Introduction: P.T. Forsyth in Focus

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Background

P.T. Forsyth was born in 1848 in Aberdeen, Scotland. Having studied classics at Aberdeen University, he was a student of Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89) for a semester at Göttingen in 1872. Ordained to the ministry in 1876, he served as a pastor in London, Manchester, and Cambridge, before taking an appointment as Principal of Hackney College, London, in 1901. Forsyth's facility in German enabled him to appropriate in German translation some important writings of Kierkegaard before their translation into English.

Forsyth's theological influence has been considerable, and it evidently includes Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, Oswald Chambers, J.K. Mozley, Daniel Jenkins, A.M. Hunter, and I. Howard Marshall. Robert McAfee Brown subtitles his 1952 book on Forsyth "Prophet for Today," thus indicating the distinctive character of his theological contribution. It typically has the passion of preaching God's holy grace, on the following ground: "The moral universe is not a windless vacuum. . . . It is too full of holy passion to leave room for absolutely impartial (and impossible) judgments, whether in man or God."[1] The "holy passion" of God is reflected in much of Forsyth's theological writing, and it contributes a kerygmatic component that distinguishes his writing from typical academic writing on theology.

Forsyth's early theological perspective, before 1893, was characterized by a kind of theological liberalism. He explains:

1. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, 408.

> Liberalism had its work to do. I felt its force. I took part in it. And it has won—I might say all along the line. . . . But the result of the general victory of religious liberalism has been disappointing on the whole. . . . The movement was too sentimental. It interpreted the heavenly Fatherhood by the earthly, instead of the earthly by the heavenly. . . . Its ethic was more altruistic than evangelical, more of effort than of faith. . . . Its general tendency was to canonize freedom instead of an authority that makes free. . . It is a spent movement.[2]

By 1893 Forsyth had departed from such liberalism, as shown in his seminal essay "Revelation and the Person of Christ" (Chapter 6, this volume; he gives credit to Wilhelm Herrmann of Marburg for the general theological and religious perspective of that essay). He came to see that the biblical good news, or gospel, of God's grace is at odds with the human-centered liberalism of his early ministry.

Gospel of Grace

The mature Forsyth's signature emphasis on the grace of God's holy love accounts for his disappointment with his earlier liberalism. He remarks on the place of divine grace in Christian faith and life:

> The ultimate idea of Christianity is neither faith, works, truth, nor love, but grace. Our Christian life is our due response to that. Our faith is simply its human echo; it is God's redeeming grace returning *through* man upon itself—the Holy Spirit returning to Him who gave it. According to the freedom of the grace revealed must be the freedom of the answering faith. If grace be absolutely free, so must faith be.[3]

2. Forsyth, "Our Need of a Positive Gospel," 462–3. Cited in Brown, *PT Forsyth: Prophet for Today*, 19.

3. Forsyth, *The Charter of the Church*, iv–v.

In this perspective, the center of the Christian message is the gracious God's free intervention in human life to elicit a free response of faith from humans. The divine coercion of a particular response to God would have no place in grace as an interpersonal reality that preserves responsible agency in humans.

Forsyth elaborates on the role of divine action in grace:

> By grace is not here meant either God's general benignity, or His particular kindness to our failure or pity for our pain. I mean His undeserved and unbought pardon and redemption of us in the face of our sin, in the face of the world-sin, under such moral conditions as are prescribed by His revelation of His holy love in Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And by the Gospel of this grace I would especially urge that there is meant not a statement, nor a doctrine, nor a scheme, on man's side; nor an offer, a promise, or a book, on God's side. It is an act and a power: it is God's act of redemption before it is man's message of it. It is an eternal, perennial act of God in Christ, repeating itself within each declaration of it.[4]

The powerful act of divine grace, then, includes God's "undeserved and unbought pardon and redemption" of humans on the basis of the divine holy love found in Jesus Christ. Such grace is thus a candidate for experience by humans, beyond any talk about it.

The human experience of the divine grace of holy love includes moral severity. Forsyth remarks:

> I venture to think John Newton's [hymn] "I asked the Lord that I might grow" one of the greatest and most realistic utterances of Christian experience. And it represents the course our sunny liberalism must take as it passes from a trout stream of the morning to the river of God which is full of deep water. Our young lions suffer hunger.[5]

4. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, 3.

5. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, 106.

Forsyth suggests, in accordance with the hymn, that humans need, and get, a serious moral challenge from the God of holy love, even if they expect divine approval of their goodness.

Newton's hymn identifies the following kind of moral severity from the hand of God:

> He [God] made me feel
> The hidden evils of my heart,
> And let the angry powers of hell
> Assault my soul in every part.
> Yea, more, with His own hand He seem'd
> Intent to aggravate my woe;
> Cross'd all the fair designs I schemed,
> Blasted my gourd, and laid me low.
> Lord, why is this?: I trembling cried,
> Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death?
> "Tis in this way," the Lord replied,
> "I answer prayer for grace and faith.
> These inward trials I employ
> From self and pride to set thee free;
> And break thy schemes of earthly joy
> That thou may'st seek thy all in Me."

The divine severity in moral experience is an aspect of divine judgment, but it seeks the redemption rather than the condemnation of humans. Specifically, it seeks the reconciliation of humans to God in holy love.

The grace of God is not just the grace of love; it is the grace of *holy* love as perfectly *righteous* love. Forsyth follows the apostle Paul in linking divine grace to divine righteousness, in particular, to a divine "gift of righteousness" and of reconciliation in Christ (Rom 5:10–17). In this Pauline perspective, God aims that "grace might reign *through righteousness* to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 5:21, RSV, italics added). This is not righteousness earned by humans from God, but righteousness offered to humans as an unearned gift from God, to be received by "the obedience of faith" in God (Rom 1:5). Such righteousness is central to the gift of grace as reconciliation with a perfectly righteous, holy God.

Forsyth describes his experience of grace in relation to ordinary love: "It also pleased God by the revelation of His holiness and grace, which the great theologians taught me to find in the Bible, to bring home to me my sin in a way that submerged all the [academic] school questions [about theology] in weight, urgency, and poignancy. I was turned from a Christian to a believer, from a lover of love to an object of grace."[6] In neglecting divine holy love, one easily can neglect the human need of divine grace by the standard of God's perfect righteousness. In that case, one also can miss the heart of the Pauline gospel of God's gracious redemption in Christ, and thus fail to become a self-conscious "object of grace." That would be to miss the point of the gospel of God in Christ.

The Pauline gospel, according to Forsyth, is a powerful fact of divine "redemptive action," and no matter of mere talk. He remarks:

> What [the earliest Christians] had was what they called the *kerygma*, with all its foolishness (1 Cor. 1:21, where we hear of the scandal of the cross, the absurdity of what was preached, not of preaching as an institution). *The gospel was an experienced fact, a free and living word long before it was a fixed and written word*. This is the manner of revelation. . . . The most precious thing in Christ for the church is not his life story but his deed of gospel. It is not his teaching, not his personal influence, but his redemption. *It is a theological gospel, but it is not authoritative as dogma, but as revelation, as redemptive action*. It is the gospel, not in an exact theology, but in a theology of glow, and power, and range. It is this gospel that has made the New Testament. What inspired the apostles was not Christ's legacy of teaching about God or grace; it was grace itself, as the large burden of his life.[7]

God in Christ does something powerful on behalf of humans for their reconciliation to God, and this redemptive action forms the center of the gospel. Forsyth speaks of the gospel as an "experi-

6. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, 193.

7. Forsyth, "The Evangelical Churches and the Higher Criticism," 30, 32.

enced fact" among humans. A key issue concerns *how* it is experienced.

Forsyth elaborates on the experienced gospel of grace:

> The gift to men in Christianity is the Gospel deed of God's grace in the shape of forgiveness, redemption, regeneration. *Im Anfang war die Tat*. But I should perhaps define terms. By "grace" is not here meant either God's general benignity, or His particular kindness to our failure or pity for our pain. I mean His undeserved and unbought pardon and redemption of us in the face of our sin, in the face of the world-sin, under such moral conditions as are prescribed by His revelation of His holy love in Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And by "the Gospel of this grace" I would especially urge that there is meant not a statement, nor a doctrine, nor a scheme, on man's side; nor an offer, a promise, or a book, on God's side. It is an act and a power: it is God's act of redemption before it is man's message of it. It is an eternal, perennial act of God in Christ, repeating itself within each declaration of it.[8]

The experience of the gospel, according to Forsyth, is in the experience of what it offers: forgiveness, redemption, and regeneration from God in Christ. Such experience is not mere talk, because it makes a powerful life-changing difference in and among humans who freely and obediently receive it in faith. Forsyth develops his position in connection with the role of Christ in conscience.

Christ, Conscience, and Authority

Forsyth portrays Christ as a living Savior, and no mere historical figure:

> We need a living Redeemer to plead for us in God, not against God, but against our accusing conscience, to be our Advocate with the Father against our self-condemnation. We need Him as the human conscience

8. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, 3.

> of God to come to our rescue against our conscience—and the more so as our conscience is quickened, socialised, exalted, and aggravated by solidarity with all the damnation of the world. Conscience makes us men and heroes. Yes, but it is conscience, too, that mocks our manhood with the memory of our sin, our neighbour's, and our kind's. If we were left alone with our conscience it would do more, on the whole, to overwhelm us than to redeem us or support us. We need some surety more sure and merciful and universal than our conscience. We need something more worthy than our natural moral manhood. We need to be made "more sure that we are Christ's than that we are men," more the servants of Christ's conscience than the heroes of our own, more penitents than stalwarts, more saints than ironsides. That is our need of a Redeemer, of a living human Redeemer, a moral owner and King.[9]

Christ, then, has authority as the human conscience of God, and thus has authority over any human conscience apart from Christ. Human conscience alone does not give us God's authority, because it does not include Christ, as the conscience of God, on its own.

Forsyth elaborates on the role of divine authority in human conscience:

> [Ultimate authority] is the authority of an absolute, holy Person. And in religion nothing is authoritative except in so far as it shares the authority of God Himself, and holds of the holy. The degree of its authority is that of its true sanctity. But the holy [God] is the absolute conscience. So this divine authority is exerted upon a conscience. But on a conscience which, as soon as it realises the holy, realises itself in the same act as sinful and lost. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." It is therefore, farther, the authority of a Saviour (for nothing damns like what saves). It is the authority of a Saviour Who effects a new creature, with

9. Forsyth, *God the Holy Father*, 93.

> the absolute right over it that creation always must give. It is the new creative action of the perfectly holy conscience of God on the helplessly guilty conscience of man. It is life from the dead.[10]

Forsyth thus emphasizes the contrast between God's perfectly holy moral character and the morally deficient character typical among humans. God's presence in human conscience can enable this contrast to prompt guilt in human conscience, thereby leading to repentance before God and a new human relationship with God.

Forsyth explains how an inquirer should proceed in relation to Christ. He discovered that his congregation could not simply "accept my verdict on points that came so near to their souls," but rather that "there were Christian matters which [people] must decide for themselves, trained or not"[11] He adds: "Religion without an experimental foundation in grace readily feels panic in the presence of criticism, and is apt to do wild and unjust things in its terror. The Churches are not, in the main, in the spiritual condition of [moral] certainty which enables them to be composed and fair to critical methods."[12] Forsyth links a certain kind of anti-religious scholarship to a spiritual condition, and he suggests a spiritual condition for facing such scholarship without shame.

Forsyth contends that "it is the wills of [humans], and not their views, that are the great obstacle to the Gospel, and the things most intractable."[13] He does not preach the Christian faith as an elaborate worldview or philosophy. Instead, he challenges people to place their faith in Christ crucified as central to their Christian experience. He thus seeks "to restore some sense not only of love's severity, but of the unsparing moral mordancy in the Cross and its judgment, which means salvation to the uttermost; to recreate an experience of redemption, both profound and poignant, which should enable [Christians] to deal reasonably, without extravagance and without panic, with the scholars' results as these

10. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, 58.

11. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, 282.

12. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, 283.

13. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, 288.

came in."[14] One important consideration is that the Christian gospel preceded the New Testament and does not depend on the inerrancy of the New Testament.

Forsyth affirms the value of theology for Christian life. "Well do I know," he writes, "how little a theology in itself can do, and how the mighty doer is the living faith. But I know well also that that faith is not the real thing unless it compels and loves an adequate theology; and if it cannot produce it, it dies."[15] Christian theology, in his perspective, requires articulating an individual or corporate Christian experience. Christ crucified inspires articulation, as a historical and moral fact that confronts us in our Christian experience. "The theologian," then, "is not a syllogist but an experient, an observer. He gives an account of faith, and especially of his own, as a creation by a historic fact and not the dialectic of a fertile idea."[16] Theology is not the ultimate Christian authority.

Christ crucified serves as Forsyth's ultimate authority in theology and ethics. He writes: "It is in the Forgiver and Redeemer of the Cross that the seat of moral, and so of all, authority for the renovated race must be found."[17] Rather than appealing to theology or religious tradition, Forsyth acknowledges the authority that confronts him in Christ crucified. He holds that we can experience this authority that both judges and welcomes. The experience of Christ crucified has fixed features, because we "cannot conceive a Christianity to hold the future without words like *grace*, *sin*, *judgment*, *repentance*, *incarnation*, *atonement*, *redemption*, *justification*, *sacrifice*, *faith*, and *eternal life*. No words of less volume than these can do justice to the meaning of God."[18] Philosophy, Forsyth contends, is no preamble to or prerequisite for Christian experience. Christian theology makes no "appeal to a prior and surer philosophy; but a philosophy comes later, and it must take due account of the facts, and especially of the revelationary and experienced fact

14. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, 283–84.
15. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, 287–88.
16. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, 93.
17. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, 404–5.
18. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, 288.

which theology expounds."[19] Divine revelation, then, takes priority over philosophy and even theology.

Forsyth puts Christ crucified first in Christian experience, leaving Christian theology and philosophy to articulate an experienced gospel of divine power. He adds: "Neither philosophy nor psychology is there in order to determine what we may know, but to find and set out the conditions of what we do know."[20] A Christian theology and philosophy, then, should explain Christ crucified in experience, rather than seeking perpetually to prepare the way for (knowledge of) him. The historic fact of Christ, Forsyth submits, is there prior to our interpretation of it—and interpret it we must.

One might ask whether Forsyth's approach is overly subjective, because it apparently invokes experience as our authority. Forsyth replies: "A real authority is indeed *within* experience, but it is not the authority *of* experience; it is an authority *for* experience, it is an authority experienced."[21] The fact of Christ intrudes in Christian moral experience, but this experience is not itself the source of the divine authority in Christ. Christ crucified, Forsyth remarks, is "a public, social, natural fact and history, with a claim and a truth independent of the soul's experience. Such experience is the medium but not the canon of religious truth."[22] Conscience is not itself our authority but is rather the context where we encounter authority. "The authority is nothing in us, but something in history. It is something given us. What is in us only recognises it."[23] An appeal to Christ crucified, then, is no subjective appeal, but is an appeal to a historic and moral fact that calls for our attention and interpretation.

As a *personal* authority, Christ crucified differs from a presupposition, axiom, community standard, or worldview. Unlike the latter phenomena, Christ crucified is a powerful *intentional* source of distinctive evidence and life. Forsyth describes the difference:

19. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, 106.
20. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, 101.
21. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, 83.
22. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, 66.
23. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, 454.

> We are not merely inserted into our foundation. It is more than a ground that will not give way; it is a source that will not fail or dry. We draw life from it, and it is a medium in which we live. It does not simply uphold us—it carries us, feeds us, slakes us. It is not only true for us, but mighty for us. It supports us as food does, and not simply as a floor does. It is better, of course, to be on rock than sand, but to be in soil is better still. We are rooted, and not only grounded, on our God.[24]

Forsyth thus offers advice that moves Christian inquiry beyond talk of presuppositions, community standards, and worldviews to a uniquely powerful *agent* in Christian moral experience. This agent is intentional in Christian conscience, and thus is purposive and capable of leading cooperative humans in communion with God. We should expect divine *lordship* in Christ to offer such moral *leading* in the experience of Christian conscience.[25]

The key experience in conscience differs from an experience of an ordinary fact. Forsyth explains:

> It is an event which is a divine act uttering and effecting the divine will. And as divine it is an act interpreted by itself, an act inseparable from its own account of itself through men it raised up for the purpose. We can have no faith in a mere fact, but only in a personal power working and reaching us through the fact. When we ask if a historic fact can become a present experience, so that the history do not starve the experience, nor the experience ignore the history, the first step to an answer is to become quite clear that the fact is not a mere occurrence but a salvation.[26]

Forsyth holds that God is at work not only in the historical cross of Christ, but also, on that historical basis, in the kerygmatic message stemming from it. God thus continues the redemptive work via personal intervention in human moral experience, courtesy of

24. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, 41.

25. See Romans 8:14; for elaboration of such a view, see Moser, *The God Relationship*.

26. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, 61.

God's Spirit, the Spirit of the risen Christ. Such intervention makes the kerygmatic message morally powerful in a way that mere talk or theory is not.

Purpose, Evil, and Judgment

Forsyth offers a broad perspective on human history, complete with a practical theodicy of divine self-justification. God has a definite purpose in human history and the cross of Christ figures at its center. Forsyth remarks:

> For the Bible as a whole, whether rising to the Cross or spreading from it, history is viewed under the category of judgment (though saving judgment) and not under that of progress. . . . The eschatologies are here in the true style of the Hebrew teleology of history. Its atmosphere was that of catastrophe and crisis rather than development. It thought of conversion, or regeneration, or restitution rather than of growth. The course of historic events is that of a series of judgments, each like an automatic release when the cup of iniquity was filled. But it was an ascending series, rising from purification to redemption, through good men to prophets and through prophets to God's Son (Matt. 21:37). It was a long crescendo of judgment, ending in a crisis of all the crises, a harvest of all the harvests which had closed one age and begun a new.[27]

The "crisis of all the crises" is the crucifixion of the Son of God, the execution of the blameless one sent from God for human redemption. The human motive in this crisis was to remove Jesus from human history, but God had, and has, a deeper purpose: to redeem humans from their alienation from God, that is, to reconcile them to God.

We cannot read God's purpose off of empirical history on our own. God must play a role even in our interpretation of redemptive history. Forsyth explains:

27. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, 178.

> We cannot frame some teleology of life, and then rise from it to a living God who is serviceable to it; but we must descend upon it from that God, from a God otherwise given, self-given, given, therefore, with absolute certainty, and not with a high probability. For He is the end, He does not simply cherish it, and He does not simply declare it, and He does not simply produce it. He *is* our peace. We began in Him in whom we end. We die in our nest. The light of our first sight came from Him who is the object of our last faith. Our great destiny is as certain as He is absolute and holy.[28]

Forsyth holds that we start with God as divinely self-given, or self-presented, to us in conscience, and not with some presupposition or theory about God. God *shows* divine holy love to us in conscience (see Romans 5:5), and this serves as a benchmark for our understanding of human history, including its crises of divine judgment.

Forsyth has in mind what he calls "moral certainty," and not the kind of logical certainty found in mathematics and logic. He remarks:

> That moral certainty of God's conquering holiness is the only foundation of any faith in man's unity, when the last pinch comes. It is not in himself but in his God as his Saviour. It is his unity in a Redeemer and a Redemption, a unity not natural but supernatural, not by evolutionary career but by mortal crisis, not in the first creation but the second, not in generation but regeneration.[29]

Forsyth thinks of moral certainty as grounded in divine holy love that leads to the regeneration of humans for the sake of communion with God. Such certainty does not depend on an argument for God's existence; instead, it depends on receiving God by faith in response to divine intervention in human experience. God thus becomes the ultimate guarantor for humans of divine reality and goodness.

28. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, 57.

29. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, 21.

We should not expect to have a full explanation of God's purposes in allowing evil in human history. As Forsyth remarks, much of the detail of God's working in history is "hidden from us."[30] Even so, we can find God "self-given" to us in the holy love of Christ in conscience. Forsyth adds:

> With this security we can sit loosely to many anomalies which seem to role God out of the course of thugs. Our faith did not arise from the order of the world; the world's convulsion, therefore, need not destroy it. Rather it rose from the sharpest crisis, the greatest war, the deadliest death, and the deepest grave the world ever knew—Christ's Cross. We see not yet all things brought under salvation but we see Jesus the Saviour of all. We taste Him. The Church is not there to exhibit progress and its optimism, but to reveal Christ and His regenerating power.[31]

Having Christ self-given to us does not entail having a complete explanation of God's purposes given to us. We have no reason to expect such an explanation from God. Even so, we can have a basis for the moral certainty of God's reality and goodness in the self-giving of Christ to us in our moral experience.

Forsyth has in mind the crucified grace in Christ which he takes to be God's purpose for the world, and not just for the Christian church. As he says, "the grace of God, with its method, is the ground plan of the universe."[32] This grace includes communion with God as an end, and not just a means. Forsyth thus offers prayer as an end, and not just a means, in God's purpose: "Prayer is often represented as the great means of the Christian life. But it is no mere means, it is the great end of that life."[33] He portrays it as bringing us into contact "with reality," the reality of God, analogous to the way that original research in science can bring one

30. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, 58.

31. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, 57.

32. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, 58.

33. Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer*, 16.

into contact with reality.[34] Forsyth's approach to prayer confirms the inherently interpersonal approach to theology he offers.

The church has a special role in witnessing to the redemptive purpose in grace, but the church is not the sole object of this purpose. God seeks a larger audience for the divine kingdom. The overarching aim of divine revelation, in Forsyth's language, is "the regeneration of the whole of Humanity."[35] The crucified Christ is thus the moral crisis of the human race, and not a tool just for the benefit of a subgroup of humans. Forsyth thus promotes a Christian view of humanity as "a family of nations to be loved, gospelled, and saved." On this basis, he contends that "the Word of the world's moral redemption by holy love must seize the conscience in the world's great heart."[36] Forsyth's passionate theology of the God of holy love aims at this passionate, and holy, end. This aim is part of the distinctive power of Forsyth's contribution to theology.

Chapter Summaries

In "The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought," Forsyth assumes that Christian interpretation of the cross must mature and progress from generation to generation. The *action* of Christ on the cross is final for religion in a way that *interpretations* cannot be, and Forsyth corrects a number of interpretations. These include: God as needing to be reconciled to humans, rather than the reverse; God's being beyond suffering, rather than the cross as costing God dearly; the cross as an equivalent substitutionary punishment rather than God's judgment upon collective human sin. God is not mollified by the cross of Christ, according to Forsyth, but graciously accepts the obedience—not the suffering—of Christ as due recognition of God's holiness in judgment upon the world.

Forsyth distinguishes the cross of Christ from both the parable of the prodigal son and the Sermon on the Mount. He contends that revelation is redemptive and not mere communication. The revelation of God in Christ is hidden in the act of redemption,

34. Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer*, 78.

35. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 102.

36. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 102–3.

in Christ crucified, not in the teaching or parables of Christ. This revelation as redemption involves God's judgment upon a sinful world, made manifest in Christ crucified, and recognized as such by the crucified Christ, and by us through him.

In "Immanence and Incarnation," Forsyth contrasts religion as evolutionary human progress and religion as historic decisive redemption. He regards this distinction as central to the greatest theological dispute (about the cross of Christ) facing the Christian church since the gnostic controversies of the second century. The dispute manifests the importance of Christ crucified in Forsyth's account of Christianity. The critical element for Christology is not the incarnation of Christ in the flesh but the incarnation of Christ crucified as Christ made sin for redemption. The key to the person of Christ, then, is his cross, not his birth. The revelation of God in Christ is a divine moral intervention in human history, not a high point in human moral progress, and our access to this revelation is moral. We experience the historic cross of Christ as the source and basis of our experienced forgiveness and peace with God. Forsyth thereby joins the subjective experience of redemption to an objective historic atonement in Christ crucified.

In "The Inner Life of Christ," Forsyth criticizes two approaches to history and Christian faith: faith as assent to knowledge (however meager that knowledge may be given the results of historical criticism) and Christian history as a myth that carries forward an ahistorical truth or impression. Forsyth acknowledges the cruciality of history for Christian faith, but he denies that history alone is a sure foundation. The results of historical inquiry are always in flux, subject to revision. Forsyth also resists reducing religion to an impression of the cross upon us, a third approach. It must be a real power to regenerate and recreate. Forsyth's proposed fourth way—meant to avoid orthodoxy, impressionism, and rationalism—involves treating faith's object as a living fact that acts upon us, with continuity between history and our present experience.

Forsyth describes the inner life of the historical Jesus using his actions, more than his words, as evidence. Jesus set his face toward his death in Jerusalem, for the sake of obeying his God and Father. We understand the inner life of Christ only as we grasp his march toward the cross, his motives and self-commitment to

that end. This march toward the cross involved a growing realization of what God would require of him. The historical obedience of Christ even to death is a creative power for us. We ought not to obscure it by the teaching of Christ alone or his impression upon us. Not all historic facts about Christ are equally available to us in our present moral experience. The cross and resurrection of Christ identify who Christ is for us. The key to his cross is his focus on God and God's demand of his life, not his nation or people. This perspective on the historical Jesus fits with Albert Schweitzer's portrait of Jesus as one who gradually comes to understand that God would require his life.

In "Forgiveness through Atonement the Essential of Evangelical Christianity," Forsyth articulates a basis for Christian faith in communion with Jesus Christ. Jesus is understood as a historic personality whose crucifixion changed the moral relation between God and the world in a final way. Rather than making the teaching of Jesus foundational, Forsyth holds that his atoning death must take priority in our interpretation. Forsyth refuses to let the Gospels overshadow the Pauline epistles, arguing that through Paul the risen Christ interprets his own life and death. To understand Christ today, we must experience the same forgiveness through atonement that Paul did—grounded in Christ's historic obedience even to death. Christ's death is not a martyr's death but rather one that reaches us today in our moral experience, prior to our understanding of it. Forsyth identifies a basis for belief in the deity of Christ. Such belief is an attempt to best explain an experienced redemption, not an intellectual prelude to redemption.

Forsyth exhorts his readers to interpret the cross of Christ, since Christ is for us what we interpret his cross to be. Forsyth laments a tendency to make the parable of the prodigal son the chief image of God in Christ, rather than the costly atonement of Christ's historic act. The holiness of God in judgment upon human sin is made manifest in Christ's obedience even to his death. To neglect the cross in our theology is to miss the holiness of God and replace it with a less demanding form of love of our own making. The cross reveals both the human moral predicament and the God of holy love who would solve it. To grasp these realities, we must turn our attention from what Christ suffered passively and toward Christ's active obedience—Christ with his face set

toward his death in Jerusalem. He thus acts toward Jerusalem, as he saw God's holy judgment upon the world, even as it fell upon himself. His passion ought to evoke our terror, not our sympathy. We should attend to God's holiness to understand God's love. Forsyth stakes the health and future of the Christian church at the point of interpreting an experienced yet objective atonement by God in Christ.

In "Faith, Metaphysics, and Incarnation," Forsyth explains how experienced redemption precedes belief in Christian doctrines that some might call "metaphysical." He notes that many in the churches either doubt or fear the collapse of orthodox doctrines about God, Christ, and the incarnation. In their traditional form, such doctrines reflect the metaphysic of a different age, and Forsyth holds that they are subject to re-articulation in modern language, namely moral language. Doctrines about the deity of Christ or the Trinity, for instance, are not products of speculation for its own sake. They are fallible attempts to articulate a collective and historic experience of salvation. The individual Christian need not understand or believe these doctrines, at least not beyond that which their own experience of grace warrants. Collective experience is anemic, however, if it cannot inspire a collective articulation of such doctrines.

Forsyth describes a process that we might call *experience seeking understanding*. Doctrines about Christ or the Trinity may seem incoherent or paradoxical because they are attempts to articulate a moral experience of redemption. Naturally, such attempts will vary in their clarity. Forsyth describes a kenotic christology of preexistence along these lines, appealing to an experience of redemption as the basis for belief in Christ as divine. He denies that such beliefs are required for redemption, or that they are always warranted at the beginning of Christian life. Rather, they follow in due course as one reflects upon one's own redemptive experience and that of the collective church. Likewise, belief in miracles is not preliminary to faith. Miracles can only be received by faith. The same is true of knowledge of the incarnation of God in Christ. The doctrine of justification is first in the order of Christian experience, with incarnation subsequent, even though incarnation is conceptually prior as an explanation of an experienced justifica-

tion. Christology follows an experienced redemption, rather than preceding it.

In "Revelation and the Person of Christ," Forsyth construes the revelation upon which Christianity depends as a matter of the will, rather than of just thought or truths. Such revelation comes by way of a historic person and his will as revealed by his actions. Specifically, revelation is redemption, and it cannot be suitably received apart from the experience of being redeemed. Revelation is not crystalized into a book or church, nor is it the evolving progress of human moral intuition. It is something final yet elusive, hidden in Christ crucified. Forsyth distinguishes Christ from other people in his relation to God. With his face set toward his death in Jerusalem, Jesus reveals the will of God in a final way in virtue of his unique obedience to that will.

Forsyth explores the topic of the deity of Christ. He holds that high Christology ought to be a religious conclusion, based on an experienced redemption, and not a premise. Those who receive the revelation of God in Christ as redemption will exalt Christ in their thinking. The historic Christ becomes present in the experience of the redeemed, as the will of God in action. Faith is not just assent to information but rather the obedient response of the redeemed to what God reveals in Christ. Forsyth elaborates upon Melanchthon's "To know Christ is the know his benefits." The key to the person of Christ is the action of Christ, specifically his cross, as the site of final revelation and the source of confidence for all future ages. It is a revelation that we encounter as an experience of God's holy love by sinful people, a revelation that both condemns sin and restores us to fellowship with a holy God.

In "The Disappointment of the Cross," Forsyth explores the process in which it dawned upon Jesus, and then upon his disciples, that God required of him his own life. Forsyth sketches the early optimism of the disciples as they realize that Jesus is their Messiah. Deep gloom follows, however, when Jesus insists upon the cross. Forsyth invites his readers to imagine themselves in a similar position, prosperous or at least hopeful, with every reason to expect a bright and blessed future. He then describes a process whereby a divine imperative emerges, perhaps gradually over time, and threatens to undermine everything. He narrows the image to that of a preacher, whose former success and popularity

face shipwreck if he obeys a costly conviction emerging in conscience.

Forsyth adds to his image some details about the inconvenient conviction. The preacher must preach judgment where before he preached only mercy. He must speak of the weight of sin, the holiness of God, and the cross of Christ as central. The preacher begins to preach along these lines, grasping the severity of holy love but leaving the congregation bewildered. His deacons and friends try to restore him to his former optimism, warning him about squandering his pulpit career and influence for the kingdom. Forsyth's imagined case may be autobiographical, describing his own theological conversion and its personal cost. In any case, this essay explores the costly burden of divine conviction from the perspective of those who, like the crucified Christ, find themselves driven by the Spirit of God.

In "Christ and the Christian Principle," Forsyth contrasts a religion dependent upon the historical person of Jesus with one dependent upon his enduring insights as encapsulated in a Christian principle. Forsyth addresses Lessing's famous gap between history and eternal religious truth, responding that the fact of Christ is a source of power, and not mere knowledge or belief. History is not accidental but sacramental: it is the means to encounter the eternal. Christ does not bring us the Christian principle in a way that permits us to receive the principle and finally dispense with Christ. It is the enduring authority of Christ as a historical personality that concerns Forsyth, and not simply Christ as a messenger surpassed by his message.

Christians commune with a living Christ rather than an eternal idea. What God offers in Christ is moral communion with the holy one, not absorption into the divine ideal. Moral reality is fundamental reality, according to Forsyth, and this is made manifest through persons in history rather than in abstract. Forsyth connects preoccupation with a principle above a person to a rationalism that misunderstands revelation as a statement of truth. Forsyth's chief concern is that we not lose the finality of Christ by distilling his person to a principle, capable of further evolution or clearer manifestation through some future individual. Rather, the person of Jesus Christ manifests, with finality, that God is holy

love. This revelation is inextricable from the person who brings it, Jesus Christ.

In "Christ's Person and His Cross," Forsyth addresses the priority of personality for religion. Personality is manifest in moral action, and the person of Christ is expressed through the cross of Christ. Forsyth traces the meaning of the atonement from Anselm to Ritschl, commenting on the turn from Christ's objective action upon God to his subjective impression upon humans. Forsyth makes his own argument for atonement grounded in God's nature as holy love, neither ignoring judgment as with liberalism nor dividing judgment and love as with some versions of orthodoxy.

Forsyth describes action as that which manifests personality, arguing that Christ the person is known by his actions, and most of all his climactic action leading to the cross. The action of Christ is key to Forsyth's understanding of the cross as a revelation of God's power to redeem and not just of divine sympathy. The cross of Christ is the sacrament of his person, the true site of his real presence being an act. Forsyth interprets the life of Christ in terms of his death, so that the cross was the vocation of Jesus, and not the defeat of his true ministry.

In "The Christianity of Christ and Christ our Christianity," Forsyth addresses those who put the Gospels ahead of the epistles in their interpretation of Christ, who emphasize his teaching and character ahead of his cross. Against this tendency, Forsyth contrasts Jesus with Socrates, observing that his actions dwarf his words and that our written Gospels of his career are secondary effects of the gospel he wrought in deed and power. The person of Jesus is unique in a way that his teaching is not. His finality lies in God, and not in his teachings. The God who is *our* Father was uniquely *his* Father. He died for his place as God's appointed king, the unique Son of Israel's God, not for his Sermon on the Mount or his teaching about the kingdom of God.

Forsyth draws upon the apocalyptic self-understanding of Jesus, stressing his position as rightful judge, who sometimes teaches to harden hearers for purposes other than education and enlightenment. Jesus flung himself upon the wheel of history, to use Schweitzer's phrase, to become God's appointed king forever. He founded his kingdom through the cross. Forsyth makes his case with biblical criticism in view, arguing that the records retain

this Christ in action even if various phrases invite dispute. He appeals to the immediate impact of Jesus on his followers and the early church, who sometimes exalted him beyond the limits of their monotheism.

In "Regeneration, Creation, and Miracle I," the first half of a two-part essay, Forsyth discusses new creation through Christ crucified. He calls for theology to return to the saving facts that yielded other alleged authorities, like the Bible and the church. Theology articulates a power hidden in Christ crucified, not directly manifest in various records or traditions about him. This power is the moral power of Christ's historic obedience unto death, not his passive suffering. It is the power of an irreducibly moral new creation, a new humanity with Christ for its conscience that does justice to the holiness of God. The moral must guide the metaphysical in such a theology. Forsyth interprets God's freedom to create in terms of new creation, with creation being an action morally necessary to a God of holy love acting in moral freedom. Love moves God to create, and holy love moves God to create the new creation. The free soul is the true object of God's creative work, with nature the workshop.

In "Regeneration, Creation, and Miracle II," Forsyth defends a theology of the freedom of God, guided by a moral necessity intrinsic to God's own nature. God does not grow in holiness through creating and creation. Rather, God creates as a result of God's holy love. God is redeemer first and creator second, creator because redeemer. The holy love that we encounter in redemption is a love that creates. Forsyth compares creation from chaos to new creation from crisis. New creation makes prior creation inevitable, yet creation does not yield new creation via historical evolution or progress. *God* creates the redeemed conscience, with the cosmos as its arena.

Forsyth identifies the human will, rather than human nature, as the object of new creation. God's action on the human will is a gift of divine power. Unlike natural birth, new birth is an experience of an imperative. It is not a transfusion of substance or some other transformation external to the conscience of the reborn. We encounter God as a will to forgive, a holy love that empowers and transforms. This will seeks and requires our cooperation and trust. Revelation is not progressive growth in knowledge but a cri-

sis of the will that provokes human decision. The Spirit of God is a spirit of conversion, not human evolution. Miracle finds ultimate expression in conversion. Forsyth describes how the historic risen Jesus is present today, not merely via posthumous influence but in power. We relate to Christ via our response to his act of world-redeeming obedience, as a fellowship of wills. We relate to Christ not just as one individual to another but in an act of faith toward the climactic act that founded a new humanity.

In "Veracity, Reality, and Regeneration," Forsyth writes about preaching and the formation of preachers. Preachers must strive to find a message, and the positive gospel is the pearl of great price for them. This pearl is hidden in God's action in history through Christ crucified. Preachers must grasp and preach new creation in power rather than human evolutionary progress. They must strive to think their gospel through to a finish and test for themselves whether their message is reality or mere symbol. The final reality is moral divine action, and preachers must build from God's action in Christ. This final reality guides Christian understanding of all other reality, as we interpret creation in the light of new creation. The power manifest in Christ and his people is the Spirit of new creation, the Holy Spirit. Christ makes no mere impression upon us, but instead is the soul's new creator and the creator of a redeemed humanity.

In "The Conversion of the Good," Forsyth describes how Jesus and John strove to address their nation, beyond individual Israelites. They called upon Israel's best to repent, including its leaders and representatives. Theirs was a call for national repentance, from the least to the greatest, and the collective fate of Israel hung upon a collective response. God's counterpart in Israel was the nation, not the individual soul. The religious leaders would respond for the people, and their response would count as Israel's response, for better or for worse. Jesus called for repentance as deep as the zeal of the zealous, daring his nation to scorn its prior hopes and embrace his kingdom of righteousness. Jesus preached repentance and not inheritance, Israel at God's disposal and not God at Israel's disposal. Jesus judged the good in their goodness and was most harsh with those closest to his own cause. He was no partisan, and thus he spoke without partiality. The collective life of Israel was at stake, and he strove to sway his nation.

In a controversial passage, Forsyth attributes the first century destruction of Jerusalem to the providence of the risen Christ. He interprets it as the direct consequence of Christ's crucifixion by Israel's leaders. While the historical Jesus and biblical authors might have interpreted this subsequent disaster that way—prophetic warnings and the pre-exilic destruction of Jerusalem are closely related in scripture—it is debatable whether we should form the same conclusions today. Forsyth seeks to interpret world crises theologically, both ancient and current, using a notion of national perdition. He writes during the First World War and seeks to interpret it as a war between Christian nations. He specifically interprets Germany as a nation facing international judgment on account of international sins.

In "The Cross of Christ as the Moral Principle of Society," Forsyth writes, again in the context of the First World War, that the Christian church must offer society its moral knowledge of the human predicament: guilt before a holy God and redemption by God's historic action in Christ. Forsyth magnifies the cross as humanity's "moral Armageddon," dwarfing all war before and since. For the church to speak during a present historic calamity, it must grasp and weigh the calamity of the cross and the power at work through it. The genius of the church, when grasped, is the moral knowledge of the cross. Society needs this knowledge, especially in times of crisis.

Forsyth discusses society as a quasi-personality, more than the pooling of individual wills but rather as a collective will formed by moral factors and pressures. The state is a fundamentally moral entity that exists, like the individual, in the presence of a holy God. The cross provokes the collective will of the state, and not just the individual, and it ought to shape the state through the collective witness of the church. The cross does not provide an idea, ideal, or hero upon which to form a society. It rather provides Jesus Christ in action, a moral personality unveiling of the will of a God as holy love.

In "Faith and Mind," Forsyth distinguishes primary or positive theology from secondary or scientific theology. Primary theology is the attempt to articulate an experienced revelation. Secondary theology is the detailed study and elaboration of Christian doctrines to an extent that often exceeds experience. Forsyth warns

against both a pietism that finds primary theology burdensome and a rationalism that leaves it behind. The church must state its gospel, and primary theology is a corporate necessity even though some individuals cannot articulate it. Primary theology is a moral theology, since it articulates the moral revelation of the cross. It is inseparable from the religion it describes.

Forsyth discusses creeds as crucial articulations of the church's faith in the context of the intellectual disputes that provoked them. Creeds are never final because the faith they describe eludes final description and the language of a creed is shaped by the language of the controversies that provoke it. New times and places, with new controversies, call forth new creeds to describe the same living faith. Creeds carry moral power, not intellectual power, and strive in the arena of competing wills rather than competing ideas.

In "Intellectualism and Faith," Forsyth describes the sharp dialectic of Jesus and of Paul, on display in the New Testament, and he dispenses with the impulse to treat Christian writing as necessarily dull, simple, or straightforward. Even so, Forsyth suggests that the Christian intellect weighs moral reality more than general truths or concepts. Christians should then study to prepare for moral action in the world rather than merely intellectual debate. The Christian intellect should strive to interpret the human moral situation before a holy God, for the sake of obedient action. Theology strives to weigh the human tragedy and to know the power of God amidst it.

Forsyth depicts the move to return to the simple teaching of Jesus as a form of intellectualism and orthodoxy. Christ brings God in action, his face set toward his death in Jerusalem, and not a teaching or message alone. Christ brings power rather than mere information. Any theology that exalts Jesus for the sake of information is intellectualist, whether that information be straightforward aphorisms or sophisticated theological systems. An intellectualism of the Sermon on the Mount is no different from an intellectualism of the Athanasian Creed. The antidote to both is attention to the cross, the historic Christ in action. The Christian mind weighs the finality of the cross, and not just the eternality of certain truths, teachings, or systems.

In "The Moralization of Religion," Forsyth describes Christianity as a response to an irreducibly moral revelation of holy love.

It is fundamentally moral and best understood in moral terms. Writing during the First World War, Forsyth criticizes the notion that sacrifice is the true measure of moral power. Both sides sacrifice, yet German sacrifice, Forsyth proposes, serves a great international evil. Sacrifice, then, is no sound basis for religion. To obey, Forsyth reiterates, is better than to sacrifice. Christ died for holy love, for the sake of righteousness, and not for love alone. We cannot understand Christ's sacrifice apart from his obedience for the sake of God's holy name.

Forsyth questions whether the spirit of sacrifice manifest by many during the war was sufficient to face the problems of the subsequent peace. Christ died for the kingdom of God, a kingdom of righteousness. Forsyth argues that religion today must grasp anew the kingdom of God as collective and international righteousness manifest in the present. We return to the cross as the climactic revelation of the power of God at work in history, up to the present.

In "Unity and Theology: A Liberal Evangelicalism the True Catholicism," Forsyth proposes that Christian unity comes by way of a shared positive theology (the primary theology discussed above), and not by casting creeds aside for the sake of unity. Forsyth qualifies appeals to religious experience (in a significant passage given his regular appeal to experience elsewhere). That which unites is the *object* of Christian experience, not the religious experience itself. The spirit of Christian unity is the shared spirit of the cross, not a shared spirit of Pentecost. New creation emerges in experience, but it is the new creation and not the experience itself that unifies those who share in it. There can be no meaningful unity apart from a shared new creation that demands shared description.

Forsyth looks to the power behind a primary theology as the source of unity. He holds that such a power must be one that addresses the actual moral evil in the present world. Unity involves a collective theology of a shared salvation, not merely the uniformity of the theologies of individuals. Different churches hold different truths in trust. They must not abandon their convictions for the sake of unity. Rather, ecumenism requires the theological work of weighing and adjusting the convictions that each party brings by the standard of the moral revelation of the cross.

In "Religion Public and Private," Forsyth struggles with the First World War as a war within Protestant Christendom. Why, he wonders, has the Christian revelation entrusted to both combatants failed to prevent this calamity? What accounts for the futility of the Protestant gospel in international affairs? Forsyth suggests that Christian worship must extend to great public actions and works, not merely to individual religion. The Christ of Christianity is the Christ of the cross, Christ in action. Jesus was driven by concern for the kingdom of God, a kingdom of righteousness, and Christians should likewise strive for the same in the public realm. Where Christianity remains private, the public state need not act for the sake of righteousness. A nation of individual Christian piety will then become a force for evil on the world stage.

The God of the cross has power to heal the nations. The Christian gospel is a revelation of the righteousness of God, and this includes a public and international righteousness. There are many who preach to local congregations, but few who preach with prophetic power to ruling state authorities, provoking the national conscience. Christ provoked his nation through its leaders, rather than through the crowd alone. The gospel speaks to public affairs and must not be limited to private piety.