime on theological grounds. He lectured extensively in the universities and seminaries in South Africa arguing that the only valid appropriation of John Calvin's theology in the context would commit the theologian to recognise the Lordship of Christ over every sphere of life – and he was the one in whom there was neither Jew nor Gentile, black nor white, and in whom all people found their dignity affirmed. To recognise the headship of this Christ over all creation could only involve unambiguous opposition to apartheid. Indeed, he argued precisely this with De Klerk during the apartheid years prior to his leading South Africa in its radical change of course. JB's concern was not to try to meddle in politics or tell the South Africans how to run their country. Rather, he saw it as his duty to speak *as a Christian theologian* for whom God's purposes for creation were to be interpreted in the light of Jesus Christ the creative Logos made flesh.

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Similar concerns drove his involvement in debates in Northern Ireland. There he found himself addressing two forms of civil religion. As in the case of Afrikaner nationalism, the “troubles” in Northern Ireland were the consequence of two parallel forms of romantic nationalism that led to diametrically opposite conclusions. Both parties fused a political agenda, a romantic and highly selective interpretation of history and religious affiliation. The tragic outworkings of this were, yet again, there for the world to see. His response was to plead for the Catholic and Protestant churches to recognise the sole headship of Christ and to rethink their affiliations from that centre. Again, he challenged the use of the nature-grace model and a state-church dichotomy. To be a Christian of any denomination was to be committed to confessing that “Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.” (*Barmen Declaration*) To confess the Lordship of Christ was for Catholic and Protestants to seek, together, to cease to allow their loyalties and enmities to be “schematised by the secular order” but to be reconceived and transformed in joint recognition of the headship of Christ *in whom* we are reconciled both to God and to each other. During this period he established close ties with the Roman Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor, Cahal Daly, who was later to become Primate of all Ireland and then a Cardinal. JB urged Bishop Daly to call for an ecumenical “Belfast Confession” to reiterate the affirmations of the Barmen Declaration formulated in the context of nationalism and civil religion in Germany and the Belhar Confession which emerged in the context of civil religion and romantic nationalism in South Africa. As a result of their relationship and his commitment to working for reconciliation, JB was invited to participate in highly secret conversations (lives would have been lost had news of this been leaked) with Jerry Adams of the IRA and key Protestant leaders.

Fifth, at home in his native Scotland, JB was concerned by the failure of the church to communicate the Gospel to its young people. He believed the failure of Calvinism to communicate the love of God and the extent of God’s all-inclusive commitment to humanity had profoundly undermined the outreach of the church in Scotland. The God of hyper-Calvinism was an object of fear, not of love. The exclusive fencing of the tables that continued to shape the mind-set of the parishioners in Croick Church in Strathcarron was still evident in the 1970s. Even then only one member of the deeply devout, local community went forward to receive the sacraments in the annual Church of Scotland communion service. The rest of the community were insufficiently confident that they discerned within themselves evidences of election.

Consequently, when he was appointed convenor of the Panel on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland he set out, successfully, to challenge the church's practice of refusing to allow believing children to participate in the Lord's Supper. Again, what motivated him was his inclusive, christocentric vision — that children belonged to Christ by right of creation and redemption and that it was a primary function of the church to witness to children that they did indeed belong. The practice of excluding children from the Lord's Supper until they reached their mid to late teens communicated the opposite message — that they did not belong and could not receive the bread and wine until they met the relevant conditions. The effect was to present the church as an exclusive religious club rather than the family of the one Father, the Body of Christ — of which our children were members by virtue of their baptism. This he challenged fearlessly! His passionate vision of the all-inclusive humanity of Christ and the unconditional nature of God's covenant commitment to humanity led him to confront the contractualism that haunted the life of the church and distorted and undermined its witness.

More fundamental than any of the above, however, was JB's love of Scripture. He read and devoured it — always with a pencil with which he scribbled in the margins. During what would turn out to be my final phone conversation with him the evening before he died (suddenly and unexpectedly), he and my mother were on different phones in different parts of the house. While my mother chatted I became aware that there was an ominous silence at Dad's end. "Dad, are you watching the news?" I asked, in a somewhat censorious tone. "No!" he replied. "So what *are* you doing?" There was a pause and then he confessed, rather sheepishly, "I'm reading my Bible!"

### **Key Emphases in JB's Theology**

Elsewhere, I have provided an extended account of the key emphases integral to his approach.<sup>1</sup> I shall summarise these briefly.

First, for JB, the heart of the faith was the doctrine of the Trinity which he saw as impacting on every facet of the Christian life. The New Testament witnesses to a communion of love that defines the very being of God. To say that "God is love" is not to suggest that God only became loving with the emergence of the contingent order as an object of his love. God is love because there is mutual loving in his innermost being from all eternity, quite independently of the existence of creation. JB never claimed the term "social Trinitarian" for good

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1 Alan J. Torrance, "The Bible as Testimony to our Belonging: the Theological Vision of James B. Torrance," in *An Introduction to Torrance Theology: Discovering the Incarnate Saviour*, ed. Gerrit Scott Dawson (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 121-134.



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reasons. To the extent that Trinitarian theology affirms the mutual love between the Father and the Son in the Spirit, he was simply seeking to be true to the biblical witness — references to the relationship between the Father and the Son “before the world existed” and “before the foundation of the world” (Jn. 17:5 and 17:24). Such an emphasis should not be construed as an attempt to fit Trinitarian theology into some Procrustean “social” bed. Nor is it simply based in John’s Gospel. The intra-Trinitarian relations opened up to humanity through the incarnation of the Son as Jesus Christ underpin the entire witness and message of the New Testament.

Second, to affirm the doctrine of the Trinity is irreducibly bound up with affirming the incarnation. Without the hypostatic union, the Trinity becomes irrelevant and the whole grammar of “abiding” as John would have it, of sharing, as Hebrews’ doctrine of the priesthood of Christ has it, and of participation (*koinonein/metechein*) which lies at the heart of Paul would be meaningless. The very suggestion that God should be so radically present to us and identify so radically with us is, of course, foolishness to the philosopher. But the ways of God are not the ways of women and men. For JB, as also for TF, the grammar of grace is to be conceived in terms of the unable to be anticipated reality of the participation by alienated, hostile creatures through the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father. To appreciate this we need to appreciate the two-fold movement represented in and through the hypostatic union, namely, that God comes to humanity *as God* (anhypostatic movement) and God comes to humanity *as man* and presents humanity redeemed and sanctified in himself to the Father (the enhypostatic, human-Godward movement). For JB, the incarnation embodies both movements and, without both, the incarnation is lost and the New Testament witness ceases to make sense. The weakness of the history of Western thought has been its emphasis on the former without perceiving the need to hold both together.

Third, this leads to JB’s emphasis on the vicarious humanity of Christ — he is the one who has come on behalf of the many, to be our representative, our priest-king. In him the many find their humanity cleansed, renewed, and now presented to the Father. What is presented is not simply some generic humanity and, as he insisted, Pauline participation has nothing to do with Platonic participation. In Jesus Christ each and every one of us finds our worship, prayers, and intercessions lifted up, sanctified and presented by the one who is the sole Priest and Representative of each of us. The very nature of our ongoing life of worship and, indeed, ethics (worth-ship) is to be conceived, therefore, in terms of this very concrete participation, by the Spirit, in our sole priest,

intercessor and *leitourgos*. In worship we are not “turned back upon ourselves” to try and generate what God requires of us. Worship and, indeed, every facet of our response (all that is required of us by the *torah*) is to be conceived as participation, by grace, in Christ’s fulfilment of these *dikaionomata*, in his Amen, in his “Yes” to the Father, and in his worship. In the Eucharist and in prayer and, indeed, in every facet of the Christian life the Spirit seeks to lift us up to share in his perfect response and ongoing worship offered on our behalf.

Fourth, in order to grasp this radically inclusive Gospel we are required to grasp the theological nature of God’s covenant commitment to humanity. JB was, indeed remains, famous (notorious?) for insisting that God’s relationship to humanity was to be interpreted in covenantal terms and emphatically *not* in contractual terms. “The God of the Bible is a covenant God and not a contract God!” And this covenant is unconditional and unconditioned by considerations of human worth. For precisely these reasons, however, it also places us under unconditional obligations — something, of course, which a contract cannot do! Now JB certainly did not deny that there are “ifs” in the Bible — indeed, he had a Bible (what was referred to as his “if Bible”) in which there was a carefully researched analysis of every single occurrence of that (massive) little word that has such massive theological significance. For JB, there were descriptive “ifs” and prescriptive “ifs” and both were entirely appropriate in the context of covenant relationship. This is something that everyone recognises in the Christian understanding of the “covenant of marriage” which is a covenant commitment based on love and which is unconditional — one promises to love “for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health . . .,” that is, *unconditionally*. “Prescriptive ifs” would take the form, “If you wish to have a happy, fulfilling marriage, do not beat your wife, do not commit adultery . . .” “Descriptive ifs” articulate the consequences of the way you behave in your marriage. If you are faithful, forgiving, selfless in your relation to your spouse, this is likely to engender mutual trust and *shalom*. If you are unfaithful, if you deceive, if you get your priorities wrong, this will lead to a loss of trust, insecurity, loneliness and an undermining of the *shalom* that God intends married couples to know. Not only is grasping the difference between a covenant and a contract vital for understanding the nature of marriage, if we fail to grasp this, we can only fail to appreciate the force of the obligations within a marriage. A contractual relationship means that obligations are no longer apodictic, they become conditional: if you are unfaithful, then I am free within the conditions of the contract to reciprocate. If the deal is contractual, then either party is effectively free to depart from the contract at any point and accept the contractual consequences. This is no more the Christian

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understanding of God's (unilateral) covenant with humanity than the Christian understanding of the (bilateral) covenant of marriage. A covenant places us under *unconditional* obligations.

For JB, it misconstrues every facet of biblical theology to suggest that God comes to us and proposes a bilateral contract where we are free to choose one of two or more options on the understanding that each has a different set of rewards. Such a "contract God" is the projection of the crudest models of human interaction displacing the God of Christian worship for a pauper! For JB, disillusionment with such a tawdry "god" has disillusioned and demoralised Christian congregations, undermined any real assurance of God's love and commitment, and, as a result, emptied the churches. Preaching is reduced to exhortations and condemnations pressuring people to meet the conditions of the contractual deal, effectually "turning people back upon themselves" such that they look away from Christ — and in its Calvinist form leading people to search desperately within themselves for "evidences of election," that is, evidences that they are loved and have not been elected from all eternity to be the objects of reprobation and that, therefore, Jesus' satisfaction of the contractual conditions of their being forgiven apply to them and save them from being the objects of God's wrath.

In radical contrast, God comes to us in an act of love that transcends anything that humanity could imagine and makes a unilateral, covenant commitment to us in all our sin and alienation. But grace does not stop there. The eternal Son then fulfils, on our behalf and in our place, the obligations that stem from this unilateral covenant. It is the indicatives of this inconceivable work of grace that sustain the imperatives of law. The latter flow from the former. To reverse that order is, of course, to turn the Gospel on its head by making a covenant into a contract. And that, as JB argued, is the universal temptation of the human heart!

### **Filial not legal**

For JB, the witness of Scripture is thus to a God who created us to be daughters and sons. God's primary purposes for all humanity are filial and not legal. The *torah* spells out the obligations of the God who, in love, has delivered us from the land of Egypt to be his sons and daughters. It is when we discern that God's purposes are from beginning to end "filial" that we are liberated to look away from ourselves (*excurvatus ex se*) in joy and confidence to live in the light of the love in which God addresses each one in Jesus Christ as his loved and forgiven children.

## **Evangelical versus legal repentance**

JB's emphasis on the filial goes hand in glove with a further key emphasis. In order to appreciate the nature of God's transformative work in our hearts, it is imperative that we are clear about the distinction between "evangelical" and "legal" *metanoia*. Arguably, the central weakness of the Western *ordo salutis* is its endorsement of the fact that repentance is to be conceived primarily in terms of the imperatives of law (*lex* as opposed to *torah*) and the condemnation implicit in the presentation of law to sinners. For JB, God transforms sinners by presenting them with the Gospel — the good news that the Son has taken what is ours in an act of love, healed and transformed it, and now presents us with our humanity cleansed and sanctified as a gift of pure grace. It is in and through the recognition, therefore, of the length and depth and breadth of God's love and the extent of God's forgiveness that the Spirit gives us the eyes to see that we belong to him by right of creation and by right of redemption and in and through this recognition brings about our transformation. For JB, the parable of the "Prodigal Son" and the account of Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus illustrate the transforming impact of the unconditioned and unconditional affirmation of our dignity by the one whom we recognise as having first loved us.

The substance of this good news is actualised in the vicarious humanity of Christ as this denotes "the one on behalf of the many" and the "many in the one." As we have seen, for JB, Athanasius' dictum that the eternal Son took what is ours and gives us what is his does not refer simply to the work of Christ prior to his death or resurrection. Rather, it refers to his whole life and thus his ongoing ascended life as the sole priest of our confession, as our *leitourgos*. He takes our worship and our intercessions and makes them his so that we might participate, by the Spirit, in *his* ongoing worship and repose in the fact that whereas "we do not know how to pray or worship as we ought" our frail and compromised prayers and worship are taken up by the sole mediator of our prayer and worship and presented to the Father in him. JB's essay for Barth's *Festschrift* was indicative of his perception that Karl Barth ought to have taken fuller account of John Calvin's emphasis on the ongoing priesthood of Christ.

## **Conclusion**

JB did not publish a great deal despite the fact that he read voraciously. He preferred to communicate his theological vision to his students to whom he was devoted by teaching. What he did write, however, exhibits analytic skills that

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find expression in a rare clarity and lucidity. This has been misconstrued in an age which too easily confuses obfuscation with theological depth. Particularly frustrating is the extent to which his detractors fail to engage his analyses with equal analytic care. It is fashionable, for example, to dismiss (even ridicule) his emphasis on the significance of distinguishing a covenant from a contract when it comes to interpreting God's relationship with humanity. I have yet to come across a scholar who has had the courage to argue against JB that it is not a unilateral covenant but a bilateral contract or that it is not relevant to make a theological distinction between these! This is, in part, a reflection of the re-emergence of "federal theology" and the doctrines of the double decree and limited atonement. (Recently, the advocates of the latter have opted for the more upbeat expression "definite atonement" though it is not entirely clear that "definite non-atonement" would not be more accurate.) It is at this point, however, one recognises a weakness in JB, as also in TF. A strong argument can be made to show that their approach was in harmony with a central (arguably, *the* central) trajectory in Calvin's thought. However, they were too slow to admit that there is also a double predestinarian trajectory in Calvin which they should have acknowledged and critiqued! There are points when Calvin appears to go beyond scriptural warrant in his references to the decisions made in God's secret counsels. (Cf. *Institutio* 3;21) At the same time, the vast body of his *Institutio* has a very different theological flavour to that of his more scholastic successors.

Were JB alive today, his philosophical skills would doubtless be deployed in defending the significance of the Trinity and the hypostatic union against contemporary tendencies that threaten them. He would question those who wish to insist on attributing metaphysical simplicity to God in ways that lead not only to modal collapse but also property collapse of a kind that ultimately leads to agnosticism. He would also question the growing tendency to affirm apophatic approaches to God, *a priori* endorsements of divine ineffability, and, indeed, arguments that there is no *real* relationship between the creature and the Father. However, he would be unlikely to argue against these with reference to *a priori* philosophical assumptions (although he could). He would be more likely to engage in what might be termed "analytic, Biblical dogmatics" that seeks to ask whether these teachings really do represent faithful, rigorous engagement with God's self-disclosure in the incarnate Word — the mutual love between the Son and the Father from before all worlds, the fact that the Word became flesh and thus that God speaks, that we have an apodictic duty to proclaim who God is and to affirm that God's being can be articulated. He would ask whether an emphasis on the unreality of the relationship of human creatures to God can make any

sense of Jesus' relationship to the Father. Is that to be regarded as "unreal?" JB (and TF) would be likely to see such contemporary tendencies as examples of the cyclical attempt to reintroduce the Arian *chorismos*, the gulf between God and the creation that has been overcome in Immanuel, the presence with us once and for all of the one through whom and for whom all things were created. For both brothers, the incarnate Son is both fully God and fully human. And this union of God and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ is the reality that stands at the heart of human existence and that requires us to interpret every facet of our communion with God in heart and mind and the life not only of the church but of the world from that centre.

In the small town of Roslyn, a few miles south of Edinburgh, there are two pieces of granite. The first is located in the garden of the Community of the Transfiguration and was discussed in my father's book. It is a sculpture carved by an artist who was banished by his family and his church when he confessed that he was gay. In the community in Roslyn where he had turned up broken and homeless he discovered a sense of belonging that he had never known in the church circles in which he had grown up. On leaving the community he gifted the community a sculpture that portrayed two men locked in an embrace. The only difference between them was the holes in the palms of one. When asked what the sculpture portrayed, he explained that it was the second Adam embracing the first Adam.

A few hundred yards away, in the grounds of Roslyn Chapel, stands another piece of granite, which is JB's headstone. Inscribed on it are words chosen by my mother: "He died as he lived, filled with gratitude for the unconditional love and forgiveness of the triune God of grace."

Every facet of JB's theology sought to articulate the implications of that belonging the ground of which is the communion of the Trinity and the Son's union and identification with humanity in Jesus Christ. To recognise that we belong, despite our alienation and confusion, serves to transform every facet of our understanding and all our allegiances both in relation to God but also in relation to God's world. To know the Gospel of Grace is to be set free. JB's theology endorsed that and his life reflected it.