

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_evangelical\\_quarterly.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php)

## P. T. FORSYTH ON THE ATONEMENT

by SAMUEL J. MIKOLASKI

**D**R. MIKOLASKI concludes his series of essays on Dale, Denney and Forsyth with a study of Forsyth's treatment of the doctrine of the Atonement.

**P.** T. FORSYTH has been the bane of many theological readers because his literary style is cryptic and aphoristic. His books defy the casual student and demand slow, pondering reading, but the persisting reader will be rewarded richly. As a theologian Forsyth thinks and writes in depth; his books and essays stretch the mind and bless the spirit. Sometimes he strove for days to discover or invent ways of expressing an idea pungently. In this paper I will attempt an exposition of his doctrine of the work of Christ in some detail. My aim will not be to engage other writers comparatively whether of that time or of this; nevertheless, I hope this analysis will aid the reader when making a comparison or contrast, especially with the neo-orthodox theology of which Forsyth is sometimes called, inaccurately, the British precursor.

Along with Denney, Forsyth said that the manner in which the Atonement involves the totality of human experience and the destiny of the world in relation to both the love and holiness of God precludes forever the bifurcation of fact from theory, religion from theology, history from eternity. The Atonement has much to do with religious experience but it is also a theological fact; nowhere, he said, does religion become so quickly theological as when one deals with the Work of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Consistently with this he said that while we distinguish the objective and subjective elements, both are true and necessary. Nothing so subjective as the Christian consciousness can be the test of the truth; so then, our forgiveness has as its objective ground the Death of Christ. The Cross is the divine act of redemption before it is man's message of it. What Christ does *for* us is the ground of any work He does *in* us.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Work of Christ*, pp. xxx, 43; *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, pp. 368-369; *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, p. 61, and on p. 70 he wrote, "The fact of the Crucifixion does not depend on a theory, but a fact like the atonement can be separated from theory of some kind only by a suffusion of sentiment on the brain. . . ."

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Father and the Living Christ*, pp. 50, 64-65; *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, pp. 6, 178, 318. In *The Christian Ethic of War*, p.v, he says, "By a real atonement I mean one not *shown* but *done* on the Cross, as the consummation of Christ's holy personality and its work."

## I. SIN AND ITS JUDGMENT

The theological evasion of the reality of evil and sin are due in part to forms of evolutionary science and philosophy where they were viewed simply as immaturity or ignorance. Nothing loomed so important to Forsyth as the need for renewal of the sense of sin both individually and corporately. He saw the chief problem of the race as a moral one: how can sinful man stand in the face of God's holiness?<sup>3</sup>

All the great tragedy of the world turns upon its guilt. Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Goethe, Ibsen, all tell it you. The solution of the world, therefore, is what destroys its guilt. And nothing can destroy guilt but the very holiness that makes guilt guilt . . .<sup>4</sup>

Sin and guilt are measured not in abstraction but against the righteousness of the holy God; therefore, guilt is incurred because sin is personal defiance of the personal God. A characteristic aphorism epitomizes Forsythian theology: "Sin is action, and action is its cure."<sup>5</sup> In Augustinian terms Forsyth put the root of sin in the perverse will involving the entire personality, though such volitions may not own us entirely:

It was I who, at my will's centre, did that thing. It was my will and self that was put into it. My act was not the freak of some point on my circumference. It came from my centre. It was my unitary, indivisible self that was involved and is infected.<sup>6</sup>

It will be useful to interject here the point that the grace of God actively impinges on the moral life of a man so that the divine action counteracts the debilitating effects of sin's action; "it is the new-creative action of the perfectly holy conscience of God on the helplessly guilty conscience of man."<sup>7</sup> From the same context it is clear that in the unbeliever the willing against God is the dominant tendency of life where each act, involving the whole

<sup>3</sup> *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, p. 52; *The Cruciality of the Cross*, pp. 21-22; *The Principle of Authority*, pp. 181-182.

<sup>4</sup> *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 333. His indictment of the attempt to reduce the moral to the natural may be seen in the following: "To realize the deep distinction between law and norm, between psychology and our conscience, between the makeup of our natural constitution and the state of our moral will, between our substance and our sanctions, to realize this is essential to a right start in the matter" (*The Principle of Authority*, p. 5).

<sup>5</sup> *The Church and the Sacraments*, p. 190. Note *Mission In State and Church*, p. 56: "Sin, you note, is not measured by a law, or a nation, or a society of any kind, but by a Person. The righteousness of God was not in a requirement, system, book, or Church, but in a Person, and sin is defined by relation to Him."

<sup>6</sup> *Christian Perfection*, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *The Principle of Authority*, p. 58.

personality, gradually habituates the life in its sinning. Conversely, the believer has Christ as the new centre of life so that, while not yet perfect, by his growth in grace he gains increasing power over sin. Further, sin extends its malignant power universally: there is both the solidaric reality of the race's involvement in sin and the infection by evil of the world order, it being also a part of the objective of God's act in the Cross:

As man grows the sin grows. The kingdom of evil grows with the kingdom of good. Sin, self, exploits every stage in the progress of society . . . the social organism has a common and organic sin. And a collective sin must have a central treatment.<sup>8</sup>

The correlative of sin is its judgment by God viewed in such terms as wrath, hell, curse and judgment not only against the sin but also upon the soul of the sinner. Judgment is the personal reaction of God against sin and not the mechanical product of a vast cosmic machine; so then, the penal consequences of sin borne by Christ were attached to sin by God.<sup>9</sup> Sensitive to the allegation that an antagonism is thus posited in the being of God, Forsyth claims the crux of the question for his advantage: first, the adjustment must be viewed as between persons, though morally construed; and second, love cannot be more real than wrath because God can be angry only with those He loves. His well-known sentence is: "if He cares enough for us to be angry He cares enough to redeem."<sup>10</sup> Grace and judgment go together; the fruit of grace came not over but through judgment. To this the properly enlightened Christian conscience must, I think, give its assent.

## II. TRINITY, INCARNATION, AND ATONEMENT

A large segment of Forsyth's writings is devoted to the Incarnation to show, contrary to much prevailing opinion, that by it there was the real intrusion of God in Jesus Christ into history. While he does not say much on the doctrine of the Trinity he is keenly aware of the implications of Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement doctrines for one another. And, he maintains that the crux of the matter is to grasp first what God has done in the

<sup>8</sup> *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> *The Holy Father and the Living Christ*, p. 22; *Faith and Criticism*, p. 141; *The Work of Christ*, p. 240; *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, p. 85.

<sup>10</sup> *Holy Christian Empire*, p. 11; note: *The Justification of God*, pp. 179-180, "the grace is the judgment; that grace, acting by way of Atonement, has in its very nature a moral element, which does not leave the indifferent immune, but becomes their judgment. Judgment is the negative side of love's positive righteousness". Cf. also *The Work of Christ*, p. 243; *Missions in State and Church*, p. 72.

Cross. Only as God could Jesus Christ be to us and do for us what He in fact is and does: "His presence is God's presence, His action on us God's action, His forgiveness of us God's forgiveness."<sup>11</sup> An appeal therefore for return to the historical Jesus can mean only a return to the Gospel and the Gospel has to do with both the person and the work of Christ. We are brought to understand the Incarnation by the Cross, not the cradle, he said;<sup>12</sup> and this was as true for the Apostles as it is for us. Whilst reacting against the Hegelianizing of Christology Forsyth knew the value of process and growth concepts: "not even God could create a character full blown".<sup>13</sup> But the Incarnation is not the self-realization of the divine spirit in the world, but the personal coming by God into history in the life of Jesus Christ so that there is a qualitative difference between His life and ours which is best seen in His purpose of life: that is, to die upon the Cross, thereby redeeming the world in the act which can be called only God's self-justification.<sup>14</sup>

Philosophies of immanence substitute one abstract principle for another, he argued, whereas only the moral and personal reality can satisfy the demands of conscience and spiritual experience. We can discover principles, but only persons can act upon one another. Revelation is divine act; God *came* into history. In Jesus Christ the eternal and the historical meet; He is not God's plenitopentary, as Arius said, but God's real presence.<sup>15</sup> Forsyth believed that the rejection by modern thought of static substance in favour of personality, social concepts, and moral action augured well for the future statements of the doctrine of the Trinity. Christ's relation to the Father is something other than modal; He is unique in his personal identity with God.<sup>16</sup> This is essential to the Atonement, where the whole Godhead is involved because it is the act of God. Christ acts not as the divine instrument but as

<sup>11</sup> *Faith and Criticism*, p. 119; cf. pp. 130, 134.

<sup>12</sup> *The Taste of Death and the Life of Grace*, p. 116.

<sup>13</sup> *Religion in Recent Art*, p. 221.

<sup>14</sup> *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, pp. 261-292; *The Justification of God*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>15</sup> *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, p. 83. In *London Theological Studies* he said, "For a world of men a man is the only fitting form of revelation. And the only question, then, is whether a man is a possible form of revelation for God: whether the great last Reality is so moral in His nature as to exist *in nuce* in a perfect moral manhood" (p. 156).

<sup>16</sup> *Theology in Church and State*, pp. 157-159, 184; *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, pp. 251-252.

God present reconciling. Only Trinitarian doctrine can give an adequate accounting of the evidence for the Atonement:

The Father who *spoke* by his prophets must *come* to save in the Son and must occupy in the Spirit. He offers, gives, Himself in the Son and conveys Himself in the Spirit. . . . It is all one holy love and grace, in this eternal three-fold action, both within God and upon man. Only on this Trinitarian conception of God can we think of such a salvation as ours.<sup>17</sup>

### III. APPROACHES TO THE DOCTRINE

Forsyth said that the progress of the Spirit in the development of the doctrine of the Atonement is most clearly marked by the ethicizing of it. How Forsyth himself stated this theologically is complex. Because of his aphoristic style it can be useful if at this stage of exposition some account is given of the ways in which to him the doctrine is hedged about and of the essential ideas of it. He said that:

1. We must go beyond the mere cataloguing of texts; rather, we should begin with the actual moral situations and the revelation of redemption.<sup>18</sup>

2. We have outgrown the idea that God has to be reconciled by a means exterior to himself. The satisfaction of Christ flowed from the grace of God; it did not procure it.<sup>19</sup>

3. Christ did not deflect the divine anger in the sense that its flash fell on Him while we had neither part nor lot in the matter.<sup>20</sup>

4. Nothing so subjective as the Christian consciousness can be the test of truth here; our forgiveness must have an objective ground in the Death of Christ construed as more than the source of a new type of experience.<sup>21</sup>

5. The Atonement is not the mollification of God nor an inducement offered by man or a third party; what was historically offered to God was eternally offered by God.<sup>22</sup>

6. We must abandon the idea that the Atonement cost the Father nothing, because the Son could not suffer without the Father suffering. Forgiveness costs.<sup>23</sup>

7. Christ did not take our punishment in the quantitative sense.

<sup>17</sup> *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, p. 327; cf. p. 283; *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 101; *The Work of Christ*, p. 152.

<sup>18</sup> *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>20</sup> *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 40.

<sup>21</sup> *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, p. 71.

<sup>22</sup> *The Cruciality of the Cross*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>23</sup> *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, p. 64.

What fell on him was not the equivalent punishment of sin but its due condemnation ;

8. Nor is it the sufferings *per se* that atone, but the obedience.<sup>24</sup>

9. The penalty inflicted on sin was not arbitrary but commensurate with the holiness of God.<sup>25</sup>

10. No ledger transfer of guilt to Christ was involved.<sup>26</sup>

11. The term penalty may be rightly though cautiously employed of the burden Christ bore for sin ; but, "we must renounce the idea that He was punished by the God who was ever well-pleased with His beloved Son."<sup>27</sup>

12. It is not the case, further, that forgiveness cost so much that it was impossible till justice was appeased and mercy set free by the blood of Christ.<sup>28</sup>

13. Love cannot forgive arbitrarily with no regard to the holiness of God: "there are conditions to be met which reside, not in man, but in the very nature of God himself."<sup>29</sup>

14. Satisfaction was made neither to the wounded honour nor to the punitive justice of God ; it lay in Christ's obedience—"there is a vast difference between suffering as a condition of Atonement and suffering as the thing of positive worth in it."<sup>30</sup>

15. Christ's obedience in life and death stand together for his redeeming work ; he was obedient not simply *in* but *unto* death.<sup>31</sup>

16. Scripture must speak for itself ; for example, on justification Paul does not mean making but declaring just. On that point he uses forensic terms—his meaning is clear whatever readers may say of his authority.<sup>32</sup>

17. Expiation and forgiveness are not mutually exclusive ; but the suffering was not quantitative. It is the kind, not the amount, of penalty that is in view.<sup>33</sup>

18. What is significant is not the experience (for Christ) but the act of Christ in both judging sin and confessing holiness.<sup>34</sup>

19. Christ's Cross is not merely the prerequisite or condition of

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65 ; cf. *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 41.

<sup>25</sup> *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, pp. 66-68.

<sup>26</sup> *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 41.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* ; cf. *The Work of Christ*, p. 181.

<sup>28</sup> *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, p. 67.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

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

<sup>34</sup> *The Work of Christ*, p. 181.

reconciliation but the accomplishment of it in principle. The same act both disburdens us of guilt and commits us to new life.<sup>35</sup>

20. Christ did not bear our guilt in the sense of a vicarious repentance for He had no guilt to confess.<sup>36</sup>

21. The self-salvation of Liberalism must be abandoned in favour of the Atonement's centrality. The communion between God and man is breached—so that is the problem. The hostility must be overcome. Man is incapable of atoning for himself: "if we could satisfy the moral order we disturbed, our insufferable self-satisfaction would derange it straightway."<sup>37</sup>

So far as principles of interpretation are concerned, four may be cited as particularly noteworthy. First, said Forsyth, the Cross is self-interpreting. Both in the light of the sin with which it deals and the transformation in man that it works it is the act of God.<sup>38</sup> Second, the atonement should be viewed teleologically; that is, more in terms of its prospects and end than of its antecedents: "all great interpretation is teleological."<sup>39</sup> Third, it must be viewed ethically. The provision of forgiveness comes at great cost satisfying the conscience. The sacrifice, he writes, must be from God's own heart; God's first concern is holiness, not love grown slack.<sup>40</sup> Fourth, no theory of the Atonement will prove to be satisfactory unless it takes into account both the Godward and manward relations. Two personal movements are involved: the Godward movement of man and the manward movement of God, and the truth of each side is essential to the Atonement:

Can we combine the truth in each alternative? Can we reach the value of Christ's saving work (i.e., its true and final value) if we exclude its effects within man? Must we not take it in? *Nihil in effectu quod non prius in causa*. Must we not include the effect to get the full value of the cause, and give a full account of it?<sup>41</sup>

To the elucidation of these two sides in Forsyth's theology we now turn.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>36</sup> *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, p. 66.

<sup>37</sup> *The Holy Father and the Living Christ*, p. 32; note: *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 56; *The Cruciality of the Cross*, pp. 11-13.

<sup>38</sup> *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, p. 63.

<sup>39</sup> *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, pp. 321-322.

<sup>40</sup> *The Holy Father and the Living Christ*, pp. 8-9; "All construction of belief must begin with the holiness of God" (*Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 255).

<sup>41</sup> *The Work of Christ*, pp. 185-186. The great mass of Christ's work, Forsyth said elsewhere, is like a stable iceberg, it is hidden. "Doing this for us was the first condition of doing anything with us" (*The Holy Father and the Living Christ*, pp. 64-65).

## IV. CHRIST AND THE HOLINESS OF GOD

The task of putting into systematic form Forsyth's theology on the Godward (and manward) aspect of the Atonement is formidable because he never attempted anything more formal than *The Work of Christ*.<sup>42</sup> The following can serve as an outline.

1. *Righteousness was fulfilled in the judgment that Christ bore.* It is axiomatic, Forsyth said, that holiness must have its due; the Cross functions first to hallow the name of God: "by atonement, therefore, is meant that action of Christ's death which has a prime regard to God's holiness."<sup>43</sup> A second way of saying this is that the law must be upheld so that love and righteousness stand together. God cannot simply waive the past; "the enforcement of God's holiness by judgment is as essential to a *universal and eternal* Fatherhood as is the outflow of His love."<sup>44</sup> The Cross reveals the public righteousness of God.<sup>45</sup> Third, the judgment Christ bore was penal not as a mathematical equivalent, nor as substitutionary punishment but as the expiation of sin. He bore "the consequence attached *by God* to sin—sin's penalty; and He so recognized it."<sup>46</sup> And fourth, Christ died the death of sin: "He tasted the death of the universal soul—death eternal. It was the horror of the holy when he 'became sin'."<sup>47</sup> Properly understood only Christ could die the horror-death of sin as the universal death of stricken humanity with its loathsome despair. He died the death of sin, the universal moral death, and in that death we died:

As it was *universal*, He was involved in it—involved, though not diseased, not captured. His life as man was a real life, and He was bound to feel the last reality of man's deadness. And He alone *could* feel it. They were too dead in sin. Alone He fulfilled the condition of feeling a moral death utterly universal, and therefore dreary, cold, loathsome, to such a soul as His.<sup>48</sup>

2. *Holiness was confessed perfectly by Christ on the Cross.*

<sup>42</sup> A series of lectures given somewhat extemporaneously (the transcribed text was later revised) at a ministerial conference convened by Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, July, 1909, at Mundesley, Norfolk.

<sup>43</sup> *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. viii, note p. 39. In *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, he says: "I have sought to consider the satisfaction to a holy God as consisting only in a counterpart and equal holiness rendered under the conditions of sin and judgment" (p. 368).

<sup>44</sup> *The Holy Father and the Living Christ*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>45</sup> *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> *The Atonement In Modern Religious Thought*, pp. 84-85. Note: *Missions In State And Church*, pp. 17, 77. A characteristic phrase is that holiness becomes salvation not *over* but *through* judgment (*The Work of Christ*, p. 160; and pp. 147, 243).

<sup>47</sup> *The Taste of Death and the Life of Grace*, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Parallel with Dale's proposition that Christ made for us a perfect submission to the divine righteous judgment, Forsyth said Christ made holy submission to judgment as holy. This is not transactional in character because God does it in man; Jesus Christ as God among us yet as man gave His life as the perfect obedience unto the death of sin for us. Righteousness is owned and obedience sanctified; this is the satisfaction.<sup>49</sup>

A second way he has of saying this is that the holy Christ owned the holiness of God under the unspeakable load of human guilt worsened by the veiling of the Father's face. The confession is not of sin but of holiness. God by Christ's own consent identified Him with sin in treatment, not feeling, therefore taking Him rather than the sinner in the place of sin. In putting Christ there God put Himself there; the divine judgment was real and effectual:

Justice wants penalty, holiness wants holiness in the midst of penalty. It wants a soul's own perfect holiness in the midst of penalty due to other souls; it wants loving obedience amid the penalty of loveless defiance. God alone could fulfil for us the holy law He never broke, and pay the cost He never incurred.<sup>50</sup>

3. *The Atonement is primarily an act within God and therefore objective.* The mystery of the Atonement is thrown back upon the eternal relations, and now the historical act, of the Godhead. In sum the point is that Christ could do nothing but the Father's work. The Father did not suffer as the Son but with the Son. Forsyth expresses this under several forms: The Cross is the self-donation of God. All man's sacrifices are but responses to God's first sacrifice. Grace is the divine self-giving; not giving to us ourselves, or progress, or destiny, but "Himself, His holy self".<sup>51</sup> The Cross is God acting in Christ; "God does not suffer by deputy, or sacrifice by substitute."<sup>52</sup> In the Cross Punisher and

<sup>49</sup> *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, pp. 68, 75; *Faith and Criticism*, p. 141; *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 294; *The Cruciality of the Cross*, pp. 92-95.

<sup>50</sup> *The Holy Father and the Living Christ*, p. 36; note pp. 73-74; cf. *The Work of Christ*, pp. 83, 133, 146-147, 201; *The Justification of God*, p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> *The Principle of Authority*, p. 372; cf. *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 94; *The Justification of God*, p. 150.

<sup>52</sup> *The Taste of Death and the Life of Grace*, p. 47. The theme is common in Forsyth. Note this: "'God was in Christ reconciling', not reconciling through Christ, but actually present as Christ reconciling, doing in Christ His own work of reconciliation. It was done by Godhead itself, and not by the Son alone. The old theologians were right when they insisted that the work of redemption was the work of the whole Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit; as we express it when we baptize into the new life of reconciliation in the threefold name" (*The Work of Christ*, p. 152).

Punished are one. This work is not that of a third party, "the agent of judgment becomes the object of judgment",<sup>58</sup> and, "it is only God as the Holy atoning Son that can do justice to the Holy Father, or satisfy the changeless conditions of a perfectly Holy God in a guilty world".<sup>54</sup> Further, the universality of Christ's work points it up as essentially the self-reconciliation of God. The reconciliation is not simply of individuals but of the race to God.<sup>55</sup> Finally, the Cross is the self-justification of God. Forsyth turns the biblical sentence to express this side of it: "God was in man expiating sin to His own holiness."<sup>56</sup> What is in view in the Cross is not simply the justification of the sinner but the divine theodicy:

A holy God self-atoned in Christ is the moral centre of the sinful world. Our justification by God has its key in God's justification of himself.<sup>57</sup>

This cannot be understood outside of freedom, as both Dale and Denney maintained and as Leonard Hodgson has developed more fully in recent literature. Forsyth epitomizes the question involved in the following:

We are born into a redeemed world. We are created for redemption, created by One who knew in creating that He had in Himself all the resources wherewith to deal with freedom's abuse of His creation.<sup>58</sup>

4. *On the Cross Christ won the moral victory in the world.* The goal of all things is secured in the final triumph. That victory has been won. Christ by his Cross revolutionized the moral foundations of the world, putting them on a new footing. It took the saving of a world to save one man.<sup>59</sup> Second, this victory changed the relations between God and the world. Christ did not establish a new divine love for the world, He established a new relation. The revelation of grace means a change of treatment; this is the essential element of St. Paul's theology.<sup>60</sup> Third, the Cross heralds the paralysis of Satanic power: "Christ has judged

<sup>58</sup> *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, p. 81.

<sup>54</sup> *The Principle of Authority*, p. 190.

<sup>55</sup> *The Work of Christ*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>56</sup> *Faith and Criticism*, p. 141.

<sup>57</sup> *The Justification of God*, p. 94; cf. pp. 109, 124, 174.

<sup>58</sup> *The Principle of Authority*, p. 184.

<sup>59</sup> *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 333; *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 101.

<sup>60</sup> "The final witness of holiness to holiness amid sin's last wreck, penalty, and agony—that is the expiation as the Father made it in the Son, not changing His feeling, but by crisis, by judgment, eternally changing His relations with the world. . . . It gave man a new relation to God, and God a new relation, though not a new feeling to man. It did not make God our Father, but it did make possible for the Father to treat sinners as sons" (*The Holy Father and the Living Christ*, pp. 31, 69).

the prince of the world and doomed its principle. He did so by taking on himself the judgment of the world."<sup>61</sup> In Forsyth's theology the early patristic doctrine of Christ's victory over sin and death and the Reformation stress upon the work of Christ as satisfaction for sin join together in the ethical principles of God's holiness and righteousness acting in grace; acting, that is, not only to deal with sin and its issue, but so that the very act has regenerating power by the appeal its own intrinsic nature makes upon the minds and consciences of men.

#### V. CHRIST AND THE RACE

Two matters will occupy our attention here: first, to state the way Christ stands related to the race, and second, to state what it is that Christ has done for men and how what He has done affects them. Christ's relation to the race is described by Forsyth in two ways, namely, interpenetration of life and universality. Just as Forsyth preferred to avoid speaking of two natures (because he thought the concepts were too atomistic) in favour of the involution of personal movements, so he thought of Christ as more than the continuous head of the race: "It is not a relation of *identity* . . . the value consists in that life-act of self-identification by which Christ the eternal Son of God became man."<sup>62</sup> Nor is it the humanity of continuous self-realization that Christ shares in the way process philosophies had put forward, but the act of self-identification culminating in self-sacrifice. The relation is not static but dynamic and moral; His life is at bottom ours; we should think in corporate, solidaric terms.<sup>63</sup> Second, Christ is the universal man. This is a relation that He sustains to the race intensively not extensively in virtue of his moral perfection. His exclusiveness is His universality; our salvation is individual because it is corporate:

The certainty of revelation and faith is that in the universal Christ the world is chosen for salvation, and is saved in principle, and shall be saved in fact.<sup>64</sup>

God carried home His love to the world by Christ in one act which reveals the correspondence between the unity of the person (by

<sup>61</sup> *Missions in State and Church*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>62</sup> *The Work of Christ*, p. 158; cf. *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, pp. 333-334, 351-353; and *The Holy Father and the Living Christ*, where he declares our need of Christ as "Lord and Master more immortal than ourselves, and the root of all that makes our immortality other than a burden" (p. 136).

<sup>63</sup> *Theology in Church and State*, pp. 157, 184; *The Christian Ethic of War*, pp. 118, 187, 189.

<sup>64</sup> *The Principle of Authority*, p. 357.

His moral perfection) and scale of the world.<sup>65</sup> We may now examine the relevance of Christ's work to the race in six propositions.

1. *Christ by His obedience made perfect confession of holiness for us.* He does this, first, not by vicarious confession of guilt (this was impossible to the sinless Christ) but by freely bearing the judgment of God. The cloud was between God and the race where holiness must be confessed much more than sin, but the confession must be, he said, amidst judgment: "Then judgment has done its perfect work. The race's sin was covered and atoned by it, i.e., by the God who bore it."<sup>66</sup> Second, the confession of holiness was His perfect obedience—the obedience He learned by the things He suffered—on the racial not simply individual scale:

It was a racial obedience. God's holiness found itself again in the humbled holiness of Christ's "public person". He presented before God a race He created for holiness.<sup>67</sup>

Third, the same point is made by Forsyth when he says that Christ identified Himself with the claims of holiness upon the race so that He becomes the reversionary of them, creating the ground of our obedience and taking our response up into His own:

It was the obedience which makes ours possible; it was inimitable, but reproducible. It cannot be emulated, it can but be repeated by Himself in the members whose life and whole it is.<sup>68</sup>

And, His perfect obedience guarantees the satisfactoriness of our repentance to God; He is no third party but one with us offering up our submission not as a mere sequel to His but as an ingredient of His work.<sup>69</sup>

2. *Christ was made sin for us.* Notice has been taken of how Forsyth states this as that God was in man expiating sin unto Himself. This means that Christ absorbs the judgment so that we are judged not only by Him but in Him. How does Christ bear sin? The answer lies in His self-identification with our guilt:

<sup>65</sup> *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 312; *The Work of Christ*, p. 184; *Missions in State and Church*, p. 204.

<sup>66</sup> *The Work of Christ*, p. 133. This is a striking passage deserving study. The theme recurs often in Forsyth's books. Note: *Religion in Recent Art*, p. 208; *The Cruciality of the Cross*, pp. 97-99.

<sup>67</sup> *The Work of Christ*, p. 129.

<sup>68</sup> *Faith and Criticism*, p. 128. Note: *The Principle of Authority*, p. 390.

<sup>69</sup> ". . . our repentance was latent in that holiness of His which alone could and must create it, as the effect is really part of the cause—that part of the cause which is prolonged in a polar unity into the sequential conditions of time" (*The Work of Christ*, p. 192).

In being "made sin", treated as sin (though not as a sinner), Christ experienced sin as God does, while he experienced its effects as man does.<sup>70</sup>

3. *Christ bears the evil consequences of sin for us.* Holman Hunt's painting "The Scapegoat" spoke to Forsyth of the despised Christ that groaned under the spiritual load of the world's condition. He knew in the Cross the horror of the world's despair, especially the death that confronts it universally—He bore the evil of the world.<sup>71</sup> Specifically, the worst evil was the death—He died our death—not the heroic death of the visionary, but the chill spiritual death that was our due. He died the universal death, and by dying it He really came near mankind.<sup>72</sup>

4. *Christ achieves an eternal mediation.* The eternal validity and vitality of Christ's work rests not only upon a point in history, though it stands there; it is the prolongation of the energy of His redeeming act as the teleological, cosmic movement of history. We view the whole of life and history Christocentrically in and through the Cross; "it is the intercession of Christ that is the moving force within all the spiritual evolution of history".<sup>73</sup> His work was final both in the sense of working incessantly on to end priesthood and to consummate the priestly idea.<sup>74</sup> The eternal quality of this mediation guarantees to the race the state of reconciliation and forgiveness; that is the meaning of the objective atonement. In fact Forsyth distinguishes three aspects of forgiveness: the state of forgiveness in which the race now is before God through Jesus Christ; the experience of forgiveness that becomes the soul's possession when it realizes that it is at peace with God; and, the spirit of forgiveness that is the habit of the heart in relation to other men.<sup>75</sup>

5. *Christ's work creates our response of repentance and faith.* Just as the extinction of our guilt is an act of pure grace, the revelation of that extinction must happen by an act of grace within us. Christ's response is made actual in us by the Spirit; it is

<sup>70</sup> *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 101; cf. *The Work of Christ*, p. 164.

<sup>71</sup> *Religion in Recent Art*, pp. 209-210; *The Taste of Death and the Life of Grace*, pp. 15, 27-28.

<sup>72</sup> *Missions in State and Church*, p. 10; *The Taste of Death and the Life of Grace*, p. 44. On p. 42 he wrote: "The physical death only showed forth the spiritual. . . . That was the blood of Christ. And you cannot dwell too much on the blood of Christ so long as you are sure it was Christ's blood, the Lamb of God carrying the sin of the world."

<sup>73</sup> *The Holy Father and the Living Christ*, p. 141.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144; *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 254.

<sup>75</sup> *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 198.

repeated in us under the conditions of our sinfulness.<sup>76</sup> The mode of this is the creative power of grace. Because of our sin the power of response had to be created in us: "Christ's was a death on behalf of people within whom the power of responding had to be created."<sup>77</sup> Forsyth extends the idea by a fascinating analogy. The work of poetic and artistic innovators, he points out, is often not well received at first or even during their lifetime. They must with the creation of their work create a taste for it—the very power of understanding themselves has to be imparted to those who would understand them. Men only rarely succeed in this, but it is the glory of Christ's work that He triumphs in us :

He had to create the very capacity for response. And that is where we are compelled to recognize the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as well as the doctrine of the Saviour. We are always told that faith is the gift of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. . . . The death of Christ had not simply to touch like heroism, but it had to redeem us into power of feeling its own worth. Christ had to save us from what we were too far gone to feel.<sup>78</sup>

6. *Christ creates the new humanity.* If it is the judgment-death of the race, the Cross also marks the birth of new life for men because it registers the creation of a new conscience, a new ethic of the race. The moral victory Christ won is so constant, universal, and final that it becomes the new norm of spiritual life.<sup>79</sup> The humanity Christ saved as the object of His love must now become the servant of the new kingdom. History thus made is the passage of Christ writ large. This is the church and this is its task:

the Church of Christ is the greatest and finest produce of human history. It is the greatest thing in the universe . . . it is not a product of human history, but the product of the Holy Spirit within history. It stands for the New Creation, the New Humanity, and it has that in trust.<sup>80</sup>

*New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.*

<sup>76</sup> *Faith and Criticism*, p. 141.

<sup>77</sup> *The Work of Christ*, p. 15.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>79</sup> *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 29; *The Christian Ethic of War*, pp. 187, 189.

<sup>80</sup> *The Work of Christ*, p. 5.