

**THE IMPORT OF THOMAS F. TORRANCE'S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
FOR ADDRESSING RACIALIZATION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

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**Abstract:** *Theological anthropology is "implicated" or intimated in various places in Thomas F. Torrance's corpus. However, the doctrine of humanity has not received sufficient consideration in secondary literature. This essay will devote consideration to the import of Torrance's theological anthropology for discussions of race in our contemporary context. Torrance did not write at great length on race and racism. However, he did critique anti-Semitism and Apartheid. Moreover, his theological anthropology can serve as a significant resource for the development of theological discourse surrounding race and racism in the present setting. Torrance's volume The Mediation of Christ will serve as the fountainhead for discussion given its treatment of dualistic Enlightenment thought, Israel and Gentiles, mention of anti-Semitism, the import of Jesus as the personalizing person/humanizing human as Mediator, and his vicarious humanity. How might Torrance's theological anthropology's implications for race confront racialization in the contemporary context? Consideration will focus on the need to address and advance beyond three*

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*problematic and interrelated constructs with their import for race: first, dualism; second, Hellenism; and third, nationalism, nativism, and ethnocentrism.*

## **Implicated: Theological Anthropology and Race**

According to James Cone, dogmatic theology has not devoted sufficient attention to the subject of race.<sup>1</sup> In fact, dogmatic theology's lack of consideration of race can reinforce racialization, which entails racism's impact in all spheres of society, from employment to housing, from health care to education, and from policing to incarceration.<sup>2</sup> All too often, members of the dominant sub-culture view racial concerns as secondary or minimal in importance. They may claim that racism has already been addressed satisfactorily. The idea in the United States that racism and racialization have been overturned and that we live in a post-racialized society fails to account for the fact that racialization does not proceed by way of constants but variables.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the problem continues to evolve in unique and disturbing ways long beyond slavery, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights eras.<sup>4</sup> When dogmatic theology fails to engage racialization, it is implicated or incriminated in fostering the problem.

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<sup>1</sup> "Theologians and White Supremacy: An Interview with James H. Cone," in *America: The Jesuit Review*, November 20, 2006, <https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2006/11/20/theologians-and-white-supremacy-interview-james-h-cone>.

<sup>2</sup> Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, with a new foreword by Cornel West (New York: The New Press, 2012); Danyelle Solomon, Connor Maxwell, and Abril Castro, "Systemic Inequality: Displacement, Exclusion, and Segregation: How America's Housing System Undermines Wealth Building in Communities of Color," Center for American Progress, August 7, 2019, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2019/08/07/472617/systemic-inequality-displacement-exclusion-segregation/>; Sandra Feder, "Stanford Professor's Study Finds Gentrification Disproportionately Affects Minorities," *Stanford Report*, <https://news.stanford.edu/2020/12/01/gentrification-disproportionately-affects-minorities/>.

It's not always what we say and write about race that signifies whether we are racist. It's often what we fail to say and write that conveys whether we are racist. We must be alert and committed to confronting and overturning white privilege power systems. Torrance did not write at great length on race and racism. However, he did critique anti-Semitism and Apartheid.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Torrance's theological anthropology, which is "implicated" or intimated in various places in his corpus, as *Participatio's* editors argue, bears import for discussions of race in our contemporary context. His theological anthropology can serve as a significant resource for the development of theological discourse surrounding race and racism in the present setting.<sup>6</sup>

Torrance's volume *The Mediation of Christ* will serve as the fountainhead for discussion given its treatment of dualistic Enlightenment thought, Israel and Gentiles, mention of anti-Semitism, the import of Jesus as the personalizing person/humanizing human as Mediator, and his vicarious humanity. How might Torrance's theological anthropology's implications for race confront racialization in the contemporary context? In what follows, consideration will focus on the need to address and advance beyond three problematic and interrelated constructs with their import for race: first, dualism; second, Hellenism; and third, nationalism, nativism, and ethnocentrism.

## **Beyond Dualism**

Theologians must be ever mindful of the perennial, dualistic tendency of abstracting sensible phenomena in history from the God who reveals himself there. Theology rightly done will give pride of place to where and how God is revealed. God reveals himself to Israel. Torrance writes in *The Mediation of Christ*:

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<sup>5</sup> For the former, refer to the relevant discussion in Thomas. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1992). For the latter, refer to the treatment of his trip to South Africa in the article by Justin W. Taylor and Graham A. Duncan, "The Life and Work of the Anti-Apartheid Movement within the Church of Scotland from 1975 to 1985," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74, no. 1 (2018): 1-11; <http://www.hts.org.za>.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Jacquelynn Price-Linnartz, "Christ the Mediator and the Idol of Whiteness: Christological Anthropology in T. F. Torrance, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Willie Jennings" (PhD Diss., Divinity School of Duke University, 2016), 83.

In his desire to reveal himself and make himself knowable to mankind, he selected one small race out of the whole mass of humanity, and subjected it to intensive interaction and dialogue with himself in a such a way that he might mould and shape this people in the service of his self-revelation.<sup>7</sup>

Theology must guard against abstracting God's revelation from Israel as God's elect covenant partner. Moreover, it must be careful not to detach the spiritual significance of Israel from its spatial-temporal particularity. We cannot come to terms with God's revelation's "incisive definiteness and specificity" when operating "with a dualist frame of thought at the back of our minds." Why is that? According to Torrance, "it makes us want to detach the religious concept of Israel from the particularity of its physical extent and history in space and time, and to peel away from divine revelation what we tend to regard as its transient physical clothing." Torrance goes so far as to argue that this move "would be a fatal mistake."<sup>8</sup>

As is true of Israel, so it is true of all humanity. Humans are spatial and temporal beings. Moreover, as will be argued, we must see God's operations in history in and through Israel bearing on our humanity. We must not detach our humanity from this covenantal matrix in which Israel plays a "vicarious role" in mediating the redemption of humanity.<sup>9</sup> For Torrance, God's covenantal framing of Israel bears on human existence in its entirety.

Torrance's critique of damaging dualisms manifests itself throughout *The Mediation of Christ*.<sup>10</sup> It is a central tenet in Torrance's theology. Dualistic thinking affects our realization of our union with God in Christ. Torrance was ever mindful of the need to contend against dualisms that did great damage, including those forms of dualistic or "dichotomous" thinking that "detach Jesus Christ from God," "Jesus Christ from Israel," and "Christianity from Christ himself."<sup>11</sup> This dichotomous

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<sup>7</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 15–16.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–36.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 47, 99–100, 107, 122.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

perspective concerns a trajectory found in classical and European thought that “abstracted” sensible appearances from their “intelligible base.”<sup>12</sup>

In contending against dualistic thinking, Torrance highlights the importance of interrelations and internal relations. He indicates that we find both relational emphases in theology and science. Interrelations between entities are constitutive of their identities. Internal relations within entities constitute and distinguish them from other things.<sup>13</sup> Such relational dynamics are in play for all humans in our spatial-temporal existence. We find both interrelations and internal relations in Jesus’s identity. He is only who he is in such interrelations as “Son of David,” “Son of Mary,” and in his “bond” with God’s covenant partner Israel throughout time. Moreover, he is only who he is in such internal relations with God as disclosed in his “word and deed” to which the Gospel bears witness in the Church.<sup>14</sup> For Torrance, we cannot understand humanity apart from Israel’s history, apart from reconciliation with Israel, apart from the God-human who personalizes and humanizes us as human persons, apart from Jesus’ vicarious humanity, apart from the union of the immanent and economic Trinity. There is no dualism involving Israel and Gentiles, God and us, Christ and us, or the triune God in eternity and in history and their bearing on us.

Todd Speidell addresses the subject of dualism in an article on the reception of Torrance’s paradigm among theologians and scientists:

Torrance believed that modern theology remained trapped within dualist habits of thought that have plagued the mind of the Church since ancient times, damaging and disrupting its apprehension of the reality of our union with Christ. Dualism, both ancient and modern, resulted in an unfortunate conception of the universe as a closed, mechanistic continuum of cause and effect in which we cannot know

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1, 21.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 2–3. Here Torrance stands in stark contrast to Kant who argued that we cannot know things in themselves or their internal relations, only as they appear to us and in their external relations. See page 122.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 3.

things in themselves, but only as they appear to us.<sup>15</sup>

Further to Speidell's claim, one of the striking features in *The Mediation of Christ* is how Torrance nimbly weaves treatments of scientists like James Clerk Maxwell and Albert Einstein into his theological arguments. He finds that their discoveries bound up with relational, holistic, non-abstractive and non-projectionist patterns of inquiry resonate far better with the biblical witness to revelation and trinitarian theology's subject matter than the Newtonian universe that for so long dominated modern theology.<sup>16</sup>

By no means irrelevant to the present discussion, all too often abstractive and projectionist patterns of inquiry, whether scientific or theological, prove devastating for treatments of race. Examples include Social Darwinian trajectories and Nazism's impositions on scientific inquiry and attack of Einstein as propagating "Jewish science."<sup>17</sup> Rather than project the visible onto the invisible, which we find in racialized treatments of God and nature, we must move from the invisible reality to the visibly real, as in the case of the Hebrew Scriptures with its command not to make graven images of God. As with the biblical command not to "project our creaturely images into God," we must respond to the divine self-mediation of

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<sup>15</sup> Todd Speidell, "What Scientists Get and Theologians Don't About Thomas F. Torrance," *First Things* (June 26, 2013): <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2013/06/what-scientists-get-and-theologians-dont-about-thomas-f-torrance>.

<sup>16</sup> See for example Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 2–3, 49. Note also his affirmation of Jewish scientists on page 21. For Torrance, one's theological deliberations on God's relation to the world bears upon scientific explorations. For a striking account of Newton's non-trinitarian theology's import for his physical theory, see Simon Oliver's article "Motion According to Aquinas and Newton," *Modern Theology* 17 (2001): 163–199.

<sup>17</sup> Consider the treatment of Nobel-prize winning scientists who were advocates of "Aryan physics" and who criticized Einstein for espousing "Jewish science" in Philip Ball, "How 2 Pro-Nazi Nobelists Attacked Einstein's 'Jewish Science,'" *Scientific American*, February 13, 2015, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-2-pro-nazi-nobelists-attacked-einstein-s-jewish-science-excerpt1/>. The article is an excerpt from Ball's book, *Serving the Reich: The Struggle for the Soul of Physics under Hitler* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014). See Agustín Fuentes' recent critique of Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man*. He sees it as "often problematic, prejudiced, and injurious. Darwin thought he was relying on data, objectivity, and scientific thinking in describing human evolutionary outcomes. But for much of the book, he was not. *Descent*, like so many of the scientific tomes of Darwin's day, offers a racist and sexist view of humanity." Agustín Fuentes, "The Descent of Man, 150 Years On," *Science* 372, no. 6544 (May 2021): 769.

revelation whereby we appropriate the images to refer to “the invisible God imagelessly.”<sup>18</sup> This orientation finds a parallel in the realm of science: “interpret what is visible from what is inherently invisible.”<sup>19</sup> It is little wonder, as Torrance claims, that “it is very frequently Jewish scientists who have led the way.”<sup>20</sup>

Dualistic forms of thought bear negative import for theological and scientific inquiry and their application to race. As it pertains to theology proper, such projections and abstractions cloud our vision so that we find it difficult to discern God’s revelation in history. As a result, we fail to account for God’s actual dealings with people and societies. It leads to discounting Israel as the locus of God’s revelatory dealings with humanity. Hellenistic ways of thinking “have steadily gentilised our image of Jesus.”<sup>21</sup> If we are blind to what is sometimes called the “scandal of particularity,” we will never be able to see how God could or would engage us today in particular and concrete terms in present day struggles, including racialization, as in the case of color-blindness.

Shortly, we will turn to consider Hellenistic or “gentilised” forms of thought in greater detail. Before doing so, it is important to highlight how dualistic thinking also manifests itself in detached or abstract consideration of one’s subject matter. We can only truly know the object under investigation if there is what Torrance calls “cognitive union.”<sup>22</sup> “All genuine knowledge involves a cognitive union of the mind with its object, and calls for the removal of any estrangement or alienation that may obstruct or distort it. This is a principle that applies to all spheres of knowledge, and not simply to our knowledge of God.”<sup>23</sup> Knowledge always involves union and reconciliation.<sup>24</sup> Thus, God had to reconcile and transform Israel. Revelation and reconciliation always go hand in hand. As Torrance writes in the

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<sup>18</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 20.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 24–25.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 24–25.

context of what he takes to be a rapprochement involving Jews and Christians, reconciliation is “the inner dynamic of God’s self-revelation, for there is no way of really knowing God without being reconciled to him.” God’s personal encounter with us is all-encompassing.<sup>25</sup>

As it relates to race, all too often, people who are not deeply invested and entrenched in the struggle claim to have advanced to an elevated status on race. They either see themselves as enlightened or have the appearance of being discerning without participating in the struggle or despise those as “woke” who are sensitive to racial problems. It is saddening to see a word that once conveyed the need to stay alert or vigilant on racial matters be made a term of derision.<sup>26</sup>

One cannot understand race without seeing oneself as existing in reconciled solidarity with others. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers. Just as Israel underwent a fiery ordeal of purgation in relation to God, so we must undergo a baptism by fire in terms of race. Rather than presume neutrality and spectator status, we need to see ourselves as implicated and in need of purgation. Those of us who belong to the dominant culture must die to dominant culture power structures. As Torrance writes, Jesus’ cruciform love must lead the way forward as his “Cross has the effect of emptying the power-structures that the world loves so much, of their vaunted force.”<sup>27</sup> Jesus engages us and effects change, not by way of “external transaction” but full incorporation and appropriation of our fallen existence to transform us from the inside out.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>26</sup> Refer to the following two articles on these dynamics. The first is an article critiquing the Left as being “woke.” The second is an article critiquing the disparaging use of “woke.” Helen Raleigh, “Woke Racism Is a Systemic Problem in America,” *Newsweek* (May 6, 2021): <https://www.newsweek.com/woke-racism-systemic-problem-america-opinion-1589071>; Dana Brownlee, “Exhibit A Bill Maher: Why White People Should Stop Using the Term ‘Woke’... Immediately,” *Forbes* April 19, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danabrownlee/2021/04/19/why-white-people-should-stop-using-the-term-wokeimmediately/?sh=3b6344287779>.

<sup>27</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 39–40.

Jesus moves us beyond our in-groups and out-groups. We are embedded in our bodies, including skin color, as well as sub-cultures. But we are not reduced to them as persons in covenantal communion. We exist in relationship to others.<sup>29</sup> The relationships which exist between people are "onto-relations." This is so because "they are person-constituting relations."<sup>30</sup> Our personhood is embedded and emergent, arising from the biological and cultural, but not enslaved to the biological and cultural. The triune God constitutes us as persons with inherent dignity through the personalizing person of Jesus of Nazareth. This interpersonal constitution awards us with indescribable dignity and worth. We no longer look at anyone from a merely human point of view but from the vantage point of Jesus' vicarious humanity. We used to look at Jesus in a reductionistic way, but not any longer (2 Corinthians 5:16). We are the church, the covenantal community made up of Jews and Gentiles as the new humanity reconciled to God in Jesus through the Spirit. Contrary to the way many Christians, especially Evangelicals, today apparently view "personal covenantal relationships" as "passive inter-personalism," "a covenantal approach to relationships calls for a commitment to the well-being of others and taking action to secure it in every area of life."<sup>31</sup>

This covenantal framework is bound up with the "ontological reconciliation" that occurs through the mediation of Christ. In view of Jesus as "the personalising Person and the humanising man" who mediates us to God, the church as God's covenant community

is not merely a society of individuals gathered together on moral grounds and externally connected with one another through common ethical ideals, for there is no way through external organization to effect the personalising or humanising of people in society or therefore

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<sup>29</sup> For treatments of personalism and their import for human dignity in society at large, see the following works: Rufus Burrow, Jr., *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Christian Smith, *What Is a Person?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Torrance, *The Mediator of Christ*, 49.

<sup>31</sup> Gary W. Deddo, "Neighbors in Racial Reconciliation: The Contribution of a Trinitarian Theological Anthropology," *Cultural Encounters: A Journal for the Theology of Culture* 3, no. 2 (2007): 36.

of transforming human social relations.<sup>32</sup>

The ontological reconciliation through the mediation of Jesus heals and transforms our various “inter-personal” relationships.<sup>33</sup> Will we live into that reality?

The idea that one can be racially astute without being interpersonally connected in total solidarity with those of other ethnicities in concrete historical and racialized settings is a sham and a denial of the ontological reconciliation that the triune God establishes. There is no way one can grapple with racialization’s entrenchment and complexities without substantial exposure and investment in diverse relationships. With this point in mind, Michael Emerson and Christian Smith note how difficult it is for white Evangelicals to address racialization due to isolation: “white Evangelicalism likely does more to perpetuate the racialized society than to reduce it.”<sup>34</sup> The very dynamics that help it thrive, such as its sustained investment in cultivating homogeneous solidarity, are what hinder it from seeing how pronounced racialization is.<sup>35</sup> God engages Israel and calls on us who are Gentiles to be in solidarity with Israel through the “permanent structures” that God put in place by way of teaching and liturgy, such as messiah, covenant, and atonement, which shaped the early church’s own thought and practice. We must engage one another,<sup>36</sup> Jew and Gentile alike, in view of the Hebraic patterns of old and Jesus as the sole mediator between God and humanity by way of embedded, personal covenantal communion, not detachment.

With this point in mind, it is worth drawing attention to Torrance’s rebuke of white Evangelicals in South Africa after he visited the country. They remained entrenched in Apartheid systems of thought and practice. Jacquelynn Price-Linnartz comments in her doctoral dissertation “Christ the Mediator and the Idol of Whiteness: Christological Anthropology in T. F. Torrance, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Willie Jennings”:

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<sup>32</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 71.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>34</sup> Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 170.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 125–127, 132–133.

<sup>36</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 17–19.

Torrance is “ashamed of many so-called ‘evangelicals’ in [South Africa] who live and act in such a way as to condone apartheid, keeping their Christian witness apart from any resolve to actualise in the flesh and blood of human existence reconciliation in Christ with one another.” Too many missionaries in South Africa, he judges, had detached Christianity from Christ, removed Christ from the center, rejected Christ’s “sole mediatorship,” and imposed “European Church divisions upon African people.” He issues a call to action, that the churches should “combat and eliminate obstructions to the Gospel of reconciliation through divisive policies enacted in the name of a Christian State and with the backing of a Christian Church.” If the churches did not unite ecumenically to overcome the divisions of apartheid, then they were living a lie.<sup>37</sup>

God has constituted and situated his covenant community in the matrix of cultural and social dynamics bound up with Israel. We should shape our communal life involving Jews and Gentiles and people of diverse ethnic backgrounds in view of these permanent structures embedded in the biblical narrative. The Jewish people continue to have a “vicarious mission” or “vicarious role” in the mediation of God’s work of redemption among the nations, including its being blind for our sake.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Jesus remains a Jew in his vicarious humanity, which will forever remain in indissoluble union with his deity as the God-Man.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, we must guard against Hellenizing the Gospel. We now turn to this subject.

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<sup>37</sup> Price-Linnartz, “Christ the Mediator and the Idol of Whiteness,” 83, quoting Thomas F. Torrance, “Strategy for Mission,” in *The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection* (Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, [1976]), 1-2.

<sup>38</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 34–36.

<sup>39</sup> Elsewhere Torrance highlights the continuity of Jesus’ Jewish identity for all time: “Thus the knowledge of God, of Christ, and of the Jews are all bound up inseparably together, so that when at last God came into the world he came as a Jew. And to this very day Jesus remains a Jew while still the eternal Son of God. It is still through the story of Israel, through the Jewish soul shaped by the hand of God, through the Jewish Scriptures of the Old Testament and the Jewish Scriptures of the New Testament church, that the gospel comes to us, and that Jesus Christ is set before us face to face as Lord and saviour,” Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 43.

## Beyond Hellenism

We must guard against Hellenism on the one hand and nationalism on the other hand. Proper consideration of Israel that guards against Hellenism or “gentilised” forms of thought involves consideration of the spatial-temporal configuration of divine self-revelation.<sup>40</sup> God always works with his distinctive people Israel. Contrary to dualistic ideological patterns, Israel is a distinctive people and nation in space and time with all that entails, not simply a religious or moral concept:

Divine revelation did not just bear upon the life and culture of Israel in some tangential fashion, rippling the surface of its moral and religious consciousness, but penetrated into the innermost centre of Israel and involved itself in the concrete actuality and locality of its existence in time and space, so that in its articulated form as human word it struck home to Israel with incisive definiteness and specificity.<sup>41</sup>

Hellenistic thinking entails promoting spirit over matter, spirituality over physicality, rather than seeing them as inseparable, as in Jesus’ incarnation. Kanzo Uchimura refers to this spiritualizing dynamic in his critique of Western imperialist missions as “amorphous” spirituality.<sup>42</sup> While it does not appear that T. F. Torrance accounts explicitly for the Hellenistic impulse’s role in anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish thought and action in *The Mediation of Christ*, it was certainly apparent in Aryan Supremacy and Nazism’s reign of terror against the Jews.

Alan Torrance reasons that German nationalism’s rise fostered spiritual subjectivism and the relativism concerning the “imperatives of the Gospel.”<sup>43</sup> Such

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<sup>40</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 19.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>42</sup> Kanzo Uchimura, “Japanese Christianity,” in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, vol. 2, ed. Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore de Bary, and Donald Keene (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); reprint, H. Byron Earhart, ed. *Religion in the Japanese Experience: Sources and Interpretations*, The Religious Life of Man Series, ed. Frederick J. Streng (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1974), 113 (italics added).

<sup>43</sup> Alan J. Torrance, introduction to *Christ, Justice and Peace: Toward a Theology of the State in Dialogue with the Barmen Declaration*, by Eberhard Jüngel, trans. D. Bruce Hamill and Alan J. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), xi.

relativism and spiritual subjectivism of the law of the gospel advanced the *Volksnomoi* or law of the German people.<sup>44</sup> According to Karl Barth, only by privatizing Christ's law could the fallen powers equate "the law of God" and "the law of the German people." Such seeds of privatization had already been sown given the influence of Neo-Kantian thought in certain sectors of German culture, according to which religion was relegated to the realm of the "*Individuum*."<sup>45</sup> Barth's *Barmen Declaration* contends against the *Volksnomoi* and the Third Reich in view of Jesus Christ, the one Word of God. For the gospel is Jesus Christ, and him alone. He "is the one Word of God." In the light of him, the church rejects "other events, powers, historic figures ..., and truths ... as God's revelation."<sup>46</sup>

To return to spatial-temporal considerations, it is important to note the importance of land in Torrance's mind. People of the book and people of the land go hand in hand. They are inseparable. Torrance observes an awakening among Jewish people in his day to champion *Am ha' Aretz*, which involves the wedding of the Torah and the Promised Land.<sup>47</sup> There can be no "abstract intellectualism and legalistic moralism" when Judaism (and the Church, for that matter in accounting

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<sup>44</sup> With the rise of nationalism in Germany, which Barth refers to as "these recent troubled times," one finds the invention of the "Volksnomoi." Karl Barth, "Gospel and Law," in *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays*, with an introduction by Will Herberg (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1968), 91.

<sup>45</sup> See Alan Torrance, introduction to *Christ, Justice and Peace*, xi.

<sup>46</sup> Douglas S. Bax, trans., "The Barmen Theological Declaration, A New Translation," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 47 (1984): 79. Bax points out that the "'German Christians' spoke of Hitler as the German Moses" (79, fn.9). He also highlights Ernst Wolf's exegesis of this text. According to Wolf, "events" refer to Hitler's seizure of office in 1933, "powers" as "*Blut und Boden*," "figures" as Hitler, and "truths" as the doctrines of the "Volk" (Bax, "Barmen Theological Declaration," 79, fn.10). See Ernst Wolf, *Barmen. Kirche zwischen Versuchung und Gnade* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1957), 104. It is worth noting that Barmen has been hailed as a paradigmatic text in the struggle against oppression. For discussions of the relevance of Barmen for the war against oppression, see the following two works: John W. DeGruchy, "Barmen: Symbol of Contemporary Liberation?," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 47 (1984): 59-71; Desmond Tutu, "Barmen and Apartheid," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 47 (1984): 73-77.

<sup>47</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 16.

for Israel) accounts for the full implications of its spatial-temporal<sup>48</sup> reality as God's covenant partner throughout history.

Torrance is right to emphasize land in his consideration of God's covenantal purposes for Israel. Willie Jennings has astutely appropriated concern over spatial considerations involving Israel and Jesus for Christian discipleship in the contemporary context:

Rather than the emergence of spaces of communion that announce the healing of the nations through the story of Israel bound up in Jesus, spaces situated anywhere and everywhere the disciples of Jesus live together, we are now the inheritors and perpetrators of a global process of spatial commodification and social fragmentation. These processes are performed within the class and economic calculations of global real estate. They force local communities to reflect global networks of exchange in regard to private property that echo colonialism's racial hierarchies and divisions.<sup>49</sup>

Such problematic dynamics manifest themselves in gentrification and results in decay for minority communities in their places of origin. Economic and educational challenges abound. Gang activity increases. It is critically important to challenge dualistic forms of presumed gospel witness that prize spirit over matter and in which church planting initiatives by the dominant culture in these urban environments fuel further displacement of minority communities.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 16–17.

<sup>49</sup> Willie Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 293. See also page 292. J. Kameron Carter also emphasizes the Jewishness of Jesus. According to Carter, the Enlightenment project Hellenizes him, taking away his Jewish particularity bound up with Israel as an elect community (rather than a race). This bears on colonialist and imperialist trajectories abroad: the West (with its Hellenized Christ principle) is always better than the rest. J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>50</sup> For an important new work on what can be done to address the global real estate problem in America's inner cities, see David E. Kresta, *Jesus on Main Street: Good News through Community Economic Development*, with a foreword by Paul Louis Metzger (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021).

Torrance's affirmation of Israel as a spatial-temporal reality in God's covenantal purposes holds great promise for addressing social unrest, as noted here. One cannot readily divest people of their landed identity in Christian mission if one accounts for Israel's embodiment in the land as part of Gospel witness. Still, there is one problematic feature, and it bears on nationalism, which we will soon address. Given Torrance's concern to guard against nationalism, including in the context of Israel,<sup>51</sup> it is important to qualify concern for the land of Israel with concern for the Palestinian people who lived in the land for generations before the formation of the modern state of Israel.

The Old Testament calls on Israel to care for the alien in their midst, treating them as natives and providing them with an inheritance (Ezek. 47:21-22). How much more should that be the case when those in the land are not aliens or sojourners, that is, recent arrivals, but people who have lived there for generations, even as neighbors? One cannot treat them as Canaanites, who existed in the land at the time of the Conquest. Palestinians and Jews had lived together in peace for a very long time. Like the Jews, they are also people of the Book, as they are Muslims and Christians.

Speaking of people of the Book, Christian Zionism often neglects consideration of Palestinian Christians, who have been departing in droves from the region for decades. Christian nationalism and concern for eschatology apart from ecclesiology shapes the psyche of many American Christian nationalists and Zionists. They have no seeming awareness or vital concern for Palestinian Christians and no appreciation that these Palestinian Christians have been a stabilizing and mediating presence in the region. Their absence only intensifies the divide and fans extreme positions among Jewish and Muslim people, as well as the Christian West and Muslim world.<sup>52</sup>

It is also worth noting here that the modern state of Israel does not reflect the Old Testament Scriptures' call to shalom in the land. Yes, Israel has every right to experience safety and prosperity and should not be subject to aggression. That

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<sup>51</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 14.

<sup>52</sup> See for example Don Belt, "The Forgotten Faithful: Arab Christians," *National Geographic* (June 2009): 85–86, 94.

said, it has no right to confiscate and demolish Palestinian property and homes, build and expand settlements in direct violation of international law, and build walls and checkpoints that keep Palestinians from getting to work and having access to healthcare.<sup>53</sup>

Torrance cannot be expected to address this issue in *The Mediation of Christ* in any detail or forecast the resulting and ongoing aftermath of the Six Days' War of 1967 for Jewish-Arab relations. Still, it was striking that no mention was made of the matter in his treatment of the modern state of Israel<sup>54</sup> and given his concern over nationalism. That said, Torrance is to be commended for resisting the move to discount Israel's vicarious role in God's redemptive purposes in history. As he writes elsewhere,

rebellion against the reconciling purpose of God being worked out through Israel cannot but bring fragmentation among the peoples and nations of [hu]mankind, for it detaches them from their creative centre in God's providential activity in history, when they are thrown back upon their separated existences and cultures as national entities. Nationalism of this kind can only take the form of group-egoism or ethnic sin, which is the poisonous root of all racism.<sup>55</sup>

We now turn to address the subject of nationalism, nativism, and ethnocentrism.

## **Beyond Nationalism, Nativism, and Ethnocentrism**

We have highlighted the need to contend against Hellenistic impulses that downplay spatial-temporal, ethnic, and cultural particularity, including Jesus' Jewishness. It is also important to guard against the other extreme of promoting matter over spirit

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<sup>53</sup> For consideration of illegal settlements and movement restrictions, refer here: "High time for accountability', UN expert says as Israel approves highest rate of illegal settlements," *UN News* October 30, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/10/1076572>; "Permits, checkpoints and the Wall: Health care barriers due to movement restrictions," World Health Organization, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, <http://www.emro.who.int/pse/palestine-infocus/seam-zone-access-health-services.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 44–45.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "The Divine Vocation and Destiny of Israel in World History," in *The Witness of the Jews to God*, ed. David W. Torrance (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1982), 87.

or reducing spirit to matter, which involves nationalism, nativism, and ethnocentrism. Torrance protects against the latter extreme by distinguishing between nation and people and by giving primacy of place to Jesus as the *telos* of God's gracious covenantal purposes with Israel.

Regarding nation and people, Torrance argues that Israel is both a nation (*ethnos*) and a people (*laos*): "Unlike any other nation Israel is not just a nation, an *ethnos*, but a people of God, a *laos* ...."<sup>56</sup> Israel is ultimately God's covenant partner and so must guard against giving way to a completely nationalistic orientation. Not only in the ancient world, but also in the modern era, Israel has an extremely challenging role to play in God's purposes:

... as *laos* as well as *ethnos* Israel cannot behave as though it were only *ethnos*, a nation like the other nations of the earth, without conflicting with the basic relationships which underlies its whole history and existence. That is to say, Israel cannot completely nationalise its own existence without detaching itself from the very covenant with God which constitutes it the people that it always has been and is.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to the important distinction between nation and people and how Israel functions as both a nation and God's covenant community, we must also consider Israel's subordinate status to Jesus Christ when confronting nationalism. Jesus Christ, not Israel, serves as "the controlling centre of the mediation of divine revelation in and through Israel." He is this controlling centre given his identity as "the personal self-revelation of God to man, the eternal Word of God made flesh once and for all." Jesus "constitutes the reality and substance of God's self-revelation, but Jesus Christ in Israel and not apart from Israel."<sup>58</sup>

If Israel could have comprehended this non-nationalistic, Jewish messianic hope in Jesus' day, it would have been spared much grief. Rather than fixate on the temple and nation, it would have viewed Jesus as the temple and as their long-expected Messiah, whose kingdom aims did not put the Jewish people in harm's

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<sup>56</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 14.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–23.

way with the Roman Empire. If Israel had viewed Jesus as the temple and long-anticipated Messiah, this frame of mind would have put a check as well on their nationalistic and ethnocentric ambitions. In John's Gospel, Jesus becomes the point of reference, not a building or city. Jesus' body is the ultimate temple. Jesus makes this claim in the context of cleansing the temple and the authorities' demand for an authoritative basis for his actions (Jn. 2:18-22). Such de-centering and reframing political opposition was the only way forward for Israel, as N.T. Wright argues.<sup>59</sup> Jesus as the center rather than the temple or nation also would have prompted Israel to reconcile with the Gentiles rather than prohibit them from entering the inner court with the threat of loss of life. Paul certainly had this context in mind when he spoke of Christ Jesus breaking down the wall of division between Jews and Gentiles in the church (Ephesians 2:11-22).

How often do our nationalistic ambitions today exclude peoples of other lands, namely those we deem unclean or impure, as the equivalent of Gentile barbarians, especially those of darker complexion and those of different faith traditions like Islam? What happens when white Christian nationalists and nativists feel threatened by "the other" and sense the need for cleansing the world and their native land — not necessarily themselves, and by whatever means? What might the result or aftermath be?<sup>60</sup>

We must ensure that such disturbing ideologies as nationalism and nativism do not arise in our midst. Rather than view any nation or people group as God's natural selection, we must champion the notion that we only stand by God's grace. Israel is central, not by nature, but by grace. As a nation and people, Israel, and only Israel, has this role, not because it is superior or inferior in any way. It had no

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<sup>59</sup> See N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 54–73.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew L. Whitehead, Samuel L. Perry, and Joseph O. Baker, "Make America Christian Again: Christian Nationalism and Voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election," *Sociology of Religion* 79 (2018): 147–171; Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Philip Gorski, "White Christian Nationalism: The Deep Story Behind the Capitol Insurrection," *Berkley Forum* (January 22, 2021): <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/white-christian-nationalism-the-deep-story-behind-the-capitol-insurrection>.

“special religious propensity or insight.” It was not “morally or spiritually worse.”<sup>61</sup> Rather, it serves in this role in view of God’s electing purposes for revelation and reconciliation through Jesus Christ. Given that God calls Israel into this unique role, we should neither take its mantle for ourselves (nationalism and ethnocentrism) or blame Israel (anti-Semitism). If anything, we should be grateful for the role Israel plays on behalf of all nations and peoples, honor Israel, and empathize with Israel for the suffering it bears in this fundamentally unique role throughout history.<sup>62</sup>

God’s covenantal grace made an indelible impression upon Israel’s being and transformed it through a most painful process:

The Old Testament Scriptures, which are the product of it, show that Israel was subjected to the most appalling suffering, an ordeal in which Israel was again and again broken upon the wheel of divine Providence in order to become pliable and serviceable within the movement of God’s intimate self-giving and self-communicating to it as a people set apart for that end.<sup>63</sup>

It endured “physical and mental” suffering at the hands of other nations on account of its peculiar status as God’s covenantal people.<sup>64</sup> It suffered “internal upheaval

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<sup>61</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 10.

<sup>62</sup> Torrance’s view of Israel’s centrality as a suffering covenantal community calls to mind the rabbinic leader “Rashi,” that is, Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (1040–1105) and his interpretation of Isaiah 53. The fundamental difference between the two is that Rashi generally does not interpret the Suffering Servant as an individual Messiah, limiting the Suffering Servant’s role to Israel as a people. Moreover, he does not appear to emphasize Israel’s disobedience, but righteousness. Rashi and others commented on Isaiah 53 against the backdrop of the persecution of the Jews at the hands of Christians during the Crusades. The theme of God’s presence prompted Rashi’s comments on Isaiah 53: Has God abandoned his people Israel? One solution was to interpret Isaiah 53 to refer to the nation. God was not abandoning Israel but giving them a unique role in suffering on behalf of the Gentiles. Joel Rembaum points to one place where Rashi interprets Isaiah 53 in messianic terms. See Joel Rembaum, “The Development of a Jewish Exegetical Tradition Regarding Isaiah 53,” *Harvard Theological Review* 75 (1982): 289–311, including the note on the individual messianic figure — 294, fn.19.

<sup>63</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 8.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

whenever it chafed at its covenanted destiny."<sup>65</sup> As far as its ultimate suffering at God's hands is concerned, Torrance argues,

But Israel had to suffer above all from God, precisely as the chosen medium of his self-revelation to mankind, for divine revelation was a fire in the mind and soul and memory of Israel burning away all that was in conflict with God's holiness, mercy and truth. By its very nature that revelation could not be faithfully appropriated and articulated apart from conflict with deeply ingrained habits of human thought and understanding and without the development of new patterns of thought and understanding and speech as worthy vehicles of its communication.<sup>66</sup>

We should not idolize or demonize Israel. Rather, we should empathize with and affirm Israel in its representative or vicarious function for humanity in covenant relation with God. Israel's obedience prepares the way as it participates in God's revelation in Jesus. Its disobedience also reveals or "mirrors" our own rebellion against God. Torrance argues:

the conflict between God and man throughout Israel's existence which contributed to its strangeness, mirrors the conflict between God and ourselves, which we resent, and while our real quarrel is with the searching light of divine revelation reflected by Israel, it is against Israel itself that we vent our resentment. There we have, I believe, the root of anti-semitism.<sup>67</sup>

It is exceptionally challenging for other nations and people groups to understand and value Israel's role in the world. We cannot compute the singular "depth and intensity of the contradiction between man and God" that Israel embodies in its representative function.<sup>68</sup> But rather than taking it out on Israel as anti-Semitism

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

does, we should come to terms with the fundamental problem: our real conflict is not with Israel, but with God.

Just as anti-Semitism is excluded, supersessionism finds no place in God's covenantal plan. God's covenant is with the whole of Israel, not just a part. It's for all time, not just leading up to Christ. Israel as a people experiences security, not independent from, but in relation to Christ, the eternal mediator. Israel finds its security in him.<sup>69</sup>

In addressing the perennial problem of uprooting the Hebrew Scriptures (like Amos) from Israel, Torrance writes:

we detach patterns of thought from their embodiment in Israel as they [are] presented in the Old Testament Scriptures, or even in the New Testament, and then schematise them to our own culture, a western culture, a black culture, an oriental culture, as the case may be. It is not difficult, as Albert Schweitzer found, to show that, when we seek to interpret Jesus like that within the conditioning of our European culture, we inevitably lose him.<sup>70</sup>

We must remain vigilant to see "him as he really is, as a Jew."<sup>71</sup>

Given God's continued purposes for Israel, there can be no sense in which other groups, whether white Christian nationalists or nativists, who wear the mantle of manifest destiny,<sup>72</sup> or African Americans in the form of the Hebrew Israelite

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>72</sup> For a historical discussion of Christian nationalism, including Manifest Destiny, in the U.S. to the present time, see Mark T. Edwards, ed., *Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Basel: MDPI, 2017); download <https://www.mdpi.com/books/pdfdownload/book/326>.

movement,<sup>73</sup> may detach and uproot the Jewish people from the Hebrew Scriptures and view themselves as the true heirs of the biblical promise. All besides Israel are Gentiles. That said, there can be typological extension and application (not detachment or replacement) in drawing comfort and hope for deliverance from such passages as the Exodus story, as in the case of African American slaves and later generations of African Americans engaged in the struggle for justice in the church and society at large.<sup>74</sup>

The ultimate comfort and hope for deliverance we find in Genesis and Exodus is that God will bless all peoples through the promised One who will descend from Israel. He is the hope of the nations. He will reconcile all peoples to God and Israel with the nations. The biblical narrative portrays one humanity and one mediator of humanity, Jesus of Nazareth, for Israel and the rest of humankind in their differentiated existence. Given that there is one humanity and one mediator between God and humankind according to Scripture, it follows that the racial divisions that we find in society are not inherent. They are neither theologically or

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<sup>73</sup> It is important to pause and differentiate “Black Jews” who originate from Sub-Saharan Africa and African Americans who are sometimes called “Black Jews,” but who refer to themselves as “Hebrew Israelites.” Regarding the latter, they are “obviously liminal even in their status as Black Jews; they often reject any identification with the modern Jewish community or practice or at least are unwilling to undergo conversion, believing that would be a relinquishing and submission of their own — allegedly longstanding — traditions and claim of identity to one that has no stronger such claim; sometimes they perceive themselves or African Americans generally as the authentic descendants of the Israelites or Judaeans, while the people commonly known as Jews are seen as European interlopers who by some feat have become mistakenly regarded as linearly related to the people of the Bible. These Judaizing groups most generally do not name themselves Jews, but prefer to go by the name Hebrew Israelites, or one of a few other variations. There are several factions among this broad movement, of varying ideologies and varying degrees of militancy in their outlook.” Michael T. Miller, “Black Judaism(s) and the Hebrew Israelites,” *Religion Compass* 13 (2019): 1–10.

<sup>74</sup> See Albert J. Raboteau, “African-Americans, Exodus, and the American Israel,” in *African American Christianity: Essays in History*, ed., Paul E. Johnson, with a foreword by Vincent G. Harding (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1–16; David F. Herr, “Identification with Biblical Israel and the Exodus Story,” *Encyclopedia.com*, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/applied-and-social-sciences-magazines/identification-biblical-israel-and-exodus-story>. Richard Lischer discusses the African American community’s comparison of Dr. King and other African American preachers and leaders with Moses and the biblical prophets in *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 172–176.

biologically grounded, but psychological and sociological constructs. Paul addresses such psychological and sociological problems.

Ephesians 2:11-22 features the church as a community made up of Jews and Gentiles. That includes everyone through faith in Christ. Paul writes of how the triune God has removed the dividing wall of hostility involving certain applications of the Law that functioned to polarize the two groups. Through Christ, the two have been brought together as one new humanity (Ephesians 2:15), fellow citizens of his kingdom, members of his household (Ephesians 2:19), and temple parts/participants (Ephesians 2:21).

Torrance reflects upon this passage.<sup>75</sup> As he considers the Apostle Paul's argument, Torrance reasons that there is an "inner relation between the doctrine of atonement and the doctrine of the triune God."<sup>76</sup> Moreover, he asserts that one only has "access to knowledge of God as he is in himself" via "God's self-revelation through the medium of Israel" and "reconciliation with God through the cross of Christ."<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, in addition to Jesus, the Spirit of God "intervenes in vicarious intercession on our behalf and pours out the love of God into our hearts."<sup>78</sup> What we find here, as well as throughout the volume, is Torrance's unequivocal stance in contending against dualisms of various kinds. He takes issue with our "gentile approach" in East and West that discounts Israel's connection to Jesus<sup>79</sup> and that dualistic trajectory that discounts Jesus' fundamental reality as God and human. Regarding the latter, Torrance writes: the Nicene *homoousion* "overthrew the dualistic ways of thinking dominant in the Hellenistic culture of the ancient world and made room for the formulation of the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> See for example Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 103–105.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 109–110.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 122–123.

F. F. Bruce also addresses Paul's treatment of the Jew-Gentile division in Ephesians 2. In Paul's day, certain interpretations and applications of the Law served to ostracize Gentiles. It was not that the Law itself was done away with by Jesus, but the written code or letter of the law. Bruce writes that the transformation occurs through Jesus' high priestly sacrifice and the empowerment of the Spirit in our inner persons:

It is not the law as a revelation of the character and will of God that has been done away with in Christ .... The righteousness required by the law of God is realized more fully by the inward enabling of the Spirit — in Jew and Gentile alike — than was possible under the old covenant. But the law as a written code, threatening death instead of imparting life, is done away with in Christ.<sup>81</sup>

In the biblical context involving Jews and Gentiles, whether the wall of hostility was the barrier that divided the court of the Jews from the court of the Gentiles in the Temple or the Law as a written code, the fundamental problem according to Bruce was ultimately psychological — often a sense of superiority bound up with separateness. As we see in Romans 1-3 and 9-11, the sense of psychological superiority can work both ways. Bruce writes about this psychological barrier:

The barrier between Jews and Gentiles was largely a psychological barrier, the antipathy aroused by the separateness of the Jews, accompanied as it often was by a sense of superiority on their part. But this antipathy, it is affirmed, has been abolished by Christ "in his flesh" — that is, by his death... How? Because by his death he has done away with that which separated the Jews from the Gentile, "the law of commandments, ordinances and all."<sup>82</sup>

Such barriers or dividing walls of hostility exist in our day, too. We have laws that isolate and "otherize" individuals and people groups on account of ethnic differences. Such othering might not manifest itself in visible or explicit laws of

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<sup>81</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 298.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

religious legalism, slavery, segregation, and redlining. They could simply be laws or ideological constructs of social segregation that allow us to stay entrenched in our respective domains of confirmation bias, conservative and liberal forms of identity politics, and consumer comfort zones, which keep us from realizing our emancipation and full equality in Christ.

Often such laws of separation in the modern period involve a mistaken sense of racial superiority that claims to have scientific support. All too often, people view racial barriers as biological. This is fallacious thinking. Anthropologist Agustín Fuentes discusses this theme:

In humans today, there are not multiple biological groups called “races.” However, race is real and it impacts us all. What we call “race” are social categories ...

There is currently one biological race in our species: *Homo sapiens sapiens*. However, that does not mean that what we call “races” (our society’s way of dividing people up) don’t exist. Societies, like the U.S., construct racial classifications, not as units of biology, but as ways to lump together groups of people with varying historical, linguistic, ethnic, religious, or other backgrounds. These categories are not static; they change over time as societies grow, diversify, and alter their social, political and historical make-ups. For example, in the U.S., the Irish were not always “white,” and despite our government’s legal definition, most Hispanics/Latinos are not seen as white today (by themselves or by others) ...

The biologized racial fallacy “influences people to see racism and inequality not as the products of economic, social, and political histories but more as a natural state of affairs.”<sup>83</sup>

This naturalistic trajectory is extremely dangerous and damaging. When we think of racial constructs in biological terms, we may look at social inequities as

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<sup>83</sup> Agustín Fuentes, “Race Is Real, But Not in the Way Many People Think — Busting the myth of biological race,” *Psychology Today* April 9, 2012, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/busting-myths-about-human-nature/201204/race-is-real-not-in-the-way-many-people-think>.

inevitable forces of nature. While not biological, such social constructs can negatively impact us biologically, as Fuentes argues. Social configurations along racialized lines affect minorities in their access to good health care, biological development, and immune systems.<sup>84</sup>

As important as it is to point out that there is only one biological race in our species, it is even more important to highlight that there is only one mediator between God and humanity, namely Jesus Christ. While the racial problem is social and psychological, the solution to addressing it requires the triune God's transformation of our being in the history of Jesus' mediatory work as divine and human who together with the Spirit vicariously enacts the new humanity in which we are called to participate.

### **Concluding Implications: Beyond Moralism**

Consideration of Jesus as the divine-human mediator is critically important to overcoming racial barriers. Jesus as "a human doctor, a moralist, or a social worker" can deal with "external relations," but nothing more. However, as the God-Man, he is able to go much deeper and address human depravity at its fount: "if Jesus Christ is God the Creator himself become incarnate among us, he saves and heals by opening up the dark, twisted depths of our human being and cleansing, reconciling and re-creating us from within the very foundations of our existence."<sup>85</sup>

Jesus' atoning work is not simply based on the historical occurrence of Jesus' crucifixion in which he enacts an "external transaction" between God and humanity expressed in "moral or legal terms." Rather, the atoning work that reconciles God and humanity (and Israel and Gentiles) takes place "ultimately within the incarnate mystery of the union of divine and human nature in Jesus Christ the Mediator between God and man, and thus as ineffable inexplicable mystery hidden in God himself."<sup>86</sup> The triune God alone is able to transform our creaturely being so that we not only want what God wants for humanity, but also do what God wants through

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<sup>84</sup> Fuentes, "Race Is Real, But Not in the Way Many People Think."

<sup>85</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 62.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

participation in Jesus' vicarious humanity. He takes to himself our fallen human nature to redeem it<sup>87</sup> in conjunction with the Spirit's vicarious activity.<sup>88</sup> We cannot make it by our own effort in whole or in part. We rely on God's grace at work in Jesus through the Spirit. Through participation in Jesus' life by the Spirit, we experience and express God's sacrificial love to people of diverse racial backgrounds freely and fully.<sup>89</sup>

The preceding discussion calls to mind Bob Dylan's song on racism titled "Blind Willie McTell." Dylan sings of God being in heaven and our longing for the good that God intends for us. And yet, we are caught up in a relentless struggle between such longing and our insatiable desire for "power" along with "greed" and humanity's "corruptible seed." Their intensity and propensity give the appearance of being "all that there is."<sup>90</sup> What is missing from Dylan's poignant song (which was written and recorded shortly after the close of his Christian period of music) is that the God who is in heaven makes his way to earth and brings about the new order of being in the Spirit through the mediation and vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ.

While it might not work as song lyrics, Jesus' vicarious humanity that responds to God's saving love<sup>91</sup> and our participation in his life through the Spirit is what makes it possible for us to exist in the actuality of one humanity of differentiated unity, namely, Jews and Gentiles. The onto-relational basis for our humanity established through the divine-human mediation and vicarious activity of Jesus Christ grounds the transformation and action. It is more than a biological unity since our biology cannot undue the depravity. The problem is more than social and psychological, even though racism is a social construct. The social and psychological distortions reflect a deeper disruption, which constantly surfaces in

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 109–110.

<sup>89</sup> For more on the subject of participation in God's triune grace, see Geordie W. Ziegler, *Trinitarian Grace and Participation: An Entry into the Theology of T. F. Torrance*, Emerging Scholars (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017).

<sup>90</sup> Bob Dylan, 1983, "Blind Willie McTell," vol. 3/14, *The Bootleg Series Volumes 1–3 (Rare & Unreleased) 1961–1991*, Columbia Records, 1991.

<sup>91</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 77, 94.

every domain through the social and psychological barriers we create. We cannot simply think differently or act differently. We must undergo a transformation of our being, which is exactly what God enacts in our lives through Jesus' mediation and vicarious humanity. As Torrance argues,

sin has been so ingrained into our minds that we are unable to repent and have to repent even of the kind of repentance we bring to God. But Jesus Christ laid hold of us even there in our sinful repentance and turned everything round through his holy vicarious repentance, when he bore not just upon his body but upon his human mind and soul the righteous judgments of God and resurrected our human nature in the integrity of his body, mind and soul from the grave. Thus as the firstborn of every creature he became the firstborn from the dead, and the head of the Church of the firstborn.<sup>92</sup>

We need to remember who we were before Christ — and what Christ has since made us to be. May no sense of superiority or inferiority lead us to segregate from one another. We need to live into the reality of our new humanity in Christ and confront racial bigotry, indifference, and social segregation. Let us take time to remember where we come from, what God has done for us, and who we are as one new humanity in and through Jesus, the sole mediator between God and humanity as the Jewish Messiah. He is the humanizing human and personalizing person,<sup>93</sup> who is the ground of the new humanity who destroys impersonal racialized structures. In view of what God has actualized for us in Jesus tearing down the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles through his cross and through the indwelling presence and empowering love of God's Spirit, may we not dehumanize or depersonalize diverse individuals or communities as "other," but live together as one.

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–49, 67–72.