

THE HOLINESS OF GOD IN P. T. FORSYTH'S THEOLOGY OF ATONEMENT

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29420 HONOURS THESIS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

As many of Forsyth's works have rather long titles, the following abbreviations have been adopted.

The Church and the Sacraments	The Church
The Cruciality of the Cross	Cruciality
Essay in The Atonement and Modern Religious Thought	The Atonement
God the Holy Father	Holy Father
The Justification of God	Justification
The Person and Place of Jesus Christ	Person and Place
Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind	Positive Preaching
'The Preaching of Jesus and the Gospel of Christ' (I, II, III, IV, V or VI) in The Expositor, 8th Series, April - Nov., 1915	'The Preaching of Jesus`
The Principle of Authority	Authority
Revelation, Old and New	Revelation
The Work of Christ	Work

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	1
I. INTRODUCTION: P. T. FORSYTH THE MAN AND HIS TIMES	4
A. Preamble '	4
B . Formative Influences	8
C. Relationship to Protestant Liberalism and Orthodoxy of His Day	13
II. THE NATURE OF GOD'S HOLINESS	20
A. Introduction	20
B. The Relationship of Holiness to Judgement	25
C. The Relationship of Holiness to Love	29
D. The Relationship Between Holiness and Grace	33
III. FORSYTH'S UNDERSTANDING OF SIN AND THE STATE OF MAN . .	37
A. Introduction	37
B. Sin Against the Holy God	38
C. The Plight of Guilty Man	40
IV. THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S RECONCILING WORK	46
A. The Essence of Christ's Atonement	46
B. The Cross as Satisfaction	61
C. The Cross as Substitution	65
D. The Cross as Victory and Regeneration	68
V. THE FRUIT OF CHRIST'S RECONCILING WORK	74
A. Justification and Sanctification	74
B. The Meaning of the Atonement for the Church's Life and Sacraments	78
C. Atonement and Theodicy	85
VI. CHRISTOLOGY AND ATONEMENT	91
A. Person and Work	91
B. The Athanasian Necessity	93
C. Kenosis and Plerosis	95
VII. EVALUATION	97
BIBLIOGRAPHY	101
A. Works by Forsyth	101
B . Other Works	101

PREFACE

O sword that finds, O Word that binds
The weakness of the soul
O piercing word! O healing sword!
Our terror, and our goal.

O light of God! O fire of God!
And Truth that maketh true!
Pierce us, search us, burn us, bring to dust,
But, O, create us new

These words were penned by P. T. Forsyth in 1899. They form two verses of his 'Hymn to Christ' which appeared in the 1 June edition of *The British Weekly* of that year. They breathe the sense of God's holiness and majesty which dominated Forsyth's thought, inspiring his writing, teaching and preaching.

Over the years since his death (on Armistice day 1921 the title 'prophet' has often been affixed to his name.¹ Certainly Forsyth was in many ways ahead of his time, prefiguring many of the theological trends of the generation which followed him² He also saw the possibility of a looming catastrophe in Europe that eventually occurred in World War I, while much of the rest of the theological world was committed to the concept of mankind's upward evolution and inevitable

¹ For example: F. B. Coggan, 'P. T. Forsyth's Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind', *Expository Times* 72 (1961) p.324; R. McAfee Brown, *P. T. Forsyth a Prophet for Today* (Westminster Press, 1952); A. M. Hunter, 'P. T. Forsyth: *Per Crucem ad Lucem* (S.C.M., 1974) p.8; M. W. Anderson, 'P. T. Forsyth; Prophet of the Cross', *Evangelical Quarterly*, vol. 47 (1975) pp.146-161, etc.

² For an excellent discussion of the way in which Forsyth prefigured many of the theological trends associated with Barth and the NeoOrthodox approach to scripture, see A. M. Hunter, 'P. T. Forsyth, Neutestamentler', *Expository Times* vol. 73, pp.100-106.

progress.³ I have personally been struck by the relevance of many of his comments to the contemporary state of Western society in general⁴ and the current state of the Protestant Churches in particular.⁵

If a prophet, however, is one who does not just 'foretell', but 'forthtells', the truth of God as a consequence of encounter with him (as did Isaiah), then P. T. Forsyth must be ranked as one who speaks with a prophetic voice. There can be little doubt that his vision of God's holiness forms the integrative key to understanding his theology of the cross of Christ, and that this cross forms the central focus of Forsyth's diverse writings. Whether dealing with art, literature, philosophy, politics, ethics, history or dogmatics (and he wrote in all these areas), Forsyth constantly takes his compass bearings from the cross. He sees things on a broad horizon, but from a unified perspective, seeking, as it were, 'to bring every thought captive into the obedience of Christ' (2 Cor. 10:5).

The aim of this thesis is to examine how P. T. Forsyth sees the holiness of God and the cross of Christ as related. This, of course, must issue in more specific questions, such as: What is the nature of God's holiness? What is the relationship between Forsyth's understanding of holiness and the concepts of grace, love and judgement? What does his theology of holiness mean for his view of man? What is

³ See, for example, his comments in the sermon 'The Slowness of God', Expository Times, vol. 11 (1899-1900), pp.218-222.

⁴ For example, in 1905 Forsyth stated in his Chairman's Address to the Congregational Union of England and Wales: 'Material progress, in the wake of invention and discovery, will trample over human sympathy, and progress itself in the end will succumb to some form of disintegration and anarchy.' Quoted in 'P. T. Forsyth: Reactionary or Prophet?' by H. Cunliffe-Jones, Congregational Quarterly 28 (1950), p. 346.

⁵ This is especially so in his understanding of the persuasive influence of humanism expressed as an anthropocentric theology in the Church. More will be said on this later.

the state of humanity before the Holy God? In the light of these questions, what is the *essence* of Christ's atonement in Forsyth's thought? How does this relate to the traditional views of the atonement (e.g. Abelard and Anselm)? What does it mean for the old terms such as 'penalty', 'victory', 'satisfaction', 'substitution' and 'regeneration'? How does Forsyth understand them?

Obviously the answers to such questions will take up the bulk of this paper, but we must at least comment on some related areas. For example, what does Forsyth's understanding of the atonement and holiness mean for the concepts of justification and sanctification? What does his view mean for the Church's life and sacraments? What bearing does it have on his Christology? What does it mean for theodicy? How critical can we be of Forsyth's approach today, i.e. does his theology of 'holy atonement' have any abiding validity? Or has he 'overstated the case' with regard to God's holiness?

Before we can answer any of these questions, we need, albeit briefly, to see Forsyth, the man, against the backdrop of his times. It is to this that we now turn.

P.T. FORSYTH: THE MAN AND HIS TIMES.

[A] BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In 1909 Lord Morley, then Chancellor of the University of Manchester, dubbed Forsyth ‘One of the most brilliant minds of Europe’¹ In 1962 Emil Brunner, when invited in a television interview to say who was the greatest of British theologians, named P.T.Forsyth.² Likewise Karl Barth spoke in warm terms about Forsyth’s work,³ while J.K.Mozley stated that Forsyth was perhaps English Christianity’s most powerful theologian in the sphere of dogmatics.⁴

What do we know of this man who has been the object of the praise of the not insignificant names mentioned above? There is no complete biography of Forsyth available, nor is there likely to be one. He once said to his daughter: ‘I hope no-one will ever write a dreary full-dress biography of me!’⁵ None has appeared, but we do have a

¹ For the full story behind this comment, see D. R. Davies’ Foreward to *The Justification of God* (1948) p.5. Davies was the student to whom the comment was made.

² For details see A.M. Hunter, ‘P.T.Forsyth, Neutestamentler’, *Expository Times*, vol. 73 (Jan. 1962) p. 100

³ In a letter to W. H. Leembruggen, Barth wrote: ‘It has interested me to learn that you are a disciple of P.T. Forsyth. I only heard a little time ago of the books of this man and I was very much touched to see that these things were written and said by him at a time in which they were forgotten and out moded in England and on the Continent.’ Leembruggen does not date this letter, but the above words appear in Leembruggen’s article, ‘The Witness of P. T. Forsyth, a Theologian of the Cross’, first published in the *Reformed Theological Reviews*, 1945.

Karl Barth’s son, Markus, speaks in glowing terms of Forsyth in ‘P. T. Forsyth: The Theologian for the Practical Man’, in the *Congregational Quarterly*, vol. 17 (Oct. 1939) pp.436—442. Perhaps it was his son who drew Barth’s attention to Forsyth’s work?

⁴ J. K. Mozely, *The Heart of the Gospel*, p.66.

⁵ Quoted by Jessie Forsyth Andrews in the Memoir which prefaces *The Work of Christ* (1938 edn.) p. vii.

number of rather detailed sketches of his life. From such resources the following facts can be drawn.

Forsyth was born in Aberdeen on 12th May, 1848, the son of a postman and his wife, a maid. His surroundings during his growing years were frugal to say the least. His mother had to take in boarders to make ends meet, and even then her sympathy for others who were struggling financially meant that she often ‘carried’ her boarders for extended periods without cost.⁷ As a child he was never very healthy and he wrote later in life: ‘I cannot remember since boyhood passing a day without pain.’⁸

For all this, however, he seems to have been a lad of bright spirits, and was often the centre of classroom pranks. Certainly he was bright academically: the academic roll of honour of Aberdeen Grammar School has recorded on it: “Dux 1864, Peter Taylor Forsyth.’ In the autumn of the same year he won a Cargill Bursary to Aberdeen University and embarked on the study of the Classics. He did exceptionally well, collecting prizes in Greek, Humanities, English, Latin and Moral Philosophy.⁹ A colleague later wrote:

⁶ For example, the ‘Memoir’ mentioned above and also: A .M. Hunter, *Teaching and Preaching the New Testament*, pp. 131-143; J. H. Rodgers, *The Theology of P.T.Forsyth*, pp. 2-9; W .L. Bradley, *P.T.Forsyth, The Man and His Work*, pp. 13-63; R M .Brown, *P.T.Forsyth, Prophet for Today*, pp. 13-31.

⁷ Forsyth’s less than luxurious surroundings are reflected in a letter to his daughter. In apology for ignoring her birthday he wrote: ‘Forgive a poor boy who never had any birthdays or any presents.’ *Memoir in Work*, p. ix.

⁸ Quoted in W. L. Bradley, *P. T. Forsyth, The Man and His Work*, p. 17. Cf. a schoolmate of Forsyth’s who wrote: ‘...as a boy he was never robust, and rarely went in for outdoor games. While we were at our bats, he was at his books.’ *Ibid.*

⁹ For details taken from his academic record, see *Ibid.* p.20.

Forsyth was one of the ablest students that Aberdeen ever boasted. He was not only a great prize-taker, but he was a brilliant personality. You could not be about the University at this time without being aware of him.¹⁰

After graduation he assisted the Professor of Latin for a year, before studying under Ritschl in Göttingen for a semester in 1872.¹¹ In his own opinion this was the most important intellectual factor in his experience,¹² and during this time Forsyth gained a love for both the German people and German theology which had endured throughout his life;¹³ a fact which made the outbreak of World War I particularly painful for him.

In 1873 Forsyth entered Hackney College, London, in order to train for the Congregational ministry. Poor health forced him to leave the college early, in 1874, before completing the full course of study, and for the next two years we have no record of his movements.

In 1876 Forsyth began his public ministry at Shipley in

¹⁰ W.R.Nicholl, quoted in *Ibid.* p.21.

¹¹ Forsyth's daughter indicates that one of the 'prime movers' in this step was his friend Robertson Smith, adding 'and this name foreshadows the period of his so called heterodoxy' (see 'Memoir' in *Work*, p.xi). Smith was suspended as Professor of Oriental Languages and O.T. Exegesis at Free Church College, Aberdeen in 1879 for his unorthodox views regarding the inspiration of Scripture.

¹² *Ibid.* p.xi. Hence Rodger's comments: 'One could, with reasonable accuracy describe Forsyth's whole theological pilgrimage as an inner critique of Ritschlian theology. One should add immediately, however, that the critique was so radical and basic as to create a position which can only in the most qualified manner be described as Ritschlian.' J.H.Rodgers, *The Theology of P.T.Forsyth*, p.3.

¹³ His daughter estimates that at least a third of the books in his library were in German. He received German religious periodicals and weekly papers throughout his life. 'Memoir', *op. cit.* p.xxii.

Yorkshire.¹⁴ This was the first of a series of five pastorates spanning a period of 25 years. Four years after going to Shipley he accepted a call to St. Thomas' Square, Hackney in London. This was followed by a move to Cheetham Hill Congregational Church at Manchester in 1885. Subsequently he had 6 years at Clarendon Park, Leicester, and in 1894 he went to Emmanuel Church in Cambridge.¹⁵

Forsyth was refused membership of the Congregational Union while at Shipley (which was a non-Union Church), and also during his initial period at Hackney. There can be little doubt that this rejection was related to his heterodox views on the nature of the atonement¹⁶ and to his involvement in the 'Leicester Conference' (about which more will be said later). His acceptance by the Union during the latter part of his ministry at Hackney reflects the change that took place within his theology.¹⁷

In 1895 Forsyth was awarded the D.D. degree from Aberdeen, though he was too ill to be present at the conferring ceremony. He accepted the call to the principalship of Hackney College in the spring of 1901, which position he filled until his death 20 years later.

¹⁴ He had worked in a least one pastorate in a part-time capacity earlier, when he and John Hunter (another Aberdonian) sought to 'resuscitate' the Congregational Chapel in Dee Street. (For details see Bradley, *op. cit.* p.21.) Shipley, however, was his first full time pastoral charge.

¹⁵ Only two weeks after his arrival here, his wife died unexpectedly. This event broke Forsyth's health, frail at the best of times, and he was forced to take six months' leave before he could resume work.

¹⁶ During his time at Shipley, Forsyth published as a pamphlet the text of a sermon entitled 'Justice and Mercy'. We have, unfortunately, no copies of the pamphlet itself, but we do have an anonymous rejoinder printed shortly after Forsyth's work appeared. From this it seems clear that Forsyth opposed 'the whole immoral theory of substitution'. For details see Bradley, *ibid* p.31f.

¹⁷ For further comments see I.B. below, 'Formative Influences'.

These two decades were the most busy, and productive, of Forsyth's life. Besides administrative duties he had a heavy lecturing load, extra responsibilities as the Dean of the Faculty of the London Theological Colleges and involvement in a number of public controversies.¹⁸ In 1905 he was elected Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales. He was also involved in a number of lecturing tours, e.g. the Lyman Beecher lectures at Yale in 1907, yet these decades saw him produce more than twenty books and over two hundred articles, pamphlets and essays.

As a College Principal he is reported to have had an intimate rapport with his students and colleagues, who appreciated his quick wit and bright personality. His daughter describes him as one who was 'cheery, witty, ironical, and he suffered fools madly'.¹⁹ He was, as a friend put it, 'a good man to go hunting tigers with'.²⁰

[B] FORMATIVE INFLUENCES ²¹

It is always a precarious undertaking to delineate the influences which were decisive in the shaping of another person's life and thought. In the case of Forsyth this is no less true, but his writings

¹⁸ E.G. Opposing alterations to the new Education Bill in 1906, opposing the importation of Chinese labour into the Transvaal, and the protracted battle with R.J.Campbell over Campbell's 'New Theology'. For details see Bradley, op.cit. pp.53-57.

¹⁹ Memoir in Work, p.xxiv: 'He was a charming colleague, I am told - easy to work with, always tolerant, always sympathetic, never intransigent, even in the least degree. He had a swift, gay wit...and he had an inexhaustible deep (sic) of humour...' Ibid.

²⁰ Quoted in A.M.Hunter, Teaching and Preaching the New Testament, p.137.

²¹ By far the most comprehensive discussion available regarding Forsyth's formative intellectual influences appears in Bradley, op.cit. Chapter III, 'Intellectual Background', pp.90-110. By nature of the case the statements in this section of the paper must be of a general nature, but the footnotes will point to more detailed material.

do give evidence of at least three areas that were of great significance for him. One cannot doubt the great debt which Forsyth owed to the study of Classics and Literature at Aberdeen. His writings are sprinkled with quotations from or allusions to literary figures such as Eliot, Hardy, Browning, Milton, Ibsen, Goethe and Ruskin.²² He also owed a great deal to Immanuel Kant, Soren Kierkegaard and Frederick D. Maurice.²³ It would seem that Forsyth was introduced to most of these writers during his time at Aberdeen, though the influence of Maurice seems to predominate at New College, Hackney.²⁴

We have also mentioned is passing the debt which Forsyth owed to Ritschl and thence to his abiding love of German theology generally. We will see later where he disagreed with Ritschl at a most fundamental level (i.e. on the need for and nature of the atonement), but in his early ministry the influence of Ritschlian liberalism cannot be doubted. Forsyth's sermon on 'Justice and Mercy' has been mentioned above, but the point is further brought home by Forsyth's participation in the Leicester Conference of 1877.²⁵

This conference, which met concurrently with the regular meeting of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, was called by a

²² For further details see Bradley, *Ibid.* p.103f.

²³ The argument presented by Pitt, *Church Ministry and Sacraments: A Critical Evaluation of the Thought of P.T.Forsyth*, pp.xxvf., for the influence of these thinkers seems compelling, especially when the same points are supported well in Bradley, *op.cit.* Chapter III.

²⁴ J.H.Rodgers *The Theology of P.T.Forsyth*, does not doubt the influence of Maurice, but argues that Bradley has misunderstood Maurice's position with regard to the 'universal man', believing that Forsyth's understanding of the solidarity of the race is quite different to Maurice's approach. Be this as it may, Forsyth certainly spoke in glowing (though not uncritical) terms of Maurice and Maurice's student J.Baldwin Brown. For details see Bradley, *op.cit.* pp.96-99.

²⁵ The best account of the purpose, nature and achievements of this conference appears in Bradley (*Ibid.* pp. 28-31) though it is mentioned in virtually all of the biographical sketches appearing under note 6 above.

group of liberals²⁶ with the intention 'to encourage a wider bond of fellowship than conventional orthodoxy'.²⁷ Forsyth openly identified himself with the liberal group, calling upon them, in a speech entitled 'Free Trade in Theology', not to rely so much on Paul as to:

lean simply on Christ. The power of his name has been more than the power of his creed. That is my contention. Call all men who worship the goodness of Christ, members of Christ²⁸

We will consider the relationship between Forsyth and Protestant Liberalism further in the next section, but it is very clear that he came to reject the liberalism of his early days as insufficient and too sentimental.²⁹ The key to this rejection is to be found in his own religious experience, in which he was turned from 'a lover of love to an object of grace'.

Of this, his so-called 'conversion experience', we know little. There can be no doubt that matters came to a head during his pastorate

²⁶R.M.Brown, *P.T.Forsyth: Prophet for Today*, p.18.

²⁷ From a more extensive summary of the Conference's purpose appearing in Bradley, *op.cit.* p.29.

²⁸ Quoted in Brown, *op.cit.* p.18. Cf. similar statements which appear in two letters which Forsyth wrote to the English Independent in Nov. 1877 about the conference. Bradley, *op.cit.* pp.276-284 (Appendix).

²⁹ See, for example, the following words (appearing in *The Examiner*, Nov. 5, 1905, p.462): '...liberalism had its work to do. I felt its force. I took part in it. And it has won - I might say all along the line... But the result of the general victory of religious liberalism has been disappointing on the whole... The movement was too sentimental. It interpreted the heavenly Fatherhood by the earthly instead of the earthly by the heavenly. It was cowed by Huxley and comforted by George Macdonald. Its ethic was more altruistic than evangelical, more of effort than of faith... Its general tendency was to canonize freedom instead of an authority that makes free... It is a spent movement' (quoted in Brown, *Ibid.* p.19).

at Hackney³⁰ for the sermon he preached at the Congregational Union Meetings at Leicester in 1896 ('Holy Father') marks a turning point in his thought. According to his daughter, the experience at Hackney was the culmination of a gradual process of re-orientation, rather than a climactic 'crisis' event,³¹ but even so its effects were dramatic. The only place where Forsyth deals with the experience at any length is in *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*:

There was a time when I was interested in the first degree with purely scientific criticism. Bred amongst academic scholarship of the classics and philosophy, I carried these habits to the Bible and I found in the subject a new fascination, in proportion as the stakes were much higher. But, fortunately for me, I was not condemned to the mere scholar's cloistered life. I could not treat the matter as an academic quest. I was kept close to the practical considerations. I was in a relation of life, duty and responsibility for others. I could not contemplate conclusions without asking how they would affect these people and my word to them in doubt, death, grief or repentance....it also pleased God by the revelation of His holiness and grace, which the great theologians taught me to find in the Bible, to bring home to me my sin in a way that submerged all the school questions in weight, urgency and poignancy. I was turned from a Christian into a believer, from a lover of love to an object of grace.³²

³⁰ For details see Bradley, *op. cit.* p.34f.

³¹ See the Memoir in *Work* ,p.xvi.

³² *Positive Preaching*, pp.281f.

Certainly, in being confronted with God's holiness and grace, Forsyth gained a perception of his state as a sinner which was never to leave him. Newton's hymn 'I ask'd the Lord that I might grow' became to him 'almost holy writ'.³³ He wrote:

I venture to think John Newton's 'I ask'd the Lord that I might grow' one of the greatest and most realistic utterances of Christian experience. And it represents the course our sunny liberalism must take as it passes from a trout stream of the morning to the river of God which is full of deep water.³⁴

Forsyth knew of holiness, grace and sin directly. All his theological and classical training enabled him to plumb the depths of his experience, to articulate it in theological reflection, but *the* formative influence in his theology must be regarded as his experience of the holy God, Forsyth knew that it was the Holy Father himself 'who has made life out of my shipwreck...that is my experience'.³⁵ It is

³³ Ibid. p.285. The words of this hymn are as follows:

I ask'd the Lord that I might grow
In faith and love and every grace;
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek more earnestly His face.

Instead of this He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart,
And let the angry powers of Hell
Assault my soul in every part.

Lord, why is this? I trembling cried,
Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death?
"Tis in this way," the Lord replied,
"I answer prayer for grace and faith.

These inward trials I employ
From self and pride to set thee free;
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou may's't seek thy all in Me."

³⁴ See Brown. op.cit. p.23.

³⁵ P.T.Forsyth, *Missions in State and Church*, pp.340 -41, quoted in Bradley, op.cit. p.134.

from within a *relationship* that Forsyth wrote, preached and taught - and that relationship was with the One whom he knew to be holy.

[C] RELATIONSHIP TO PROTESTANT LIBERALISM AND ORTHODOXY OF HIS DAY

In many ways Forsyth was a man caught between two camps. He came to be rejected by liberal theologians as being outdated in his views on God's wrath, judgement and transcendence, while many more 'orthodox' Protestants, both within and without his denomination, were suspicious of his use of liberal theology's critical tools and his adoption of some liberal terminology.³⁶

Certainly Forsyth was not averse to the use of the tools of Biblical criticism. In the *Work of Christ* he says:

Modern scholarship has made of the Bible a new book. It has in a certain sense rediscovered it... We have, through the labours of more than a century of the finest scholarship in all the world, come to understand the Bible, in its original sense, as it was never understood before.³⁷

Elsewhere he suggests that to disallow the use of critical scholarship would be to 'refuse the light from heaven'.³⁸ Notwithstanding this, however, he knew that Biblical criticism must not be used

³⁶ While the above statements are of a very general nature, more detailed discussion in support of this position can be found in Brown, *op.cit.* pp.34-39 and Rodgers, *op.cit.* pp.14-24.

'Orthodoxy' is a problematic term used in relation to Congregationalism, which was, after all, a non-creedal denomination. See the comments by Forsyth in his letter to the *English Independent* (Nov. 1, 1877) in Bradley, *op.cit.* p. 279.

³⁷ *Work*, p.33f. For similar comments see also: *Person and Place*, p.viii; *Cruciality*, p.94n.1; *Positive Preaching*, p.280; 'The Preaching of Jesus and the Gospel of Christ III' in the *Expositor*, 8th Series, No.55, July 1915, p.71.

³⁸ 'The Preaching of Jesus III', p.71.

injudiciously. It must be used 'critically',³⁹ not abused by creating 'false divisions' between the 'humanitarian Christ' of the Gospels and the 'dogmatic Christ' of the Epistles.⁴⁰ He argued (at least 25 years before the appearance of C. H. Dodd's *Apostolic Preaching*) for the importance of seeing a common kerygma which created both the Gospels and Epistles, thus showing the essential unity of the N. T. message.⁴¹

The watershed of his division with Liberalism related, then, not to its methods, but its subject and its objectives. In the *Cruciality of the Cross* he writes:

We have to do in the New Testament with the person of Christ and with the cross of Christ. And in the last issue with the cross of Christ, because it is the one key to his person... We must take that view of Christ which does most justice to the holiness of God. This starting point of

³⁹ Person and Place, p.viii.

⁴⁰ Hence we read (in *Work*, p.51): 'I met a man the other day who had come under some poor and mischievous pulpit influence, and he said, "It is time we got rid of hearing so much about the cross of Christ; there should be preached to the world a humanitarian Christ, the kind of Christ that occupies the Gospels"'. There was nothing for it but to tell the man he was the victim of smatterers, and that he must go back to the Gospels and read and study them for a year or two. It is the flimsiest religiosity and the most superficial reading of the Gospels that could talk like that... The centre of gravity, even in the Gospels, falls upon the Cross of Christ and what was done there, and not simply on a humanitarian Christ.'

⁴¹ Hence, in the *Principle of Authority* (1913), p.104f., we read: 'In the matter of the vital, creative meaning of Christ's person and death, Peter, Paul and John are all of one mind... There was, of course, no universal theological formula, there was not an orthodoxy; but certainly there was a common Apostilic Gospel, a kerygma... And this theological kerygma stands for us as the common chord in the three great names who represent the Apostolate.' For further discussion of this point, see A.M.Hunter, 'P.T.Forsyth: Neutestamentler' in *The Expository Times*, vol. 73, pp.100-101, and the more detailed, well documented work in Rodgers, op.cit. pp.160-172. See also Forsyth's comments in 'The Preaching of Jesus IV' in *The Expositor*, 8th Series, No.56, August 1915, pp.118f.

the supreme holiness of God's love, rather than its pity, sympathy of affection, is the watershed between the Gospel and the theological liberalism which makes religion no more than the crown of humanity...My point of departure is that Christ's first concern and revelation was not simply the forgiving love of God, but the holiness of such love.⁴²

The natural corollary of this shift in starting point was, for Forsyth, a change in his focus. Where the liberalism of his day down-valued the holiness of God, its anthropocentric theological approach was inevitable. Without an understanding of God's holiness, liberalism was preoccupied with man, even in worship:

We tend to think of God as if man were his chief end, as if he had no right to a supreme concern for his own holy name, as if his prodigals were more to him than his only begotten Son in whom he made the worlds and has all his delight. We think of worship as if the only question was whether God loves us instead of whether his love has absolute power to give itself eternal and righteous effect.⁴³

For Forsyth, the chief heresy of his day was that of humanism,⁴⁴ i.e. 'man's preoccupation with humanity and its spiritual civilization or culture'.⁴⁵ He believed that 'everything has come to turn on man's welfare instead of God's worship, on man with God to help him and not

⁴² Cruciality, pp.vii and viii.

⁴³ The Justification of God (1917), p.11.

⁴⁴ He states this plainly in Ibid. p.24; Person and Place, p.91; Positive Preaching, p.267, etc.

⁴⁵ Justification, p.24.

on God with man to wait upon him'.⁴⁶

Naturally, therefore, Forsyth rejected the then current notion of man's progress. As early as 1900 he was sounding a warning against confidence in human ability, comparing the state of European culture with the tower of Babel - beautiful, secure, well-constructed and self-sufficient.⁴⁷ He saw that, eventually, 'the chimney would have to be fired'.

His most fundamental disagreement with Ritschlianism related to this anthropocentric vs. theocentric approach. The optimistic humanism of liberal theology led to there being no need for the atonement to accomplish anything objectively. The cross declared God's love, but did not effect a fundamental change in relationship.⁴⁸ For liberalism

the point is that this act (of God in the cross) is not a revolution in man, not a new creation, not a regeneration, not an absolute redemption, but only a release, an impulse from God, the extrication of our best... It is not a salvation from death but only from scanty life... He is not in a real sense, but only in a figurative sense, our Redeemer

⁴⁶ Ibid. cf. the following poem which he included in *Cruciality*, p. 59:

They talk to us of an immanent God
As if man were the true Transcendent;
As if man were the judge of all the earth,
And God the poor defendant.

As if God were arraigned with a very black case,
On the skill of his bar dependent,
And 'I wouldn't like to be God', says one,
'For his record is not resplendent.'

⁴⁷ See the text of his sermon entitled 'The Slowness of God' in *The Expository Times*, vol.11 (1899 - 1900), pp.218 - 222.

⁴⁸ These points will be considered further in the sections which follow.

... It should be clear that this is another religion from that of redemption; and it has no room or need for atonement.⁴⁹

Forsyth's understanding of Revelation, therefore, was quite different from that of the liberalism of his day. For him, Revelation must not simply *declare* something about God's nature, but it must *effect* a change in relationship.⁵⁰ In a word,

Revelation is Redemption. The new light is new life... And there is no other way of revealing God to sinners but by redeeming them.⁵¹

...(we need to grasp the idea) of revelation as something done, instead of something shown, as creation instead of exhibition, as renovation instead of innovation, as resurrection instead of communication.⁵²

On the other hand, he was not advocating a return to the old orthodoxy, which Forsyth believed lacked both a historical and a personal perspective. It was flat, like a map on a wall.⁵³ Its mistake

⁴⁹ Cruciality, p. 35,cf. similar comments on p. 30, and again, with specific reference to Ritschl and/or Hegel in Work, p.66f; Person and Place,p.131.

⁵⁰ Why this is so we will see as the discussion unfolds in the following sections.

⁵¹ Revelation, Old and New (from a sermon delivered in 1911), p.11f. For detailed discussion of Forsyth's use of the term 'Revelation', see Rodgers, op.cit. pp.26-29, Brown, op.cit.pp.42ff., 52ff.,etc.

⁵² From Forsyth's contribution to The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought, p.70. For similar comments see also Authority, pp.6,7,27,etc. Positive Preaching, pp.6.10.239.etc.; Person and Place,p.354; Revelation, as indicated above.

⁵³ 'The Preaching of Jesus III', The Expositor, 8th Series, No.55, July 1915,p.68.

was to equate the map with the reality about which it spoke. Against this Forsyth insisted that revelation cannot be seen simply as a series of propositions, but it was at its core a personal encounter with the Revealer. Liberalism had erred because it placed its trust in man, and the old orthodoxy had erred because it placed its trust in propositions. The result of the latter, Forsyth described as Confessionalism ('faith in some utterance of faith'), Biblicism (faith in the words of the Bible rather than the One to whom they point) and ecclesiasticism (faith in the pronouncements of the Church).⁵⁴ The distinction is made clear in this way: 'There is no authority for mere theological knowledge or statement. There are doctrines of salvation, but no saving doctrines.'⁵⁵

The strength of Forsyth is that he was not content simply to expose the inadequacies of either liberalism or traditional orthodoxy, but that he set out to provide a positive alternative. This is the whole thrust of his *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, in which he seeks to give voice to a 'positive theology which is alive, alert and in power',⁵⁶ as opposed to a doctrinaire liberalism or an ossified orthodoxy. 'We must have more of a gospel', says Forsyth, 'than liberalism is left with; and we must have more recognition of the modern mind than orthodoxy has allowed for'.⁵⁷ The remainder of this paper

⁵⁴ Brown, op.cit. p.38.

⁵⁵ From an article in *The Hibbert Journal*, Oct,1905. p.68, quoted in *Ibid*.

⁵⁶ *Positive Preaching*, p.203.

⁵⁷ From an article in *The Examiner*, Nov.5, 1903, p.462 (quoted in Brown, op.cit. p.39). Cf. 'Orthodoxy urges the necessity of a certain theological system for salvation. Liberalism grounds faith on general ideas or sympathies native to man, but roused by Christ, who gave them unique expression winged by His great personality. While positive Christianity rests Christian faith on certain historic and saving facts, centering in the death and resurrection of Christ, as the new creation of the race', in 'The Preaching of Jesus V', op.cit. p.342.

focuses on the 'heart' of this positive alternative - the atoning work of the Holy God.

II

“HALLOWED BE THY NAME”.

[A] INTRODUCTION

In the preceding discussion we have noted that the watershed of Forsyth’s break with liberalism was the holiness of God. We saw how central this concept was in his own experience, and we also saw how his *relationship* with the Holy caused him to question the dead propositionalism of traditional orthodoxy. Given all this, how does Forsyth understand the holiness of God? How does it relate to other concepts such as judgement, love and grace?

Before proceeding to these questions we must further emphasise the centrality of the concept for Forsyth’s theological development. The following quotations are representative:

Christianity is concerned with God’s holiness before all else.¹

If we take the Lord’s prayer alone, God’s holiness is the interest which all the rest of it serves. Neither love, grace, faith nor sin have any but a passing meaning except as they rest on the holiness of God, except as they arise from it, and return to it, except as they satisfy it, show it forth, set it up and secure it everywhere and forever.²

Everything begins and ends in our Christian theology with the holiness of God.³

The grace of God cannot return to our preaching or to our faith till we recover what has almost clean gone from our general, familiar, and current religion, what liberalism has quite

¹ Cruciality, p viii.

² Ibid. p.23.

³ Work p.78.

lost - I mean a due sense of the holiness of God... This holiness of God is the real foundation of religion... Love is but its outgoing; sin is but its defiance; grace is but its action on sin; the cross is but its victory; faith is but its worship.⁴

A cursory reading of these quotations may prompt us to assume that Forsyth has become 'lop-sided' in his understanding of God. Has he not put all his theological eggs in one basket and thus arrived at a deficient understanding? This is not the case, but before we can take the discussion further we must seek to understand what Forsyth means in talking of God's holiness.

One must acknowledge that we are here faced with a lack of precision in Forsyth's thought (or, at least, a lack of precision in the *expression* of his thought). But then, Forsyth himself was conscious of this and gives the following reason:

The holiness of God is beyond our definition for it is God the holy; and we cannot define a person, far less the absolute Person. It is not simply His perfection either in thought or act... We cannot define it, we can but realise it... To know such a God is to be crushed, to be known of Him is to sit in heavenly places.⁵

In other words, Forsyth does not see the holiness of God (nor, may we add, the love, grace, mercy, justice and goodness of God) as an *attribute* of God which may be manipulated by him or defined by us. He returns to the Hebrew concept of an attribute of God 'as God himself behaving with all his unity, in a particular way, in a particular situation'.⁶ In other words, God does not 'have' holiness: he *is* holy,

⁴ Cruciality, p.22f.

⁵ Authority, pp.418f.

⁶ Work, p.117.

and all his acts, his dealings with men, are expressions of his being. They are expressions of love, grace, mercy, etc. which are all *at one* with his holy nature. Holiness is then not something 'outside' God, but it is his essential nature, i.e. 'The holiness of God is God as holy'.⁷

In the nature of the case, therefore, there is a mystrey about the holiness of God which we cannot plumb,⁸ but this does not mean that we cannot articulate anything about God's holiness. We may not be able to sum it up in a theological statement, but *wecan* make statements which express something of the way God is in holiness. Hence Forsyth writes:

The holiness of God is His self-sufficient perfection whose passion is to establish itself in the unholy by gracious love. Holiness is love morally perfect: love is holiness brimming and overflowing.⁹

As holy, God is transcendent, yet this itself is the only basis for a true understanding of immanence¹⁰ and the Incarnation. How so? Because:

The holy is both urgent and inaccessible. It is imperative yet inapproachable. The situation is only solvable by a

⁷ Cruciality, p.104 n.l, cf. This Life and the Next, p.28f.: 'In the Bible, things, or places, or people are holy which are set apart for God; God is holy as he is set apart for himself. Things are holy as they are for God; he is holy as he is for himself. We are holy as belonging to him; he is holy as belonging to himself, as absolute possessor of himself, by gift of none... For the creature to be holy is to be for God; for God himself to be holy is to be God. His holiness is the complete accord of his will and nature. It is not an attribute of God; it is his name and being and infinite value.'

⁸ So Ibid. p.111.

⁹ Positive Preaching, p.213.

¹⁰ See, Authority, p.181.

miracle... The unapproachable approaches, enters, tarries, lives, dies and conquers among us and in us, knows us into our only knowledge or ourself, subdues all things to its sanctity, and establishes its good and blessed self in us and on us all.¹¹

Moreover, God's holiness is the foundation and basis for the moral universe¹² which 'must do and do till it sees itself everywhere'.¹³ Thus what Christianity means by the holy, 'is best expressed in ethical terms as the absolute moral Reality',¹⁴ or, to restate the matter:

God wills good because He is good, He is good because He wills good. That is the holiness of God, the identification of the moral norm with the ultimate reality of the world. The holy is the ideal good, fair, and true, translated in our religious consciousness to a transcendent personal reality, not proved, but known, experienced immediately and honoured at sight as the one thing in the world valuable in itself and making a world.¹⁵

Given that God is holy, the law of God must be seen as inviolate. God's law is not a creation of God, outside of himself, but it is the expression of his moral nature. Thus, 'it cannot be denied or simply annulled unless He seem false to Himself'.¹⁶ Naturally, therefore, anything which strikes against God's law in transgression of it cannot be ignored. To disobey the law of God is to disobey God, i.e. to strike at his holiness, to offend his Person.¹⁷

¹¹ Ibid, p.6.

¹² apositive preaching,351.

¹³ Ibid. p.350.

¹⁴ Authority, p.4.

¹⁵ Authority, p.5f.

¹⁶ The Atonement, p.69.

¹⁷ These points will be taken up more fully later.

Significantly, Forsyth adopts liberalism's emphasis on the Fatherhood of God, but he re-interprets it in the light of God's holiness. He argues that the Fatherhood of God cannot be seen simply as something analogous to human fatherhood. 'We put too little into the name Father', says Forsyth, 'when we think no higher than natural fatherhood at its heavenly best.'¹⁸ To conceive of God's Fatherhood as equivalent to earthly paternalism is to deny holy nature, 'for you do not introduce the moral element by merely introducing the paternal'.¹⁹ Thus:

There is a height and depth in the Father beyond His utmost pity and His kindest love. He is *Holy* Father and Redeemer, and it is His holiness of fatherhood that is the source of our redemption and sonship... Christ's own prayer was 'Holy Father'. That was Christ's central thought of God and He knew God as He *is*. The new revelation in the cross was more than 'God is Love'. It was this, 'Holy Father'.²⁰

Hence, rather than having a 'lopsided' view of one of God's attributes, Forsyth has given expression to one of the most fundamental truths of theology: we have to do with a *Person*, not an abstract collection of attributes. We must see God in his *unity*, and understand that he acts in accordance with his *being*, not in accordance with some attributes external to himself. He does not do 'holy things', but he

¹⁸ Holy Father, p.7.

¹⁹ 'Preaching of Jesus II' in the *The Expositor*, vol. 9 (1915), p.417. Hence he writes: 'The more we dwell on the relation between God and man as a moral one, the more inadequate does a gospel of mere father-hood become, however extensive or intimate we may conceive it to be.' *Ibid.* p.419.

²⁰ Holy Father, p.3.

acts *in holiness* to preserve the moral nature of his creation. His judgement, grace and love cannot be seen as attributes at variance with his holiness, but all statements about the way he *is*, essentially. Thus there can be no love which is not holy, no judgement which is not one of love, no grace which is not the outworking of holy love and no holiness which does not act both to judge and redeem.

[B] THE RELATIONSHIP OF HOLINESS TO JUDGEMENT

In all Forsyth's major works there is an emphasis upon judgement. Not unreasonably, therefore, A.F. Simpson argues that it is impossible to grasp Forsyth's doctrine of redemption apart from the persistent stress he lays on this theme.²¹ At the most fundamental level, this flows from Forsyth's understanding of holiness.

The most basic movement of holiness, he argues, is that of judgement.²² God's holiness is ontologically inseparable from the concept of judgement:²³ for God not to act in judging sin, evil and rebellion would be incongruous. Or, to restate the matter, Holiness which does not judge impurity and thus act to preserve the moral nature of creation is no true holiness. Judgement and redemption must be seen as two sides of the one coin:

Holiness could be revealed to sin only by an act of Redemption, by a Redemption whose principle consisted in that which active holiness always is as it is established—the reaction on sin, the judgement on sin and its destruction.²⁴

²¹ A.F. Simpson, 'P.T. Forsyth: Prophet of Judgement', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol.4, p.148.

²² 'The Preaching of Jesus III' in *The Expositor*, 8th Series, vol.9 (1915), p.416.

²³ *Cruciality*, p.viii.

²⁴ 'Preaching of Jesus II', art. cit. p.416.

We saw earlier the emphasis Forsyth places on God as Holy Father, and it is as this is extended to judgement that his thought is seen to diverge even more clearly from that of his liberal contemporaries. In his holy Fatherhood, God must judge, i.e. the Judge and the Father are not opposites. God is the 'Father-Judge' who *acts* to redeem his erstwhile ones.²⁵

What does P.T. Forsyth mean by 'judgement'? To answer this he turns to the Scriptures, which he sees as pointing to a concept of judgement that is different to ours. In the scriptures, he argues, judgement is looked forward to with hope and joy (e.g. Ps. 96:11-13) because '...it is not retribution that is the uppermost notion in it, but vindication'.²⁶ While not denying that judgement involves retribution to God's enemies:

It is not the destruction of God's enemies that is in the foreground, but the establishment of His people for the sake of His kingdom. Judgement is adjustment far more than vengeance. It is sanctification more than punishment. Nothing could be more shallow than to talk about the Old Testament God as being angry in the sense of vindictive.²⁷

It is because of this positive understanding of judgement that

²⁵ So, 'Your Judge is your Father in Jesus Christ. But it was not the Father that had ousted the Judge. He was Father-Judge. He was the judging Father and the atoning Redeemer.' 'The Preaching of Jesus IV', *The Expositor*, 8th Series, No.56, Aug. 1915, p.118.

²⁶ 'The Preaching of Jesus III' in *The Expositor*, 8th Series, No.55, July 1915, p.82.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Forsyth can speak of judgement as the 'mode by which grace goes into action'.²⁸ The Holy Father acts in judgement to establish his holiness in the face of sin and *in so doing* to restore his creation. This judgement, moreover, is not relegated to some remote future, but is present and active *now* in the world. Indeed, it could not be otherwise.

Thus, man must recognize that he stands under judgement. If God is not owned as man's Judge, man becomes God's. 'Where man is not felt to be on his trial before God, God is put on His trial before man and summoned to explain Himself to the conscience of the times'.²⁹ By *moral necessity*, man lives under holy judgement, such judgement being worked out in the conscience of man and the course of history.³⁰

The loss of this sense of holy judgement Forsyth saw as the 'cardinal sin' of contemporary liberalism.³¹ For him, the love of the Father was meaningless unless its basis was holiness and its outworking was the judgement of sin. There can be no 'soft gospel' of sentimental paternalism which does not deal with the issues of sin and guilt in the historical arena. Thus:

The sinner's reconciliation to a God of holy love could not take place if guilt were not destroyed, if judgement did not take place on a due scale, if the wrath of God did not somehow take real effect... The vindication, the judgement,

²⁸ Cruciality, p.viii.

²⁹ Cruciality, p.59.

³⁰ For a detailed discussion of this last point, see Simpson, art. cit. pp.152-154.

³¹ See, for example, 'The Preaching of Jesus IV', art. cit. p.416.

must take place within human history and experience.³²

It is axiomatic, therefore, that there is no possibility of salvation without judgement taking effect. There can be no 'easy forgiveness, all things considered'.³³ Judgement must be worked out, and righteousness must be 'finally established on the wreck of sin'.³⁴ And (and this pre-empts some later discussion) this very thing has been done in the cross of Christ. One cannot talk about the cross without talking about the holiness of God and its concomitant judgement on sin. Thus:

It was not curse and suffering only that fell on the Saviour, it was holy judgement. The Holy Father dealt there with the world's sin on (not in) a world soul. God in Christ judged sin as a Holy Father seeking penalty only for holiness' sake.³⁵

The cross is not, therefore, a place of sacrifice only, but of *judgement* on sin. Indeed, it is *the* place of holy love's judgement, for it is the place where the *sin of the world* has been judged. 'The

³² Work, p.132, c.f. Holy Father, p.10. 'There is a spiritual order where judgements are the one guarantee for mankind and its future. That law of holiness can by no means whatever be either warned off or bought off in its claim. God cannot simply waive it as to the past, nor is it enough if He simply declare it for all time. In His own eternal nature it has an undying claim to which He must give effect in due judgement somewhere if He is to redeem a world. The enforcement of God's holiness by judgement is as essential to a universal and eternal Fatherhood as the outflow of His love.' (His emphasis.)

³³ Hence, 'We should realize how far from a matter of course forgiveness was for a holy, and justly angry God, for all His love. A free forgiveness flows from moral strength, but an easy forgiveness only means moral weakness. How natural for God to forgive! Nay, if there be one thing in the world forever supernatural it is real forgiveness - especially on the scale of redemption.'

³⁴ From *Missions in State and Church*, p.52, quoted in Rodgers, op. cit. p.48.

³⁵ Holy Father, p.10.

final judgement' says Forsyth,³⁶ '...took place in principles in the Cross of Christ. Sin has been judged finally there.'³⁷ Holiness demands judgement and in the cross the demand is met.

[C] THE RELATIONSHIP OF HOLINESS TO LOVE

We have seen that, by nature of the case, holiness, love, judgement and grace cannot be seen as distinct 'attributes' of God. Necessarily, therefore, in any discussion of Forsyth's theology there will be a good deal of overlap between these concepts. However, there is value in considering them separately in order to appreciate more fully the distinctiveness of Forsyth's thought when compared to his theological contemporaries.

In passing we have seen Forsyth's concern to fight against notions of God that are more sentimental than Biblical. This is no less true of his understanding of the love of God. For him, the holiness of God's love is the key to our trusting it,³⁸ i.e. the holiness of God is the ground and guarantee of his love. ³⁹ 'God is love', he says, 'has in the New Testament no meaning apart from the equally prominent idea of righteousness, of God as the author and guardian of the moral holy law.'⁴⁰

The love and holiness of God thus cannot be separated. Holiness is 'love morally perfect',⁴¹ while 'love is holiness brimming and

³⁶ This point will be taken up in more detail later.

³⁷ Work, p.160.

³⁸ So, Crucialty, p.70f.; see also Work, p.113; Holy Father, p.9; Justification, p.217f., etc.

³⁹ Holy Father, p.26.

⁴⁰ The Atonement, p.65.

⁴¹ Positive Preaching, p. 213.

overflowing'.⁴² This does not mean, though, that God's holiness *is* his love, or that his love *is* his holiness, but rather that he himself *is holy love*. The distinction can be expressed as follows:

Holiness is that in the love of God which fixes it and assures it forever. If holiness fail not, then love cannot. If it cannot be put by, then love cannot fade.⁴³

With such understanding of love, the wrath of God is not a theological problem for Forsyth. Wrath is not the passion, temper, or 'mode of feeling' of God, but rather is the 'judgement of God in the reaction of His moral and spiritual order'.⁴⁴ This, as we have seen, is positive in its focus, i.e. vindicative rather than vindictive, restorative rather than simply retributive.

However, this does not mean that the wrath of God (i.e. the judgement of God) is merely the 'automatic recall of His moral order upon the sinner'.⁴⁵ While God's holy love issues in wrath, this is not separate from his person. He is *personally* angry against evil, and his judgement is the *personal* response to that which affronts his nature. His creation is thus not left to run mechanistically, certain

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Holy Father, p.26. Hence his statement: 'You can go behind love to holiness, but behind holiness you cannot go', in Ibid. p.5. Cf. also the discussion in 'The Preaching of Jesus IV', art. cit. p.136f.

⁴⁴ Work, p.118. He goes on: 'The judgement of God is perfectly compatible with His continued love, just as a father's punishment is perfectly compatible with his love for his children. The father has to discipline his children. He institutes certain laws, the children disobey; they must be punished, or, using the more dignified term, judged. The anger of God: we shall get the most meaning out of it when we think of it as the judgement of God, the exalted, inflexible judgement of God.'

⁴⁵ 'Addendum' in Work, p.239.

causes producing effects, with God being little more than a spectator. The 'curse of the sequel of sin' is *God's* infliction on man. Thus, says Forsyth:

We do not only grieve God but we provoke Him to anger...

The love of God becomes real anger to our sin, and to us as we identify ourselves with the sin, to us while, outside of Christ, we are no more than members of a sinful race. Is not our satisfaction and increase in well doing the personal blessing of God? Then surely our misery and infatuation on the other path is His personal anger.⁴⁶

While we may like to ameliorate statements such as this, Forsyth's argument is compelling. The important point is that we are not dealing with human emotions raised to an infinite level. Unlike our wrath, God's wrath is pure in its motivation and positive in its goal. It is the outworking of his holy love in all its personal power.

Does such a 'strong' understanding of God's love necessarily minimise the concept of compassion? Certainly the paternal compassion of God for his children and the fraternal compassion of man for his brother was a note prevalent in the liberalism which formed the matrix of Forsyth's theological training and early work. Must his understanding of holy love (issuing in personal wrath and judgement) be seen as contrary to the prevailing climate?

Forsyth himself was a man concerned with social issues. Throughout his life he had an active interest in both local and national politics⁴⁷ and he also devoted himself to causes of social justice as

⁴⁶ Ibid. p.241.

⁴⁷ For examples, see Bradley, *op. cit.* pp.37, 41, 118.

specific needs arose.⁴⁸ In 1902 he wrote:

It is quite impossible today that a Christian faith should be real, and yet refuse to respond in any way to the social needs, suffering and sin which are special to this hour.⁴⁹

However, while Forsyth saw the need for such work, he was concerned that the church of his day was on the threshold of losing the evangel in the struggle for 'social justice'.⁵⁰ He saw that Christianity stood in danger of becoming 'a fine and fading Positivism' which would be 'unable to bear the strain of the world's grief and guilt'.⁵¹ He could not agree that mankind could 'bring in the Kingdom' and that it was progressing to a utopian goal through moral and social evolution.⁵² The spectre of the world's sin and guilt and the inevitable suffering which flowed from a world alienated from its Creator were too real for Forsyth to ignore.

Human misery is too great for the power of pity... Our

⁴⁸ For example, his support of the workers in the great dock strike of 1889 and his fight against the use of Chinese labour in the Transvaal. See Bradley, *Ibid.* p.118.

⁴⁹ The Examiner, April 17, 1902, p.320 in an article entitled 'The Evangelical Experience'. Quoted in Pitt, *op. cit.*p.320.

⁵⁰ In 1906 he wrote: 'I must sometimes, I fear, have seemed to speak without respect of the sympathetic element of our faith and work...(But) I have nothing even to hint against this precious thing except when it is made the essence of Christianity and the substitute of schooled faith and moral obedience.' 'A Rallying Ground for the Free Churches' in The Hibbert Journal, vol.4 (1906), p.842. Quoted in *Ibid.* p.106.

⁵¹ Person and Place, p.39. In 1909 Forsyth wrote an article in The Hibbert Journal entitled 'The Insufficiency of Social Righteousness as a Moral Ideal'. Doubtless the arguments he expressed in this article would be of great benefit in expanding the comments which follow, but, unfortunately, at the time of writing, I have not yet received a copy of The Hibbert Journal contribution.

⁵² See, for example, his sermon manuscript mentioned in the Introduction n.47, above.

suffering can only finally be dealt with by Him Who is more concerned about our sin; who is strong enough to resist pity till grief has done its work in His son.⁵³

In other words, the perspective of *holy* love is the one that is sufficient for social action, for only this takes proper account of man's sin. The utopian dreamers of his day, he argued, could react to wrongs but 'failed at sin'⁵⁴ and this is where he parted company with many of his contemporaries.

Thus, the holy love of God means that sin cannot be overlooked. It is only immoral love, Forsyth argues, which has no moral hesitation about mercy.⁵⁵ Without love being holy, forgiveness is meaningless, sinking only to 'amnesty on a wide and ready scale'.⁵⁶ Forsyth thus guards his theology from sentimentalism by his emphasis on *holy* love, but (and this part we will consider further) on the obverse side of the coin he guards it from the legalism of a dead orthodoxy by his emphasis on *holy love*, rather than naked justice, i.e. 'The love that fills our needs is the love which first hallows His name. The love that blesses is at its deeper heart the love that atones'.⁵⁷

[D] THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOLINESS AND GRACE⁵⁸

As with his understanding of the love of God, Forsyth was

⁵³ Cruciality, p.81f.

⁵⁴ See Forsyth's comments from *The Hibbert Journal*, vol.7 (1909), in Pitt, op. cit. p.106 n.3.

⁵⁵ *The Atonement*, p.56.

⁵⁶ 'The Preaching of Jesus II', art.cit. p.418.

⁵⁷ 'The Preaching of Jesus IV', art.cit. p.136.

⁵⁸ In the nature of the case, an extended treatment of this topic would involve much repetition of material covered above. In the light of this, only the most salient points are noted here.

concerned to guard the concept of grace from the enervating influence of sentimentalism in a 'romantic religion'.⁵⁹ Grace could not be equated with beauty and serenity without losing the power of the gospel.⁶⁰ Nor could it be equated with 'human love on a divine scale' without 'reading more in the heart than the Bible'.⁶¹ Rather, Forsyth's understanding of grace is reflected in the following statement:

By grace is not here meant either God's general benignity, or His particular kindness to our failure of pity or pain. I mean His undeserved and unbought pardon and redemption of us in the face of our sin, in the face of the world sin, under such moral conditions as are prescribed by His revelation of His holy love in Jesus Christ and His crucified.⁶²

In other words, grace must be understood as the *moral* action of the God who is holy love. This means that 'grace' cannot be understood as an abstract, aesthetic quality of God infused into man, but rather it is the personal *action* of God in all his holy love, all his moral freedom.

⁵⁹ This is a term Forsyth uses in 'Taste of Death and the Life of Grace', in *Holy Father*, p.71

⁶⁰ Hence, in *Ibid.* p.59, he writes: '...I am sure that the attention so freely given by the church today to grace in the Greek sense, to the beauty of Christ, the beauty of the Cross, the beauty of holiness, has done something to impair real spiritual feeling, to produce, not levity, but religious mediocrity and inadequacy. It is too aesthetic in its nature. It does not search, know, and elicit the soul enough. It does not plough deep enough for the true crop of the cross and the fruits of the Spirit. Not to realise hell is not to prize the cross.' See further in *Positive Preaching*, p.214f. where the fruits of such a wrong understanding are set forth.

⁶¹ *Positive Preaching*, p.35.

⁶² *Ibid.* p.5f.

Grace is not a force. It is not among natural causes, quantities or infusions, nor is it due to natural effects. It is nothing corporeal or emanative. It is a Person's will... It aims, therefore, at the production of a certain type of free personal life in those to whom it comes. It aims at their will and its re-creation to a new freedom. It is the action of will on will, soul on soul.⁶³

Grace thus must be understood as 'atoning grace'.⁶⁴ God's holy love demands that sin must be dealt with in such a way as to do justice to holiness and restore it, and it is the *action* of such holy love that is grace to the sinner.⁶⁵

Understood in this way, grace is central to the gospel, with in terms of experience and proclamation. For Forsyth, 'Christianity stands or falls with grace',⁶⁶ i.e. it stands or falls with grace understood as the atoning action of the Holy God.

To that gospel of grace, as we are continually sent forth from it, so we must continually return, to adjust our compass and take our course... It is more than our base, it is our source... Our theology is not a fixed system

⁶³ Church and Sacraments, p.142.

⁶⁴ Positive Preaching, p.22. Cf. Holy Father, p.26: 'The grace of the Holy Eternal Father has but one image among men, and it is the holy face of Jesus and Him as crucified. The cause of the cross was not only that man was lost, not that God is love, but also that the Father is holy.'

⁶⁵ 'God's love then is love in holy action, in forgiveness, in redemption. It is the love of God above all things holy whose holiness makes sin damnable as sin and love active as grace. It can only act in a way that shall do justice to holiness and restore it.' Positive Preaching, p.353f.

⁶⁶ Positive Preaching, p.212.

we must accept but a gracious experience we must declare.⁶⁷

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that there is an essential unity in Forsyth's understanding of holiness, judgement, love and grace. This unity we have seen is personal, i.e. it flows from the nature of God as he is. Clearly, however, the concepts we have been discussing cannot simply be identified. Holiness is the ground and guarantee of his love, love is the overflowing of his holiness. Judgement is the wrath of a holy love which refuses to accept sin, but which personally acts in grace to establish holiness in the face of sin. In this way grace is 'absolutely synthetic', for 'it unites what was beyond man's power to unite' sin, love, holiness, and judgement'.⁶⁸ Moreover, it unites them forever, 'in endless beauty and power, in the one object of faith and source of morals—the Cross of Jesus Christ as the spring of the New Humanity'.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Faith, Freedom and the Future, p.19f, quoted in Brown, op. cit. p.42.

⁶⁸ Authority, p.402.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

II

FORSYTH'S UNDERSTANDING OF SIN AND THE STATE OF MAN

[A] INTRODUCTION

We ended the last section with a quote that brought together sin, grace, holiness, love and judgement. Throughout the paper so far we have used the word 'sin', particularly in opposition to holiness, without discussing in any depth the relationship between the two concepts. In this section we will explore that relationship, for without an understanding of the seriousness of sin in Forsyth's thought, any discussion of the atoning cross would be meaningless. We begin by very briefly setting Forsyth's argument in its contemporary context.

Forsyth saw that the constant danger of the 'sunny liberalism' of his day was to either minimise the fact and effect of sin or to ignore it altogether.¹ He saw that to do either was to lose the Biblical emphasis of the seriousness of sin on the one hand, and to maximise the potential of man on the other, beyond and in spite of the Pauline picture of man cut off from God - 'dead in trespasses and sin'.²

For Forsyth sin could never be regarded as a mere 'lapse'.³ It could not be separated from the sinning personality: sin is personal and related to the will. When I sin:

it was I who, at my will's centre, did that thing. It was my will and self that was put into it. My act was not the freak of some point on my circumference. It came from my centre. It was my unitary, indivisible self that was

¹ Positive Preaching, p.212.

² See, for example, the comments he make on Campbell's 'New Theology' in this regard in Brown, op. cit. p.27.

³ Positive Preaching, p.34.

involved and infected.⁴

In what, however, does his understanding of sin consist? How is it related to holiness and guilt and what is its affect on man?

[B] SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GOD

In very simple terms Forsyth describes sin as the defiance of holiness.⁵ What does he mean by this? In our sin, he argues, we have soiled God's purity, despised his love and crossed his will.⁶ We have not only denied him but more importantly we have 'denied ourselves to Him' and refused either to honour or worship him.⁷

Sin is thus totally opposed to God (and *vice versa*). Indeed there is no sense in discussing 'sin' unless it is seen to stand in such a contrary relation to God. If one could summarise the connotation which appears to be uppermost in Forsyth's mind when speaking of sin it would be 'rebellion'. Forsyth describes it dramatically in this way:

God is fundamentally affected by sin. He is stung to the core. It does not simply try Him. It challenges His whole place in the moral world. It puts Him on His trial as God... Its total object is to unseat Him: It is the one thing in the world that lies outside reconciliation, whether you mean by that the process or the act. It cannot be taken up into the supreme unity. It can only be

⁴ 'Christian Perfection' in Holy Father, p.100f.

⁵ Cruciality, p.22.

⁶ 'The Preaching of Jesus I', art. cit.. p.327.

⁷ Ibid. Cf. Rom. 1:21: '...they did not honour him as God or give thanks'.

destroyed.⁸

Sin is thus a *personal* affront to the Holy God. It is not the breaking of some abstract laws, for the law is the expression of God's will, the commands of the person who is holy. And because sin is the personal affront to the holy God in transgression of his law, man stands *objectively* in a state of *guilt* before him.

'Guilt' is the word Forsyth prefers to use when speaking of man's rebellion. Whereas 'Sin' could possibly be explained impersonally, 'guilt' consciously and deliberately sheets sin home as *personal* rebellion, antagonism and hatred of God.

It is the sense of guilt that we have to get back today for the soul's sake and for the kingdom's; not simply the sense of sin. There are many who recognize the power of sin, the misfortune of it; what they do not recognize is the thing that makes it most sinful, which makes it what it is before God, namely, guilt... the fact that it is transgression against not simply God, not simply a loving God, but against a holy God.⁹

⁸ Positive Preaching , p.366. Cf. p.56: 'We are not His counterparts, but His antagonists... There is a huge dislocation... And as a race we are not even stray sheep or wandering prodigals merely; we are rebels taken with weapons in our hands.'

⁹ Work, p.78, cf. Church, p.298: 'Grace was mercy to guilt, it was not medicine for disease. More than disease ailed us. We are not responsible for disease, except in a secondary way... In my sin, even others may have had some share, but I made my own guilt.' So also, 'Sin is not, as the Greek idea goes, infection with a moral microbe, nor is sin, as the mediaeval idea, mere distance from God. It is what the Reformers declared it to be, guilt.' Quoted in Rodgers, op. cit. p.40. While the above statement apropos Forsyth's preference for the term 'guilt' is generally true, he is not always strict in his usage of the two words. Cf. Cruciality, p.19.

[C] THE PLIGHT OF GUILTY MAN

In the light of his guilty standing before God, man's plight is desperate. Guilty man does not see his situation to be this way, for his sin has dulled his perception to his true state before the One who is wholly holy.¹⁰ Man must be redeemed into the power of appreciating redemption, for, of himself he is always seeing salvation as relating to self-help.¹¹ It is impossible, says Forsyth, for anyone to really know the wickedness of their evil, for it is only truly 'knowable' by the Holy.¹²

In this state guilty man lies, not merely helpless, but at *enmity* with God. We are God's 'antagonists' and he finds us 'not even as stray sheep or wandering prodigals merely, but as rebels with weapons in our hands'.¹³ Christ comes:

not as the herald of God's forgiveness for sins that but hamper our development or soil the surface without tainting the core. But... He is the Redeemer of our total personality from its radical recalcitrance to God's will...

¹⁰ Cf. *Cruciality*, p.47f.

¹¹ '...He finds all salvation to be but the recuperative effort of man's inalienable divinity, his infectible essential identity with God, which is the only true eternal life. And the act of saving grace is nothing but our own act of faith in our profound and innate selves. Against all which I would say, in a word, we have to be redeemed into the power of appreciating redemption and appropriating the greatest moral act man knows - the Cross.' *Positive Preaching*, p.62.

¹² 'It is impossible that the whole dimensions and heinousness of wickedness, the abysmal perdition of humanity, should be grasped by any created soul. Only the absolutely holy can measure sin or judge it... And what we now realise of evil is but a fraction of what the holy ye has seen, His heart borne and His redemption engaged since history began.' *Cruciality*, p.22.

¹³ *Positive Preaching*, p.56.

The natural man is a *nisus* against God, against a God he cannot but feel. And the world's treatment of Christ shows us that the higher and better God's will is for us, the more man repudiates, rebels and fights against it.¹⁴

Man stands, therefore, guilty before God, needing not aid, but deliverance.¹⁵ The issue is not whether man feels this or not subjectively, but rather how he stands *objectively* before the holy Father-Judge.¹⁶ Objectively he is guilty, and in his guilt he is morally bankrupt, for he has rejected the One who is both wholly moral and the only ground for morality in man.¹⁷

The death of Christ, then, had not simply to touch a chord of love or sympathy in the human soul in order to provoke a response, but rather it had to overcome the *guilt* of a hostile humanity. It had to turn us 'not from potential friends to actual, but from enemies into friends'.¹⁸ We had to be saved from that guilt which are 'too far gone to feel',¹⁹ and redeemed by and to a holiness we had not simply ignored, but actively rejected.

Moreover, all of this it had to do, not for humanity as an aggregate number of individuals, but for a humanity which exists as a

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.70.

¹⁵ *Positive Preaching*, p.5; see also pp. 54, 56, 123, etc. A loss of this sense of sin's seriousness 'empties grace of this meaning'. See *Cruciality*, p.60

¹⁶ *Cruciality*, p.60

¹⁷ Cf. *Positive Preaching*, p.56. God is the only holy One, hence man can only be morally upright in so far as he acknowledges this by submitting to the will of the Holy Father.

¹⁸ *Work*, p.19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.18.

solidary organism. The problem of sin is thus very much a *corporate* problem:

We are not absolute, solitary individuals. We are in a society, an organism... And our selfish, godless actions and influence go out, radiate and affect the organism as they could not do were we absolute units... We are members of one another both for evil and for good.²⁰

That Forsyth held to the doctrine of 'original sin' cannot be doubted. He saw humanity as infected 'at core' with sin and its curse.²¹ As to how this situation has arisen Forsyth was not concerned to speculate, rather, he argues, we must deal with the reality of what is. The cross stands as 'its own evidence to our moral need',²² and this evidence stands independent of the conclusions of anthropology with regard to an historical fall. 'The need of Atonement', he says, 'does not rest on an historic fall, but on the reality of present and corporate guilt.'²³

To take the issue of man's solidarity from another angle, Forsyth devotes a good deal of discussion to the 'conscience'. His fundamental

²⁰ *Work*, p.121 Cf. also the statement below and *Justification*, pp.9,10: 'Humanity is not a mere mass of units. It is an organism with a history. And revelation therefore is God's treatment of us in a history in a Humanity.' *Hibbert Journal X*, Oct. 1911, p.241. Quoted in Mozely, *The Heart of the Gospel*, p.77. One of the great lacks in Forsyth's works is his little use of key exegetical passages in his arguments. We surmise here that his argument springs from places such as Rom. 5:18, but his arguments would have been better served by rooting them in more specific exegetical discussion.

²¹ So he writes: 'The whole race is not only weighted with arrears, but infected with a blight. The train of history is not simply late, but there has been an accident due to malice and crime. We struggle not only with misfortune but with a curse.' In *The Gospel and Authority*, p.174. Quoted in Hunter, *Per Crucem ad Lucem*, p.57. Also see Bradley, *op. cit.* p.123.

²² *The Atonement*, p.53.

²³ *Ibid.*

point is that the unity of the race lies not in the biological, affectional or organizational spheres, but in the moral. The unity of the race is a moral unity and 'therefore it is a unity of conscience'.²⁴

What does he mean by this? Fundamentally man is not only *aware* of himself, he is *critical* of himself, i.e. he is more than a consciousness, he is a conscience.²⁵ This means man not only can, but does (and indeed *must*) pass moral judgement upon himself. Even if the voice of conscience is negative it cannot be silenced.²⁶ Conscience follows us like a shadow, constantly present in spite of us, as a power akin to us.²⁷ There is 'no crevice in the universe' into which we can escape, for, ultimately, 'Conscience is the Word of God within us; and moral responsibility means responsibility before God, its living God and Christ, His living Grace.'²⁸

While asserting this, Forsyth is aware that prevailing social *mores* affect the workings of conscience as to its specific 'brief'. His argument is not that the specific accusations of conscience are the Word of God, but that *in* these accusations man cannot escape the principle of moral responsibility. In other words, conscience stands as the voice of the Moral to man, whatever his specific social setting.

As such, the conscience of man can never be satisfied with mere remission of sin. It constantly brings man to the point of needing forgiveness, but conscience will not be satisfied with a forgiveness

²⁴ Work, p.122, also see Justification, pp.20-21.

²⁵ Caciality, p.62.

²⁶ There is a brilliant passage which personifies the consciences as 'judge' and 'critic' in *Ibid.* p.63f.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p.64.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p.65.

that takes no account of judgement.²⁹ Nothing will satisfy the conscience of man which does not first satisfy the conscience of God.³⁰

If a message of grace tells us there was and is no judgement any more, and that God has simply put judgement on one side and has not exercised it, that cannot be the true grace of God.³¹

Man thus stands before God guilty, alienated and hostile, but nonetheless constantly confronted by the presence of the Holy in that he is unable to escape the moral nature of the universe. His conscience will not 'let him off the hook', but rather confirms him in his corporate guilt.

In the light of his emphasis on the solidary nature of the race, it is axiomatic that for Forsyth social evils and 'individual sin' cannot be separated.³² At their core, then, the social problems of humanity are but the outworking of the moral problem of his guilt.

The whole social problem is at bottom a moral problem. And the moral problem is at bottom religious. It turns not merely on man's normal, or ideal state, but upon his actual, moral relation to God and God's personal unity of holiness.³³

²⁹ Ibid. In this whole area of 'conscience', one cannot but be struck by the similarity that C.S. Lewis has to Forsyth. See, for example, the basic argument of *Mere Christianity*.

³⁰ *Work*, p.167.

³¹ Ibid.

³² See, for example, his discussion in *Cruciality*, p.21f.

³³ *Cruciality*, p.58

Such a situation can only be redemded by a 'great salvation'. Social reparation is not enough, for it does not deal with the core of the issue. The social organism 'has a common and organic sin' which must have a central treatment.³⁴ There must be a

central and solidary treatment of sin and one where responsibility is borne in man, even though it be vicariously... That seems inevitable if we believe in responsibility, and also believe in the unity of the human race.³⁵

Given the nature of the holy Father, and given the state of man before him, there must be, then, a cosmic reconciliation. It is not enough that we be reconciled with our own self-respect, or even our neighbour. We must be reconciled to the God who is holy love.³⁶ It is to the mode of this reconciliation that we now turn.

³⁴ Ibid. p.22. Forsyth saw that this was one of the greatest 'plusses' of the old juridical theories of atonement. See Ibid. p.21.

³⁵ Ibid. p.22.

³⁶ So, 'Preaching of Jesus I', art. cit. p.328.

IV

THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S RECONCILING WORK.

[A] THE ESSENCE OF CHRIST'S ATONEMENT

We noted earlier how Forsyth saw that Revelation could not be simply declarative, but that, given the nature of God as holy, it must be *effective* : i.e. Revelation must be understood as the act of God by which he *effects* his holy will in his creation.¹ Without doubt *the* act of Revelation, for Forsyth, is the Person and work of the Son, and more particularly his work.²

In natural accord with this understanding is the emphasis which Forsyth lays in all his works on the cross as *God's* activity. God must be preserved as the focal point of the cross, not man. Thus:

God was in Christ reconciling. The prime doer in Christ's cross was God. Christ was God reconciling. He was God doing the very best for man and not man doing his very best for God. The former is evangelical Christianity, the latter is humanist Christianity.³

This means that there can be no thought of God as the object of some third party's reconciliation.⁴ In the cross of Christ, God

¹ See I, n.50; 51 above. So also *Holy Father*, p.19: 'Christ came not to say something but to do something. His revelation was action more than instruction. He revealed by redeeming. The thing He did was not simply to make us aware of God's predisposition in an impressive way. It was not to *declare* forgiveness. It was certainly not to *explain* forgiveness. And it was not even to *bestow* forgiveness. It was to *effect* forgiveness, to set up the relation of forgiveness both in God and man.' (*His emphasis.*)

² This point will be discussed further below.

³ *Cruciality*, p.17.

⁴ *Work*, p.89.

himself deals with the guilt of man directly,⁵ and he deals with it in all his unity of holiness, i.e. Forsyth stands firmly with the Reformers in his Trinitarian understanding of the cross.⁶

However, in his zeal to preserve the Godward aspect of the cross, Forsyth laid himself open to the charge of Patripassianism. He speaks boldly of the 'death of God',⁷ and that 'God died' in the cross, (adding - 'I am not afraid of that phrase: I cannot do without it').⁸ We would be wrong, though, if we were to interpret these statements as Patripassian in the strict sense of the word. Forsyth himself saw the possibility of being misunderstood, and frequently sought to guard himself against it:

The Father did not suffer as the Son (that were too Sabellian), but He suffered with the Son... It cost the Father at least as much as the Son... Our redemption drew on the Whole Godhead. Father and Spirit were not spectators only of the Son's agony, nor only recipients of His sacrifice. They were involved in it.⁹

In this understanding of the Father's role in the cross, Forsyth was seeking to establish as a positive alternative to what he saw as two untenable errors. No longer can we say that God had to be reconciled by a sacrifice which, in effect, procured grace; nor can we say that Redemption cost the Father nothing: that he only had to receive

⁵ Thus he writes: '...there can be no talk of hoodwinking. Atonement means the covering of sin by something which God Himself had provided, and therefore the covering of sin by God Himself.' *Ibid.* p.55; cf. also p.92f.

⁶ See, for example, *Ibid.* p.152.

⁷ *Justification*, p.147.

⁸ *Work*, p.25; also *Cruciality*, pp.17, 37.

⁹ *Missions in State and Church*, p.29. Quoted in Bradley, *op. cit.* p.169. Cf. also the comments in *Justification*, p.147.

the payment which the Son made.¹⁰ Atonement is not made to a passive God, but rather it is made *by* God and reconciliation takes place between two *active* parties.

The cross thus stands as the *personal* action of the holy Father. The active obedience of Christ is an important concept for Forsyth in this regard. Christ never accepts the cross as his fate, but he actively *wills* it in obedience to his Father.¹¹ In so doing, his work is not passive endurance, but the outgoing and creative holy grace of God who reconciles the world to himself.¹²

Moreover, this reconciliation is not mechanistic, but personal in that it affects both sides. In the cross, God effects forgiveness and establishes holiness in one movement, the outflow of which is a restored relationship. And, argues Forsyth, you cannot set up a relation between persons without affecting both sides, 'even if on one side the disposition existed before, and led to the act that reconciled'.¹³

How, then, is the holy God affected in reconciliation? As we have seen, there can be no change in God brought about by the influence of a third party causing him to 'adjust' his attributes of love and mercy,¹⁴ but nonetheless there is a change *within* God himself brought about *by* God himself. This cannot be a change of affection, from

¹⁰ See points 1 & 2 in *The Atonement*, p.54.

¹¹ *Cruciality*, p.38. Again we are left to guess at Forsyth's exegetical basis. John 10:17f. immediately springs to mind.

¹² So, *Ibid.* p.37.

¹³ *Holy Father*, p.19. Intriguingly he continues... 'The great mass of Christ's works was like a stable iceberg. It was hidden. It was His dealing with God, not man. The great thing done was with God. It was independent of our knowledge of it. The greatest thing ever done in the world was done out of sight.' Cf. 'Preaching of Jesus II', art. cit. p.414.

¹⁴ Here Forsyth disagrees strongly with Melancthon. See *Work*, p.117.

'hatred into grace', for God has never ceased to love us, 'even when He was most angry and severe with us'.¹⁵ There is no change of 'mood' or 'feeling' but there is a change of manner, argues Forsyth.¹⁶ As in the parable of the prodigal son, the father's heart towards his prodigal child did not change, but while his son was a prodigal he could not treat him otherwise. Likewise:

God needed no placation, but He could not exercise His kindness to the prodigal world, He certainly could not restore communion with its individuals, without doing some act which permanently altered the relation.¹⁷

In brief, the act of the cross, 'did not make God our Father, but it made it possible for the Father to treat sinners as sons'.¹⁸ In the cross God himself reconciled the world to himself, that we might receive the 'adoption as sons'. Though the mass of humanity may not recognize it, we now live in a changed world. The holy One himself has entered, tarried, lived, died, atoned and reconciled as man for men.

Let us examine this same point from another perspective. We have seen earlier that humanity stands guilty before God as a solidary organism, i.e. there is a moral unity of the race in its sin. Forsyth develops this thought further in his discussion of the atonement, arguing that any reconciliation between man and God must take place on a racial scale. 'The first charge of Christ and His cross', he says, 'was the reconciliation of the race, and of its individuals by

¹⁵ *Work*, p.105.

¹⁶ Here he struggles to find appropriate words.

¹⁷ *Work*, p.109.

¹⁸ *Holy Father*, p.20.

implication'.¹⁹

Forsyth was here concerned to negate the contemporary influence of individualism,²⁰ but his comments are not simply reactionary statements. If God is holy (which he is), and sin is totally opposed to him (which it is), there can be no possibility of God acting in a way so as not to destroy sin *totally*. All sin (and this is to use a quantitative term to which Forsyth might take exception) must be judged and overcome or else God's holiness would not be 'wholly holy'.

If forgiveness is no more than a series of individual acts, what security is there for the soul, what guarantee is there of a new creation?²¹ Sin in *the race* must be dealt with.

We must avoid every idea of atonement which seems to reduce it to God's dealing with a mass of individuals, instead of with the race as a whole - instead of a racial, a social, a collective salvation in which alone each individual has his place and part.²²

In other words, for God to redeem even one person must mean the destruction of sin in its totality, which means, in short, the re-organisation of the universe, the reconciliation of the race.²³

¹⁹ Work, p.99; see also p.96; *Cruciality*, p.45.

²⁰ See *Work*, p.114.

²¹ See the series of questions raised in *Cruciality*, p.45f.

²² *Work*, p.96. See also *Positive Preaching*, p.364; *Cruciality*, p.22. Thus: 'Individualism has done its work for Christianity for the time being, and we are now suffering from its after-effects. We do not realise that we are each one of us saved in a racial salvation. We are each one of us saved in the salvation of the race, in a collectivist redemption. What Christ saved was the whole human race.' *Work*, p.114.

²³ Cf. Bradley, *op. cit.* p.142.

Does this mean that Forsyth was a universalist? That is, does his emphasis on the solidary nature of the race and God's dealings with it overrule or negate personal response?²⁴ To this answer must be 'No'. He saw that individuals must 'enter in' upon the reconciled position of the world,²⁵ just as in John 3:16 'the world' and 'whosoever' are placed in juxtaposition.²⁶ God loved not individuals, or specific groups of individuals, but the world, and he has directed his love upon the world 'in such a way that it should be taken home in every individual experience'.²⁷ There is thus a racial, 'whole worldly' reconciliation upon which individual souls enter upon by faith.²⁸

Here Forsyth obviously is working to give due weight to both the Scriptural positions that the world has been reconciled (e.g. John 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:18f.; Col. 1:20, etc.), yet only those who believe will be saved (Rom. 8:29f.; Rom. 9; Eph. 1:3ff.; John 10:26, etc.). While there will always be an inherent paradox in any statement along these lines, Forsyth's contribution is valuable in that he insists that the enquiry cannot proceed along quantitative terms. Rather the atonement must be understood in *qualitative* categories. The 'sin of the world' does not equal the total of the sins of its members, nor does the solidarity of the race mean the aggregate number of its individual constituents. Thus he can say:

²⁴ A criticism is raised by A.E. Garvie, for example, in 'A Cross Centred Theology', *Congregational Quarterly* XXII (1944), p.326.

²⁵ *Work*, p.86.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p.115.

²⁷ *Ibid.* He goes on (p.116): '...He did something to it (the world) in such a way that every individual 'whosoever' should receive the benefit, and receive it in the only way which made a world of saved individuals possible. You can never compound a saved world out of any number of saved individuals. But God did so save the world in such a way as to carry individual salvation in the same act.'

²⁸ *Work*, p.133, cf. p.168.

do not go away with the hasty conclusion that the salvation of the race must necessarily mean the salvation of every soul in it. You have to settle the question whether every soul ever born is required for the unity of the race as a whole.²⁹

We must conclude, therefore, that God in Christ *has* reconciled the world to himself, but that we, as the Church must be 'ambassadors' of that reconciliation urging the repentance and belief that lead to eternal life.³⁰ All will be saved *if they will*,³¹ but all can only be saved because the guilt of the *race* has been dealt with.

How is it that Christ's cross was able to deal with the guilt of the race? i.e. in what way was the guilty race itself present in the cross? Surely this question must be important, for if the race was only a passive bystander, as it were, at the cross then it is problematic as to whether *its* guilt could be dealt with.

The answer, says Forsyth, is to see that Christ came as a *federal* Saviour who saved in a *federal* act.³² He became *one* with the race in his identification with us.³³ And, 'as Head of the human race by His voluntary self identification with it, Christ took the curse and

²⁹ *Revelation*, p.35.

³⁰ So, *Ibid.* p.35ff. We do not have opportunity here to open up Forsyth's theology of mission. Suffice to say that he saw the missionary task of the church as both urgent and imperative.

³¹ *This Life and the Next*, p.21 (his emphasis). Cf. his comments on the hardness of the human heart in *Work*, p.161.

³² '...The Object of our faith, Jesus Christ, is what our fathers used to call a federal Person, a federal Saviour in a federal act. All humanity is in Him and in His act. It is quite true that every man must believe for himself, but no man can believe by himself or unto himself.' *Work*, p.172.

³³ See *Person and Place*, p.352f.

judgement, which did not belong to Him as sinless.'³⁴

To take it from another angle, Christ identified himself completely with the race by becoming one with it in sharing not just personality, but the conditions of personailty. His identity with man:

lay in no mere continuity of substance, nor even in participating in personality, but in His assumption of man's *conditions* of personality, and His renunciation of God's. It lay in His active acceptance of the human and sin-laden conditions of communion with God in such a victorious and sinless way as to make that communion possible and real for every other personal soul.³⁵

We are here touching on a subject which is beyond the scope of this paper to follow in depth (viz. Forsyth's understanding of the Incarnation and the Person of Christ). The relevant point at this juncture, however, is that Christ, as federal Saviour, has identified so totally with the race that the judgement which fell on him in the cross was the judgement of humanity in Christ.³⁶ His was not the death of a man among many, but when he died, all died. We were judged, our guilt dealt with, because we were *in him* by virtue of his self-identification with us.³⁷

Moreover, Forsyth argues that this death of Christ for the race is a

³⁴ *Work*, p.159, cf. pp.150, 159; *Positive Preaching*, p.364.

³⁵ *Person and Place*, p.353.

³⁶ *Cruciality*, p.30.

³⁷ So, *Cruciality*, p.30. Having said this, we have not come to the end of the matter, however, We will need to pursue the issue further in Forsyth's understanding of substitution and satisfaction. The point is made here anticipating the discussion to follow.

finished work. There need not be, cannot be, anything added to it: he died 'once, for all'. Holiness demands that there be nothing lacking in his bearing of sin, i.e. judgement must be *fully* wrought on the cross or it is not wrought at all.³⁸ This means Forsyth is able to say that, *in principle*, the last judgement is past.³⁹ The last judgement (of the eschaton) is simply the outworking of Christ's cross in detail, for 'the final judgement, the absolute judgement, the crucial judgement for the race, took place in principle on the cross of Christ.'⁴⁰

One cannot doubt that there is judgement on and in the world now, but this judgement is in principle the same judgement of grace which effected reconciliation through the cross. We saw earlier the positive (though not mechanistic or impersonal) understanding Forsyth has of judgement. His argument is that judgement must be the obverse of holy love: they are complementary not contradictory.⁴¹ The true moral problem would be if there were no judgement in history, if man was able to escape from the moral order of things. But God does bring judgement

³⁸ 'If He had not vindicated His holiness to the uttermost in that way of judgement (i.e. the Cross), it would not be the kind of holiness men could trust.' *Work*, p.136.

³⁹ See II n.37 above.

⁴⁰ *Work*, p.160. One here would like to delve into the understanding of time and history which underlies this statement. For some introductory considerations, see Rodgers, *op. cit.* p.70f. Forsyth rarely refers to the resurrection of Christ specifically. Generally his understanding of the word 'Cross' includes it implicitly, but one of the few passages I have found on the resurrection links specifically with this conception as the cross of Christ as a *finished* work: 'God has, by the resurrection of Christ, regenerated us into a living hope: He has not simply given us a living hope that we may one day be regenerate... any living hope we have is the action of Christ's resurrection in us'. *Person and Place*, p.57 (*His emphasis.*)

⁴¹ Thus, 'The anomaly is not that a God of love should permit such things as we see (referring to W.W.I). In the egoistic conditions of Europe and of civilization everywhere, and with a God of holy love overall, the scandal and the stumbling block would have been if such judgements did not come.' *Justification*, p.119.

to bear upon sinful man in history, and this judgement is the working out of the principle of judgement set forth in the cross. Thus:

The judgement *process* in history only unfolds the finality of the eternal judgement *act* which is in the Cross, to reconcile it in the final settlement of all things.⁴²

Thus far we have noted the following points in our discussion: the cross of Christ was the work of God and, as such, it stands as the personal action of the Holy *effecting* reconciliation. This reconciliation, being personal, affects both sides, in that a change of relation is established. Moreover, it is a racial reconciliation based on the finality of God's holy judgement on the sin of man. We have, however, not yet distinguished reconciliation from atonement, nor have we yet seen the kernel of the relationship between atonement and holiness, though all of the foregoing discussion is indispensably bound up with it.

It is clear from the preceding discussion that the over-riding concept in Forsyth's theology of the cross is that of reconciliation. The idea of the holy God effecting a change in relationship between himself and a sinful humanity through the cross undergirds all of Forsyth's major works.⁴³ However, Forsyth makes it quite clear that reconciliation and atonement are not identical. There can be no possibility of reconciliation without atonement,⁴⁴ for atonement is

⁴² *Ibid.* p.182. This, of course, begs one to open up a study of his eschatology. For a 'comment in a nutshell', see *Work*, p.130.

⁴³ In *Work* he calls the doctrine of reconciliation the 'backbone of the church'. By this term he says that he means what Paul means: 'By reconciliation Paul meant the total result of Christ's life-work in the fundamental, permanent, final changing of the relation between man and God, altering it from a relation of hostility to one of confidence and peace', p.54

⁴⁴ So, *Cruciality*, pp.67, 68; *Work*, pp.66, 67, 154; *Person and Place*, p.131; *Positive Preaching*, p.124. etc.

the indispensable means by which reconciliation is accomplished.⁴⁵ Reconciliation has no meaning apart from atonement, but it is not the same as atonement.⁴⁶

Reconciliation could only be possible if guilt were destroyed, judgement effected and the holy love of God vindicated.⁴⁷ The cross must bring reconciliation through the judgement of man's guilt. Thus we read:

The thing we are to be redeemed from is not chiefly ignorance or pain, but guilt. The things to which revelation has first to address itself is guilt. The love of God... can only appear as atoning love in some form of judgement.⁴⁸

Why is this so? Because God is holy. Reconciliation is impossible unless holiness is satisfied, unless sin is atoned.⁴⁹

The holiness of God, then, necessitates the atoning cross. God 'could not trifle with His own holiness. He could will nothing against His holy nature, and He could not abolish the judgement bound up with it'.⁵⁰ This, however, does not mean that the Son in the cross somehow 'placates' God's anger.⁵¹ The cross is the *gift* of God in which he

⁴⁵ *Work*, p.58.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p.80.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.132.

⁴⁸ *The Atonement*, p.80f.

⁴⁹ *Cruciality*, p.viii: 'By atonement... is meant that action of Christ's death which has a prime regard to God's holiness, has it for its first charge, and finds man's reconciliation impossible except as that holiness is divinely satisfied.' Cf. *Revelation*, p.60.

⁵⁰ *Work*, p.112.

⁵¹ Cf. the earlier discussion under IV. A. n.7ff. above, and IV. B. below.

himself atones. The judgement, if it were upon man alone, 'would have destroyed him', but if it were borne by God alone 'would be wide of the mark as irrelevant to man's experience and regeneration'.⁵² Rather, in the cross, the judgement of holy love is borne by God in man.⁵³

Thus reconciliation is effected by the 'representative sacrifice of Christ crucified; by Christ crucified as the representative of God on the one hand and of Humanity... on the other'.⁵⁴ Atonement, then, is the satisfaction of the conscience both of God and man⁵⁵ which enables reconciliation to take place.⁵⁶ Such an atonement (by holy love effecting judgement on guilt) is the only hope for a secure faith,⁵⁷ for it alone assures us that God's holiness has been satisfied.

Forsyth's characteristic description of Christ's work on the cross is that there he 'confessed God's holiness'.⁵⁸ What does Forsyth mean by this and what is its significance?

The first thing we must note is that, for Forsyth, Christ's mission was thoroughly theocentric. Jesus' first concern was to obey his

⁵² *Cruciality*, p.29f.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Work*, p.145f.

⁵⁵ *Cruciality*, p.57f., cf. *Work*, pp.166f.

⁵⁶ Thus, 'In reconciliation the ground of God's wrath of God's judgement was put away. Guilt rests on God's charging up of sin: reconciliation rests upon God's non-imputation of sin; God's non-imputation of sin rests upon Christ being made sin for us.' *Work*, p.82.

⁵⁷ *Cruciality*, p.46f.

⁵⁸ Eg. *Work*, p.150; *Cruciality*, p.102; 'Preaching of Jesus II', art. *cit.* p.411, etc.

Father, whose name he hallowed,⁵⁹ and only thence to satisfy the need of man. His love for God was greater than his love for man's need,⁶⁰ or, to state the same thing in another way, his service of man was 'the index of His oblation to God'.⁶¹

Drawing upon exegesis of the Old Testament passages dealing with the blood sacrifices in the temple and the Levitical dictum that 'life is in the blood' (Lev. 17:11), Forsyth argues that piacular offerings were with the direct object of 'releasing life'.⁶² The value in Christ's death, he argues, is not in the blood *per se* but in the principle which it, and all sacrifice, represents, viz. that it was 'God's will, His appointment'.⁶³ 'Everything turns, not on His (Jesus') life being taken from Him, but on its having been laid down'.⁶⁴

The shedding of blood in the Old Testament thus represented the giving of *life* to God, and this in obedience to his will. Likewise the phrase 'the blood of Christ' must be understood to mean '*the exhaustive obedience and surrender of His total self*',⁶⁵ and this to

⁵⁹ Cf. *Holy Father*, pp.1, 5, etc.

⁶⁰ *Positive Preaching*, p.156. Forsyth himself would recognize that there is a false dichotomy here set up between holiness and love, but his concern is to state the position contra the subjective, anthropocentric theology so prevalent in his day.

⁶¹ *Cruciality*, p.69. Cf. p.100: 'Christ's first business in saving was to honour the Father's holy love. He saved man because He first saved God from being mocked by man.' Also see 'Preaching of Jesus II' *art. cit.* p.410.

⁶² *Cruciality*, pp. 94-96.

⁶³ *Ibid.* p.86. See also *Work*, p.90

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p.97 (his emphasis). Cf. 'Preaching of Jesus IV', *art. cit.* p.131f.

*judgement..*⁶⁶

Christ's sacrifice must, therefore, be linked always with the concept of obedience. Obedience is the 'typical relationship of man to God' in both the Old Testament and New Testament,⁶⁷ and the essence of all sacrifice was the submission of self.⁶⁸ Christ's sacrifice, like all sacrifice, was not to procure God's grace⁶⁹ but flowed from grace and 'was essentially one of will in obedience'.⁷⁰

The debt of man to God has always been one of obedience and thence holiness, not suffering,⁷¹ thus there is no saving value in the mere act of dying 'apart from the spiritual manner of it'.⁷² The saving value of Christ's death 'came from a holy obedience, owning, in His most intense and extreme actuality of life - viz. agony and death - the righteousness of the broken law'.⁷³

⁶⁶ 'We have passed upward from the idea of *sacrifice* to the graver, more ethical idea of *judgement*... And full self-sacrifice to a holy God involves by analogy the submission of self to the moral order and judgement of God'. *Cruciality*, p.98.

⁶⁷ 'Different Conceptions of Priesthood and Sacrifice', p.92 (1899). Quoted in Bradley, *op. cit.* p.155.

⁶⁸ From *Ibid.* p.11 in Bradley, p.154.

⁶⁹ *Work*, p.90

⁷⁰ 'Different Conceptions of Priesthood' in Bradley, *op. cit.* p.154.

⁷¹ *Holy Father*, p.21.

⁷² *The Atonement*, p.57.

⁷³ *Ibid.* p.58, cf. *Work*, p.205 f.: 'But a holy God could be satisfied by neither pain nor death, but by holiness and love. The atoning thing is not obedient suffering, but suffering obedience. He could be satisfied and rejoiced only by the hallowing of His name, by perfect and obedient answer to holy heart from amid conditions of pain, death and judgement. Holy obedience alone, unto death, can satisfy the Holy Lord.'

In obedience to the One who is holy, Christ willingly suffered the judgement of Holiness upon sin, thereby confessing God as the Holy Father and redeeming the race.⁷⁴ the heart of Christ's confession of God's holiness thus lay in the 'doxological spirit'⁷⁵ in which he accepted the cross. In the cross he accepted judgement 'as the only adequate acknowledgement of the holy God in a sinful world'.⁷⁶ In the cross he bore the curse as God's judgement, 'praised it, hallowed it, absorbed it; and His resurrection showed that He exhausted it'.⁷⁷

Moreover this confession of God's holiness in the cross stands to our good because of Christ's 'moral solidarity with us'.⁷⁸ What God sought 'was nothing so pagan as a mere victim outside our conscience and over our heads', but a 'Confessor, a Priest, one taken from among men'.⁷⁹ Only a sinless Christ could make such a confession in such a way, for only he could see the true nature of man's guilt before God and the true nature of holiness' response to man's sin.⁸⁰

Thus, in Jesus' work on the cross, we have man's justification, or glorification of God.⁸¹ The *incarnate* Son, the second *Adam*, the federal *man* confesses God's holiness, hallows his name, but in such a

⁷⁴ So, 'Preaching of Jesus IV', *art. cit.* p.134f.

⁷⁵ Rodgers, *op. cit.* p.50.

⁷⁶ *Work*, p.190.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ So *Ibid.* p.189.

⁸¹ 'Dying as man, Christ placed His whole self beside man under the judgement of God. He was beside man in court, but on God's side in the issue, confessing God's holiness in the judgement, and justifying His treatment of sin.' *Cruciality*, p.102.

way as can only be called the work of God.⁸²

Having characterized Forsyth's understanding of the cross as the 'confession of God's holiness', however, is not to exhaust this soteriology. He frequently uses more traditional terms such as 'satisfaction', 'substitution', 'victory', etc. but how are we to understand them in the light of this fundamental emphasis on confession of holiness? In what ways do they complement or expand this concept, and how does his use of these words differ from their more traditional connotations?

[B] THE CROSS AS SATISFACTION

While Forsyth saw the fact of the cross as far more important than explanations of it, he also saw that such explanations are vital to the Church's message and the 'final prospects of Christianity'.⁸³ The fact of the crucifixion 'does not depend on a theory, but a fact like the Atonement can only be separated from theory of some kind only by a suffusion of sentiment on the brain, some theological anaemia, or a scepticism of the spiritual intelligence'⁸⁴

⁸² So, *Cruciality*, p.19, cf. IV. A. n 3ff. above.

⁸³ See *Persona dn Place*, p. 251; *Work*, pp.182, 184, 185; *Cruciality*, p.96 etc.

⁸⁴ *The atonement*, p.70

Clearly, however, there can be no possibility of regarding the Abelardian theory of the atonement, of itself, as being adequate.⁸⁵ In the cross, something must be *done*, not declared merely, *accomplished* not simply stated. Hence, says Forsyth, one cannot dispense with the idea of satisfaction.⁸⁶

At the risk of great over-simplification, the Anselmic doctrine of satisfaction related primarily to the concept of God's offended honour. A direct transfer was here made from feudal society. The feudal lord maintained public order by maintaining his own position of superiority. If that authority was flouted by one of his serfs (e.g. by withholding service), that one must make adequate recompense to the feudal lord. In such a way, society's stability was guarded and the honour of the feudal lord preserved.

In such a formulation as this Anselm's great service was to emphasise the God-ward aspect of the atonement (as opposed to the older 'ransom theory' where a ransom needed to be paid to the devil to effect redemption). This God-ward aspect of the cross is obviously very much to the fore in Forsyth's atonement theology, as we have seen, but Forsyth's concept of satisfaction is marked by different from that of the Anselmic (and thence Reformers') approach. He wished to preserve their gains, but built further upon them.

There is a difference, argues Forsyth, between making recompense for offended *honour* and making atonement for an offended *holiness*.⁸⁷ Honour can be misconstrued as something beside, or outside of the person. It is an *attribute* of the person (the feudal lord had honour by virtue of his position), but it is not *personal*.. God's *honour* does not

⁸⁵ Hence: '...love which dies with no other object than to show love or create an effect is morally unreal, and could not therefore reflect Christ's view of His own death. It is stagey love. If it die, not in the course of duty to God but in the way of device with men, not in rendering a positive service or averting a real peril but as a powerful spectacle, not to deal with an objective crisis but to exhibit an objective volume of passion, if it die but to impress its love and provide an effective proof of it, then it is more or less acting. It is a saltless sacrifice. It is more or less gratuitous, more or less of a pose, and, to that extent, loses in moral and even tends to hypocrisy.' 'Preaching of Jesus VI', p.453.

⁸⁶ *Cruciality*, p.102.

⁸⁷ *Cruciality*, p.102.

require satisfaction, but the holy God, as *person*, cannot permit the attempted reign of sin against him. It is *God* who requires atonement, not an external or impersonal attribute.⁸⁸ What we are concerned with, 'is not the satisfaction of a demand, but of a Person, not of a claim by God, but of the heart and soul of God'.⁸⁹

To take the same principle from another side, atonement must be made through the satisfaction of the 'conscience' of God.⁹⁰ God's nature is holy: he does not 'possess' the concept of holiness, but he *exists* as holy. As such he is implacably opposed to sin and must vindicate his holiness by sin's destruction.⁹¹ The 'conscience' of the Holy Father must be satisfied - sin must be judged in totality.

But if the holy love of God must be satisfied in and through sin's judgement, how can this be done? Nothing but holiness can satisfy holiness, argues Forsyth,⁹² so therefore *God himself* must make satisfaction for offended holiness, but he must do it from *sin's side* or else it is of no real effect.⁹³ 'The holiness that atones, through it return from the race that rebelled, must therefore be the gift of the holiness atoned'.⁹⁴ Christ, as holy *man*, confesses God's holiness from

⁸⁸ So Bradley, *op. cit.* p.150.

⁸⁹ *Work*, p.204.

⁹⁰ *Cruciality*, p.51.

⁹¹ Cf. II. B. n.24 above.

⁹² *Work*, p.203, 205, etc.

⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 206f.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 207f. He goes on: '...if holiness could be satisfied by anything outside itself, it would not be absolutely holy. So if holiness can be satisfied with nothing but holiness it can only be with a holiness which itself creates. God above can create in us the holiness that will please Him. And this He has done in Jesus Christ incarnate.'

the midst of conditions of sin's judgement, and in so doing expiates the sin of the race.

Expiation of sin is thus inextricably bound up with the concept of satisfaction and thence reconciliation. We quote at length a passage which brings together the thoughts of man others:

Holiness and judgement are forever inseparable. To ignore them or to sever them is the central failure of theological liberalism... God must either punish sin or expiate it for the sake of His infrangibly holy nature... The one thing He could not do was simply to wipe the slate and write off the loss. He must either inflict punishment or assume it. And He took the latter course... He took His own judgement... It was vindicative and not vindictive... Expiation, therefore is the very opposite of exacting punishment; it is assuming it.⁹⁵

Naturally, then, there can be no possibility of seeing the cross as the mollification or placation of God. The cross does not purchase grace, rather it is the act of grace. Thus in holy love God propitiates his own wrath on the cross,⁹⁶ and in so doing satisfies not his honour, but his own holy nature.⁹⁷ This emphasis will be reinforced and expanded as we take up the next section.

⁹⁵ *Cruciality*, p.98; cf. *Positive Preaching*, p.368f.; *Holy Father*, p. 10; *Work*, pp.228-229, etc.

⁹⁶ *Cruciality*, p.41: 'What was historically offered to God was also eternally offered by God within the Godhead's unity.' 'Preaching of Jesus IV', *art. cit.* p.120f. Cf. *Cruciality*, p.89: 'The sacrifice is the result of God's grace and not its cause. It is given *by* God before it is given *to* Him. The real ground of any atonement is not in God's wrath but God's grace. There can be no talk of propitiation in the sense of mollification, or of purchasing God's grace, in any religion founded in the Bible.'

⁹⁷ So, *Work*, p.164f.

[C] THE CROSS AS SUBSTITUTION

We noted earlier the concept of the solidarity of the race in its guilt. We also have seen, corresponding to this, the racial nature of reconciliation through atonement: the incarnate Son of God stands as the federal head of humanity, totally identified with it, confessing God's holiness from the midst of the judgement of holy love upon it. All of this means, therefore, that the concept of substitution cannot be divorced from Forsyth's atonement theology.

Atonement is substitutionary, else it is none... We may replace the word substitution by representation or identification, but the thing remains. Christ not only represents God to man, but man to God⁹⁸.

Forsyth's understanding of the concept of substitution, as with satisfaction, is no mere re-statement of the old position, however. As we have seen, Forsyth could not countenance the thought that God somehow must 'adjust' his attributes of love, justice and mercy to effect reconciliation.⁹⁹ Atonement (and thence reconciliation) is the personal action of the holy God in all his personal, moral unity. It is for this reason, I believe, Forsyth does not use the term 'justice' in relation to the cross. 'Justice' is a forensic, not personal term, but 'judgement', on the other hand, is moral and involves personality.¹⁰⁰ This means that in the cross Christ, as the representative Man, submits to

⁹⁸ *The Atonement*, p.83.

⁹⁹ Cf. the comments re Melancthon in this regard, *Work*, p.117f., and also *The Atonement*, p.57.

¹⁰⁰ Bradley, *op. cit.* p.122. Technically it may be argued that 'judgement' is just as much a legal (forensic) term as 'justice'. However, given the fact that Forsyth constantly uses 'judgement' in juxtaposition to holiness, and given his emphasis on the *personal* action of God in the cross, the distinction I think still stands.

the judgement of holiness rather than to the punishment needed to re-establish justice. ¹⁰¹ Is this approach just 'splitting hairs', or is there a real point to be made?

The importance of this concept becomes clearer as we examine Forsyth's use of the terms 'punishment' and 'penalty'. For him the sacrifice of Christ is penal, but not punitive. God did not *punish* Christ 'in whom He was always well pleased', but rather Christ takes the penalty of sin upon himself. ¹⁰²

Forsyth uses the word 'penal' with reserve because of the many forms of interpretation which have done the word injustice. ¹⁰³ Thus, Christ's sacrifice was not penal in the sense that he stood in our stead 'in such a way as to exempt or exclude us', ¹⁰⁴ nor was it penal in the sense that he bore our punishment as some divine whipping boy. Rather, Christ's sacrifice was penal in this sense:

These is a penalty and curse for sin; and Christ consented to enter that region. Christ entered voluntarily into the pain and horror which is sin's penalty from God... It is impossible to say that God was angry with Christ, but still Christ entered the wrath of God... although He was not punished by God, He bore God's penalty upon sin. That penalty was not lifted even when the Son of God passed through. ¹⁰⁵

Christ did not act as our substitute in bearing the punishment

¹⁰¹ *Cruciality*, p.87f.

¹⁰² See *The Atonement*, p.83, 84-5; *Work*, p.146-7, 162 etc.

¹⁰³ *Work*, p.146.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Work*, p.147.

for our sin, but he became our substitute in that he bore *our sin*, and in bearing this he bore the penalty which must axiomatically fall upon it.¹⁰⁶ He was 'made to be sin' (2 Cor. 5:21), but he was not made to be sinful, i.e. 'God lovingly treated Him as human sin, and with His consent judged human sin in Him and on Him'.¹⁰⁷ He accepted the divine situation of the race before God, and in it he confessed God's holiness and hallowed his name as he bore God's righteous judgement upon the sin of that race.

In this approach, Forsyth manages to avoid the problems associated with 'ledger' type representations of the substitutionary theory, all of which seem rather artificial and remote from the human situation. Indeed, he wisely rejects quantitative terms altogether, saying:

What He offered was not an *equivalent*. So also there can be no imputation as transfer of a quantitative merit... what fell upon Him was not the equivalent punishment of sin, but the divine judgement of it, its condemnation.¹⁰⁸

Obviously, then, Christ stands *in our stead* under judgement, though not in a quantitative 'punishment bearing' way.¹⁰⁹ As our substitute, he could bear the judgement on human sin, but, argues Forsyth, there is still that in guilt which can only be confessed by the guilty (i.e. 'I did it'), and that kind of confession 'Christ could never make'.¹¹⁰ There is, 'a racial confession which can only be made by

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p.150.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p.151.

¹⁰⁸ *The Atonement*, p.55.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p.73.

¹¹⁰ *Work*, p.151.

the holy and there is a personal confession that can only be made by the guilty'.¹¹¹ In the cross, Christ, though personally sinless, bore the sin of the race by virtue of his solidarity with it. We alone can make confession of our personal guilt before the holy God, 'but we cannot make it with christian effect without the cross and the confession there'.¹¹² In other words, our personal confession of guilt appropriates the benefits of Christ's racial confession of holiness, which is another way of expressing a point we have noted earlier.¹¹³

[D] THE CROSS AS VICTORY AND REGENERATION

Given his affinity with traditional Reformed concepts, it comes as no surprise to see Forsyth's emphasis on the cross as 'victory'. However, he avoids the injudicious excesses of the 'classical' theory which has sometimes plagued it,¹¹⁴ while still maintaining the terminology. He variously describes the cross event and its results as 'victory', 'triumph', 'overcoming', etc.¹¹⁵

If the cross is a victory, who or what is the vanquished foe? Though Forsyth does not labour the point, it would seem that he believed in a 'personal' devil, arguing that 'the disbelief in Satan has much injured belief in Christ; for of course to make light of the

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ See IV. A. n.25–28, above. Thus: 'The grand sin is not to sin against the law but against the cross. The sin of sins is not transgression but unfaith.' *Ibid*

¹¹⁴ See, for example, the comment in G. Aulen, *Christus Victor*, p.120 in this regard.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, *Cruciality*, pp.33, 55; *Work*, pp.130, 168, 183, 185, 223, etc.

enemy is to make light of the Victor'.¹¹⁶

Moreover, Satan, too, has his kingdom, which stands in direct opposition to and in imitation of, the kingdom of God. The Lord thus has 'a controversy not with His people only, but with a rival king and strategy'.¹¹⁷ The Holy must battle, and overcome this rival king, or he is not holy. Indeed, only he can truly understand evil, in all its heinousness because he only is holy, and he alone can overcome that which a blinded humanity cannot see.¹¹⁸

Satan, then, must be subdued and the spoils of the strong man released by One who is stronger. But the kingdom of darkness is not simply a kingdom 'forced' upon humanity. Mankind has ensnared *itself* in the rival kingdom by virtue of its rebellion against God. We must be won from sin, and the guilt of sin, before we can be released from the powers of evil.¹¹⁹ Or, to state the same principle in another way, it is in and through the removal of our guilt that we are released from the clutches of the evil one.¹²⁰

All of this means that 'victory' and 'redemption' are inseparable. Indeed, the very word 'redemption' implies enslavement, and consequently our redemption must at the same time be a victory over the enslaving powers. Thus:

¹¹⁶ *Church*, p.98, cf. *Justification*, p.175. In speaking against many of his contemporaries: 'Their belief in Christ is impaired for want of a belief in the Satan that Christ felt it His supreme conflict to counter-work and destroy'.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ So, *Ibid.* p.97.

¹¹⁹ So, *Work*, p.202.

¹²⁰ So, *Ibid.* p.185.

To deliver us from evil is not simply to take us out of hell, it is to take us into heaven. Christ does not simply pluck us out of the hands of Satan, but He delivers us into the hands of God.¹²¹

Now this naturally relates to the further concept of the cross as regeneration.¹²² We saw earlier that Forsyth's understanding of the work of Christ on the cross was federal, and, on the same basis, we also now see the creation of a new humanity. In his federal headship the creation of the new humanity lies proleptically. Thus:

Men unite themselves with the Church because already united with Christ, and because they are, in that very act of union with Him, already in Spirit and principle organised into the great Church He created and whole life He is.¹²³

This point we have seen earlier, but from a different angle.¹²⁴ Christ, as the second Adam, has borne our sin in his body on the tree and confessed God's holiness from the midst of the judgement upon it, but he has not (indeed could not) confess *our* sin. The personal confession which we make of our guilt before the holiness which is confessed in the cross must remain *our* confession, but it would be of no effect had judgement upon sin not been 'worked out'.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* p202.

¹²² Though forming part of what Forsyth calls 'The Threefold Cord' (see further below) the concept of the cross as regeneration is the least developed of the three areas involved and the one expressed with the least clarity.

¹²³ *Church*, p.34; cf. *Authority*, p.62. Also see *Person and Place*, p.222f.

¹²⁴ See IV. C. n 109ff. above.

The repentance of each person is thus only made possible by the sacrifice of Christ for the race. We are not here talking of human potential to respond to the love of God unaided, however. Humanity is too rebellious and too blinded by sin for that.¹²⁵ Repentance, argues Forsyth, 'is never regarded in Christianity as a thing possible in itself, or a condition effectual by itself without God, but only as a part of the action of the complete work of Christ which takes effect through us.'¹²⁶

In other words, the expiation of our sin on the cross evokes *and enables* our repentance,¹²⁷ thus leading to the creation, in history, of that new humanity of which Christ is both the first-born and the head.

What is the significance of his discussion of victory and regeneration for our topic? In *The Work of Christ* Forsyth has a chapter entitled 'The Threefold Cord'.¹²⁸ His concern in this section of the book is to show the interrelatedness of these three aspects of the cross, viz.: victory, satisfaction and regeneration. The 'golden thread' which holds these three aspects together in his thought is that of the holiness of God. The 'practical confession of God's holiness', which the cross was, 'co-ordinates the various aspects which have been distorted by isolation'.¹²⁹ In other works, Forsyth's understanding of holiness acts as an integrative key to the various theories of atonement which have been held separately throughout the church's

¹²⁵ Cf. III, D, above and *Work*, pp.18, 19.

¹²⁶ *The Atonement*, p.67.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* p.66.

¹²⁸ pp. 199-235.

¹²⁹ *Work*, p.201.

history.¹³⁰

In what way is this so? The concept of satisfaction, as we have seen, relates to God's holy person, not to an 'attribute'. Satisfaction, then does not relate to punishment as the vindictive action of offended honour, but to the vindictive judgement of an offended holiness. There thus can be no redemption, no victory, that is not won *by* holiness through the unholy's destruction, i.e. by satisfaction. Likewise, redemption must be the obverse of the creation of the new humanity (the regenerative aspect), for by nature of the case the satisfaction of holiness which demands the destruction of sin must also see holiness *established* in the world - to be delivered *from* evil must mean to be delivered *into* holiness.

Forsyth's understanding of atonement in and through holiness is thus not to be understood as a novel new theory to add to the other theories of the atonement. Rather, his aim is to point to the core of the issue that unites otherwise fragmentary concepts. For this reason Forsyth cannot be categorized as holding to one theory or another,¹³¹ but rather must be seen as creatively synthetic in his approach. It is this note of the *unity* of God's work grounded in the surety of his holiness that provides the basis for the positive gospel which we must proclaim.

We have, then, in this section, come to see the core of the relationship between holiness and atonement in Forsyth's theology. It now remains to comment on some of the key areas of his wider

¹³⁰ See his discussion in *Ibid.* p.200f. in this regard.

¹³¹ Here I am writing *contra* authors such as T.H. Hughes, *The Atonement*, Chapter 1, and E.S. Kiek, *The Modern Religious Situation*, pp.151-166, who categorize Forsyth as belonging to the 'Satisfaction' Theorists.

doctrine which flow from, and relate to, his basic understanding of the nature of God's work in the cross. While these areas are important for Forsyth's overall theology, they are here treated only briefly and in a way that is clearly subservient to our more specific discussion.

V

THE FRUIT OF CHRIST'S RECONCILING WORK.

[A] JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION.

Given the centrality of the cross of Forsyth's theology, and given the centrality of holiness to that cross, we should expect to see the relationship between atonement, holiness, justification and sanctification as being very close. While various ages need various aspects turned outwards, Forsyth agrees that 'justification, sanctification, reconciliation and atonement are all equally inseparable from the one central and compendious work of Christ'.¹

The justification of man is inseparably linked with God's own holy self-justification, i.e. 'God could only justify man before him by justifying his holy law before men'.² We can only be justified by faith in God who is holy, because only if God *in his holiness* justifies us can there truly be no more condemnation.³ Moreover, such justification is not simply a forensic declaration of acquittal,⁴ but a righteous standing given to us by virtue of our faith-union with Christ. By means only best known to God, the Giver,

'we are united to such a holy Christ and set forever inside the justice of God... In a holy, living Christ we are integrated into the holy eternal self-satisfaction of the whole world's God'.⁵

Forsyth can thus speak of 'justification by holiness and for it

¹ *Work*, p.59.

² *Ibid.* p.136.

³ *So, Authority*, p.43.

⁴ The forensic concept is not wholly missing. The Holy Father is still the Judge of all the earth, but Forsyth's desire is to exclude a justification which may be misunderstood as a Divine fiat *alone*. See *The Atonement*, p.59f.

⁵ *Authority*, p.43.

alone' as the modern point of emphasis.⁶ Is this, however, some form of religious totalitarianism seeking to squeeze everything into one pigeon-hole? As Forsyth's argument which precedes this statement shows, he does not reject or deny the more traditional phrases such as 'justification by grace' (Augustine) or 'justification by faith' (Luther). Rather, he recognizes that these emphases were important given the historical contexts in which they originated, and, given the historical context of his day, holiness was the corrective that needed to be brought to 'sunny liberalism's' sentimentality.

We would be wrong, however, if we were to write off 'justification by holiness' simply as a reactionary theological statement. Forsyth was here wanting to affirm at least two important points. Firstly (and this relates to the synthetic effect that his understanding of holiness had for 'theories' of the atonement) his concern was to preserve the unity of the results of Christ's reconciling work: if a man is justified by holiness then, axiomatically, he must also be reconciled to God in holiness and also sanctified through that holiness. He writes:

Justification by holiness and for it alone. That is to say... reconciliation is something which comes from the whole holy God, and it covers the whole of life, and it is not exhausted by the idea of atonement only or redemption only. It is the new-created race brought to permanent, vital, life-deep communion with the holy God.⁷

Secondly, he was concerned to preserve one of the major gains of liberalism. Its argument against the older theories of the atonement was that basically substitution, satisfaction and propitiation were

⁶ *Work*, p.81

⁷ *Ibid.*

'immoral'. Its cry for morality Forsyth saw, 'as the grand sheet anchor of our modern theories',⁸ but the morality must be *God's* morality, ie. holiness, not sentimentalism or anthropocentric paternalism. 'Justification by holiness', then, preserves the true morality of the cross against human misrepresentation in either direction (i.e. or ossified orthodoxy or liberal heterodoxy),⁹ while also preserving the best of the traditional Reformist axioms *Sola gratia, sola fide*.

As intimated earlier, then, sanctification and justification, Forsyth says, cannot be divided.¹⁰ Far from being self-consecration or self-perfection, sanctification comes as a gift of the Holy God. Christ 'creates our holiness because of His own sanctification of Himself... and His complete victory over the evil power in a life experience of moral conflict.'¹¹

Holiness demands holiness. It is, therefore, essential that man be restored to holiness (i.e. sanctified) for full reconciliation.¹² Justification and sanctification then 'are one' and they mean:

establishing once and forever the sanctity of God in the universe, and putting us inside it; so that one day it shall be sanctified in us as we are already justified in it.¹³

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Cf. *Positive Preaching*, p.203; 'Preaching of Jesus III', *art. cit.* p.68; *The Atonement*, pp.54-62, etc.

¹⁰ *Authority*, p.43, 45, etc.

¹¹ *Work*, p.213; cf. also p.71f.

¹² So *Ibid.* p.71; *Cruciality*, p.viii.

¹³ *Authority*, p.45.

Is there, then a growth in grace? The above statement would *seem* to point this way, but all doubt is removed when one reads Forsyth's essay 'Christian Perfection'.¹⁴ There is a growth in grace, but this is not growth *into* a sanctified state, but growth which flows *from* a sanctified state.¹⁵ 'Every defect of ours is a motivation to faith',¹⁶ argues Forsyth, faith being 'that soul attitude to God, of rightness is relation to Him, which is our justification, our ideal righteousness, which used to be called imputed righteousness'.¹⁷

Thus, Christian perfection is not to be equated with perfection of conduct or character or creed, 'but of faith'.¹⁸ It is not a matter of behaviour before God the Judge, 'but of our relation to God the Saviour... You may utterly trust Him to the uttermost. You may perfectly trust your perfect Lord and charge Him with the responsibility both for your sin and your sanctification.'¹⁹

This does not mean, then, a quietistic approach. All the 'means of grace' are at our disposal, as are all the resources of the Spirit and the Father, but all of these point us further into the holy grace of the cross, further into faith which is trust in His sanctifying power.²⁰ Continually the truth of forgiveness through holiness

¹⁴ In *Holy Father*, pp. 97-141.

¹⁵ Hence, 'As Christian souls, our perfection is coming to ourselves in Christ. We are perfect in Christ, and in Him continually more so. In Christ we are what we are to be... We are what we have to become: But we are unfolding the perfection that is already ours in fee. *Ibid.* p.135f.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.102.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.132.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.126.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.129.

²⁰ So *Ibid.* pp.141f.

operates in the believer's life both as the impetus for growth in grace,²¹ and as the security for the conscience which makes such growth possible.²²

[B] THE MEANING OF THE ATONEMENT FOR THE CHURCH'S LIFE AND SACRAMENTS

For Forsyth the church's one foundation is Christ, and him crucified.²³ As such the church rests 'on the Grace of God, the judging, atoning, regeneration Grace of God, which is His holy love in the form it must take with human sin'.²⁴

It is not, therefore, a club, a group of like-minded individuals or an object created by voluntary association, even though voluntary association may give it practical, local expression. Rather, the church is a 'new creation of God in the Holy Spirit' created by the preaching of the Gospel.²⁵ But to say that the church is created by the gospel and that it is yet a creation of the Holy Spirit is not to say two different things, for it is through the Word of the cross that the Spirit brings the church to birth. Thus:

The church was not created by the inward light. It was not created by the Spirit of God alone. It was created by the Holy Spirit through an apostolic Word of Jesus Christ crucified; it was created by the redeeming Lord as the Spirit. As a matter of fact, this was so. And its principle is given

²¹ So *Cruciality*, p.45.

²² So, *Ibid.* p.46; cf. *Authority*, p.45.

²³ *The Church*, p.34.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.* Cf. also p.60: 'The great church is primarily the result of an act of God. It is primarily a divine creation and not a voluntary association. It is not of man nor of the will of man.'

in its creation.²⁶

Moreover, the New Testament's understandings of the church as 'local' and the church as 'universal', Forsyth argues, are really of one substance: the local church is the manifestation of *the* Church of God,²⁷ i.e. the local manifestation of the body of Christ.²⁸ Consequently the church is not 'individualistic' or 'aggregarian' in its unity. Rather its unity is personal and organic, which does not equate with uniformity.²⁹

The above paragraphs in themselves contain enough material for a thesis, but the important point for us is to see the relationship of such ecclesiological statements to the concept of 'holy atonement'. Central not only to the creation of the church, but also to its ongoing life is *the* fundamental truth of the holy grace of God. The church's changeless note must be grace which is 'the one source of the church's being and well-being alike. If that ceases to be our note we, i.e. the Free churches, must cease to be at all'.³⁰

This holy grace, as we have seen earlier, is not mere graciousness or beauty, 'but is consummate, final and effectual only as the self-donation of God to guilty man... in the justifying, reconciling Cross of Jesus Christ the eternal Son, our risen Lord who in that act creates

²⁶ *Authority*, p.250.

²⁷ Hence, 'The local church was but the outcrop there of the total and continuous Church, one everywhere. The total Church was not made up by adding the local churches together, but the local church was made a church by representing there and then the total Church. It was where the total Church looked out at one point.' *Ibid.* p.65

²⁸ So, *Ibid.*, p.61f.: '*The same act which sets us in Christ sets us also in the society of Christ.* It does so *ipso facto*, and not by a mere consequence or sequel, more or less optional. To be in Christ is to be in the Church' (his emphasis).

²⁹ So, *Church*, p.62.

³⁰ *The Charter of the Church*, p.vi, quoted in Brown, *op. cit.* p.156.

his Church by his eternal Spirit'.³¹ In a very real sense, then, Forsyth argues that the church is the *product* of holiness in atonement. Moreover, the confession of this principle must be the basic element of the church's dogma,³² and the cross must be its continual point of orientation.³³

From a basis such as this the church receives its charter, its mission. The church is the society created by the Holy Father which is then sent to the society of the world.³⁴ In being sent it must proclaim the Word which has brought it forth, ie. the holy love of God in the cross. It is not in the church's choice whether to spread the gospel or not, but rather, 'it is our death if we do not'.³⁵

It is in the telling of this gospel that the church's mission is effective. We have already noted that Forsyth was an ardent advocate of missions, and his distinctive contribution in his time was the

³¹ *Authority*, p.258f. Cf. *Missions in State and Church*, p.80, quoted in Bradley, *op. cit.* p.220: 'The only established Church is the Church inevitably established by the free will offering of Christ on the Cross as a redemption from curse and a judgement of sin in the flesh.'

³² So, *Cruciality*, p.39. Forsyth's understanding of 'dogma' is a very complex one. Dogma, doctrine and theology he describes as three concentric circles, each representing the same gospel, but with dogma forming the centrum, doctrine the next band and theology the ill-defined penumbral region beyond. 'Dogmas (the apostolic word about the Cross) is not religion, not faith; nor does it by itself create faith; it is the indispensable statement of that grace which does create faith, without which grace is dumb, not communicable, and therefore not grace. No statement as such... can create faith.' *Missions in State and Church*, p.13, quoted in Rodgers, *op. cit.* p.87. For detailed discussion of the relationship between dogma, *kerygma* and the Word of God, see Rodgers, *op. cit.* pp.85-89, 90-103; Pitt, *op. cit.* pp.83-87; Brown, *op. cit.* pp.45-49, 55-58, etc.

³³ 'The Cross is not just there for religious effect. The Church takes her moral bearings there. She discovers God's moral world and authority there. She reconstructs man's conscience from there, from the word, revelation and nature of the cross.' From the 1897 edition of *The Holy Father* quoted in Bradley, *op. cit.* p.220. Cf. *Authority*, pp.31,32.

³⁴ So, *Authority*, p.60; *Cruciality* p.24f.; *Justification*, p.84, etc.

³⁵ *Revelation*, p.54.

conviction that a deep theology of the cross was essential for their success. Thus he argues:

Missions are seriously threatened because we have been trying to do more for souls than for Christ, and understanding them better than we do the Gospel. We can do less by winning people for Christ than by carrying home to them a Christ who wins them. If we thought less about saving men and more about saving Christ among men, more men would be saved: for the saved would be better and mightier men.³⁶

What, then, of social action in the mission setting? Ultimately, humanitarian effort must be doomed to failure if it is not rooted and grounded in the deep theology of the cross, argues Forsyth. Where religion is divorced from such a theology it tends inevitably to run down to interests both trivial and secular.³⁷ The only hope of effective social action lies in the experience of the cross in the soul of a person which leads to the outflow of love.³⁸

In this emphasis Forsyth was aiming for a positive alternative to two contemporary errors. He saw many of the church mission societies of his day as having lost their theological footing and as having

³⁶ 'Preaching of Jesus VI',. *art. cit.* p.449, cf. *Missions in State and Church*, pp.32,33: '...missions have more to hope from a narrow creed which remains great than from a wide humanism that runs thin. The recent decay of missionary faith has gone with a genial creed of much sensibility, but no grandeur and little power.' Quoted in Leembrugen, *op. cit.* p.32.

³⁷ *Authority*, p.8.

³⁸ Thus: 'The first moment in the Christian life is when a man sees Jesus Christ and Him Crucified; the second moment is when he finds the cross, which his own iniquity has caused, in his own heart, but the third and last moment is when, looking on the world, he sees it as Jesus sees it, struggling, toiling, sinning, suffering, and finds its unutterable need his burden, and the supply of that need his task.' *Work*, p.228.

become little more than humanitarian societies. Likewise, he saw others who had retained their theological foundations, but had lost any concern for the social ramification of the gospel.³⁹ His concern was to make the concept of Christian compassion complete by basis in the compassion of the Holy Father.

Needless to say, the, in the light of the above discussion, preaching held a very high priority in Forsyth's view of the church's life and ministry. Preaching is central to the church's life because 'it is the declaration of the gospel . Nay, more - far more - it is the gospel prolonging and declaring itself.'⁴⁰ The first charge of the minister of the gospel is thus to preach the Word,⁴¹ such preaching enabling the church to preach to the world.⁴²

The minister of any particular church, then, must be the servant of the Word before he is the servant of the church.⁴³ His service of

³⁹ For the two positions, see *Church*, pp.3-5 (though here not referring to mission practices *per se*, the principle it the same); *This Life and the Next*, pp.84-87; *The Creative Theology of P.T Forsyth*, pp.234-239; *the Church, The Gospel and Society*, pp.31-33, etc; *Justification*, p.84, etc.

⁴⁰ *Positive Preaching*, p.5.

⁴¹ *Church*, p.144. What does Forsyth here mean by the 'Word'? We must take the 'definition' he gives us in the Preface to *The Church* (pp. xv-xvi) and bear it in mind for the discussion that follows: 'It may be expressly noted in advance that the Word does not refer to the Bible, but the whole medium of communication between God's soul and man's. As this was gathered to a head in Christ, Christ is the unique Word of God. And since Christ is gathered to a head in the atoning and redeeming cross as the incarnation not of love only but of grace, the Word is there in the most pointed way. It is the Word as an act and not simply as an exposition of God who acts, not as a genial Father but as a redeeming Father... The Word is, therefore, God's new creating act on us, and then it is the act of our word through which God new creates. Since it comes from God, it is pre-eminently a deed, as all the Creator's words are; as it goes out from man it is pre-eminently a word, through which God's deed works in a sacramental way. As it comes from God the Word is the Son; as it comes from Christ through his Church it is the Spirit, the Gospel.'

⁴² *Positive Preaching*, p.79.

⁴³ *Church*, p.132.

the church lies in his apostolic message to it,⁴⁴ which enables it to become the apostolic society to the world.⁴⁵ It is in this connection that ministry can be understood sacramentally, says Forsyth, here making a quite original contribution to ecclesiology.

What does it mean to speak of the ministry as sacramental? By this is meant that 'it is the outward and visible agent of the inward gospel Grace... it is a living host... it is the trustee of the one sacrament of the Word, the Word of the New Creation'.⁴⁶ The minister of the Word, through the proclaim of the gospel of the cross, becomes a living element in the 'bringing home'⁴⁷ of grace to the world. Forsyth expresses it dramatically in saying:

in the sacrament of the Word the ministers are themselves the living elements in Christ's hands - broken and poured out in soul, even unto death; so that they may not only witness Christ, or symbolize him, but by the sacrament of personality actually convey him crucified and risen.⁴⁸

Constantly, then, the members of the ministry stand *in* the church and *for* the church as living sacramental elements 'bringing home' to it the holy grace of God which both bought it and brought it forth. The effectiveness of any individual ministry must therefore be judged

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ So *Ibid.* p131.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.133, cf. *Positive Preaching*, p.80: 'The preacher's place in the Church is sacramental. It is not sacerdotal, but it is sacramental. He mediates the word to the Church from faith to faith, from his to theirs, from one stage of their common faith to another.'

⁴⁷ In connection with the sacraments 'conveying' and 'bringing home' are two of Forsyth's most characteristic phrases.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 141, cf. *Positive Preaching*, p.80.

by its message, rather than outward 'success',⁴⁹ though the communication of the message is not linked to preaching *solely*. In pastoral work, in leading of worship, in social and philanthropic work the minister is equally a 'channel of God's grace, love and help',⁵⁰ as in these diverse situations the same message of the gospel is communicated to the recipients.

What, then, of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper? They, too, stand in close relationship to the Word of the gospel.⁵¹ For Forsyth:

The sacraments are the acted Word-variants of the preached Word. They are signs, but they are more than signs. They are the Word, the Gospel itself, visible, as in preaching the Word is audible. But in either case it is an act. It is Christ in a real presence giving us a new His Redemption.⁵²

In the light of this we can understand Forsyth's emphasis on the sacraments as 'means of grace'.⁵³ They draw their meaning from their intimate connection with the vocation of Christ, serving not to convey his person alone 'but His person as consummated in His saving

⁴⁹ 'No matter how magnetic the man may be, how charming, how spiritual, how impressive, how powerful, how popular... he has not his right to a pulpit in a church in virtue of any of these things. He has his right according as he serves sincerely, capably and heartily the New Testament gospel. He is to be received not for his temperament, but for his message; not as he may be a poet, a saint, an oracle, or a capital fellow, but as he is a sacrament of the Word of the cross and its regeneration.' *Church*, p.148.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p.146.

⁵¹ Cf. Calvin on this point -*Institutes* IV,XIV.

⁵² *Church*, p.176.

⁵³ Clearly, however, in cognizance of his emphasis on the sacramental nature of preaching, baptism and the Lord's Supper are not *the* means of grace, but means of grace by virtue of *t* the sacrament, viz. the word.

work'.⁵⁴ They are not means *to* grace, but means *of* grace as personal action, mentioned earlier.⁵⁵ Their purpose is that of preaching and their power is in their word of redeeming grace,⁵⁶ and always their sphere of operation is the in the *corporate* life of the church.⁵⁷

In very brief compass, then, we have been able to see that Forsyth's ecclesiology is firmly founded upon his soteriology. The creation of the church, its corporate nature, the importance of the Word in its midst, the place of the ministry and the function of the sacraments all relate intimately to the holy atonement wrought in the cross. That cross stands as their source and the holy grace of God seen there as their constant sustaining power. It is to that cross that we must constantly return in both the theological and personal endeavours.

[C] ATONEMENT AND THEODICY

Unlike the other headings in this section, this heading does not represent a *direct* fruit of Christ's reconciling work, but, nevertheless, it is justifiable to consider it here. Forsyth's major work on theodicy is *The Justification of God* (published in 1917 in the midst of the Great War), and its basic thesis is that there can be no possibility of forming a tenable theodicy that is not centred upon the act of the cross itself. Nonetheless it is intimately bound up with the cross and all that the cross means in terms of sin and

⁵⁴ *Christ*, p.276.

⁵⁵ See II. D. above.

⁵⁶ *Church*, p.277.

⁵⁷ See, for example, *Ibid.* p.274. Cf '...sacraments are essentially corporate acts, and they are necessary for the continued existence and power of a corporate body like the Church'. *Different Conceptions of Priesthood and Sacrifice*, pp.162-163 quoted in Bradley, *op. cit.*, p.240.

holiness.

What, then, is the relationship between the cross and theodicy? How does the former provide the possibility of constructing the latter? To answer these questions we will need to examine some of the main points Forsyth raises in *The Justification of God*, all the while running the risk of gross oversimplification.⁵⁸

The Great War in Europe raised again the 'old dilemma', viz. 'If He has power to stop these things and does not, He is not good; if He is good and does not, He has not power'.⁵⁹ Rather than plunging straight into debate about this dilemma, Forsyth turns to the state of man generally and the state of the churches specifically. The fundamental heresy of the day 'now deep within Christian belief itself' is humanism,⁶⁰ he argues, meaning that rather than being God-centred and concerned first and foremost with his will, the churches of England and Europe had become man-centred and concerned with the kingdom of civilization. Having ceased to focus upon God, they had lost the knowledge of sin and evil.⁶¹ Consequently he says:

We are now having a revelation of the awful and desperate nature of evil. The task which the Cross has to meet is something much greater than a pacific, domestic, fraternal type of religion allows us to face.⁶²

⁵⁸ Seemingly by common confession, this particular book is one of Forsyth's most difficult. We are not, therefore, trying to present his argument in detail, but rather hoping to grasp its broad sweep in the light of the central issue of this thesis.

⁵⁹ *Justification*, p.12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p.24.

⁶¹ See *Ibid.* p.28.

⁶² *Ibid.*

War is thus the apocalypse of sin, even though it is impossible for any created soul to grasp the whole dimensions and heinousness of wickedness. No one escapes from the evil far enough in order to be able to really see and understand it.⁶³ Only One who is wholly holy can do that, and thus he himself, and he alone, can be our source of the knowledge of both holiness and evil.⁶⁴ The point of this is simple: there can be no theodicy which does not submit to the Revelation of the Holy, even though we may learn this only unwillingly.⁶⁵

To look at this from another angle, given the desperate plight of the world in its sin and evil, is there a Divine *telos* or goal? If so, how can this be discovered; where can it be seen? i.e. has history any revelatory purpose? The gospel of Jesus Christ tells us 'Yes', but the purpose of that Revelation is deeper than we realize.

Behind all the tragedies of incident lies the tragedy of guilt. And the supreme theodicy is that which adjusts with the goodness of God not the appalling catastrophes men suffer, but the less striking, though more paralyzing tragedy of what they have done and become.⁶⁶

What is needed, then, is a holy redemptive act of God in history, for no evolutionary or socio-historical or socio-economic approach is able to deal with the moral tragedy of racial guilt.⁶⁷ The Holy himself

⁶³ *Ibid.* p.31.

⁶⁴ So *Ibid.* p.36.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p.50.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p.50.

⁶⁷ So *Ibid.* pp. 66,67.

must deal with sin for the sake of his own holy nature,⁶⁸ and in dealing with it, his salvation must also become the final teleology.⁶⁹

What is meant by redemption, however? By nature of the case it is a rescue, but it must include a theodicy and an eschatology (i.e. a justification and a consummation) and all on the plane of holiness.⁷⁰ This operates in the realm of crisis, rather than simply 're-ordering', for the former relates to rescue from evil, the latter relates to faith in the potential of man. God 'breaks in' to the kingdom of civilization in the cross, bringing his holy redemption to men.⁷¹

Currently we do not yet see all things, but we do see Jesus and his cross which are the ground and certainty for the *telos* of the world.⁷² All things are tied up with Christ and his cross and the life we now live is the life of faith in the Holy God seen there.⁷³ Ultimately, then, the establishment of the kingdom through holy redemption is the one certainty to which we must cling. Even if civilization should collapse 'the city of God remaineth'.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p.68.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p.69.

⁷¹ So *Ibid.* p.77.

⁷² *Ibid.* p.80.

⁷³ *Ibid.* p.81. Even 'progress' must be measured in the light of the cross. 'Every stage of man's progress must go to His judgement seat; and it is progress only as it may be so measured there. It is true progress only by its relation to Him, His Holiness, and His Eternity, and not by what we can see and assess as its contribution to progress as we deem it - even to what seems moral and spiritual progress. Progress, as an object and a standard, has played its part for the time being, and must wait in the wings. This shattering war shows that. The supreme object of creation and of history... is to bring every man before the judgement seat of the grace of Christ. It is not to provide each with a minimum of three acres and a cow, and keep his pot boiling.' *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p.82.

In his day, Forsyth saw that the church had failed society. In its humanistic understanding of inevitable progress and its optimistic view of man's state and potential, the church had ceased to be prophetic in its message.⁷⁵ In failing to understand the gospel of God's holy grace the Church had failed to gauge the civilization 'which carried this war in its womb'.⁷⁶ Its message lacked the moral fibre of holiness and the sobering understanding of sin which flows from this. Fatherhood had replaced atonement and sin had become trivialized.⁷⁷ Little wonder, then, that war had come as a great shock!

The only hope for a theodicy, therefore, must be linked with the revelation of the holy love of God, in which he justifies himself and man in one act.⁷⁸ In the cross, God is seen 'putting things right', but at a depth that we do not grasp. All of the grace of God, all his omnipotent power, were focused in the cross, overcoming evil by the establishment of holiness and bringing forth the new creation as its fruit. The cross:

is not a theological theme, nor a forensic device, but the crisis of the moral universe on a scale far greater than earthly war. It is the theodicy of the whole God dealing with the whole soul of the whole world in holy love, righteous judgement, and redeeming grace. There is no universal ethic but what is based on that power and deed.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ So *Ibid.* pp.100, 101, etc.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p.100.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 104, 107.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p.121.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p.133.

There is, then, no theodicy other than one based on the cross. It is *the* revelation of both God's holiness and goodness and as such provides the only answer to the pressing question of suffering in the world. It is not a 'rational' answer, but the answer of faith.⁸⁰ It is at once the declaration of the depth of human sin and the declaration of the height of the holy love that overcomes it. And, above all, it is the act of the One who redeems at his own personal cost, not as a Spectator or remote third party.⁸¹

If humanity cries out for God to justify himself before it, he has, and this in the cross alone. There he has 'set His name forever',⁸² and to have our faith 'unhinged by what we now see is to confess that it was a faith unfounded and unfed from the eternal source. It is to own that our faith arose elsewhere than at Christ's cross'.⁸³

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p.164.

⁸¹ So this very moving passage in *Ibid.* p.164-165: "Do you stumble at the cost? It has cost Me more than you... Yea it has cost Me more than if the price paid were all mankind. For it cost Me My only and beloved Son to justify My name of righteousness, and to realize the destiny of My creature in holy love. And all mankind is not so great and dear as He. Nor is its suffering the enormity in a moral world that His Cross is. I am no spectator in the course of things, and no speculator on the result. I spared not My own Son. We carried the load that crushes you. I bowed Him to the ground. On the third day He rose with a new creation in His hand, and a regenerate world, and all things working together for good to love the holy purpose in love. And what He did I did. How I did it? How I do it? This you know not how, and could not, but you shall know hereafter. Be still and know that I am God, whose mercy is as His majesty, and His omnipotence is chiefly in forgiving, and redeeming and settling all souls in worship in the temple of a new heaven and a new earth full of holiness. In that day the anguish will be forgotten for joy that a New Humanity is born into the world."

⁸² *Ibid.* p.150.

⁸³ *Ibid.* p.152.

VI

CHRISTOLOGY AND ATONEMENT.

[A] PERSON AND WORK.

Forsyth's Christology in its own right is a topic of major proportions. Our task here is not to discuss it in depth, but rather to see in what way his Christological thought relates to the themes of holiness and atonement.

In contradistinction to the liberalism of his day, Forsyth's assertion is that we can only come to an understanding of Christ's Person through his work.¹ In his day he saw that 'the Jesus of the cross' had succumbed to 'the Jesus of society, the Jesus of culture of the Jesus of the affections',² and that in its preaching the church was:

trying to act on men with a Jesus of distinguished religion, or a Jesus the sanest of all the deep saints, with Jesus the historic character, or the fraternal, or the pietist, rather than with Jesus the Gospel power, the living dynamic of the Kingdom of God.³

He was thus concerned to battle against the cleavage being between the 'theological Christ' of the epistles and the 'simple teachings' of the historical Jesus. We have already noted the place Forsyth gave to the concept of *kerygma*,⁴ and thence to the essential unity of the gospels and the epistles. Both the gospels and the epistles stand as the

¹ Hence *Cruciality*, pp.vii, 16, 17, 45, 67; *Person and Place*, pp. 223, 239, 278-279, etc.

² 'Preaching of Jesus III', *art. cit.* p. 78.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ I. B. n. 40 f. above.

creation of the apostolic *kerygma* of the cross. Hence:

The gospels stand at least on the atoning deed, they were written for a Church which was created by it, and they give singular space to it. Even in John, Jesus is not a disguised God urging people to pierce His veil; He is there to do a work that only His death could do, as a corn of wheat must die to bear. And the Epistles are the full meaning of that deed.⁵

Forsyth's thrust is, then, to argue that both Jesus' testimony of himself, and the testimony of those who interpreted him, are essentially the same. The full meaning of Christ must, then, be read from the Gospels and the Epistles *together*. Or, to say the same thing differently, Christ can only be truly interpreted in the light of the salvation which he has brought.⁶ And, from another angle, the atonement must be the means by which the incarnation is understood.⁷ There thus can be no division made between Christ's life and his death and this death's interpretation.

The basic question, therefore, in Forsyth's Christology is, 'What things are we led inescapably to affirm about Christ in the light of

⁵ *Cruciality*, cf. p.13: 'And how came the apostolic circle to have this view of Christ's death? Could *they* have foisted on the cross an interpretation so audacious? Must they not have been taught by Christ so as to view it in such forms as are echoed in the ransom passage and at the Last Supper? Must they not have been taught, then, by Christ either during the forty days or from within the veil? They declare they were taught many new things by Him from heaven. We have the same idea, with natural enough variants, in Peter, in John and in Hebrews. It is no Paulinism, except in certain sidelights.'. For further argument see *Ibid.* p.52f.

⁶ Brown, *op. cit.* p.73.

⁷ *Ibid.* p.74.

the salvation he has won for us?’⁸ That is, What must we say of One who is able to effect a full and complete reconciliation between the Holy God and sinful humanity, especially given that that reconciliation is based on a holy atonement?

[B] THE ATHANASIAN NECESSITY.

In the *Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, Forsyth answers this question firstly by outlining the deficiencies of the Socinian and Arian approaches to the Person of Christ. The Socinian approach contends that in Christ we have a great prophet or religious genius whose unity with Father is ethical.⁹ In his contemporary setting he argued, ‘I cannot regard as other than Socinian the idea that in Christ we have the greatest of created personalities completely filled with the Spirit of God.’¹⁰

The Arian approach is a little more advanced than this, because it does not deny the ‘supernatural’ nature of Christ. In Arianism Christ:

stands with God facing man much more than with man facing God. He is a secondary God... If He is neither of Humanity, neither is He of Deity. His subordination is that of a creature, after all, though created before the worlds for a unique task. And it carried with it inferiority.¹¹

In Arianism, then, Christ is God’s ‘plinpontentary’ or his ‘super-

⁸ Hence *Person and Place*, pp.346, 347.

⁹ See *Ibid.* p.76.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.78.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.79.

human Chancellor',¹² above the world of men, yet inferior to God.

The problem is that neither the Socinian man nor the Arian 'superman' is able to account for the reconciling work accomplished on the cross. By nature of the case, sin must be atoned, and, as we have seen, this comes through the confession of God's holiness. Man, however, as we have also seen, is sold into rebellion, sin and guilt and therefore is unable to atone for his sin. Likewise, no demi-God could redeem man. Only he who has been wronged can forgive, and to forgive *he* must redeem, not any third party. Only God himself could meet the soul's last need, to restore a creation undone by sin.¹³

Thus, in the end, only the Athanasian answer as to the nature of Christ is sufficient to interpret the fact of the cross.

The sinner's reconciliation with a holy God could only be effected by God. And I press the *effectuation* of it... with God to will is to do; and the God who willed man's salvation must Himself effect it - not accept it, and not contrive it, but *effect* it. Only He who had lost us could find us, only He who was wronged could forgive, only the Holy One could satisfy His own holiness. To forgive He must redeem. Fully to forgive the guilt He must redeem from the curse. And only the creator knew the creature so as to redeem. And to know mankind He must live in mankind. To offer for man He must be man.¹⁴

We are driven, therefore, to affirm the pre-existence of Christ

¹² *Ibid.* p.80.

¹³ See *Ibid.* p.85.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* (his emphasis); cf. *Holy Father*, p.11f.

by the ‘retrospective pressure’ of our faith in him as our Saviour. The power of Christ to exercise God’s prerogative of ‘forgiveness, judgement and redemption could never have been acquired by moral excellence or religious achievement of any created being’,¹⁵ it belong to God alone. The soul’s saviour could not be any less than the soul’s creator.¹⁶

[C] KENOSIS AND PLEROSIS.

What, then, of Christ’s humanity? Here Forsyth develops his understanding of the *kenosis* of the Logos. The real problem for him, here, is not to question *whether* there has been some form of *kenosis*, but just how we are to conceive of it. He offers four human analogies that are helpful,¹⁷ though naturally not exhaustive. His argument is that, by a voluntary act of will, the eternal Son enters the status of real humanity by the renunciation of the prerogatives of his deity. The man Jesus never drew upon his deity to effect his humanity because he could not do so. By voluntary self-limitation the Son became truly man in order to effect the reconciliation of the world to the Holy Father through a life of perfect obedience even unto judgement.¹⁸

Correspondingly, says Forsyth, if there is a *kenosis*, there must also be a ‘*plerosis*’.¹⁹ If *kenosis* is God’s approach to man, then its corresponding *plerosis* is man’s new approach to God. This *plerosis* is the ‘effecting, ascending and mastering process which went alongside

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.269.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.277.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 296-300.

¹⁸ This paragraph, of course, contains enough material for a book.

¹⁹ See *op. cit.* pp.229f. Where Forsyth argues that kenotic theories alone are insufficient to explain the N.T. witness.

the renunciation in Christ',²⁰ in which the New Creation is inseparably bound up.

Now there are doubtless many points in the above paragraphs which we would want to examine in more depth, but the purpose here is to see how these elements of Forsyth's Christology relate to our specific theme. For him, speculation about Christ's person must rise from what he has done in and for us. Thus 'kenosis', 'plerosis', and the Athanasian assertion of Christ as truly God and truly man, are all fruits of reflection upon the revelation of holy atoning love which the cross is.²¹ There can thus be no adequate Christology which does not have as its major focus the cross of Calvary. This cross forms the centrepoint of Revelation, and therefore to seek to construct a Christology which is not centred upon it is to ignore the consummation of the self bestowal of God to humanity.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p.329.

²¹ So *Ibid.* p.354.

VII

EVALUATION.

Forsyth is not an easy theologian to read. The question of his style has been much debated by those who have studied him, and Forsyth himself was not unaware of the problems.¹ He constantly uses aphorisms, epigrams, paradoxes and chiasmic constructions to express himself, but these must be seen as functions of his personality, part of the 'idiom of his mind',² not as clever literary devices designed for obscurity.

The problem in coming to grips with his style, and thence grasping with clarity his meaning at every point, is compounded by the nature of the material with which we have to work. His books are almost exclusively collections of sermons, lectures or speeches, many of which were given extempore or from very brief notes.³ Consequently his work is very short of footnotes and documentation, making for further problems in research and study. They do not represent, therefore, a systematic theology worked out in the study, so much as a *proclaimed* theology.⁴

In fact Forsyth was wary of systematic theology as a discipline. In *The Principle of Authority* he wrote:

the passion for truth is at bottom a passion for no

¹ See, for example, *Positive Preaching*, pp.xi, 34 and his annotation on H.R. Mackintosh's paper 'The Authority of the Cross' in *Congregational Quarterly*, vol. 21 (1943), p.214.

² Jessie Forsyth Andrews, 'Memoir' in *Work*, p. vii.

³ See, for example, *Work*, p.xxx.

⁴ This is even true of the book which is considered his most systematic, *The Persona and Place of Jesus Christ..* In the Preface, Forsyth writes: 'I will beg leave to plead that these pages are lectures and not a treatise. The handling rests on a system, but it is less systematic than subjective in form' (p.vii).

abstract system, no symmetrical figure, and no closed system.... A theology, therefore, which is organized on a system of thought closed or self contained can never be a due expression of that action, that revelation of a personal God, which creates religion.⁵

One of the main problems of his style, however, is the little use he makes of key exegetical passages. Occasionally one comes across extended treatments that are exegetically linked (e.g. *The Cruciality of the Cross*, pp.85-104, discussing the meaning of 'the blood of Christ', or *The Work of Christ*, pp.82-84, discussing 2 Cor. 5:19), but such instances are the exception rather than the rule. Passages such as Romans 1 and Ephesians 1 stand out particularly by their absence, especially given his thoroughly Reformed view of man's sin and God's sovereignty.

Having said this, though, there can be no doubt that Forsyth was, in a profound sense, a Biblical theologian. In *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* we read: 'No man should ask for a public hearing on a theological question unless he has himself mastered the new Testament at first hand.'⁶ Certainly *his* work breathes the atmosphere of the new Testament, even though he does not give space to detailed and specific exegesis. It is as though he felt that such work was the *basis* for his public utterances, rather than their substance. Nevertheless, the fact that there are many passages in his works in which we are left to guess his exegetical basis is a serious lack which hinders further study.

Furthermore, Forsyth is not always consistent in his use of his

⁵ *Authority*, p.95.

⁶ *Positive Preaching*, p.102.

own terminology, even in areas we have seen to be central to his view of the cross. For example, 'sin' and 'guilt' are distinguished quite clearly in some passages, yet in others they are used almost interchangeable.⁷

Neither does Forsyth give much space to the significance of the resurrection. While it is true that his use of the word 'cross' generally does duty for 'cross event' (i.e. implicitly including the resurrection), in the whole thesis we have only noted one passage which deals with the resurrection specifically. This lack is even more surprising given Forsyth's twin understandings of the cross as regeneration and victory. Surely the resurrection event provides the basis for a grand exposition of these two themes, such an exposition being particularly useful for the former concept which, as we have noted earlier, remains the least developed strand of the 'threefold cord'.

However, having said all this, one would not want to detract from the very positive contribution Forsyth has made to our understanding of the atonement. He has shown holiness to be the intergrative key that unites otherwise diverse views of it, and in this regard his theology is truly creative. He has done justice to the Biblical, notably Pauline, understanding of the cross, but not merely by restating the old interpretations. At each point he has taken one of the fundamental axioms of Protestant theology and built upon it both creatively and Biblically.

One feels that Forsyth, 'though being dead yet speaks' to the contemporary situation with continued relevance and power. Doubtless

⁷ For example, *Work* (p.78) clearly distinguishes the two, whereas *Cruciality* (p.19) has them used synonymously.

he would not have wanted imitators, least of all of his own individual style, but, nevertheless, his work is of abiding value, especially to Christian preachers who are called to proclaim the gospel about which Forsyth was so passionately concerned.

Throughout his work there comes through the absolute conviction that Christianity is about a gospel, the act of God for man's redemption, a gospel that must be proclaimed and answered in faith and that the Church in every age must live. He perceives that at the heart of Christian experience is the awareness of an ultimate demand (that of holiness) and of an ultimate salvation (the act of holy love in the cross), the latter alone making possible the realization of the former.

VIII

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