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P.T. Forsyth:
An Early Twentieth Century Theology
of the Cross

Barbara A. Faught

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Theology
of St. Paul University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Arts
in Theology.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

		<u>PAGE</u>
	<u>Introduction</u>	1
Chapter 1	<u>Biography</u> Clues to a Developing Theology	9
Chapter 2	<u>Authority and The Gospel</u>	15
Chapter 3	<u>Christology</u> Kenosis and Plerosis	34
Chapter 4	<u>Atonement</u> Towards a Theory	79
	<u>Conclusion</u>	100

Introduction

Peter Taylor Forsyth (1848-1921) was a Scottish theologian whose immediate influence was not overwhelming even in his own Congregationalist denomination. At the end of the Second World War, however, his works experienced a revival and the interest in him continues to this day, a fact which would not have surprised Emil Brunner who called him "the greatest of British theologians".¹ The reader will find him to be a creature of his age and his theology a product of his time. Thus it will be no surprise to find him working with the idea of the primacy of the moral from Kantian philosophy or to learn he was perhaps the first British theologian to realize the importance of Kierkegaard. At the same time, he showed uncommon foresight in identifying problems others recognized much later and he suggested possible ways forward that are still proving fruitful.

Forsyth began his career as a convinced liberal Protestant well-versed in continental theology, a recent pupil of Albrecht Ritschl. In a manner somewhat reminiscent of Barth's account of his pastoral experience at Safenwil,² Forsyth found that in his parish experience of doubt, death, grief and repentance this liberal theology was inadequate, lacking in depth and

¹ A. M. Hunter, P. T. Forsyth: per crucem ad lucem. London: SCM Press, 1974, p. 7.

² T. F. Torrance, Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology. London: SCM Press, 1962, p. 34.

reality. What he sensed, earlier than most, was an eventual disillusionment with the doctrines of inevitable progress and the Enlightenment belief in the innate perfectibility of human nature. He became convinced that the methodology which dominated nineteenth century theology, based as it was on an anthropology whose presuppositions were non-biblical, had blurred completely the fact recovered by the Reformation of the primacy of grace. Christian faith begins, he would insist, with the movement of God to humanity not humanity to God. In this emphasis he anticipated Barth and Anders Nygren with whom he has often been compared. Like them his main purpose was to reaffirm the formative motifs of Biblical faith. In doing so, he retained from liberalism his demand for, intellectual liberty, and the acceptance of the value of biblical criticism; he questioned the creeds with their 'obsolete categories' and insisted that theology is Christian faith giving a reasoned account of revelation.³

Forsyth, who was primarily a pastoral theologian, provides few footnotes and little explicit reference to those to whom he was indebted or with whom he was in conflict. He wrote: "When a man gives out a great thought, get it, work it, it is common property."⁴ He seems to have followed his own advice.

³ Hunter, P. T. Forsyth. p. 15

⁴ P. T. Forsyth, The Work of Christ. With a forward by J. S. Whale and a memoir of the author by Jessie Forsyth Andrews. London: Independent press, 1946, p. 76

Commentators are more or less agreed on the explicit influence of Kant, Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, and Ritschl.⁵ While such an eclectic list might suggest an unfocused theological mind, Forsyth emerges from all his writings with one over-riding theme - the cross of Christ which for him is not only the centre of his thought but the centre of the world.⁶ This theme dominates works as seemingly varied as *The Principle of*

⁵ Escott argues strongly for a large role in his development for F. D. Maurice and John Henry Newman. Harry Escott, *The Cure of Souls*. An Anthology of P. T. Forsyth's Practical Writings. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, (1948) 1971, p. 9, 10, 13-15. Bradley insists that only Ritschl had a greater effect on Forsyth's thinking than Maurice did. W.E. Bradley, *P. T. Forsyth: the man and his work*. London: Independent Press (1951), p. 94f. Central to the thought of both men was the conception of universal humanity, what Maurice referred to as "radical solidarity". Forsyth's debt to Maurice extends to include theories of the Church, Baptism and Eucharist. In Chapter Four of this paper reference will be made to Maurice's *Doctrine of Sacrifice*. Many of its themes are echoed in Forsyth's presentation of the Atonement.

Newman's influence has not been explicitly documented but Forsyth shared with him an emphasis on the primacy of the practical, the concrete and the personal followed by the insistence on the need for theory to bring faith to understanding. Newman frequently referred to faith as a "venture" of the whole self whose greatest safeguard is loving obedience. Forsyth defined Christian faith as "the grand venture in which we commit our whole soul and future to the confidence that Christ is...the reality of God." Hunter, op.cit., p. 40. For reference to Newman, see Nicholas Lash, *Theology on Dover Beach*. London: Darton, Longmans & Todd (1979), pp. 51-53.

⁶ J. K. Mozley, *The Doctrine of the Atonement*. London: Duckworth, 1953, 1953 (1915), p. 182

Anglican scholar J.K. Mozley wrote: "...the Atonement...as viewed by him in its relation to the moral world, forms the background of his thought, and never a mere scenic background of every page he wrote."⁷ It is the red thread that runs through all his work.

In many ways, Forsyth's thinking most resembles Luther's *theologia crucis*. For him, as for Luther, the meaning of the phrase is not limited to soteriology and certainly not narrowly to the doctrine of the atonement. Rather it refers to a method which permeates the whole theological enterprise. In Moltmann's words, "*Theologia crucis* is not a single chapter in theology, but the key signature for all Christian theology."⁸ Forsyth would have agreed.

When Luther used the term, he contrasted it with what he termed *theologia gloriae*. The theology of the cross is essentially a critical theology whose most frequent target is Christianity itself in its triumphalist expressions. The form of triumphalism that Forsyth discerned in his day stemmed from what he saw as humanity's egocentrism. Christianity had adopted the same optimistic assessment of human nature so that even here, men and women were preoccupied with themselves not God. "There is even what we might call a racial egoism, a

⁷ J. K. MOZLEY, The Heart of the Gospel. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1925), p. 72.

⁸ Jurgen MOLTSMANN, The Crucified God. (London: S.C.M. Press, 1974), p. 72

God. "There is even what we might call a racial egoism, a self-engrossment of mankind with itself, a naive and tacit assumption that God were no God if he cared for anything more than he did for his creatures."⁹

He is not suggesting that anthropocentric thought does not speak of God or of a need for God. God still must act for humanity to reach its fulfilment, but

*this act 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, a delivery of the innate spirituality and the goodness of man with which history is in travail until now. It is not a salvation from death but only from scanty life.... (For the liberal theologians, Jesus Christ) is not in a real sense, but only in a figurative sense, our Redeemer.... It should be clear that this is another religion from that of redemption; and it has no room or need for atonement.*¹⁰

Without atonement, "religion becomes too aesthetic, too exclusively sympathetic, too bland, too naturalistic. Our very Christmas becomes the festival of babyhood, Good Friday the worship of grief, and Easter of spring and renewal instead of regeneration".¹¹

Forsyth saw in this misconception of redemption, a

⁹ P. T. Forsyth, The Justification of God: lectures for war-time on a Christian theodicy. London: Duckworth (1916), p. 11

¹⁰ P. T. Forsyth, The Cruciality of the Cross 2nd Edition. London: Hodder and Houghton (1910), p. 64f.

¹¹ *ibid*, p. 55.

reappearance of Gnosticism within the bosom of the church. What it had in common with early Gnosticism was a longing for redemption but "it sought deliverance from estrangement in the world and from the material aspect of existence but not from a guilty estrangement from God into communion with him in a new heaven and a new earth."¹²

The love of God as described by liberal Protestant theology no longer made men "wonder and fear".

*It is just paternity transfigured, maternity taken up to heaven...An element has gone out of it which makes half the Bible meaningless - the element of holiness, majesty, and judgment...The cross of Christ is treated as the great means of our peace, or of harmonizing our life by the spirit of sacrifice...*¹³

Once the love of God revealed in the cross was misunderstood in this way, it was easy for liberalism to go on to speak of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man as though these were conclusions reached by knowing the nature of man and the world. Forsyth believed in both but only as "assertions of faith...understood in the light of the atoning cross."¹⁴

In his opinion, the proper relationship between the Church

¹² John H. Rodgers, The Theology of P. T. Forsyth; the Cross of Christ and the revelation of God. London: Independent Press (1965), p. 19.

¹³ From "Faith, Freedom and the Future" quoted by John H. Rodgers. The Theology of P. T. Forsyth: the Cross of Christ and the Revelation of God. London: Independent Press (1965), p. 20.

¹⁴ Rodgers, p. 20

and culture was that of *diastasis* or separation.¹⁵ It was not so much that the Church was to be separate as autonomous. The autonomy is rooted in Christ's work which both separates the Church from the culture and binds it in evangelical service to the culture. The impetus is faith. If the Church forgets that, it begins to take on the character of a "kingdom-of-God industry".¹⁶ "The Church is not first of all a working church. It is a communion of saints and lovers, a company of believers, a fellowship of spiritual realists."¹⁷ Though he referred to the following statement of Kierkegaard as "extreme", he was in agreement with it.

For long the tactics have been: use every means to move as many as you can - to move everybody if possible - to enter Christianity. Do not be too curious if what they enter is Christianity. My tactics, have been, with God's help, to use every means to make it clear what the demand of Christianity really is - if not one entered it.¹⁸

This essay begins with a brief biography which provides an interpretive key to Forsyth's work. Chapter Two, "Authority and the Gospel", is an outline of his method which shows how he dealt with the root problem of the nature of religious

¹⁵ P. T. Forsyth, Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind. Grand Rapids: W. M. Eerdmans, 1966, (First edition 1907), p. 20.

¹⁶ The Cruciality of the Cross, p. 40.

¹⁷ Positive Preaching, p. 118f

¹⁸ The Works of Christ, page XXXII.

certainty. "Christology: *Kenosis* and *Plerosis*" demonstrates in a more detailed way how the method is applied to christology. The final chapter, as the title suggests, attempts to systematize Forsyth's writings on atonement in an attempt to see what he may have added to the contemporary discussion. An important caveat is needed here. The structure followed may create the impression that Forsyth separated the person and the work of Christ in some way while one of the strengths of his theology is that christology and soteriology form an unbroken whole. Rather, what this chapter does is to focus more intently on the what, why and how of the work of Christ as Forsyth understood it, and thus to broaden and deepen the understanding of what is introduced much earlier.

Biography

Peter Taylor Forsyth was born, May 12, 1848, the eldest of five children in Aberdeen, Scotland. His mother, Elspeth Macpherson, was a highland servant girl who inherited the home of her employer, Peter Taylor, upon his death. His father Isaac Forsyth, was kindly and bookish, a postman who with his wife let rooms to poor students. They were Congregationalists.²

After completing grammar school, Forsyth went up to Aberdeen University in 1864 to study classics. From lectures there he acquired an interest in Kant, Hegel and others. He graduated with a "first" in Classical Literature and tied for first prize in Moral Philosophy. He taught Latin briefly and on the advice of William Robertson Smith, the Old Testament scholar, went to Göttingen in 1872 to sit under Albrecht Ritschl. A life-long love affair with German theology began there and he was to look back on his study there as the most significant intellectual development in his life.³

² Biographical information is found in the books by A. M. Hunter, William Bradley, Harry Escott and in the foreword to the Work of Christ by his daughter, Jessie Forsyth Andrews.

³ The extensive library he was to develop had approximately one-third of its volumes in German. He was apparently fluent enough in the language, his daughter wrote, "that when travelling in later years he was always mistaken for a German". Jessie Forsyth Andrews, "Memoir" in The Work of Christ. London: Collins Fontana Library (1965), p. 14.

He returned to England after a term and entered Hackney College (now New College), London. There he demonstrated his obvious ability, but was allowed to leave early in 1874 because of ill health, something that would plague him all his life. So began a career that would last forty-five years, twenty-five in active ministry and twenty as a professor. This period was marked by his personal metamorphosis from his beginning as a theological liberal through Ritschlianism, and then, through a 'conversion' to an evangelical neo-orthodoxy.

His first congregation was at Shipley in Yorkshire, a working-class parish where he went in 1876. One year later he married. While there, he established himself as an unorthodox preacher who identified with the so-called 'radicals' within his denomination. Tudor James, in *Congregationalism in England*, comments that his extreme liberalism during this period "put him and his church outside the pale of the Yorkshire Congregational Union".³ Four other pastorates followed in London, North Manchester, Leicester and finally in Cambridge where he moved in 1894. Three weeks after arriving in Cambridge his wife died and he lived with his schoolgirl daughter, Jessie, until remarrying four years later. Along the way he was said to have picked up "a congregation of 'heretics

³ R. Tudor James, *Congregationalism In England 1661-1962*. London: Independent press, (1962) p. 353.

and suspects'",⁴ developed a keen interest in politics, art, music and the theatre, debated publicly about the problems of poverty and lectured on art to working men. He once burst out, "Do not take my arm and lead me away to the dwellings of the pound-a-weeks and the nothing-a-weeks and tell me, if I want realities, to consider there. I was there, and considered there and have been considering ever since."⁵ His first published piece was a tract on socialism; he supported the great Dock Strike of 1889 and took an active part in politics while in Leicester. It was while he was in this same church that he published, in 1893, an essay in *Faith and Criticism* which brought him to the attention of theologians. Its theme was the grace of God. In 1896, his famous sermon "The Holy Father", preached to the Congregational Union at Leicester, introduced a new Forsyth. "On the levity of liberalism he had forever turned his back; henceforth his themes were to be the holiness - the infinite majesty and utter purity - of God, the sinfulness of sin and the power of the cross by which God in Christ redeemed the world."⁶

It was not until 1907 that he spoke publicly about the change that had occurred in his life:

⁴ A. M. Hunter, P. T. Forsyth, p. 16.

⁵ *ibid*, p. 22, quoting The Gospel and Authority.

⁶ *ibid*, p. 17.

There was a time when I was interested in the first degree with purely scientific criticism. Bred among academic scholarship of the classics and philosophy, I carried these habits to the Bible, and I found in the subject a huge 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 in a relation of life, duty and responsibility to others. I could not contemplate conclusions without asking how they would affect these people and my word to them in doubt, death, grief and repentance.... It pleased God also 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 which submerged all the school questions in weight, urgency and poignancy. I was turned from a Christian to a believer, from a lover of love to an object of grace.⁷

In 1901, Forsyth became principal of what is now New College, London. Over the next two decades there, he wrote many books and a list of articles that fill several pages.⁸ He

⁷ ibid, quoted from Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind. There is a parallel to the pastoral experience of Karl Barth that sparked the great change in his emphasis too. "There was no sudden conversion when and where 'it' happened: the birth or discovery of what later made Karl Barth known to the world. There was but the weekly bottleneck: Saturday night and a Sunday usually defeat rather than victory for the preacher." Markus Barth, "My Father, Karl Barth" in How Karl Barth Changed My Mind ed. Donald K. McKim. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, (1986), p. 3.

⁸ Some are listed in P. T. Forsyth: the man, the preacher's theologian, prophet for the twentieth century; a contemporary assessment by Donald G. Miller, Brown Barr (and) Robert S. Paul. Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1981. A. M. Hunter says he wrote 25 books in 30 years and nearly 300 articles (p. 22). Although known as a writer on the person and work of Christ, on church and sacraments. on prayer and missions, he also wrote on marriage, the Christian attitude to war, volumes on art, socialism and independency, Calvinism and capitalism, Hardy's pessimism and Ibsen's treatment of guilt.

twice went to the United States, to speak first at a Congregational Assembly in Boston and then in 1907 to deliver the Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale. These were published as *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*. Forsyth was elected as Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1905. Two years later he found himself deeply involved in the controversy created by R.J. Campbell, whose book *The New Theology* claimed to be "a re-emphasis of the Christian belief in the Divine immanence in the universe and in mankind".⁹

Forsyth was deeply distressed by the war with Germany, although he was not opposed to it because he believed that country had ignored morality entirely when its commercial interests were threatened.¹⁰ During the war years he wrote seven books, among them *The Christian Ethic of War* and *The Justification of God*. He died in 1921, tired out after a long final illness.

From the time of the Lyman Beecher Lectures, Forsyth in his preaching and writing insisted that humanity's need is for the grace that alone can reconcile it to a holy God. The gospel of the redeeming and reconciling grace of God in Jesus Christ is the Christian's ultimate authority, not an infallible book nor

⁹ Tudor Jones, Congregationalism, p. 349, quoting from The New Theology.

¹⁰ Forsyth was one of a group of British theologians who wrote to Adolf Harnack to tell him how grieved they were at the outbreak of war while expressing their conviction that the blame lay with Germany. *ibid*, p. 356.

an infallible church. Since Jesus Christ is the heart of the Gospel so must the Cross be. In his trilogy, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, *The Cruciality of the Cross* and *The Work of Christ*, he made the claim that no Christianity is worthy of the name unless it takes the Atonement with deep seriousness.

His emphasis on these themes led many of his contemporaries to claim that "he was no more than an old-fashioned Evangelical trying to bolster up a doomed cause".¹² Such an assessment, though, is far too simplistic and does nothing to explain either the fruit his convictions began to bear in mid-century nor the turn back to the man who first held them.

¹² *ibid*, p. 353.

Authority And The Gospel

Robert Johnson reminds us that "it was Kierkegaard who turned to theological use the homey illustration that you cannot sew without a knot in the thread".¹ He adds that Protestants have more of an uneasy awareness of the theological implications of this statement than Christians of other traditions since "the very genius of Protestantism prohibits it from giving the question of theological authority a simple, static or final answer".² Forsyth identified the question of authority in its religious form, as "the first and last issue of life".³ If religious authority or the certainty for belief comes through scripture, tradition and human and Christian experience, how does the evidence count; how is it weighed?

Until the nineteenth century, Protestant Christianity considered the question of authority as settled by an appeal to an inerrant scripture as interpreted by post-Reformation orthodoxy. Then the foundation shifted from Biblical authority

1 Robert C. Johnson, Authority in Protestant Theology. Philadelphia: Westminster Press (1959), p. 11

2 ibid.

3 P. T. Forsyth, The Principle of Authority in Relation to Certainty, Sanctity and Society: An Essay in the Philosophy of Experience and Religion. London: Hodder and Stoughton, (1912) p. 11. Later in his book, Forsyth explains that by "first" he means logically prior not necessarily chronologically first or even most important. "The order of time is not the order of reality." ibid, p. 22

to "religious experience", a shift that is attributed to the influence of Schleiermacher whose work *The Christian Faith* inaugurated the new age of liberal Protestantism.⁴ Barth remarked a century later that "we see with the eyes of Schleiermacher and think along the same lines as he did...(in spite) of all our loud fundamental protest against him."⁵

Schleiermacher turned from the objective authoritarian Biblicism of Protestant orthodoxy and attempted to find a footing for religion in intuition, what he termed "the feeling of absolute dependence". All doctrine he regarded as the interpretation of the religious consciousness of the community.

His theology provided an attractive alternative at a time when the foundation of Biblical inerrancy was crumbling under the onslaught of the critics. But it managed to take hold and even to unite orthodoxy, pietism and the Enlightenment,⁶ precisely because it expressed the fact that it is the experience of salvation which prompts subsequent theologizing.

⁴ The way was prepared, of course, by the shift in philosophical thought and particularly by the negative conclusions of Kant's first Critique.

⁵ Karl Barth, Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century: its background and history. Translated by Brian Cozens. London: SCM Press (1972), p. 380.

⁶ This is the contention of Barth. The Theology of Schleiermacher: lectures at Gottingen, Winter Semester of 1923/24. Edited by Dietrich Ritschl. Translated by Geoffrey Bromiley. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans (1982), p. XV.

In this way, he appeared to have returned faith to the place it traditionally held in Protestant theology and to have overcome the error of both the rationalists and supernaturalists that faith comes through knowledge.⁷

Schleiermacher's position proved inadequate, however, for two main reasons. First, "a Faith whose doctrines were regarded as the tentative results of an analysis of ...Christian experience could be only insecurely connected to the objective Faith of the Apostles and could easily lose contact with its base."⁸ Secondly, there was a tendency in his method which he and later others followed with "fateful consequences".⁹

Though he acknowledged the togetherness of God and the feeling of absolute dependence so that one could not speak of the former save from the point of view of the latter yet he did not really take this standpoint in his theology but made the feeling of absolute dependence his object so directing the attention of faith toward itself rather than toward God... (The result was to make) the religious consciousness the object of confidence. The temptation is one to which all Protestant theology since the time of Luther has been subject...the tendency to ascribe saving power to

⁷ Claude Welch, God and Incarnation in Mid-Nineteenth Century German Theology: G. Thomasius, I.A. Dorner, A.E. Biederman. New York: Oxford University Press (1975), p. 13.

⁸ Gwilyn O. Griffith, The Theology of P. T. Forsyth. London: Lutterworth Press (1948), p. 8.

⁹ Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation. New York: The Macmillan Company (1941), p. 27.

*faith itself rather than to the God of faith.*¹⁰

Albrecht Ritschl, Forsyth's teacher, welcomed Schleiermacher's subjective approach but in opposition to him he began with the special Christian idea of God that comes through Jesus Christ rather than with God-consciousness *per se*. He insisted on the importance of Jesus as a person and not merely the illustration of a principle. Christian faith was an historical witness to an historical revelation of God in Jesus Christ. By interpreting the Faith in this way, he led "Protestant theology back to more objective standards. (To this task) he lent the whole weight of the learning and intellect".¹¹

Ritschl agreed with Schleiermacher that doctrine reflects the religious consciousness of the community but because alien influences have affected the purity of the Christian faith, it is necessary to regard Scripture as the norm and return to it again and again. The Gospels present the work of the founder of the Christian faith while the Epistles give us the faith of the early community. He did not go along with the Enlightenment idea that the "religion of Jesus" constituted

¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 27f. See also W. Kasper, Jesus the Christ. New York: Paulist Press (1977), pp. 22, 23 and W. Pannenberg, Jesus - God and Man. Second Edition. Philadelphia: Westminster Press (1974), pp. 44-48, where a similar critique is made with more attention to the philosophical foundations.

¹¹ Griffith, Theology of Forsyth, p. 8.

true Christianity. He was concerned in fact "to conserve the objective dogmatic values of the Reformation faith".¹² He believed he was able to do this while allowing for the critical revision of doctrine demanded by modern biblical and historical study by making use of the concept of "value-judgments".

Value-judgments are distinct from doctrinal formulations. An example of the latter would be that Christ is of one substance with the Father, and the second Person of the Trinity. When we affirm that Christ is God manifest in the flesh for us, that is, that he has for us in our faith and experience, the value of God, that is a value-judgment.¹³ "We know", Ritschl wrote, "that Christ is God because he has the value of God for us." He has this value for us because of the work he does for us, a work that only God could do.¹⁴

This argument of Ritschl's echoes through Forsyth's christology but he adds something to it which has implications for the question of authority - he insists that the belief that Christ has the value of God was created in us by him. "The

¹² ibid, p. 10. The following summary regarding value judgments in Ritschl's thought is from the same page.

¹³ Ritschl is being true to his Kantian foundation, agreeing with the philosopher that the thing-in-itself cannot be known. "We perceive the nature and the attributes, i.e., the definiteness of being, only in the effect a thing has upon us, and we conceive the nature and the extent of its effect upon us as its essence." Albrecht Ritschl, The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation. Quoted by Pannenberg, Jesus, p. 208f.

¹⁴ Griffith, Theology of Forsyth, p. 10.

Christ I believe in, I believe in as the creator of the belief, and not merely its object...the great change...was a revolution affected on me and by Him."¹⁵

Bradley writes of Ritschl that "he shaped the minds of all who listened to his lectures"¹⁶ and it is apparent why he would have exerted an influence on the thought of those like Forsyth who would gravitate toward a mediating position. "Ritschlians" proved to be a very diverse group but what characterized them was not the acceptance of their mentor's system but rather the adoption of his methods and principles.¹⁷ In what follows, Forsyth's debt to Ritschl is apparent; the differences with his teacher are revealed in later chapters.

The Principle of Authority is Forsyth's longest and by all accounts most difficult and philosophical book. It deals, as the title suggests, with the problem of authority¹⁸ and exposes

¹⁵ The Person and Place of Jesus Christ. p. 198f.

¹⁶ William Bradley, P. T. Forsyth: the man and his work. London: Independent Press (1952), p. 23.

¹⁷ John K. Mozley, Ritschlianism. London: James Nisbet and Co. Ltd. (1909), pp. 10-11.

¹⁸ The question of the source of religious authority was a very critical one for Non-Conformists. Not only had the traditional identification of authority with a verbally inspired Bible been undercut by higher criticism, but they were less restrained by creeds than other denominations. The fact that philosophy and theology had moved the source of authority into the inner life of the believing subject appealed to the Anabaptist element which stressed the idea of the individual alone before God. A large number of Non-Conformist theologians

his philosophy of religion and theory of knowledge. It is his statement of fundamental theology. In what he wrote, Forsyth made it obvious he was attempting to break with "the tyranny of experience" that had dominated Protestant theology in the nineteenth century, and he did so in the name of "the evangelical experience".¹³

*It must be clear that by theology, I do not mean something distilled from experience, but something presented or revealed to experience as its source, however condensed or implicit. The theology of experience is one thing - that is Schleiermacher; it is the theology which explicates the Christian consciousness. But the experience of theology is another thing, and it is the experience which explicates the Christian gospel. And the movement which arose out of Schleiermacher to correct Schleiermacher, the movement associated with Ritschl (and going beyond this system) is the movement to an objective gospel carrying a theology which does not arise in experience but makes its appeal to experience.*¹⁴

embraced the idea of the immanence of God as "a foundation...(for) a viable interpretation of the religious life". T. Langford, In Search of Foundations: English Theology 1900-1920. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press (1969), p. 198. R.J. Campbell spoke of his theology as "a re-emphasis of the Christian belief in the Divine immanence in the universe and in mankind". (Tudor James, Congregationalism, p. 349) It is possible to see all of Forsyth's work after the turn of the century as, in some sense, a critique of this position.

¹³ Robert C. Johnson, Authority in Protestant Theology. p. 100.

¹⁴ P. T. Forsyth, "the Place of Spiritual Experience in the Making of Theology" in The Creative Theology of P. T. Forsyth, selections from his works, ed. by Samuel J. Mikolaski. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (1969), p. 27.

Forsyth was very aware of the challenge religion was facing from psychology; he had read James and Starbuck and so he was careful to say he was not making a claim for a separate psychology for Christian experience. He wrote: "this authority, so super-rational in its nature and action, is yet in its method so rational that it emerges only amid psychological conditions. It is not magical."¹

Psychology, however can only co-ordinate experience; like a science, it is descriptive. What we need for our grasp of reality is a theory of knowledge.² Forsyth indicated that he had been influenced by Kant's voluntarism. "The modern movement," he wrote,

broke away from (the) quest for theoretic truth...With Kant came a new order of things. The ethical took the place that had been held by the intellectual. The notion of reality replaced that of truth. Religion placed us not in line with the rationality of the world but in rapport with the reality of it. The ethical was the real...(Kant's) route was right.³

Thought, rather than being an end in itself, only serves the activity we call "life". Life means action and where there is action there is ethic. We are, in fact, "outgrowing all merely

¹ The Principle of Authority, p. 340

² *ibid*, p. 82.

³ *ibid*, p. 5. See page 201f. for a succinct summary of Christianity according to Hegel and the Idealists. "Christianity became a grand fabric of dialectic ideas...Idealism was Rationalism transfigured and ascended...Moral relations retired behind intellectual and sin faded into...a rude stage of good."

intellectual constructions of the world, whether they be those of modern physics or of ecclesiastical systems which represented the best science of ages past."²⁴

He quoted with approval the opening line of *Foundations of Metaphysics of Morals*, "There is nothing conceivable in the world, or out of it which can be called good without qualification except a good will."²⁵ Link this with belief in God as absolute and what results is the formula: "Absolute Being must be identified with the absolute moral norm."²⁶ Thus the moral is identified with the ontological.

Forsyth's thought continues to move with Kant who argued for the existence of a Categorical Imperative. Human nature bears witness to an obligation to a moral law not of its own making; this witness points to a transcendental world and an objective sovereignty of right.²⁷ As Forsyth wrote: "It is conscience that plants us on the bedrock of being...The universe is not the key to man, but man is the key to the universe."²⁸

²⁴ Griffith, Theology of Forsyth, p. 31 paraphrasing Forsyth.

²⁵ The Principle of Authority, p. 5.

²⁶ *ibid*, p. 6 for the quote. The sentence expresses a point made by R. Johnson, Authority, p. 104.

²⁷ Griffith, Theology of Forsyth, p. 32.

²⁸ The Principle of Authority, p. 202.

While the conscience senses an obligation to the moral law, it is at the same time, an "experienced and certain fact that the conscience is divided in a standing state of collision, war and sin".²⁹ This division lies beneath any theoretic or ethical expression of the conscience and becomes obvious to us in the conflict of the "must" and the "ought" of instinct and obligation. Since this war is waged within the unity of the person, defiance of the moral norm seems as much a part of our nature as obedience. Yet our practical experience convinces us of the "ought" of the moral norm. For this "civil war" of the person, philosophy has no solution as yet. The vision of the Ideal can do nothing but foster a sense of the unattainable. It is "lovely, but it has no arms;" it cannot lift, it cannot save; and (humanity) needs saving'.³⁰ There is a "gulf fixed...which stretches between sinfulness and Holiness".³¹ Truths about God, even a faithful presentation of Him as holiness and love, can never be adequate to the reality of the

²⁹ ibid, p. 5f. In Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, Kant also recognized the radical corruption of the will. This was the only possible explanation for the fact that human beings do not obey the moral law. In this he was more pessimistic regarding human nature than most Enlightenment thinkers, possibly betraying an underlying influence of his Lutheran roots. See Diogenes Allen Philosophy for Understanding Theology. Atlanta: John Knox Press (1985), p. 218f.

³⁰ Griffith, Theology of Forsyth, p. 33.

³¹ ibid, p. 34.

situation, nor establish an effective final authority in and for humanity. We know much more than we realize. What we need is the power to be and do what we know.

That power, Forsyth said, comes only from the revelation of "the holy", that holy which is "both urgent and inaccessible. It is imperative yet unapproachable. The situation is only soluble by a miracle."³² The miracle begins with the movement of God to humanity not with a movement of humanity to God. As he put it, in religion,

*our knowledge relates not to an object but to a subject ('the absolute Subject' as he says elsewhere) who takes the initiative, not to something we know but to someone who knows us. It is knowledge not of a known thing but of the knowing God. It is not a case of our limited mind reaching God, but of an infinite God reaching us soul to soul.*³³

In an interesting parody of Descartes he writes, "The Root certainty is not "I think" but "I am thought," not, "I know" but, "I am known".³⁴

³² The Principle of Authority, p. 7. There is a fuller discussion of the term "holy" in chapter four but John Rodgers warns his readers that to miss Forsyth's distinction between 'the Holy' and 'Morality' would lead to a drastic misunderstanding, a depersonalizing and and Kantianizing of his thought. Forsyth increased the difficulty, by using the term 'moral' for the 'Holy'. "Holy is deeper than, and yet the foundation of morality. Holiness makes a total claim upon man, claiming all that he is, thinks, feels and does. God as the Holy claims man's self in all its modes and expressions of existence." Rodgers, Theology of P. T. Forsyth, p. 35.

³³ *ibid*, p. 102.

³⁴ *ibid*, p. 111.

God for Forsyth is always the God and Father of Jesus Christ. It is this God who is "the maker of his own revelation".

*It was God himself that came to us in Christ; it was nothing about God, even about his eternal essence or his excellent glory. It is God that is our salvation and not the truth about God. And what Christ came to do was...to be with us and in us as the loving God forever and ever. He came not to preach the living God but to be God in our life....*³⁵

Revelation is possible; Christ can "come home" to us because there is in us a religious a priori which is effectively a receptivity, an obedience not produced by experience³⁶ but able to receive it. It resides in the will. That is where revelation has its influence, on the heart and the will, forcing men and women to choose. It is a receptive choice on our part for "it finds something to appeal to, to stir, to evoke",³⁷ that is a deep need that we do not know until his gift awakens it. There is but one fitting response, the response of faith by which Forsyth meant an unqualified trust of the total self which manifests itself as "the will to receive and obey". Thus "the immanent consciousness of the

³⁵ The Person and Place of Jesus Christ, p. 354.

³⁶ Principle of Authority, p. 196. Forsyth was entirely skeptical of the existence of forms of thought or rational ideas latent in the mind in abstraction from concrete, historical experience. There are no forms of knowledge not produced by contacts and experience. Mozley, The Heart of the Gospel, p. 73.

³⁷ *ibid.*

divine becomes positive religion only when the leap, the choice, the resolve of faith treats it as the upheaval of a transcendent reality."³⁵ He refused, like Ritschl, to assume an "immediate presence" as the starting point for theological reflection and insisted we must turn to the Mediator prior to any claim of immediacy. He wrote:

[Ritschl] had to outgrow Schleiermacher...to secure an objective base for both theology and religion.... He found the base in history, in a positive act of revelation....It is onesided to say that Ritschl's great work was to cast us anew upon Christian experience. He cast us upon the experience of revelation, of an objective, historic, positive Gospel as the soul of the Bible and its reason for being. Schleiermacher said that religion was the sense of dependence. The result of this is mere impressionism. Ritschl moved at least two steps forward....He said faith was an act of judgment -- a judgment of our whole man on a certain fact's value; its effect and worth for us, and not on its mere existence. And he said further that it was an act of obedience, of total submission corresponding to the absolute nature of the Gospel fact and its demand.³⁶

The two-fold reciprocal act -- the approaching, recreating God and the act of surrender on our side, "completes our personality and really gives us to ourselves".³⁷ Revelation

³⁵ The Person and Place of Jesus Christ, p. 334 Forsyth's conception of faith is similar to F.D. Maurice who wrote: "The believer is really lost in him who is believed. The faith goes out of the 'I' into the object." Quoted by Excott, The Cure of Souls, p. 10.

³⁶ Bradley, P. T. Forsyth, p. 104 quoting from Forsyth: "The Place of Spiritual Experience in the Making of Theology".

³⁷ The Principle of Authority, p. 31.

is experienced as a new creation, a new birth which is a passage from death to life.⁴¹ It is neither the development of nor the elimination of our natural religion; it is the revolution of the religious life. It is "expansive and creative....There is no revolt when the authority is realized as the Lord and Giver of life for it is the passion for life and its largeness that is at the root of rebellion."⁴² Forsyth wrote: "He has made a moral change in me which for years and years has worked outwards from the very core of my moral self, and subdued everything else to its obedience. In my inmost experience, tested by years of life, he has brought me God."⁴³

Appeals to individual, private experience, however, are unhelpful because they simply cannot be discussed. Appeals to shared experience, to the way in which a particular group have come to understand and evaluate their life and history have a

⁴¹ R.C. Craston writes: "there is no evidence...(that) Forsyth understood "the evangelical experience" as a unique, "Damascus road" type of experience. "The Grace of a Holy God: P. T. Forsyth and the Contemporary Church" in Authority in the Anglican Communion. Editor Stephen Sykes. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre (1987), p. 59. Forsyth wrote: "the foundation of belief is a different thing from the reason why we became believers, and it is realized much later through our faith...The true foundation is revealed in the veteran certainty of those who have already become Christians before realizing it". The Principle of Authority, p. 93.

⁴² *ibid*, p. 15.

⁴³ "Christian Experience" in "The Creative Theology of P. T. Forsyth". p. 64.

different status. "Outside our experience we find it repeated in a vast multitude of other people, a variety of witnesses not destroyed by all the ecclesiastical divisions of Christendom."⁴⁴

For Forsyth, the answer to the question, "where is Authority for faith and life to be found?" is only in the Gospel of the redeeming and reconciling grace of God in Christ. The old claim that ultimate authority could be found in an infallible book

*implied that [humanity's] primary need was for what a book could convey -- namely [and at its highest], revelation; whereas [humanity's] primary need is not intellectual but moral, not Truth but Grace, not revelation but redemption.*⁴⁵

Church and Bible had both been made by the Gospel and along with religious experience are but channels of this one authority. He wrote:

*Everything else, Church or Bible is authoritative for us in the proportion in which it is sacramental of the final and absolute authority of the Creator as Redeemer, the authority not merely of God but of a God of grace. Authority reflects a dying King.*⁴⁶

Every topic that Forsyth handled: art, the church,

⁴⁴ Principle of Authority, p. 27.

⁴⁵ Griffith quoting Forsyth. Theology of Forsyth, p. 35.

⁴⁶ The Principle of Authority, p. 299. Forsyth pointed out that as children and youths (of whatever age) we must depend on external authority -- parents, teachers, churches, or apostles. "Our most direct contact at that stage is not with the object of religion but with people produced by that object." *ibid*, p. 22.

homilectics, socialism, marriage, authority, the person of Christ, the work of Christ and the sacraments was examined "in light of what it means in a world where there has been an empty cross and an empty tomb."⁴⁷ Robert McAfee Brown regards his method of doing this - a method he describes as christological - as one of his most important contributions.⁴⁸

Long before Barth was urging that the theme of theology must be Jesus Christ, its source the Bible and its locus the Church, Forsyth was writing about "The Word and the World" and warning that the Church always had the choice before it of one or the other as the starting point for its life and thought.

He recognized that such a doctrine of Authority could never be "proved" to the natural man. For "there is no neutral standpoint and no faithless situation from which approach can be made to that which is inseparable from faith".⁴⁹ One cannot receive or recognize the authority of a Word that offers forgiveness and reconciliation unless the need of them be awakened. If the sin of humanity or the holiness of God are not recognized, then "Christianity is a kind of rebus, an

⁴⁷ Robert McAfee Brown. "P. T. Forsyth" from A Handbook of Christian Theologians. Edited by Dean S. Peerman and Martin E. Marty. Cleveland: World Publishing Co., (1965), p. 148.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Richard Niebuhr, *op.cit.*, p. 37. The words are Niebuhr's but could have been written by Forsyth and in his day he claimed to have the support of Troeltsch on this point. The Person and Place of Jesus Christ. p. 267.

incoherent drama where you see a lifeboat launched to save a painted ship upon a painted ocean."⁵⁰

In summary, Forsyth insisted that authority is found in the situation of faith, and Christian faith always revolves around its true centre, the cross of Jesus. This event

*constituted a correlation that was initiated by the act of God's self-giving in Jesus and the acknowledgment by the believer of Jesus as Saviour. Here was the sure source for authority in Christian experience, a valid centre for theological reflection, the foundation of the church, and a point of leverage by which the Christian community could be particularly effective in Society.*⁵¹

Forsyth's starting point in theology was as the preacher concerned to preach the Word of God. His work was primarily addressed to those who were within the circle of faith. His choice of audience was deliberate for it was the church itself he saw as threatened by a liberal theology that had forgotten or obscured the fact that Christianity stands or falls on its gospel of redemption.

The *sola fide* of the Reformation was a central part of the epistemological dimension for him: men and women experience being judged by God and saved by him and they are thus taken far beyond themselves; the certainty which comes with faith has

⁵⁰ Quoted by Griffith, Theology of Forsyth, p. 35.

⁵¹ Thomas Langford, p. 267. The over-riding concern for him was the rootedness of the Christian's life and thought and for him it was in the work of Christ. Johnson says his concern was similar to the Reformation project of establishing "the evangelical way of life." Authority, p. 105.

much more in common with the certainty that characterizes profound human relationships than it does with which we hold particular propositions that we have come to accept as true.⁵² At the same time, Forsyth was able to break through the subject-object relationship with the apprehension that God is not a passive object to be observed by a spectator but "our Other" is the one who takes the initiative to make himself known. This conviction, in Buber's familiar phrase: "The Thou meets me through grace -- it is not found by seeking",⁵³ Forsyth was virtually alone in holding in British and American theology in his day.⁵⁴

The problem of historical and religious relativism first articulated by Lessing, loomed large in Forsyth's time. Many were confident that they had a solution to the problem by suggesting a separation of the Jesus of History from the Christ of Faith. But Forsyth like Kierkegaard insisted that a theological affirmation that is not existential is not true;⁵⁵ that faith is a strange thing which is not sufficient to itself

⁵² Nicholas Lash, Theology on Dover Beach. London: Darton, Longmans & Todd, (1979), p. 58. Lash adds that this is not to deny the necessity of propositional claims "'real' assents entail 'notional' assents". (Newman)

⁵³ H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation. New York: Macmillan (1941), p. 146.

⁵⁴ Johnson, Authority, p. 101.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p. 105.

and will not work alone. "We need", he wrote, "a revelatory point in history to give us a measure for judging the final tendency of what seem revelatory lines. If they only converge outside of history perhaps they never do, so far as we know."⁵⁶ The history where faith finds its referent, however, is not the history of uninterested spectators but the history of the Christian community; it is Geschichte not Historie.⁵⁷ The question as to whether or not the church has understood the revelation correctly is handled in his treatment of christology.

⁵⁶ The Principle of Authority, p. 197.

⁵⁷ ibid, p. 23.

CHRISTOLOGY: KENOSIS AND PLEROSIS

It was F. D. Maurice who wrote that "no man...will ever be of much use to his generation, who does not apply himself mainly to the questions which are occupying those who belong to it."¹ At the turn of the century in England, the complex reassessment in theology culminated in a rethinking of christology. It was here that the disparate issues were drawn together.² The christological themes most clearly articulated were those of immanence, kenosis and the Jesus of history. The first Forsyth called "a kind of religion which is but the spiritualizing of the natural man"³ and in regards to the latter he claimed such teaching repudiated the New Testament by reducing it to a piece of tradition.⁴ He faced both views and answered their claims with his christological statement.

The two poles between which British philosophical thought moved at the time were platonism and empiricism; in its

1: The Kingdom of Christ. Quoted by Alex Vidler in F. D. Maurice and Company: nineteenth century studies. London: SCM Press, (1966) p. 27.

2: Langford, Foundations, p. 185.

3: Forsyth, The Person and Place of Jesus Christ, p. 15.

4: This word is not used here in any technical sense. Forsyth said that if the New Testament faith in Christ made Christianity, as this school seemed to imply, then "the relativism that makes us to outgrow the New Testament Christ will also carry us beyond the religion of Jesus....Christianity itself will become but a stage." *ibid*, p. 50.

Hegelian form, the former had won the day. The fact that idealism was "humane, spiritual and corporate in its emphasis"⁵ provided a welcome antidote to the widespread materialistic view of life which was the legacy of Hume, Comte and Spencer. Furthermore, it meshed well with evolutionary thought which had found a home in England even before Darwin provided the empirical foundation.⁶ Equally important, Hegelianism made it possible to interpret history in such a way as to account for change and development which so characterized the age.

Thomas Langford identifies three main issues which arose out of idealism which had an impact on theology⁷ - the idea of immanence which implied an interlocking of the Divine and human, God and nature; questions concerning the metaphysical status of a person⁸ and the interpretation of history as an

⁵ Langford, Foundations, p. 57.

⁶ This is the contention of C.S. Lewis in "The Funeral of a Great Myth" in Christian Reflections edited by Walter Hooper. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (1967), pp. 82-93.

⁷ Langford, Foundations, p. 66.

⁸ See Langford, pp. 62-66 for a discussion regarding idealistic psychology which took as its starting point the thinking, willing individual. J. R. Illingworth's Brampton Lectures of 1894, Personality Human and Divine provided an interpretation of human personhood which was so in tune with the sensibilities of the time that the Study became a basic ingredient in theological descriptions for the next generation. [Langford, p. 65] Langford adds that these psychological presuppositions were to play an important role in the investigation of the idea of authority, in anthropological interpretations,

evolutionary process.

The *logos* Christology which emerged from this idealistic foundation and was given expression in *Lux Mundi* published in 1889,⁹ gave first place to incarnation rather than atonement as the key to interpret the person and work of Jesus Christ. It was essentially a theology of explanation formulated to meet the 'mind' of the age, and it did enable "genuine contact between supernatural religion and contemporary culture".¹⁰

Those, like Forsyth, who were less receptive to this christological view pointed out that the stress put on the continuity between nature and grace allowed people to forget that because of the presence of sin, the world needs radical transformation before it can be explained. Classical

and in christological discussions up to the First World War.

⁹ *Lux Mundi* a series of studies subtitled "on the Religion of the Incarnation" published by a group of young Anglo-Catholic theologians from Oxford, has become famous as more or less the opening statement representing this position of incarnational christology. The aim as stated in the preface was "to put the Catholic faith in its right relation to modern intellectual and moral problems". A. M. Ramsey, *From Gore to Temple*. The Development of Anglican Theology between *Lux Mundi* and the Second World War. London: Longmans (1959), p. 2.

¹⁰ Contemporary secular thought was welcomed as an ally not as an enemy. Langford adds that "the important contribution of these thinkers must not be overlooked, namely their denial both of a materialistic interpretation of the universe and of a reductionalistic naturalism corroborated by evolutionary ideology. Against both of these tendencies they affirmed the dignity of man." [*Foundations*, p. 200]

theology, especially in the western tradition, had also stressed discontinuity. As Ramsey suggests, it was incautious of the *Lux Mundi* group to downplay atonement, for the doctrine of the Incarnation in the apostolic and patristic ages had arisen out of the church's experience of Redemption. "The doctrine of the atonement guards the difference between true and false types of immanentism."¹¹ Forsyth's language is even stronger: "The Incarnation has no religious value but as the background of the atonement."¹²

Furthermore, by the use of non-biblical categories, though lip-service is paid to the Bible as the basis for theology, Scripture "is not quite allowed to tell its own tale in its own way".¹³ Forsyth questioned whether the apostolic *kerygma* knew anything of such an incarnational christology. He raised the more basic question from an evangelical point of view: is christology final? "Is Jesus Christ the proleptic goal of history or do we wait for another?"¹⁴ *Logos* christology was embraced very widely in the congregationalist churches of the time. Freed from inerrant biblical authority by higher criticism and less restrained by credal expression than was the

¹¹ Ramsey, Gore to Temple, p. 4.

¹² Forsyth, Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind, p. 182.

¹³ Ramsey, Gore to Temple, p. 28.

¹⁴ Forsyth, The Person and Place of Jesus Christ, p. 11.

case with Anglican theologians, the Free Churches produced a small group who went as far as to say that Jesus was the supreme but not the unique instance of God's indwelling.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the question of the Jesus of history and historical investigation of the Gospels were coming to central importance.¹⁵ Ritschlian types of theology were bound to appeal to the keen contemporary sense of the importance of historical inquiry the British showed.

Ritschl's influence came largely through Adolph von Harnack and Wilhelm Herrmann.¹⁶ Harnack contrasted the religion of Jesus, (in his view, a message featuring the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man and the Kingdom of God understood in ethical terms) with religion about Jesus. The latter represents primarily the distortion of Paul who covered up the simple humanness of Jesus with his own "bizarre Christology".¹⁷ His stress on the moral quality of Jesus and his teaching fitted well with the moral idealism and concern for social

¹⁵ Langford, Foundations, p. 217.

¹⁶ Herrmann emphasized the centrality of Jesus for faith so exclusively that faith could only come to know God as he was revealed in the consciousness of Jesus. Langford calls his "an existentially involved analysis history as objective description gave way to participation, to shared-life with Christ." Foundations, p. 220.

¹⁷ Pannenberg, Jesus - God and Man, p. 22. This, of course, represents a change from Ritschl who saw the Epistles as the valid expression of the faith of the community and normative for Christian experience today.

justice prevalent at the time when Kant was emerging victorious over Hegel.¹⁸

One of the key ideas of Harnack, that led both to development of and reaction to Ritschlianism, was his distinction of the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.¹⁹ If Ritschl seemed to have failed to "bridge the gap between the present fact of inner experience and a past fact of outward history," a criticism offered by K.C. Anderson, a congregationalist, then Harnack offered an alternative - "to separate the Christ of Faith from the Jesus of history and talk about belief in the first and the historical existence of the second."²⁰

The question that dominated the discussion was succinctly put by George Tyrrell: "Does the predicate 'Christ' as interpreted by the creeds, agree with the subject 'Jesus' as determined by criticism?"²¹ Forsyth insisted that Christianity began as christology. It is not possible to return to a Jesus

18. Johnson, Authority, p. 104.

19. Harnack's views spread widely with the English translation of What is Christianity, published in 1901. D. M. Baillie comments on Herrmann's and Harnack's roles in saving the Christian faith of many questioners and in illuminating many students of theology. God Was In Christ. London: Faber and Faber, 1986 (1948), pp. 32-34.

20. Langford, Foundations, p. 226.

21. *ibid.* Langford quotes from the Hibbert Journal: Supplement 1990: Jesus or Christ, p. 9.

of history uninterpreted by the eyes of faith. The debate moved back and forth across the channel with the contributions from the British side tending to be more conservative.

This raises an important point regarding the influence of Ritschlian theology - the shift in the emphasis from the person to the work of Christ. "To know Christ was to know his benefits", Melancthon had written. Interpreting this statement in a one-sided manner can lead to the reduction of christology to soteriology so that eventually the critique of Feuerbach comes close to validity.²² Forsyth insisted that being and meaning were not be separated. He would have agreed that: "what is believed can be known only in the exercise of belief. The exercise of belief, however, is meaningless, if it is not directed to a something which is to be believed."²³ In his words, "the fact without the word is dumb; the word without the fact is empty".²⁴

In England, though there was added emphasis on the work of Christ, theologians continued to treat the person and throughout the entire period there was a continual wrestling with the question of Christ's nature. The answer for many was found in some form of kenotic theory.

²² See W. Kasper, Jesus The Christ, p. 23 and Pannenberg, Jesus - God and Man, pp. 47-49.

²³ Kasper, p. 23

²⁴ Forsyth, The Work of Christ, p. 47.

Christ, theologians continued to treat the person and throughout the entire period there was a continual wrestling with the question of Christ's nature. The answer for many was found in some form of kenotic theory.

Nineteenth century kenoticism had its roots in 'Germany where it flourished briefly before being pushed aside by the Ritschlian theology. Robert Franks characterizes it as "a very remarkable synthesis between orthodoxy and the theology of Schleiermacher."²³ As such, it accepted his humanistic thrust and that of Strauss. But, while seeking to uncover a deeper and more genuine understanding of the humanity of Christ, at the same time, it was determined as far as possible to retain the traditional christological framework.

Kenotic themes had not found a large place over the centuries in formal christological thinking but were widely present in hymns, prayers and liturgies. Donald Dawe finds the theme in the sermons of Gregory of Nazianzus, in the mystical writings of Bernard of Clairvaux and in Luther's writings where the divine *kenosis* is a source of comfort and hope for the

²³ Robert FRANKS, The Work of Christ, a Historical Study of Christian Doctrine. (London: T. Nelson, 1962), p. 561. Langford calls the idea of *kenosis* "extremely rich and quite complex...each new expression of it qualifies any general definition." (Foundations, p. 202) The two examples given here in what follows, Charles Gore and Frank Weston, are offered because Gore is credited with introducing *kenosis* to English theology and was the most widely read, and Weston's book is regarded as "one of the greatest essays on the Incarnation". [RAMSEY, Gore to Temple, p. 38]

conscience-stricken sinner.²⁵ Thus kenoticism had a moral and religious appeal but the implications for christology remained unclear.

The theme was seized upon by many, first in Germany and later in England, as a way of relating the traditional doctrine of Christ as one person with two natures to the new understanding of personality. A person was no longer understood as "a principle of individualization but as a set of psychological functions, for example, the will, the reason, the feelings. A person is shaped and determined by his experiences and the resultant functions of his will..."²⁷

How could personality conceived in this way be reconciled with the orthodox understanding of Christ's person which saw the *logos* as his integrative centre? Critical New Testament studies which demonstrated the limitations of Jesus' knowledge added emphasis to the reality of his humanity.

In the first theories offered by the German Lutherans and referred to as "classic" or "extreme",²⁸ their basic question

²⁵ Donald DAWE, "A Fresh Look at Kenotic Christologies". Scottish Journal of Theology. Vol.15 (1962), p.341.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 342.

²⁸ RAMSEY, Gore to Temple, p. 32. Pannenberg traces a brief history of what he terms "the Self-Emptying of the *Logos* in Lutheran theology, prior to this period, in the 17th and 18th centuries. In these theories, it is the God-man or the incarnate *Logos* who humiliates himself. In the later theories it is the pre-incarnate *Logos*." PANNENBERG, Jesus - God and Man, p. 308, 309.

limited himself in some way so that the presence of the divine in Jesus did not impair the humanity of his personality or deny the limitation of his knowledge displayed by the Gospels.

More radical statements of kenotic doctrine denied that Jesus was simultaneously human and divine. *Kenosis* meant that first he was divine and then became human. Such an interpretation only underscored the chief problem identified by critics - a self-limited *logos* at the incarnation results in a limitation of the Trinity. Only those who were explicitly Hegelian had a way out of this difficulty.²⁹ In the main, however, the idea of God's unchangeability played an important role in the rejection of kenotic christology.³⁰ But from this christology itself came the impetus for the redefinition of the absoluteness of God and in this, a clear advance was made.

While the interest in kenoticism waned quickly in Germany,

²⁹ Claude Welch says it is certainly plausible to argue that the kenotic movement as a whole could hardly have taken place without Hegel and his influence seems to be present even where not explicit. C. Welch, ed. God and Incarnation in *Mid-Nineteenth Century German Thought*: G. Thomasius, I. A. Dorner, A. E. Biederman. New York: Oxford University Press (1975), p. 6.

³⁰ The criticism of the kenotic doctrine was quite widespread. There is a contemporary critique from an Anglo-Catholic perspective in F. J. Hall "The Self-Effacement of Christ" Chap. VII, pp. 202-229 in The Incarnation. London: Longmans, Green (1915). He listed ten objections to kenotic christology. A further contemporary critique is found in Eric Mascall, Christ, the Christian and the Church. London: Longmans, Green (1946). In chapter 2 pp. 23-47, the author offers criticism of Gore and Weston specifically.

weighed down as it became in unfounded speculation, "in its restrained and imprecise Anglican form...[it] held its own for fifty years."³¹ It seems that something in the Anglican climate responded to the mediating theology. Anglicans had an inclination for patristic orthodoxy and for Gospel criticism. This latter fact, coupled with the recent stress on personality and the tendency to interpret the 'Person' of the creeds in a way that paralleled the modern understanding of the person, led to an emphasis on the self-consciousness of Jesus. The result was a kenoticism less concerned with metaphysical theory than its continental counterparts.

Charles Gore brought the kenotic principle to the fore in England. He was himself concerned first with the question of the limitation of the knowledge of Jesus concerning the Old Testament and scientific knowledge but these limitations extended even further to include questions regarding his ministry and destiny. "It was really because the future was not clear", he wrote "that Jesus could pray, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."³²

Since Gore had also stressed the *logos* doctrine, he saw Jesus Christ as continuous with creation and any limitation as

³¹ Ramsey, Gore to Temple, p. 42.

³² John Macquarrie, "Kenoticism Reconsidered". Theology. Vol. LXXVII (Jan. 1974), p. 118, quoting from Gore's Dissertations.

a different mode of expression. He insisted that Jesus' full humanity was essential to a viable christology. There was first a fundamental viable ontological continuity between God and man or the continuity between creation and incarnation would be false.³³ Second, Jesus' humanity was essential if he participated in the full range of human experience.

Gore felt confident that with the kenotic doctrine, theology seemed "to be moving within the lines of dogma and doing justice to all the intentions of Scripture."³⁴ This was the doctrine's chief appeal to British theology which often tended to be agnostic about the details of the kenotic operation.

There was a further strength to the doctrine which Gore as well as others saw - God's redemptive purpose was woven, as it were, into the fabric of the cosmos and was shown to have come at great cost. Kenosis of some sort was in keeping with the divine method of dealing with the world of nature and history.

All real sympathy of the unconditioned for the conditioned demands, so far as we can see, the power of self-limitation. The method of God in history, like the method of God in nature is to an astonishing degree self-restraining. It is the physical power which makes itself felt only in self-assertion and pressure: it is the higher power of

³³ Langford, p. 204f.

³⁴ *ibid*, p. 203, quoting The Incarnation of the Son of God.

love which is shown in self-effacement.³⁵

The kenotic principle had unsurpassed moral appeal.

Frank Weston wrote *The One Christ* in 1907. Where Gore had focused on the limitations of Jesus' knowledge, Weston's emphasis was on the personality of Jesus, on the question of his self-consciousness. He avoided Gore's "language of depotentiation"³⁶ insisting that in the incarnation the Son of God added to himself a human nature but the Second Person of the Trinity remained the ego of his human personality.

The reality of Christ's human experience was the result of a decisive acceptance of its limitations. He wrote:

*As Incarnate He is at every moment observant of and obedient to the law of self-restraint which He as unlimited LOGOS wills should be imposed on Himself...By this law, the incarnate has no possible means of self-knowledge or of the exercise of his divine powers that he cannot find in the manhood that he has assumed.*³⁷

The relation of the Incarnate Son to the Father was in and through his manhood.

[The] means are not of fixed content, for as the manhood grows and moves onwards to its glory, its power of mediating the divine must necessarily

³⁵ Quoted by Ramsey, p. 35 from Gore's Brampton Lectures.

³⁶ Langford, p. 210. As Mascall wrote, "for Weston, the Word has not, as Gore sometimes seems to suggest, rendered himself helpless by one act of self-abandonment in the past." Mascall, Christ, Christian and Church, p. 29.

³⁷ *ibid*, p. 205.

*increase. But forever the manhood is the measure of the self-consciousness and self-manifestation of the divine Son as incarnate.*³⁸

Weston's work marked a switch in emphasis to the will or volition which became an important theme later: the eternal *logos* wills to become human and accepts the limitations imposed by the choice. This in essence is Forsyth's view but he puts equal emphasis on the love of God which determined the choice.

At the time when the kenotic theme gained currency in the English-speaking world, it was valued not so much as a speculative doctrine of God and Christ as for its devotional power. For men like Charles Gore, the Christ who emptied himself to share our humanity was a type of priest who empties himself to share the life of the people he serves. "The images of their theology were a source of religious power, firing the imagination, and integrating their lives of devotion with the intellectual quest for truth."³⁹ Thus Forsyth would say that he held the necessity of affirming the kenotic theme as "a moral and religious principle in the face of its insuperable speculative difficulties".⁴⁰

Bishop Gore wrote when asked "how we relate this 'limited' condition of the Son as incarnate with his exercise of all the

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Graham James, "The Enduring Appeal of a Kenotic Christology". *Theology*. Vol. LXXXVI, (1983), p. 11.

⁴⁰ Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, p. 294.

cosmic functions of the external Word...I think I had better give no answer."⁴¹ There is no satisfactory answer if the traditional trinitarian framework which would admit no change or development in the divine is maintained. Thus the kenotic writers were unable to find a solution "on the terms they had set for its discussion"⁴² In the face of "the extremes of dissolution" to which Strauss and Feuerbach had gone,

*they were right as against these extremes to hold fast to the traditional framework as alone making possible a truly incarnational theology. But what they failed to see was that if the traditional docetic drift is to be redressed, the framework must emerge only at the end and not be presupposed.*⁴³

Thus the kenotic theories of the early twentieth century faced a dilemma shared by earlier christological controversies - when dogma sets the limits for discussion the result is often deadlock. An impasse was reached when the construction of theology began with the incarnation. That Forsyth was able to avoid this impasse more successfully than most of his contemporaries may be traced to Ritschl's early influence. Ritschl was "the first to build his Christology on the question about the divinity of the historical man Jesus."⁴⁴ It was a

⁴¹ Mascall, Christ, Christian and Church, p. 28 quoting from Gore in Belief in Christ.

⁴² Dawe, "A Fresh Look...", p. 346.

⁴³ Macquarrie, "Kenoticism Reconsidered", p. 121.

⁴⁴ Pannenberg, Jesus - God and Man, p. 36f. Pannenberg points out that there were impulses toward a christology from below in the ancient church, in the Middle Ages, and

christology from below but because he failed to treat adequately the manner in which God is present in Jesus, the ontological basis is lacking.⁴⁵ Forsyth did not share Ritschl's suspicion of metaphysics but reminded his readers often that the experience of saving faith demanded nothing less.

*If our faith involves a universe, we must utter it in a universal way....a truer and deeper philosophy of history spreads away from the theodicy of salvation than from the procession of an idealist evolution. It is in a philosophy of history as nowhere else that Christianity comes to its own.*⁴⁶

It was the starting point for theological reflection that he identified as the source of the problem for liberal theology, a starting point shared by the *Lux Mundi* group. Theological liberalism begins with the world. "It begins from the wrong end. It begins with a scheme of the world or man,

by Luther but the "approach of the incarnational Christology was never successfully taken up into a more inclusive one. Rationalism, on the other hand, asked about the man Jesus, but no longer about his unity with God in the sense of christological dogma. Schleiermacher thought of the unity of Jesus with God only in the sense of Jesus' God-consciousness."

⁴⁵ David Mueller. An Introduction to the Theology of Albrecht Ritschl. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press (1969), p. 175.

⁴⁶ The Principle of Authority, p. 233f. He also wrote that "the crusade against metaphysics which was identified with Ritschl has had a distinct set back of late years and Christian thought is moving up to a cautious return upon ranges which are named after Schelling and Hegel."

with which, in truth, religion is but indirectly concerned."⁴⁷ An easy transition from humanity's experiences, philosophies and schemes to the heart of the gospel cannot be assumed. To begin with the Word is to begin with the new creation, with the evangelical experience, the moral redemption, Eternal life in Christ.⁴⁸ A radical break from "the speculative reason or the instincts of the heart" is needed if the gospel of God's grace is to make its way into a life.⁴⁹

To begin with the world is to become dubious about the Word, whereas to begin with the Word is to become sure about the world. A philosophy can bring us to no security of a revelation; but a revelation develops a philosophy, or a view of the world; it is adjustable to many schemes of the world; and it is hospitable to many of the modern principles of interpreting the world.⁵⁰

There is no thought here of turning one's back on culture - "to begin with the Word is to become sure about the world." We must take seriously the insights of the social and physical sciences.

We must keep adjusting our compass, by asking always, and showing it is still equal to the new moral situation and still lord of the new problems of life...The certainty of yesterday will not do for today...the experience of salvation's ripening power

⁴⁷ Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind, p. 169.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ McAfee Brown, "F. T. Forsyth" in A Handbook of Christian Theologians, p. 149.

⁵⁰ Positive Preaching, p. 170.

is the only real way to continued certainty of its truth. Apologetic is not so valuable to convert the world as to confirm the Church which does convert, to give faith a foundation in the world's reality, and to unify its knowledge of the Son of God.⁵¹

Forsyth recognized that the Christian theologian had much to learn from Hardy and Ibsen, Shakespeare and Aeschylus about the human predicament.

[But] the intellectual difficulties of our own age are only a special case of those that have always confronted faith....the genius of it is the same --- the principle of the world against the Word, and of man's self-salvation, his self-justification, against the grace of God.⁵²

The "Word" is Jesus Christ, and for Forsyth's christology we turn to what many consider as his best written work, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*.

His dogmatic approach is made most explicit in the chapter he called, "The Moralizing of Dogma". Here, Forsyth calls faith, "the science of the spiritual life". As physical science rests upon the belief in the uniformity of nature, so Christian Faith rests "upon the holy love of a changeless and saving God in Christ."⁵³ Both science and faith have their dogmas which are accepted as authoritative within their respective spheres.

We must beware of confusing his meaning of the phrase "the science of faith" for it does not mean "a science of thought

⁵¹ The Principle of Authority, p. 35f.

⁵² *ibid*, p. 36.

⁵³ The Person and Place, p. 216

attached to faith....it does not mean a metaphysic of Being...(nor) a science of the subjective religious acts, a psychology of religion".⁵⁴ It means a science in which faith itself is the observing subject, not the observed object; "it is faith *thinking*...with the view of things created by the new man in Christ and not discovered by the modern man."⁵⁵

*A religion of moral redemption can only be understood by a Church of the morally redeemed, as rational science...can only be pursued by rational minds schooled to its method.*⁵⁶

There is a further necessity for a proper theological method - theology must have "the right to employ methods proper to the nature of its subject matter".⁵⁷ The demand that the personal claim about a Saviour of humanity from its sin and guilt be investigated by methods appropriate to the natural sciences which studied impersonal data was improper and indicative of a "dogmatism" of a special kind. Christian theology had the right to use categories of will and personality appropriate to Christ's claim rather than the slide and test tube.

Often the church was guilty of the same improper demands as it sought to bring its proclamation of the gospel into line

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ *ibid*, p. 219.

⁵⁷ McAfee Brown, p. 150.

with "the modern mind", cutting "off all that projects over [its] edge".⁵⁶ The norm becomes "the modern mind"⁵⁷ to which Christ must be accommodated when Christ ought to be the challenge to the modern mind. This tendency was characteristic of what Forsyth referred to as "the Illumination" or "the Aufklärung" in contrast to "the Reformation" or "the old Protestantism". The latter he described as "the old intellectualism fallen into poverty... (and having) a tenacious hold on the Church's rank and file, who find belief easier than faith, both to cultivate in themselves and to apply to others."⁶⁰

Orthodoxy required the challenge presented by the modern mind; it needed the Enlightenment because it carried much of the debris of medieval doctrine. It should therefore, Forsyth wrote, "be trimmed down and cleared up from the critical side of the Illumination, and be deepened and humanized from its romantic side."⁶¹ Nevertheless, whether we fall victim to an orthodox theology or a speculative theology, the result may be the same - "the experimental Gospel in each case ceases to be

⁵⁸ Positive Preaching, p. 169. "For instance," Forsyth adds, "nothing more worthily marks the modern church than the idea of evolution, especially in connection with its own history. But is our belief to be stretched on the pallet of evolution and everything to be trimmed down which is beyond that stream?"

⁵⁹ A phrase commonly used against Lux Mundi.

⁶⁰ The Principle of Authority, p. 118f.

⁶¹ The Person and Place, p. 190

life"....And how are we to test a theology at last but by its service for the purposes of the Gospel?"⁶²

If christology exists in the interest of the church's evangelical faith, then Forsyth insisted, the great christological issue was the superhistorical finality of Christ. Gwilyn Griffith points out that Forsyth understood this as "the issue within the Church. The question between Church and World is whether or not there is in Christ a real revelation. The finality of that revelation is the question the Church itself must face."⁶³ While New Testament Christianity was absolutely certain of that finality, at the turn of the century there were the evolutionists who wished to outgrow the New Testament faith, even while professing it, and those of the newer schools who professed to hold a "simple gospel of Jesus".

Forsyth found the phrase, "the religion of Jesus" to be ambiguous. Did those who used it mean the religion he taught or the religion he practiced? In the one case we have Jesus the prophet and in the other Jesus the saint; the change represented the difference between the old rationalism and the

⁶² *ibid*, p. 192.

⁶³ Griffith, Theology of Forsyth, p. 44.

new.⁶⁴

There were significant difficulties too, in seeking to reproduce this "religion of Jesus" in the second sense. Data are scant and what we have put his religious experience beyond ours. To make the point, Forsyth quoted the verse which had great significance for him, Matthew 11:27:⁶⁵ "Everything is entrusted to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son but the Father, and no one knows the Father but the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." "His experience of the Father can be ours only through Him and in Him."⁶⁶

The idea that there ever was a time when a distinction could be made between the religion of Jesus and the Christ of dogmatic faith had been laid to rest by the religious-historical school of Germany [elsewhere he referred specifically to Weiss, Wernle and Bousset]. They have destroyed the fiction that

the earliest church had a view of Christ far more simple and more religious than any which makes him the Eternal Son of God, and the centre of the world's drama of redemption....We may for ourselves edit the faith of the first church in that interest of a simple piety, but we cannot now say that the faith so edited

⁶⁴ The Person and Place, p. 37.

⁶⁵ Refer to footnote #85 below.

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p. 40.

[and emptied] was that of the first church.⁶⁷

At the time, the religious historical school was enamoured of evolution⁶⁸ but if that was to be "the world's explanation come at last", then they needed to be reminded that no religion is final. The current image of "Father God may go the way of the despot God when the paternal conception has worked out its happy moral effect."⁶⁹ The idea of evolution had made havoc of their Christian theology and rendered them unable to comprehend the greatness of the Christ who made the church and produced the New Testament in whose witness there is no evidence of any gospel except the gospel of the Divine Redeemer.

Peter was cited as an example of "heroic" faith, whose trust in himself was unwarranted. What made him a Christian for good was the word of the risen Saviour, "Tell my disciples and Peter". Deeper than any confession of sin was his confession that Jesus was Messiah and Lord (Acts 2:36). "It was", Forsyth added to drive his point home, "no remembrance of

⁶⁷ *ibid*, p. 45.

⁶⁸ Forsyth respected the evolutionary theories of the biologists and anthropologists and described any fear of them as "outgrown". He spoke of evolution being within Christianity (referring to the development of theology) but Christianity not being within evolution (referring to the ideas of the History of Religion School). The Person and Place, p. 10.

⁶⁹ *ibid*, p. 50.

Christ's teaching and no emulation of Christ's religion that brought that to pass; ...it is only on the experience of a Redeemer from eternal death into eternal life that the New Testament witness of Christ's Godhead rests."⁷⁰ From the first, the faith of the Church was the apostolic faith of which Jesus was the object, not the subject. And it is only the same experience that has prolonged that witness in the Church. "Soteriology is the way of access to Christology".⁷¹

What do the writers of the New Testament Gospels tell us of Jesus? Forsyth drew a portrait of the one who dominates the New Testament and whose stature had only been enhanced, he believed, by recent scholarship. He found his person to be itself a paradox - authority and humility, severity of judgment and tenderness of pity drawn into a living unity in that which consummated his personality - his cross. While all admit the greatness of his impact, there is no complete agreement that deity is necessary to explain it.

Forsyth found the Church had described Jesus' relationship to God in three different ways which he described as Socinian, Arian and Athanasian: to Socinians, Jesus is a prophet and religious hero, "a religious genius unsurpassed."⁷² It is a conception that is true as far as it goes but it comes no where

⁷⁰ ibid, p. 54f.

⁷¹ ibid, p. 220.

⁷² ibid, p. 77.

near the New Testament witness to Christ. The Arian assessment still fascinates, especially for those dissatisfied with Unitarianism. It removes Christ from the merely human plane and makes him a demi-god, a superman. He believed that much New Testament christology seemed quite compatible with this viewpoint if we left out the cross. The cross, however, is central. "There impression deepens as we contemplate it, into faith, and the correlate of faith, in its deepest, fullest and most religious sense, is God."⁷³ Therefore, nothing less than the Athanasian judgment of Christ as the Godman was sufficient to account for the experience of redemption which makes the church.

Forsyth was not naive about the difficulties, even the contradictions in asserting a union between God and man. Rationalism had no answer but more room had been given in recent philosophy for faith as an organ of knowledge. "A formula which logic might call contradictory, such as the Godman, becomes less an absurdity than an indication of adequate thought on the greatest matters. ...The greatest things we believe we cannot comprehend, not only in religion but in practical life."⁷⁴ Contradictions may not even prove

⁷³ Griffith, Theology of Forsyth, p. 49.

⁷⁴ *ibid*, p. 69f.

fatal as the development of modern physics shows.⁷⁵

Life, he suggested, presents us with antinomies and paradoxes aplenty. We have to accept them and believe for our life that reality needs "the other and the opposite".⁷⁶ In an important paragraph which follows, he wrote:

Kant revealed a whole series of these rational antinomies. And it was thus he broke the reign of dogma; it was by no direct criticism of theological LOCI. For the essence of authoritative dogma is to make faith depend on rational consistency for its being; and the essence of negative dogma is to think belief can be destroyed by being shown to be rationally inconsistent. Beware of clearness, consistency and simplicity especially about Christ. The higher we go the more polygonal truth is. Thesis and antitheses are both true. But their reconciliation lies, not as Hegel said, with a superrefined rationalism, in a higher truth which is also of the reason, but in a supreme and absolute personality, in whom the antinomies work. Its marchent. It is the category of personality that adjusts the contradictions of reason; which, after all, is not abstract thought but a person thinking.

God and man then may seem to exclude each other but as the greatness of Christ grows on us we sense that the categories of critical thought are inadequate. "We need not two truths lying in a third...but two personal movements...in a surmounted collision within a person. We need man and God, and we need them in a Godman and in a cross."⁷⁷ We must pursue theory or

⁷⁵ Forsyth, of course, is writing this in 1909 long before this point was widely made.

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p. 71 and following long quote.

⁷⁷ *ibid*, p. 72.

suffer a paralysis of thought but we must never lose sight that our theories are but "faith codifying itself" and neither reality nor adequate to reality.

At the time Forsyth was writing it was commonplace to hear that Jesus had proclaimed not himself but the "Fatherhood of God".⁷⁸ Implicit in this position was the belief that the apostolic church had taken the pristine gospel and gone off and run with it so to speak and that the truth was that Paul and Jesus were scarcely related. The claim was made that "apostolic Christianity...misunderstood Jesus", and thus "misrepresented him".⁷⁹ With such a view, he thought, the critics reduced the New Testament to a piece of tradition⁸⁰ and in the process surrendered the protestant position to the catholic.

A challenge to that view would begin with the Synoptics

⁷⁸ This was widely considered to be the thesis of Harnack's book What is Christianity? Forsyth did not quite agree that that was all Harnack was saying but he found his answer "too meagre". Harnack was "too much a devout historian and too little a spiritual thinker". *ibid*, p. 59. Perhaps Forsyth let him off too easily. Harnack did write that the simple gospel of Jesus, the gospel of the Father, was perverted "to make christology the fundamental substance of it and to introduce the idea of redemption, which threatened the very existence of the gospel by drawing away men's thoughts and interests in other directions".

⁷⁹ *ibid*, p. 103, 118.

⁸⁰ Refer to footnote #4, p. 34.

themselves. "The answer has changed since the Tubingen days."⁸¹ The historical reality of Jesus is scarcely challenged and the dogmatic nature of even the Synoptics is accepted. While the New Testament provides little evidence concerning the self-consciousness of Jesus, the Gospels reflect his Messianic sense of himself, in Forsyth's view. Israel will ultimately be judged on its attitude to himself; supreme blessing was promised to those who were ready to lose their lives for his sake and the gospel's; one's eternal destiny depended on one's acceptance or rejection of him. The evidence is that he thought of himself in a category distinct from other men, whose attitude to him was determinative for their relationship with God. "Is the absence of a Christology in the Synoptics not the assumption of much 'advanced' criticism instead of its results?" he asked.⁸²

Forsyth repudiated the use of prooftexts as such but he saw Matthew 11:27 [see page 55] as an expression of Jesus' own experience and as such part of the history. It was not simply a communication of God-consciousness in the Ritschlian sense.⁸³ It is the bridge by which we pass from the Synoptic to the Johannine Christ, "the 4th Gospel in nuce".⁸⁴ It was

81. *ibid*, p. 104.

82. *ibid*, p. 110.

83. Griffith, p. 52.

84. Person and Place, p. 116.

sense.³³ It is the bridge by which we pass from the Synoptic to the Johannine Christ, "the 4th Gospel in nuce".³⁴ It was for this reason suspect in Forsyth's day.³⁵ Yet it speaks of one who is central to his own gospel and the mediator between God and humanity; it speaks of one who is not only unique but final. The critics, however, insisted on leaving the centre of Jesus' life a blank. It was almost forbidden territory. We could say what the Church said about him but not what he thought about himself. That might have been something quite different. The question then becomes: Can we believe in someone made Christ in spite of himself? The answer for Forsyth, of course, was "no", but the claim of Jesus in his cross and resurrection is greater than any explicit in his mouth. His work was not half done till he died.³⁶ His words

³³ GRIFFITH, Theology of Forsyth, p. 52.

³⁴ The Person and Place, p. 116.

³⁵ Harnack had accepted it "in the main" as authentic; *Ibid.*, p. 111. John Robinson writes: "Though the passage...in the synoptic gospels sticks out like a sore thumb and 'gives the impression of a thunderbolt fallen from the Johannine sky', recent critical study has shown there is less and less ground for doubting its genuineness as a saying of Jesus." He devoted two and a half pages to a discussion of the Synoptic view of the intimacy of Jesus' relationship with the Father and his claim to a freedom and authority within that relationship. Quote from J.A.T. Robinson, The Priority of John. Edited by J. F. COAKLEY. (London: Meyer Stone Books, 1985), p.359.

³⁶ The Person and Place, p. 118.

in whose light we read all his words."⁸⁸ True revelation comes by historic facts and deeds rather than truths, even those uttered by the chief actors.

While most of his contemporaries claimed the New Testament to be the Church's book, Forsyth insisted that though the Church preceded the New Testament, both were produced by the Spirit. They are parallel products of the Spirit, the Church made by faith and the Bible by inspiration. For inspiration we should read insight which had the character of a gift, a miracle even. He wrote:

*Christ by his work made then saints, and by the inspiration of his Spirit he made then theologians.... They translated Christ, the text, who without the translation would have a dead letter so far as history is concerned.*⁸⁹

They give what they have received. The Christ they preach is the Christ God sent, and if they included Christ in his own gospel then he did.⁹⁰ The New Testament is not the first stage of the evolution but the last phrase of the revelatory fact and deed.⁹¹ It is part of the finality of 'Christ's work for

88. *ibid.*

89. *ibid*, p. 161, 166. He agreed with Luther's assessment that there was more inspiration in the epistles than in the gospels.

90. *ibid*, p. 181, 207.

91. *ibid*, p. 152. Italics are Forsyth's.

gospel then he did.³¹ The New Testament is not the first stage of the evolution but the last phrase of the revelatory fact and deed.³² It is part of the finality of 'Christ's work for revelation is not revelation until it has been received.

The apostles were not infallible. As we noted, their limitations were those of their time and place. They wrote to apply the Gospel to particular circumstances. The recent work of the religious-historical school had shown that there was a substantial dogmatic unity in the gospel of the first church. "There was", Forsyth wrote, "no universal theological formula, there was not an orthodoxy, but certainly there was a common Apostolic Gospel, a *kerygma*."³³

The chief content of this *kerygma* had for its centre the person and work of Christ. It was not Christ's ethical precepts but his death and resurrection that were made central

³¹ Ibid., p. 181, 207.

³² Ibid, p. 152. Italics are Forsyth's.

³³ Principle of Authority, p. 126. A. M. HUNTER, Forsyth, p. 38, points out that Forsyth's use of the word *kerygma* in this sense pre-dates C. H. Dodd's by almost three decades. There seems to be some difference in how they use the word. For Forsyth, it refers to a central theme or motif of the New Testament message; for Dodd it means something akin to a primitive creed.

Pannenberg speaks of *kerygma* theology which arose in Erlangen Lutheranism and resulted from a renewal of the dogmatic theme of the Word of God, which had long been submerged in the doctrine of inspiration. W. PANNENBERG, "Kerygma and History" in Basic Questions in Theology. Vol. 1. Translated by George H. KAHM. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 83.

In order of importance we should go to the world first of all with the atoning cross which is the Alpha and Omega of grace; second, with the resurrection of Christ, which is the emergence into experience of the new life, character, teaching and miracles of Christ; fourth with the pre-existence of Christ, which is a corollary of His eternal life, and only after such things with the virgin birth which may or may not be demanded by the rest."

In this order, we have "their true perspective of faith,"⁹⁴ Forsyth wrote. It was a recovery of this perspective of the primacy of faith which made the Reformation.⁹⁵ Recovery of Protestantism from scholasticism would come along the same route through a movement from the interior of faith itself. The result would be not a mere repetition of apostolic experience but a prolongation of the experience which made them apostles, the redeeming, reconciling work of Christ.⁹⁶

The ground of the Church's experience remains the same; its theology needed to be revised to keep pace with the living

93. Forsyth, Positive Preaching, p. 88. This is Christology from below, to begin reflection on the meaning of Christ with the experience of forgiveness and the realized presence of Christ risen. It is what Karl Rahner calls the "saving history" type of Christology, leading upwards from below. "The Two Basic Types of Christology". Theological Investigations. Vol XIII Translated by David Bourke. London: Darton Longman and Todd (1975), p. 214.

94. *ibid.*

95. Forsyth claimed the Reformation was mainly an ethical and religious change not a theological one. The Reform resulted from the self-recuperative power of Christianity itself....the Reformation was the vital Element in the Church disengaging and asserting itself. Person and Place of Jesus Christ, p. 188, 190.

96. *ibid*, p. 200.

church.⁹⁷ He called for "the moralizing of dogma". What he intended was that the Church's doctrine come "closer to life", that it reflect the change in our views about God and the cosmos that have resulted from the insights of the Enlightenment. Morality had been shown to be the "nature of things" [Butler]. Therefore, the dynamic qualities of will⁹⁸ and action as they pertain to both God and humanity needed to be emphasized and expressed in a way that is both moral and personal.

Forsyth demonstrated what he meant by a critical treatment of the Christology of Chalcedon. That classical dogma, he argued presents a union of the two natures in Christ in categories too elemental and physical.

It conceived the union as an act of might,...which united the two natures into a person rather than through that person. It united them miraculously rather than morally. The ethical notion of the true unity as the interpenetration of persons by moral action must take the place of the old metaphysic of the union of natures by a tour de force,⁹⁹

Using this moral method and applying it to the incarnation

97. *ibid*, p. 213.

98. Either through William Law or Hegel, Forsyth seems to have assimilated some ideas of Jacob Boehme who had a marked influence on English religious thought. Boehme's philosophy can be understood only by living it, and accordingly the will is the radical force in man and in God. This practical and experiential side of the teaching of the German mystic appealed to Forsyth. Escott, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

99. *ibid*, p. 223, 231.

we seem confined to one of two theories. In the first, the incarnation was "a great and creative moral decision" of Christ before he entered the world.¹⁰⁰ This understanding preserves his pre-existence and calls for some form of *kenosis*. In the second theory, the incarnation was "the result of the continuous and ascending moral action in Christ's historical life", the absolute union completing his personal development taking place through his self-sacrificial death. "We have", says Forsyth, "a progressive incarnation of God and a progressive deification of man...which requires some form of adoptionism". Later Forsyth will show why he believed the truth may well lie in combining both theories but in either case the cross is the key to the incarnation.

In the early Church, there were two ideas to explain Christ and his final work - the Virgin Birth and his pre-existence. The emphasis on the former had fallen off somewhat in Forsyth's day on critical grounds. It seemed to hold little interest for him perhaps because he believed the doctrine could still leave us with an Arian Christ.¹⁰¹ Pre-existence though is absolutely essential to explain the finality of Christ but he found the Church not speaking enough of it.¹⁰² The One who has an

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*, p. 232 and following two quotes.

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, p. 261.

¹⁰² He found what he termed "a Synoptic positivism which corresponds in its sphere to the Comtist empiricism in philosophy." (p. 267) The preference for the Synoptics,

epilogue of eternal history must have a prologue of the same. "The power to exercise God's prerogative of forgiveness, judgment and redemption could never have been acquired by the moral excellence or religious achievement of any created being, however endowed by the Spirit of God."¹⁰³

What we have come to is the cross as a reflection of an act within the Trinity. It was but "the exercise in historic conditions of an eternal resolve taken in heavenly places;"¹⁰⁴ "his obedience as man was but the detail of the supreme obedience which made him man."¹⁰⁵ There was a Calvary above, which was the mother of it all.¹⁰⁶ "He consented not only to die but to be born." "When God spared not his own Son, and yielded not even to the prayer of Gethsemane, it was a piece of

where few references to pre-existence are found, led to an easy dismissal of the allusions of Paul and the Fourth Gospel, frequent and unequivocal though they seem.

¹⁰³ *ibid*, p. 269.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, p. 270.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*, p. 271. In the previous chapter, Forsyth had insisted that obedience belongs to Godhead just as much as authority does. There could not have been "an Eternal Father with but a temporary son (read Arian), unless obedience be an undivine thing and the only divine thing is to lord it, and to wrap oneself in a conscious power with no outgoing love... And then why would Nietzsche not be the true prophet, and a *deus humilis* a mere figment fostered by the weak majority to strengthen their case and better their lot? (*ibid*, p.244)

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*, p. 271.

Himself that he foreswore.¹⁰⁷ Forsyth continued thus for several paragraphs reminding us that nothing less will carry the weight of the Church's adoration nor its liturgy.

From here he moved quite naturally to the issue of *kenosis*, to Christ, "a godhead self-reduced but real, whose infinite power took effect in self-humiliation".¹⁰⁸ Forsyth was aware of the difficulties of the kenotic theory both to those who dismissed it outright and with some of the details of those who put it forward. He held this view as "a choice of difficulties",¹⁰⁹ and in putting forward his own interpretation addressed what are admittedly common objections.

Kenosis was widely regarded as incompatible with the idea of God's changelessness, his "divine immutability" as it is called. The only immutable thing in God, Forsyth insisted, is his holy love; it is "the supreme category of the Almighty".¹¹⁰ "The conditions of time must lie within the possibilities of Eternity, the growth of man within the infinite mobility of the changeless God. *Finitum non capax infiniti* is the principle of

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, p. 273.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*, p. 294.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*. "The alternative to a *Kenosis* used to be a *Krypsis*, or a conscious concealment of the active divine glory for practical or strategic purposes. But that is now an impossible idea, while an acquired Godhead would really be none."

¹¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 316.

Deism; the principle of Christian theism is *infinitem capax finiti*."¹¹¹

Most kenotic theories set for themselves the question - What did the Son renounce in becoming man? In answering, many, following Thomasius, distinguished between the relative and immanent attributes; *kenosis* meant renouncing the former and retaining the latter. Forsyth, however, took another tack. He saw the attributes as existing in different modes of being - actual and potential. In the Incarnation, the divine attributes were retraced from actual to potential. The application of this principle is made as follows: omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence are not so much attributes as functions of attributes.¹¹² Omnipotence then "means not that God should be able to do anything and everything that fancy may suggest...but everything that is prescribed by Holy Love. To a physical omnipotence it is indifferent."¹¹³ Omnipresence means God is not hampered by space but can enter spatial relations without being tied to them, "can exist in limits without being unfree, or ceasing to be God".¹¹⁴ Omniscience

¹¹¹ *ibid*, p. 309.

¹¹² *ibid*. In fact, he prefers not to speak of attributes at all. The Cruciality of the Cross, p. 104.

¹¹³ *ibid*, p. 309, 313.

¹¹⁴ *ibid*, p. 309.

Love. To a physical omnipotence it is indifferent."¹¹⁶ Omnipresence means God is not hampered by space but can enter spatial relations without being tied to them, "can exist in limits without being unfree, or ceasing to be God".¹¹⁷ Omniscience in its eternal form is an intuitive and simultaneous knowledge of all things. In Christ, it became morally retracted and potential, developing under the conditions that govern human growth, that is a series of moral crises and victories.

Finally, Forsyth addressed the problem of sinlessness for a kenotic theory. The claim was often made that without the possibility of sin, Jesus Christ could not have been fully human. Religiously and theologically, Forsyth says, "this is not possible". To deal with the dilemma he made the "bold suggestion"¹¹⁸ that as the Son he was incapable of sinning, as incarnate he did not know this. The limitation of his knowledge is indubitable - even about himself. "Did that nescience not extend to the area of his own moral nature, and so provide him with the temptable conditions which put him in line with our dark conflict, and which truly moralize and

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 313.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 309.

¹¹⁸ Lovell COCKS, "P. T. Forsyth's 'The Person and Place of Jesus Christ'". The Expository Times, Vol. 64 (1952 - 1953) p. 197.

A Christ merely kenotic is not enough. It gives us but the descent and humiliation while neglecting the ascending and mastering process which is its coefficient. Forsyth returned to the two natures of Chalcedon in which there is no systematic reconciliation without the resulting impairment of one or the other. He suggested a reconciliation based on the by now familiar categories of the personal and the moral.

When we analyze mankind's religious experience, we see two vertical movements - God seeking humanity and humanity seeking God and responding to his revelation. "Faith is man's greatest moral act as Grace is God's".¹¹⁸ "Put Christ into the picture and think of his person not as a union of two natures but as *the mutual involution of two personal movements raised to the whole scale of the human soul and the divine*".¹¹⁹ In the historic life of Christ", as A. M. Hunter comments, "the two movements - perfect revelation and perfect religion - were united and involuted. Alongside the *diminuendo* of *kenosis* there went a corresponding *crescendo* of *plerosis*."¹²⁰

Christ did not come into the world a completed personality, which would have been mere magic. He had to achieve his as we

¹¹⁸ *ibid*, p. 332

¹¹⁹ *ibid*, p. 333. Italics are Forsyth's.

¹²⁰ A. M. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 78.

do but his personality differed from ours,¹²¹ in that he came to be what he already was, the agent of mankind's redemption and the locus of its communion with God.¹²² He could not fail, he could not sin, not by virtue of his divine nature but through "the moral reverberation of his great, initial and inclusive act eternal in the heavens".¹²³ His moral conflict was no charade because his self-emptying involved him in ignorance that sin was an impossibility. The more he laid down his personal life, the more Christ gained his soul. His soul was perfected and our salvation won in the cross, the resurrection and the glory. This view of Christ's life as a story of growth and recovery by moral conquest is told early, Forsyth reminds us, in the Philippian hymn. (Philippians 2:6-11)

Mozley writes that the chapter on "Plerosis or the Self-Fulfillment of Christ" is important because "here we have a theologian, to whom the reality of Christ's godhead is essential to Christianity, laying hold of the idea of an 'acquired divinity' which has usually been held in contrast to

¹²¹ "His relation constituted his personality...His whole personality was absolute sonship...destroy his sonship and you destroy his personality...think it away and nothing is left." *ibid*, p. 280-286.

¹²² *ibid*, p. 341.

¹²³ *ibid*.

the other doctrine."¹²⁴ Forsyth perceived the importance of seeing in Jesus the revelation of the full meaning of human existence. Christ represents the End, the *telos* of evolution. The *plerosis* represents the fulfillment of the human and shows us the goal of our search for a richer, fuller life. That life "does not begin as a finished article. It begins with certain possibilities, with a destiny engrained in the protoplast; but it only passes from a destiny into a perfection in a career."¹²⁵

Christ is certainly no less concerned than Nietzsche that personality should receive the fullest development of which it is capable and be more and more of a power. The difference between them lies in the moral method by which the personality is put into possession of itself and its resources - in the one case by asserting self, in the other by losing it..."¹²⁶

Forsyth insisted always that the essence of humanity is conscience. It is man's moral relation to a holy God. Therefore, Christ's humanity centers in the moral reality of his experience, his conflict and his growth under historical circumstances. His identity with humanity

lay in no mere continuity of substance, nor even in participating in personality, but in his assumption of

¹²⁴ Mozley, The Heart of the Gospel, p. 90.

¹²⁵ The Person and Place of Christ, p. 344f.

¹²⁶ Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind, p. 178. In The Principle Authority, he wrote, "The individual with his egotism is born, but the personality has to be made. It grows; and some weak, violent, or obstinate people die without it." p. 327.

*man's conditions of personality...It lay in his active acceptance of the human and sin-laden conditions of communion with God in such...a way as to make that communion real for every other personal soul."*¹²⁷

What Jesus Christ demonstrated in his life and death was that man though incomparable with God is not incompatible. In Christ the compatibility becomes full communion.¹²⁸ Through an examination of the meaning of the cross for God, Christ and humanity, Forsyth attempted to show how the communion is achieved.

For Forsyth, then, the starting point for christological reflection was not common human experience but the experience of one who has been redeemed. It may be incorrect to speak of his christology as starting "from above" or "from below"¹²⁹ and more correct to call it "celebration theology" which called attention to the fact that something had happened and consequently "nothing could ever be the same again".¹³⁰ For the one who has been there and back again, theology is done, as

¹²⁷ *ibid*, p. 352f.

¹²⁸ *ibid*, p. 353.

¹²⁹ An examination of the two terms is found in Karl Rahner, "The Two Basic Types of Christology," Theological Investigations, Vol. XIII; Anthropology and Christology. Translated by David Burke. London: Darton, Longman and Todd. 1975

¹³⁰ Robert McAfee Brown, "P. T. Forsyth", p. 164.

it were "on the return journey."¹¹¹

*When we have found our soul's God on other than intellectual lines, it is quite possible for us to return to our mental process to the logic of thought, and find in its donative quality features which corroborate the will's faith, and share in the convergence of all our powers on the God whose gift they are.*¹¹²

Theology for Forsyth was an effort to understand a faith that had been given and not an effort to understand in order to believe. The method of confession and demonstration was what distinguished the role of the theologian from that of the philosopher. That distinction he believed many liberals of his time had ignored.

The influence of Ritschl remained though he moved beyond him. He and Forsyth both realized that if the historical events on which the Christian story is based did not occur, or if they were misinterpreted, then it would not be clear what the church was responding to. It was this realization that motivated what was to become "the new quest" for the historical Jesus. Ritschl wrote that "if the conception of his present Lordship cannot be filled out with definite characteristics of his earthly ministry it is either a worthless schema or an

¹¹¹ Lash, Dover Beach, p. 111, 112. See his discussion on the distinction made by medieval theology of the two roads -the 'via inventionis', the way of discovery, or enquiry and the 'via disciplinae' or way of confession and exposition.

¹¹² The Principle Authority, p. 117.

his earthly ministry it is either a worthless schema or an excuse for every possible enthusiasm."¹³¹

An element of historical factuality is involved in the Christian belief claim. Therefore, the believer has to meet the questions and criticisms of the historian. In this regard, Forsyth never ceased to be a liberal and where he disagreed with liberalism his positions were critically supported.

Whether any of the kenotic theories was theologically adequate was a matter of much debate. The main objection to the kenoticism of the period was its failure to make sense within the existing framework of the impassibility of God.¹³² A change in methodology was needed. "The priority of questions asked about kenosis had to be changed. The starting-point for these questions is in the full actuality of revelation in Jesus Christ."¹³³ The question changes - it is no longer: How is God-manhood possible in light of the nature of God and man? but: What does the reality of Christ's God-manhood tell us about the nature of God and man?

This in fact was Forsyth's question precisely because he began with Jesus Christ and the cross and refused any other place on which to stand. Kenosis is not forced to fit within

¹³¹ RITSCHL, The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, p. 365.

¹³² See discussion on p. 48.

¹³³ DAWE, "A Fresh Look...", p. 348, for the quote and the questions.

Kenosis says that "God is free to be our God without ceasing to be God the Lord."¹³⁶ God's nature, Forsyth wrote, "has absolute mobility. It has in it the power and secret of all change, all out-going without going out of himself."¹³⁷ Kenosis is a description of God's freedom within which doctrine must be shaped. The result will be "theology uttered with a different accent."¹³⁸

This "different accent" included for Forsyth the importance of seeing in Jesus the full meaning of human existence. He saw that a christology that stops with *kenosis* (like that of Weston for example), is somewhat lopsided. If incarnation leaves human nature untouched, the subsequent christology will be open to the charge of monophysitism with the issue of Christ's struggles and faith a foregone conclusion. Although Forsyth applied the concept of *plerosis* mainly to explain the historical life of Jesus, the implication is that *plerosis* is the destiny for all those who are "in Christ." And human nature in contact with God does not disappear, on the contrary, it becomes fully human. It is not too much to say that Forsyth points in the direction of a new definition of the relationship between anthropology and christology.

¹³⁶ *ibid.* Barth used the phrase "the holy mutability" of God in contrast to "an immutability about human beings" in their sin. Quoted by Donald Dawe in Jesus: The Death of Resurrection of God, p. 95.

¹³⁷ The Person and Place, p. 348.

¹³⁸ Mikolaski, Creative Theology, p. 23, quoting from Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind.

Atonement - Towards A Theory

The underlying assumption of Forsyth in articulating the work of Christ was that the understanding of atonement needed to be cleared of the artificial structures into which it had been forced historically.¹ Doctrinal statements couched in the legalistic, governmental or transactional language familiar to Protestant Orthodoxy in particular, had obscured its essential nature as divine moral action. A new investigation of the scriptural approach to the subject, which Forsyth called "objective and scientific", had been undertaken by Schleiermacher, Ritschl, McLeod Campbell, Maurice and others and he respected their work because the chief gain had been the view of Christ's work as that of a moral personality instead of a heavenly functionary.² The teaching of the cross, like the doctrine of the Person of Christ, needed to be thoroughly moralized for an age which had "a question and need of its own",³ and the question was not that of the first century nor of the sixteenth. Luther had spoken to people who were in a church and knew sin but at the time, he believed, the sense of sin had been trivialized and many were not in the church.

By way of preliminary remarks, Forsyth suggested that any revision of doctrine which was to take hold in the life and

¹ H. D. McDonald refers to this as Forsyth's "dominating purpose." The Atonement, p. 250.

² The Work of Christ, p. 179, 185.

³ From "The Reality of Grace" in The Creative Theology of P. T. Forsyth, p. 121.

thought of the church, while meeting the mind of the age, had to be in large measure dependent on earlier formulations.⁴ He wrote:

...both philosophy and theology have not only a chronicle but a history....The past is not devoured but lives on, and comes to itself in a future....The new arrivals (neither) consume their predecessors (nor) ignore them....They correct the past and enrich it, and they hand on their corrected past to be a foundation for the workers yet to be.

The amateur...therefore is at a great disadvantage.⁵

Time and effort were wasted criticizing what had been discarded and establishing what "the competent" had already agreed to accept. In his view, this had been the position in which those who go straight to the Bible for the materials of their theology found themselves. They ignored the articulation the problem had received from the greatest minds of the church forgetting that "the Bible is enough for our saving faith but not enough for our scientific theology."⁶

Forsyth insisted that recent work by the competent scholars of atonement doctrine was largely in agreement that the idea that grace is acquired through atonement, that suffering has an equivalent value or that God's attitude changes from wrath to grace have no place in modern theory. Furthermore, great care

⁴ F.W. Dillistone writes that every new interpretation of atonement doctrine has reviewed, criticized or transformed the categories of the past. The Christian Understanding of Atonement. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press (1968), p. 239.

⁵ The Word of Christ, p. 176.

⁶ ibid, p. 177.

and caution were required with the use of terms such as substitution and penalty but discarding them altogether was not the answer either. There were still many whose atonement theories were essentially in the Anselmic Reformation tradition but "the prelude in the minor key" with its themes of sin, guilt and punishment had been recognized as something other than the main theme.'

In seeking to present "a renovated theology", Forsyth nevertheless felt compelled to begin as St. Paul did in his theological *magnum opus*, Romans, with the 'the sin of man'.⁴ "The need of atonement," he wrote, "does not rest on an historic fall, but on the reality of present and corporate guilt."⁹ His starting point again was not doctrine but life. Guilt is not illusion, disease or a figment of the mind, but life's reality.

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, which introduces something noxious and not merely deranged, malignant and not merely hostile; the fact that it is transgression against not simply God, not

⁷ L. W. Grenstead, The Atonement in History and in Life. London: Society for promoting Christian Knowledge. 1936 (1929), p. 242.

⁸ It is A. M. Hunter who offers this comparison of Forsyth with Paul on p. 56. J. K. Mozley who is in agreement with Hunter that systematizing Forsyth, particularly with regard to atonement doctrine, is very difficult, also suggests the sin of humanity as the starting point. J. K. Mozley. The Doctrine of the Atonement. p. 183.

⁹ *ibid.* Quoting from "The Atonement in modern religious thought."

*simply against a loving God, but against a holy God.*¹¹

Forsyth was always intent on stressing the personal. Humanity as sinners stand in a personal relationship with God which is described variously as rebellion, antagonism and guilt. Sin is rejection by humanity of God's movement toward it in holy love, a rejection of communion. He expressed it thus:

*Sin, you note, is not measured by a law, or a nation, or a society of any kind but by a person....The essence of sin is exposed by the touchstone of his presence by our attitude to him.*¹²

He meant that Jesus Christ was the holy God's loving movement toward humanity. Sin is humanity's attitude toward God's loving presence; "it is to live in active rejection of the Lord."¹³

When Forsyth spoke of the guilt of sin, he was not equating it with a sense of guilt which might be expressed as "a guilty conscience." The real meaning of sin is not recognized or understood by the natural man. Forsyth insisted, however, that writers who have explored the human condition have borne witness to the truth that "the history of the world morally viewed is a tragedy. All the great tragedy of the world turns upon its guilt. Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Goethe, Ibsen all tell you. The solution of the world, therefore, is what destroys

¹¹ The Work of Christ, p. 78.

¹² Rodgers, Theology of Forsyth, p. 40, quoting from Forsyth's Missions in State and Church.

¹³ Rogers, p. 40

its guilt."¹³ This man may see his shortcomings, even his offenses against the accepted moral code but the sense of a state of sinfulness is dismissed. The religious experience of the reality of sin and guilt is something that comes only through revelation of the holiness of God.¹⁴ It is this belief, reinforced by his own experience, that led Forsyth to speak and write so frequently and passionately of the Holy God and to denounce the trend in so much of the theology of the time to treat sin so lightly. He wrote:

*The bane of liberal thought is that it does not grasp the idea of the holy as the changeless thing in God, God's conscience, the immutable thing in the universe, the ruling principle of religion, and the organizing principle of its truth as theology. Therefore it does not grasp the idea of sin... It deprecates the incessant reference to sin and sinners in such a connexion, it tends to treat the sense of sin as a ghost walking from a dead past, a bad dream haunting us from the Middle Ages...*¹⁵

Much had changed for the better since the Middle Ages which "over engrossed with a mere distributive equity, ...made God the

¹³ Positive Preaching, p. 227.

¹⁴ In chapter two, we have already noted that for Forsyth, Revelation is Redemption and that central to all his theology is the category of the Holy (p.25). Gwilyn Griffith points to the great similarity in understanding between Forsyth and Rudolph Otto in his book The Idea of the Holy (1917). "Forsyth had anticipated, very much of Otto's findings.... 'Mere morality' says Otto, 'is not the soil from which grows either the need of redemption and deliverance or the need for that other unique good which is likewise altogether and specifically numinous in character - 'covering' or 'atonement'." Griffith, Theology of Forsyth, pp. 66, 69.

¹⁵ The Principle of Authority, p. 215.

Lord Chief Justice of the world".¹⁶ We have been living now upon the love of God, God's love to us. That was a necessary corrective step. But now, Forsyth believed, people needed to be saturated with the idea of God's holiness, the awful purity at the centre of his love. Without a holy God there would be no need of atonement, no need of the cross for it is holiness that makes sin guilt. And a God whose nature is such cannot wink at sin or waive it but must judge it.

What did Forsyth mean by the holiness of God? He did not mean what Protestant orthodoxy meant in its metaphysical discussions for it lost the personal and the active (a criticism made more explicit below). He wrote:

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 his nature. It is not an attribute of God; it is his name, and being and infinite value. But if the holiness does not go out to cover, imbue, conquer and sanctify all things, if it does not give itself in love, it is less holy...God's holiness is...the moral principle of both love and grace. It is love's content, it is what love brings or grace gives...¹⁷

John Rodgers points out on the basis of this understanding, that a discussion of God's holiness that does not include his movement toward humanity is impossible, not only because without a relationship with him we cannot know holiness but also because his holiness is the foundation of this movement

¹⁶ The Creative Theology of P. T. Forsyth, p. 65.

¹⁷ From "This Life and the Next" quoted by John Rodgers, p. 32.

from God to mankind.¹⁶ "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."¹⁷

As with the Anselmic-Reformation tradition, Forsyth's view of the atonement would be classified as objective, that is, it grounds the necessity of the atoning death of Christ in the nature of God. Anselm, however, defined God's nature in terms of honour and the Reformation discussed it in terms of retributive justice. Forsyth grounds the objective necessity of the atonement neither in God's honour nor his justice but in his holiness. It is God's moral self-determination, his will to communion with his creatures that grounds the atonement.¹⁸ This purpose to restore communion is a moral decision but it is deeper than justice.¹⁹ For

in the face of injustice, justice calls for penalty, for satisfaction, whereas holiness in the face of sin calls for holiness; that is, holiness calls for a positive appreciation of its own nature, for reverence amid the penalty and thus for a sharing of the burden of sin and not just shame.²⁰

In a word then, the one thing necessary in light of the guilt of humanity and the holiness of God was reconciliation. If Forsyth had a biblical text that was central for him it was

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 23.

¹⁸ *The Work of Christ*, p. 78.

¹⁹ John Rodgers, footnote p. 287.

²⁰ *ibid*, p. 35, summarizing Forsyth in *The Justification of God*, p. 32.

from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians 5:14-6:2, particularly verse 19, "...God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." Reconciliation was Paul's great word which described for him the total result of Christ's life-work in permanently changing the relation between collective humanity and God from one of hostility to one of confidence and peace.²³

For centuries, Forsyth thought, the idea of reconciliation had been almost totally suppressed by the idea of atonement. As the century began the tendency was toward the other extreme on both the philosophical and religious fronts. The leaders in their respective fields were Hegel and Ritschl, "much opposed to each other, yet at a certain point one"²⁴ in which they had emptied the reconciliation idea of atonement.

Philosophy, Forsyth wrote, is devoted to idea and process while religion, and the theologian with it, stands or falls with the idea of an act. Reconciliation, understood philosophically with Hegel, meant that mankind was being brought into tune with God, not in the sense of sharing communion but in having our thinking adjusted to that mighty rational process moving forward in the world. The Gospel says

²³ The Work of Christ, p. 53f.

²⁴ ibid, p. 66. Forsyth singled out these two men because "their thought has profoundly affected English thinking" philosophically and theologically.

instead that we are reconciled, brought into communion in "a mutual act which He begins."²⁵ In Hegel's scheme, Christ is but one of the greatest instances of adjustment to the mighty order. Accept his principle, which is "die to live", as rationally and spiritually as you can.²⁶ But this is another Christ, an attenuated Christ, not the eternal Son of God in whom God was reconciling the world to himself. The Christ of philosophy may be cosmic but he is diluted and cannot penetrate to the depth of our human need and personality or reach our guilt and hell.²⁷

Ritschl rejected the idea of original sin and inherited guilt in order to do justice to human responsibility.²⁸ He

²⁵ *ibid*, p. 74.

²⁶ Forsyth said if he were preaching a theology like this he would have said "This mighty process, of which you are all part, is unfolding itself to a grand closing result...You must accept the idea that the whole world is working out, through much suffering and by many roundabout ways, to a grand final consummation which will be a blessing for everybody, even though it might mean their individual extinction." (*ibid*, p. 73)

²⁷ *ibid*, p. 75. He added: "What a poor use of Christ, to accept his interpretation of life, as if he were a mere spiritual Goethe." (*ibid*, p.74) At the same time. it should be noted that Forsyth in The Justification of God, p. 153, sounds very like Hegel when he writes: "God so died as to be the death of death. He commands his own negation - even when it pierces as deep within Himself as His Son. He surmounts the last, the most limiting phase of finitude - evil." In a footnote he adds, "This line of thought is pursued with fine and deep suggestion in Hegel's *Religionsphilosophie*....Only some caution is required."

²⁸ John Rodgers refers to Ritschl's view as semi-Pelagian, p. 281. McDonald is even stronger, The Atonement, p. 216. The following paragraphs on Ritschl's theology are

neither denied or minimized the reality of sin, even referring to "the kingdom of sin" but it was seen as the failure to realize ethical values, a seeking of less than the ideal.²⁹ Sin was a social infection that threatened but did not really bind the freedom of humanity which remained essentially free to resist the evil influence of the world ("the kingdom of sin") and to adopt the higher values of the kingdom of God.

Humanity then, in Ritschl's view, was not under judgment, or the threat of God's wrath. God is essentially love. What is interpreted subjectively as guilt is, in effect, the result of a sense of estrangement caused by our sin. Christ's atoning work, if we may speak that way, was chiefly to dispel the error that God is the vengeful judge and to banish mankind's distrust of him.³⁰ Humanity was created for lordship. What connects humanity with God is not some inherent entity of its nature but the task given to it of subduing the world in righteousness. To be redeemed, therefore, is to be restored to the place of

taken primarily from material in The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation. Chapter 5. "The Doctrine of Sin", p. 327f.

²⁹ Pannenberg suggests that the ideal Ritschl had in mind was that of the life of the bourgeoisie of the later nineteenth century, an ideal Pannenberg calls "impressive". Jesus - God and Man, p.45. Niebuhr has a similar view in The Meaning of Revelation, p. 30f.

³⁰. Recent study had shown how wrong it had been to interpret the Old Testament sacrifices as designed to move God from wrath to grace. Ritschl, p. 474. Ritschl's atonement theory could be described as a creative restatement of the Abelardian view. Such is the judgment of Franks (p. 630) and Mueller (p. 174). Ritschl himself states a preference for Abelard (p. 371 and 473).

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was toward "mere ethicism" and that "the moral power needed to be made religious."³⁵ It was one thing to criticize orthodoxy "by the fierce light of the natural conscience" and another to have it judged by "the better knowledge of revelation".³⁶ In the first instance, the soteriological interest is modest; it was "concerned with making possible the humanness of life on earth. (It was) no longer concerned with the conquest of death and the theme of resurrection."³⁷

Against this view, Forsyth contended that in Christ, on the cross, God acted in and for the world to reconcile humanity within itself and with God. Reconciliation thus understood was necessary because "sin challenges (God's) whole place in the moral world. It puts him on trial as God. It is the one thing in the world that lies outside of reconciliation."³⁸

The cross is what it is by virtue of two moral elements which lie at its centre. The first idea is expressed by the words sacrifice and obedience, and the second by confession and

³⁵ The Work of Christ, p. 229.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ Pannenberg, Jesus, God and Man, p. 45. Forsyth saw the intentions of Ritschl to be "the reconciliation of man with his world, the establishment of his moral personality against nature that were mere apologetic." Positive Preaching, p. 251. Interestingly, Richard Niebuhr wrote that "it was defensiveness and the desire to prove the worth of Christ other than this might be proved or disproved by the fruits of Christian faith that tempted Ritschl to relinquish the standpoint of faith in God and to accept the point of view of pagan confidence in man." The Meaning of Revelation, p. 33.

³⁸ Positive Preaching, p. 251.

judgement.³⁹

In a phrase, obedience is the truth of sacrifice and this had come to light in regard to the Levitical praxis as well as in the New Testament. Leviticus XVIII, ii reads: "The life of the flesh is in the blood: and *I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life.*"⁴⁰ Two truths fundamental to a biblical understanding of sacrifice were to be discerned here. The first is that sacrifice is the result of God's grace not its cause. "It is given by God before it is given to Him. The real ground (therefore) of any atonement is not in God's wrath but in God's grace."⁴¹ The second truth elucidated was that the pleasing thing to God was not the death of the animal victim but the life so released in the blood that was poured out and offered to God. Moreover, the material sacrifice was but the outward symbol of the real inner sacrifice "which was the offerer's self-oblation."⁴² The sacrifice was the symbol of an obedient will, "an appropriation

³⁹ This arrangement of themes was suggested by Mozley. The Doctrine of the Atonement, p. 185.

⁴⁰ The italics are Forsyth's. Much work had been done on the subject of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament by exegetes and historians. Doubtless, Forsyth received ideas from many quarters but in view of his stated debt to Maurice we can assume that The Doctrine of Sacrifice was a major influence on his thought.

⁴¹ Cruciality of the Cross, p. 185.

⁴² *ibid*, p. 187. Forsyth repudiated the cult of self-sacrifice. See Cruciality of the Cross, p. 182.

of God's gift in the institution itself."⁴³ Thus the ritual act was valuable only as the organ of an ethical obedience.

Jesus Christ shed his blood, that is he made a total dedication and sacrifice of his will and "our will alone is our ownest own, the only dear thing we can and ought really to sacrifice."⁴⁴ Often the Church had laid exaggerated emphasis on the sufferings of Christ as something pleasing or satisfying to God. But suffering should be seen as a condition not as a factor in the sacrificial act. The atoning thing was not its amount or acuteness but its obedience, its sanctity.⁴⁵

Forsyth's debt to Maurice seems apparent at this point. Maurice had spoken of Christ as indeed bearing our penalty and yet we are prohibited from calling it penal, because his penalty bearing was permeated through and through by his gracious loving obedience. Christ indeed made satisfaction, yet we cannot equate the satisfaction with the bare fact of his death, since the death was an expression of obedience which made all the difference to it.⁴⁶

In relation to the work of Christ, there remained something

⁴³ *ibid*, p. 188. Sacrifice was denounced by the prophets precisely because it was made an *opus operatum*.

⁴⁴ *ibid*, p. 192.

⁴⁵ Work of Christ, p. 157. "Suffering is no acknowledgment of a broken law but pure sequel. It confesses only the power of the law not its righteousness." *ibid*, p. 125.

⁴⁶ This summary of F. D. Maurice from A. M. Ramsey. F. D. Maurice and the Conflicts of Modern Theology. Cambridge: University Press (1951), p. 62

deeper still than sacrifice, deeper because more ethical - the idea of judgement, a note that "runs through the whole genius of Israel's history."⁴⁷ Holiness and judgement are forever inseparable. In *The Work of Christ* the central chapter is entitled 'The Cross, The Great Confessional.' In a pivotal passage,⁴⁸ Forsyth affirmed that the essential work of Christ, while in a sense it was to confess human sin, was far more to confess God's holiness in his judgement on sin.⁴⁹ He wrote:

*he stood in the midst of human sin full of love to man, such love as enabled Him to identify Himself in the most profound, sympathetic way with the evil race; fuller still of love to the God whose name he was hallowing; and as with one mouth, as if the whole race confessed through Him, ... He lifted up His face unto God and said "Thou are holy in all Thy judgements, even in this judgement which turns not aside even from me, but strikes the sinful spot if even I stand on it."*⁵⁰

Forsyth continued:

⁴⁷ Cruciality of the Cross, p. 205

⁴⁸ This is the opinion of F. W. Dillistone, Christian Understanding of Atonement, p. 294.

⁴⁹ Forsyth had in mind the positions of McLeod Campbell and R. C. Moberly, two men who had made important contributions to "the renovation" of atonement doctrine. Both had objections to the penal substitutionary view of Protestant Orthodoxy. They saw Christ as the perfect penitent. Vicarious repentance and confession were substituted for a doctrine of vicarious punishment. The clue for this solution came rather unexpectedly from the New England philosopher-theologian Jonathan Edwards. (See Dillistone, pp. 289-295. Grenstead, p. 247-252.) Forsyth in turn insisted there is something in guilt which can only be expressed by the guilty thereby agreeing with one of the main criticisms by the Enlightenment of the Anselmic-Reformation view of atonement.

⁵⁰ Work of Christ, p. 150.

This is the taking of sin away, the acknowledgement of judgement as holy, wise and good and its conversion into blessing; the absorption and conversion of judgement into **confession and praise**, the removal of that guilt which stood between God and man's reconciliation, the robbing sin of its power to prevent communion with God.⁵¹

This was the result of Christ's work. From within the circle of sin's power he actively confessed God's holiness with his whole life⁵² and death. In him we have "the one right attitude of the world's conscience to God's. In Him humanity justifies God and praises Him in its nadir."⁵³ In so doing, the forgiveness of the world was accomplished by the judgement of the world.⁵⁴

Forsyth thus found a way beyond the futile conflict between penal substitution and exemplarism⁵⁵ toward the recovery of

⁵¹ Quoted by F. W. Dillistone, op.cit., p. 294.

⁵² Forsyth said that confession had to be made in life and action as the sin was done (Work of Christ, p. 153) and he lamented the fact that Protestant Orthodoxy had not put sufficient emphasis on the life of Christ.

⁵³ The Justification of God, p. 174.

⁵⁴ Positive Preaching, p. 300. In The Work of Christ (p. 77) Forsyth wrote "It is the reconciliation of the world as a cosmic whole." Salvation was racial, social and collective. McAfee Brown and others believe Forsyth was reacting against the overemphasis on religious individualism in his day. op. cit., p. 156.

⁵⁵ Hastings Rashdall's Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology (1915) is the best known example and a great influence on the development of an exemplarist or moral theory of the Atonement during the first two decades of this century. (Ramsey, From Gore to Temple, pp. 53 - 55) In 1892, Rashdall delivered a University Sermon at Oxford entitled "Abelard's Doctrine of the Atonement." It was a theory which he said, "meets the demands of an age

something similar to the "classic" doctrine later articulated in Aulen's *Christus Victor*. The world has been redeemed, he insisted, the last judgement is passed. Though the Christian must continue to be concerned about evil, he need never be in despair.

*The evil world will not win at last, because it failed to win at the only time it ever could. It is a vanquished world where men play their deviltries. Christ has overcome it. It can make tribulation, but desolation it can never make.*⁵⁶

Christ has shown us a humanity in perfect tune with the will of God, but in acting as our representative and head he did more than exhibit the grace of God at work; he actually set up the new Humanity.⁵⁷ Here we reach what A.M. Hunter calls Forsyth's "prospective view" of the atonement.⁵⁸ Our holiness was latent in his who alone could create it. Christ is the pledge not only of God's holy love to us but also of our response to it by a total change of will and life, the response of "the new man created unto holiness."⁵⁹ He wrote : "(Christ) comes bringing his sheaves with him. In presenting Himself He

shaped in the spirit of Darwinism and historical criticism." (Alister McGrath. "The Moral Theory of the Atonement: An Historical and Theological Critique." Scottish Journal of Theology Vol. 38, pp. 205-220). McGrath adds that the most celebrated critique on theological grounds is found in Forsyth's The Person and Place of Jesus Christ.

⁵⁶ The Justification of God, p. 223.

⁵⁷ The Work of Christ, p. 180f.

⁵⁸ A. M. Hunter, op. cit., p. 63.

⁵⁹ The Work of Christ, p. 210.

offers implicitly and proleptically the New Humanity His holy work creates."⁶⁰ Reconciliation meant not only that God was free to act differently after he had restored communion than before but man too is free to respond differently in reconciliation than outside of it.

Forsyth was addressing the faith and works dilemma that developed in Protestantism as a result of the quarrel with Rome.⁶¹ He uses the biblical terms 'justification' and 'sanctification'. In reality, in his view, the same holiness which satisfied God works to further the effect of Christ's work in us through our union with him in the Spirit.⁶² Humanity participates in this union by penitent faith and faith is a commitment of the whole self to God, not for belief only but for life. He wrote:

Christ is the condensation of history. You must go on to think of his summary reconciliation as being worked out to cover the whole of history and enter each soul by the Spirit. "Christ for us" is only intelligible as "Christ in

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p. 192. He adds against the liberal view, "Christ represents before God not a natural humanity that produces Him as its spiritual classic, but the new penitent Humanity that His influence creates."

⁶¹ Work of Christ, p. 217f.

⁶² *ibid*, p. 221. Maurice had written: it is, through men's union with Christ in the power of the Spirit, a replacing of the rule of Sin within them by the rule of Sacrifice....He comes to make us priests; to give us all the power of offering up spiritual sacrifice to God; of offering up ourselves. Ramsey, F. D. Maurice, p. 66, quoting Maurice. Forsyth speaks often of the Church as priestly but equally emphasizes its prophetic role. He is quick to add that it is not kingly. The reference is to the Protestant discussion regarding Christ's work as prophet, priest and king.

us" and we in Him. By uniting us to Himself and His resurrection in His spirit, He becomes the eternal guarantee of the historical consummation of all things some great day.⁶³

Believing in Christ cannot be done in an individualistic setting. Forsyth was what Mozley called "a High Church man."⁶⁴ It is quite true", he wrote, "every man must believe for himself, but no man can believe by himself...the Christian faith fades away if it is not nourished and built up in a community in a Church."⁶⁵ We must have a social gospel for the Church is God's instrument through which the fullness of the Gospel is shown.

Finally, Forsyth believed that God's saving activity would not cease until every trace of resistance to his grace was removed from the universe. There were two ways in which this might be possible - universal salvation or the annihilation of the finally impenitent. "He hesitates over the first

⁶³ *ibid*, p. 130. John Rodgers points out (footnote 94.3, p. 288) that Forsyth puts the Spirit in much closer connection to the cross than the Reformers. Moberley found the failure to do just that to be the chief criticism of McLeod Campbell. R.C. Moberley, Atonement and Personality. London: John Murray (1901), p. 402, 409.

⁶⁴ Mozley. The Doctrine of the Atonement, p. 188.

⁶⁵ Work of Christ, p. 172. McAfee Brown writes that the place to see the nature of Forsyth's churchmanship is in his treatment of the sacraments in The Church and the Sacraments. The second part of the book is as "exciting and relevant" today as anything he wrote. *op. cit.*, p. 162.

conclusion and is clearly unwilling to accept the second."⁶⁶ He preferred to leave the answer to eternity.

Forsyth's view then, is much more inclusive than the view of the old Protestant Orthodoxy precisely because he dealt with the cross in terms of reconciliation and not only in terms of atonement. This allowed him to give due weight to the triumphant and regenerative aspects of the cross as the Anselmic-Reformation tradition had not done. This emphasis was made possible because of his grasp of Christ as the universal head of humanity, an idea found in Maurice and in the German theologies of the same period.

The major weakness of Forsyth's treatment of atonement was his failure to relate incarnation and atonement. While it was one thing to put incarnation in its proper perspective from the point of view of the New Testament gospel, it was quite another to make the contrast so sharply between the "moral Act of Atonement" and the Incarnation, "an act largely metaphysical."⁶⁷ It is here perhaps that the criticism of his lack of system and clarity⁶⁸ is most evident. He had the kenosis idea at hand through which he might have made explicit

⁶⁶ Clifford Pitt, Church, ministry and sacraments: a critical evaluation of the thought of Peter Taylor Forsyth. Washington, DC: University Press of America. (1983) p. 265.

⁶⁷ The Justification of God, p. 91.

⁶⁸ A. M. Hunter, p. 24

the link between creation, incarnation and atonement.⁶⁹ He might well have followed Maurice who wrote that "Sacrifice is not contingent upon Sin; it is implicated in the very original of the universe."⁷⁰ Had Forsyth written a systematic theology of Atonement which put greater emphasis on his insight that grace is more primary than sin, he could have freed himself of the charge that he was "an old fashioned Evangelical."

⁶⁹ Ramsey wrote that Forsyth had gone further than any other theologian to relate kenotic doctrine to the fundamentals of theology. From Gore to Temple, p. 40

⁷⁰ Ramsey, F. D. Maurice, p. 65.

Conclusion

Forsyth's intended audience were those within the circle of faith, a faith which had become so hazy that many wished not to run the risk of defining its boundaries. He showed little fear, perceiving his role as preacher and writer to be one of correcting error. His work consequently bears the mark of polemic. He admitted as much but believed that "it is more true at this juncture to press the antithesis than to slur it."¹ To this end, he used "every tool at his command" - paradox, analogy, epigram and antithesis.

While he was guilty of one-sidedness and of a failure to appreciate the Fathers whom he found too speculative and too interested in the incarnation², by and large Forsyth was able to avoid the failure to be contemporary, which is the weakness of traditional orthodox theology, and the failure to maintain clear continuity, the weak spot in liberal theology. In the tradition of a "critical orthodoxy",³ he expressed his intent

¹ Person and Place of Jesus Christ, p. 193

² Pitt, op.cit., p. XXVIII. For this reason Forsyth is tempting to quote and difficult to paraphrase because something gets lost in the process.

³ Forsyth failed to appreciate that all the Patristic theological statements presupposed a soteriology. "Who is this God who is for us" was their question too.

⁴ The phrase is used by Brian Hebblethwaite in "The Propriety of the Doctrine of the Incarnation as a way of Interpreting Christ." Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol 33, pp. 201-222. Forsyth seems to belong with those whose theology he so defines.

as speaking "the old faith in a new tongue."⁵

Many of the authors consulted for this essay see Forsyth as the preacher's forerunner of Barth and Niebuhr. Reference has already been made to some similarity in viewpoint. All three of them were in agreement that

*there is no way of 'backing' or 'underpinning' the text of God's word with another text and giving it another background in hope of making it more easy to read and more comprehensible. God's word must interpret itself and wishes to do so.*⁶

Forsyth, though, is not open to the same charge of *fideism* as is Barth,⁷ for he does not share his viewpoint on the role of reason in revelation and undergirds his 'metaphysical' christology with a fundamental one (see Chapter 2).

In each of the specific areas of authority, christology and atonement, Forsyth, writing mainly before the war, before the emphasis in theology shifted from immanence to transcendence

⁵ Positive Preaching, p. 198.

⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, Love Alone New York: Herder (1969), p. 40f. This quote was used here to allow the point to be made that von Balthasar's thought among that of Catholic theologians today seems to stand closest to Forsyth's theology of the Cross.

⁷ Pannenberg accused Barth and the dialectical theologians of "trumping atheistic arguments by a radical belief in Revelation" which he called "the cheapest form of modernity." Kasper, The God of Jesus Christ. Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell. New York: Crossroad, p. 61. Clark Pinnock suggests though, that Barth's antipathy to classical apologetics can be viewed as other than *fideism*. "If Christianity is not true in this power-encounter sense, no amount of learned apologetics can accomplish anything." From How Karl Barth Changed My Mind, p. 151.

and from progress to crisis, did prove prophetic. There are few now who would argue with the statement that "the correlate of revelation is faith";⁸ or that Christ "is a truth capable of apprehension by faith, and when so apprehended there is the consciousness in the heart of the believer that he has been helped to that apprehension."⁹

There is widespread agreement now that the historical situation of unbelief demands a theology of the cross, which "alone is able to deal with the fearful question of God's justice in the world."¹⁰ The concept of divine self-giving with the resultant suffering is not only seen as the core of Christian faith but the uniqueness of Christianity and a more adequate response to the theodicy issue than atheism or theism. As Forsyth insisted, God by taking on the burden of the world's evil rendered himself morally credible.

Recent definitions of the relationship between anthropology and christology have defined anthropology as "incomplete christology" (Rahner). In Jesus, the potential given to humanity in creation was realized and the unity of God and man is not the antithesis of human freedom but the condition of its emergence. Donald Dawe points out, though, that the irony of the human potential, as presently encountered, is that it lies

⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, p. 52.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Claude Geffre, The Risk of Interpretation. Translated by David Smith. New York: Paulist Press, 1948, p. 139.

beyond our power to release it. "Caught in bondage to sin and death, the potential of humankind for love, community and meaning is glimpsed in moments of vision but this vision is mocked by everyday life."¹¹ It is here, he tells us, that the realism of neo-orthodox theology provides the needed caution.

The New Testament is by no means homogenous in its ideas but underneath its varied theological expressions lies a common experience of redemption. Ideas of atonement and sacrifice cannot be bypassed, as Martin Hengel and Frances Young, among others, have shown. F. W. Dillistone's book The Christian Understanding of Atonement is a recent attempt to explore and interpret atonement themes recognizing insights from a range of theories expressed by theologians from Schleiermacher to the present. One of the advantages, he sees, in approaching the problem of atonement using the classic theory is that the salvation brought by Christ is shown to be relevant to all forms of failure - "indeed to the total nexus of evil in the world."¹² Forsyth's work shows the continuing validity of a theology that results when a theologian of vital faith enters fully into the dialogue between contemporary culture and the

¹¹ Donald Dawe, Jesus: The Death and Resurrection of God, p. 115.

¹² Francis Young, Sacrifice and the Death of Christ. London: SCM Press, (1975) 1983, p. 90.

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¹¹ Donald DAWE, Jesus: The Death and Resurrection of God, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), p. 115.

¹² Frances YOUNG, Sacrifice and the Death of Christ. (London: SCM Press, [First edition, 1975] 1983), p.90.

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