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Bitter Tonic for our Time – Why the Church needs the World: Peter Taylor Forsyth on Henrik Ibsen

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SUMMARY

Why does the Church need the world? This paper seeks to explore what today's Church might learn from secular 'apostles' and 'prophets' as part of its ongoing mission to, for and with the world that God so loves. In particular, it will investigate the role that poets, dramatists and other artists might play in identifying humanism's problem of

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Wozu braucht die Kirche die Welt? Dieser Artikel versucht zu untersuchen, was die gegenwärtige Kirche von säkularen „Aposteln“ und „Propheten“ für ihre laufende Mission in, für und mit der Welt lernen kann, die Gott so sehr liebt. Insbesondere wird die Rolle untersucht, die Dichter, Dramatiker und andere Künstler in der Identifizierung des Menschheitsproblems spielen, den mora-

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RESUME

Pourquoi l'Église aurait-elle besoin du monde ? Goroncy se penche sur la question de savoir ce que l'Église d'aujourd'hui pourrait apprendre des « apôtres » et « prophètes » séculiers concernant sa mission envers, pour et avec le monde que Dieu aime tant. En particulier, il considère le rôle que les poètes, dramaturges et autres artistes pourraient jouer en mettant à jour le problème que rencontre l'humanisme du fait qu'il a minimisé le

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In his book *The Antichrist*, Friedrich Nietzsche concedes that if he cannot find a replacement for the crucified Christ, he has failed.¹ Nietzsche's quest for such a replacement, though, leads him through a tragic vision of life in which joy and pain

downplaying moral realism – a problem that Church has often failed to critically grasp. The excursion will proceed via the engagement of the Scottish Congregationalist theologian Peter Taylor Forsyth (1848-1921) with one of his contemporaries, the Norwegian poet and dramatist, Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906). Forsyth provides us with a model of how we might engage our world with candor, humility and gospel courage.

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lischen Realismus herunterzuspielen – ein Problem, das kritisch zu begreifen die Kirche häufig versäumt hat. Der Exkurs entwickelt sich anhand des Dialogs zwischen dem schottischen kongregationalistischen Theologen Peter Taylor Forsyth (1848-1921) und einem seiner Zeitgenossen, dem norwegischen Dichter und Dramatiker Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906). Forsyth bietet uns ein Modell, wie wir unserer Welt mit Offenheit, Demut und dem Mut des Evangeliums begegnen können.

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réalisme moral – un problème que l'Église n'a pas toujours su appréhender de manière critique. L'auteur montre comment Peter Taylor Forsyth (1848-1921), théologien congrégationaliste écossais, a exploité les œuvres de l'un de ses contemporains, le poète et dramaturge norvégien Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906). Forsyth donne un bon exemple de la manière dont nous pouvons tirer profit de ce qui se fait dans notre monde avec sincérité, humilité et le courage que donne l'Évangile.

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are inseparable. It is not simply that tragedy echoes both the destructive and constructive dimensions of humanity's primal will, but that tragedy itself is the affirmation of the essential unity of creation, destruction (fall) and life (eternal). Of course, the

view of human history through the lens of the tragic is not unique to Nietzsche. Where else do we see it? Why is it important, even crucial? Upon what does this tragedy turn? Is there an answer to Nietzsche's search, albeit an answer that no-one seeks? Why should the Church even care about Nietzsche's quest? What can the Church today learn from the continuing contribution of contemporary apostles and prophets who raise similar questions? And why are they necessary? Why does the Church need the world? This paper shall seek to offer some preliminary reflections, a mere door-opening, on these important questions, and explore a way forward for the Church's interaction with the world that God so loves. The excursion will proceed via the engagement of the Scottish Congregationalist theologian Peter Taylor Forsyth (1848-1921) with one of his contemporaries, the popular Norwegian poet and dramatist from Stockmannsgården, Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), the centenary of whose death we celebrate this year.

Setting the stage: a tragic journey

Like Nietzsche, Ibsen's contradictory vision of life is fundamentally one of struggle – the 'pathos of disillusioned idealism', as Hermann Weigand put it.² That said, there remains in Ibsen's worldview a confession that life, even life as it is, as tragic as it is, has value. And Ibsen identifies this value in life's struggle itself. For him, struggle is good, vitalising and wholesome. 'To live is to – fight troll-demons in vaults of the mind and heart.'³ As one reviewer of Ibsen's *Brand* put it, 'it is not liberty and truth, but rather the struggle for them that matters. The struggle for ideals is more important to [Ibsen] than ideals themselves... In fact Ibsen believed more in struggle than in any permanent improvements. "All development hitherto has been nothing more than a stumbling from one error into another"'⁴

Ibsen's affirmation of struggle is essentially an affirming of life – life is good for it harbours the possibility of tragedy,⁵ and so of growth, process, and maturity. And for Ibsen, it includes a kind of eschatology, a forward momentum to life in which the entire evidently apathetic and impotent mass is slowly moving forward. Weigand notes:

By seeing life as a rhythmical process and pronouncing it good, [Ibsen] has deprived himself of any philosophical basis to fume in indignation against the whole universal process... Seen as

a whole, the process of life is an invigorating struggle, with even a forward swing; but – its tempo is intolerably sluggish, measured against the tempo of Ibsen's own feverish blood. He would leap on and on, to ever greater heights, opening up wider and wider panoramas; but this onward rush is retarded by the snail's crawl of human nature – human nature around him and human nature within his own vitals, from which escape is impossible.⁶

After a violent period in which he examines 'ideals', Ibsen attempts a new blow in his play *Enemy of the People* in which he seeks to create an honest and truthful bourgeois descendant of his *Brand*, whom Ibsen later refers to as 'myself in my best moments'.⁸ It is in this play that Dr Stockman discovers (among other 'discoveries') that 'all our sources of spiritual life are poisoned, and that our whole society rests upon a pestilential basis of falsehood.'⁹ This, to be fair, is not Ibsen's view, but that of one of his characters. However, it does reveal something of the intensity with which Ibsen views life.

Enter: Forsyth – learning from Ibsen

Forsyth's analysis on this penetrating insight brings us to what he understands to be the source of tragedy:

It is not a world out of joint that makes our problem, but the shipwrecked soul in it. It is Hamlet, not his world, that is wrong. It is not the contradictions of life, and its anomalies, that make the real trouble, but the unfaith, the falsity of those who live. It is the soul's own civil war, the rebellion of man-soul, its sullen severance from God, its ostrich hope of escaping His law, its silly notions of making it up with Him, its hate and dread of Him, its sin, and the triviality of its sense of sin.¹⁰

Forsyth's probing analysis of human personhood, born of intense theological and psychological reflection that twenty-five years in pastoral ministry brings, equals that of Pascal, Bonhoeffer, and Kierkegaard, 'in whom he found a kindred spirit'.¹¹ He maintains that the solution to this problem, the world solution, is in what destroys its guilt, and that nothing can do this except 'the very holiness that makes guilt guilt' in the first place.¹² In Tolkien's terms, the ring can only be destroyed in the very fires of Mount Doom from which it was forged.¹³ That destruction takes place in the

Crucified Man. There in his Cross, and there alone, does it finally penetrate into us that, morally, all the great tragedy and history of the world, including our own history, is tied up with its guilt. Forsyth cites Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Ibsen as examples of those who see this.¹⁴

Forsyth's reference to Ibsen is no passing one, for he sees in Ibsen one who painstakingly identifies the problem with humanism as lacking 'moral realism'.¹⁵ Ibsen sees 'a different world' from Thomas Hardy's 'impressive unfaith',¹⁶ although Hardy too, in his own way, 'does a real service to the Christian'.¹⁷ In words that seem to suggest that Forsyth sees Ibsen's work functioning not unlike the 'natural' conscience, he writes: '[Ibsen] has not "found Christ," but he has found what drives us to Christ, the need Christ alone meets. [Ibsen] unveils man's perdition, and makes a Christ inevitable for any hope of righteousness.'¹⁸ Here Forsyth sees Ibsen as an ally. Forsyth laments not only that Ibsen never read Kierkegaard more closely, but that while critics with the judgement such as Ibsen and Nietzsche do not grasp the revealed answer to the questions that plague the human heart and conscience, 'the Church with the revelation does not critically grasp the problem, nor duly attend to those who do'.¹⁹ Of the Church he says,

We are unreal, sentimental and impressionist – we are in danger of being histrionic, with our Gospel. We handle the eternities, yet we cannot go to the bottom of things... We do not dwell beside the remorseless reality of God in His saving work, and so we do not reach with the final and conquering word the core of man and his need. We look on the world and say, "Ah! The pity of it." We do not delve in our own hearts, as Matthew Arnold complained, and say, "Oh! the curse of it." In a word, we do not grasp the moral tragedy of the race's suicide, and we do not grasp the Gospel... So much of our religious teaching betrays no sign that the speaker has descended into hell, been near the everlasting burnings, or been plucked from the awful pit. He has risen with Christ – what right have we to deny it? – but it is out of a shallow grave, with no deepness of earth, with no huge millstone to roll away.²⁰

He continues:

Therefore [the Church] cannot adjust its revelation to the age. It is too occupied with the comfort of religion, the winsome creed, the wooing note, and the charming home. It does not rea-

lise the inveteracy of sin, the ingrained guilt, the devilry at work, and the searching judgment upon society *at large*. God's medicine for society burns as it *goes down*. And we need a vast catastrophe like a European war to bring home what could have been learned from a Christian revelation that gave due place to the element of saving judgment in the Cross of Christ.²¹

In light of this scathing critique of the Church's shallowness and obsession with trivialities, thrice in close proximity Forsyth entreats his North American hearers to 'read Ibsen' who, more than most dramatists, carries us 'closer to life's moral realities'.²² Forsyth identifies that theology, which when done well is itself theo-dramatic reflection on *the* drama,²³ has more to do with grasping reality as moral, as tragic, as an answered-problem to be lived in, rather than as a riddle to be solved by human intellect. And he identifies in the tragic poets and dramatists, such as Ibsen, those who seem to understand something *like* holiness, and that life's real question, 'the psycho-moral dilemma', as Arthur Miller calls it,²⁴ is not 'How do I feel about God?' but 'What dealings have I with Him?',²⁵ not as a concept but as *the* leading character in the unfolding drama.

In this, Ibsen's drama is embodied tragedy yearning for a beyond. Like Nietzsche, Ibsen discerns that life culminates in its experiences of tragedy. But he is not a spectator in this tragedy. He is an actor. It 'unhinge[s] his mind'²⁶ and tears at his very being as it does for any who feel the question so deeply but do not know God's solution in the tragedy of the Cross. (Is this not why Ibsen's Master Builder fears not death but judgement and retribution?) But it is because of Ibsen's weighty treatment and moral seriousness and sensitivity to life's fundamental questions that Forsyth praises him saying,

Mark and learn his unsparing ethical realism. Could that remorseless insight of his through the shams and clothes of ordinary society miss the grim dull ache of guilt? For him, as for all the rest of the tragic poets, guilt is the centre of the tragedy... To save your soul from sunny or silly piety, to realize the deadly inveteracy of evil, its dereliction by God, its sordid paralysis of all redeeming, self-recuperative power in man, its incurable fatal effect upon the moral order of society, read Ibsen. Yea, to realize how it thereby imports the element of death even into the moral order of the universe read Ibsen.²⁷

Continue: Forsyth – arrainging Ibsen

Forsyth identifies in Ibsen the cataclysmic despair of the analyst who, crushed by the quagmire of the reality he has unearthed, is unable to find his way back to a synthesis. He praises Ibsen, and other ‘tragic poets’, for his recognition that what lies at the nucleus of the human problem is guilt. But Forsyth is critical of these ‘apostles’ to culture for not recognising what it is that makes guilt guilt, that is, holiness, and that holiness as unveiled in the atoning Cross. This analysis leads Forsyth to say to these budding preacher-listeners, ‘Preach to Ibsen’s world, and there are few that you will miss. Only do not preach his word.’ For while Ibsen ‘reads one book with uncanny penetration, the book of Man, Church, and Society, he has never turned the same piercing eye on the other book, the New Testament, and never taken Christ as seriously as he takes man. He is grimly, ghastly interpretive but not redemptive – like his analytic age.’²⁸ And lest there be any who doubt the veracity and power of such a New Testament word to reach Ibsen’s world, Forsyth reassures his hearers that ‘Christ’s Gospel has the same radical, unsparring, moral realism, tearing to the roots, and tearing them up with relentless moral veracity. It has the note of *thorough*.’²⁹

Ibsen’s prophetic exposé, his ‘moral and religious genius’,³⁰ his ability to unmask the ‘hypocrisy, self-deception, and sham with which contemporary society clothe[s] itself’,³¹ and to identify and ask the right questions, is imperative, even though, in Forsyth’s view, no answer comes. Forsyth contends that Ibsen ‘has enough conscience to know the nature of the true human burden; but he had not enough to bear it, still less to roll it upon another... He had the conscience to feel the sin of the world, but not the power of remedy... Like his age, he knew what a redemption should be better than he knew the Redeemer that has been... he understood the psychology of Redemption more than its power, the way it should take more than the way it did... He had the moral vision to feel the need of [the Christian Messiah], but not the spiritual power to recognise the gift of him through the hulls of his Church’.³² What Ibsen lacks is a gospel adequate to meet the cataclysm he so critically sees. His proficiency is that he is ever ‘aware of the rodent with sharp eyes and teeth, living in fierce terror behind the grubby walls of life’, but he is ‘never taught by any competent mind to haunt the spot where absolute ethic and infinite mystic meet in Christ.’³³

He grasps life’s fundamental moral realities, but life is not a seductive puzzle to be solved by human acumen, but a ‘tragic battle for existence, for power, for eternal life.’³⁴ As George Hall notes, ‘Forsyth did not believe that tragic drama provided the solution, only that it contained theologically relevant insights into the human condition and, in many tragedies, intimated a Beyond in which the action of the play continued’.³⁵ This is echoed by Frank Brown who asserts that ‘the art that has the greatest religious significance is not necessarily the art of institutional religion but rather the art which happens to discern what religion in its institutional or personal forms needs most to see’.³⁶ Forsyth understands that poetry creates an experience of mind and heart which compares in kind, though not in measure, to the Beyond itself. Insofar as it does this, it is sacramental.

In our own day, Nicholas Wolterstorff has sought to remind us that one of the purposes of poetry (,the most spiritual and least sensuous of all the arts’,³⁷ as Forsyth defines it) is not to impose illusion on reality, but rather to do the opposite. Poetry’s ‘hazy words’³⁸ intimate a world, indeed, a reality, beyond the life of the poem, functioning not unlike a doorway through which the hopeful sojourner is invited to enter ‘the path of longing’³⁹ and explore the land of life as it really is, not simply as it appears. Arthur Miller articulates it: ‘While there are mysteries in life which no amount of analyzing will reduce to reason, it is perfectly realistic to admit and even to proclaim that hiatus as a truth.’⁴⁰ The significance of this truth for the Christian theologian should be obvious: faith lies far nearer to the dramatic than to the intellectual sphere of life. ‘Life begins as a problem’, Forsyth says, ‘but when it ends well it ends as a faith.’⁴¹

Enter: Ibsen – a home-longing

It is possible to argue that what is going on in Ibsen’s work is a restless longing for home. That he sacrificed home for career may indeed have been at the root of much of his own sense of guilt, particularly in light of his wife’s and children’s deprivation of a much-desired stability and return to their native country. For twenty-seven years, they moved about, living in temporary quarters in Rome, Dresden and Munich. In 1891, the year before penning *The Master Builder*, he took the long-debated step and returned home, to Christiania. But a longing for home remained, so much so that six years later he penned to an old friend, the Danish literary

critic George Brandes, ‘Up here, by the fjords, is my native land. But – but – but! Where am I to find my homeland?’⁴² And in the following year, at his seventieth birthday, Ibsen makes the following speech:

But the inward real happiness – that is not a find, not a gift. That can be acquired only at a price which is often felt as very oppressive. For this is the point: He who has won for himself a home out there in the many lands – in his innermost depths he feels altogether at home nowhere, – not even in the land of his birth.⁴³

Here Ibsen gives voice to a universal human longing, an intuitive sense that we are at home nowhere and beyond, that life itself is but a tragic journey towards the ‘heart-nook of the hidden’.⁴⁴ Ibsen seeks a homecoming in the sphere of geography, and Nietzsche in his own solitude.⁴⁵ But the Christian revelation (and it takes revelation to see it!) is that home is where the Father is. It is to be in the Holy Father’s arms. Forsyth notes: ‘At the heart of man you will find divine symptoms, but not a divine salvation.’⁴⁶ The human person, like Abraham, is never at home with themselves, or, indeed, anywhere in this world. Ever strangers in a foreign country, living in tents, we are created to live in and for ‘the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God’⁴⁷ – and to do this now by faith. What we see in Forsyth is that there is an answer to Ibsen’s (and Nietzsche’s) probing and despairing questions, his home-longing, but that the answer is provided not from the side of the human pilgrim but from the side of the One for whom all songs will one day be written. Forsyth notes,

Sin steadily maims the sense of holiness and the power of sacrifice to it. And even if man by any sacrifice, or even penitence, could mend the moral order he has broken, it would be royal for him no more. It would be supreme and commanding for him no more. If we could heal our own conscience, it would no more be our king. If we could satisfy the moral order we disturbed, our insufferable stir-satisfaction would derange it straight-way. We should be (as Luther said) “the proudest jackasses under heaven”. We may sorrow and amend, but we cannot atone and reconcile. Why, we cannot atone to each other, to our own injured or neglected dead, for instance, our silent inaccessible dead.⁴⁸

Enter: the matrix of grace

Just where one might be tempted to utilise natural theology to bridge the gap between the question and the answer, between sin and redemption, Forsyth introduces something noticeably absent from Ibsen’s corpus – the priority of grace. For while ‘nature cannot of itself culminate in grace, at least it was not put there without regard to grace. Grace is Nature’s destiny.’⁴⁹ ‘Nature, if not the mother, is the matrix of Grace.’⁵⁰ But that grace is bloodied, despised and rejected, crushed for the iniquities of, and laden with punishment for, those who hide their faces from it. Grace is never an abstract thing. Nor is it cheap. Grace is a man groaning on a cross, dying, as Gerd confesses, on a ‘bitter tree’,⁵¹ not only for his friends but also for those who would wish him and his Father dead. Grace is a person redeeming in holy love. Grace is God in his holy action in the face of sin. Grace is God taking seriously the scandalous nature of the offence, and himself going down into the experience of nothingness and dread, into hell, into death, into the furnace of his own wrath, into the radical depths of its wound, in order to save.⁵² There can be no higher gift. Moreover, such grace alone satisfies the human (and divine) conscience, which requires not merely an *explanation* of the Cross, but its revelation. This grace alone, the grace of the initiating Father, carries humanity home and brings peace to the human spirit. And so again and again, from wherever he starts, Forsyth makes an undeviating grace-shaped and grace-inspired beeline for the one place in the universe where the conscience of God and of human persons has been satisfied.

In 1864, while on a self-imposed exile in Italy, Ibsen began writing *Brand*, his most overtly ‘religious’ and Kierkegaardian play. The play concludes with a voice sounding above the thunder saying, ‘God is love’.⁵³ While it is certainly possible to read this ending as a response to the torture rung out of Brand’s final questions, I suspect that, given the context, it more likely betrays something of Ibsen’s inadequate view of God. Certainly the play as a whole does this. Although, as Maximus says, ‘a tender heel alone makes no man an Achilles’,⁵⁴ herein may very well lie Ibsen’s Achilles. Forsyth reminds us,

The moral world... is the real world, the ever modern world. And the supreme problem of the moral world is sin. Its one need is to be forgiven. And nothing but holiness can forgive. Love cannot. We are both forgiven and redeemed in

Jesus Christ and in Him as crucified unto the world for the holiness of God and the sin of men.⁵⁵

God's love is impotent if it is not holy, and holy is the one thing Ibsen cannot afford his God to be. This is revealed in the final scene of *Peer Gynt*. After Buttonmoulder's challenge, the wayward Peer has opportunity to know the gift of repentance,⁵⁶ to grow up, to know forgiveness, to come home. Clinging to Solveig and hiding his face in her lap, he squalls 'My mother; my wife; purest of women! Hide me there, hide me in your heart!'⁵⁷ But here, *pietà*-like, in Solveig's arms, in the one place he might know freedom and come home, she robs him (and he allows himself to be robbed) of his one hope of forgiveness, of redemption, of life, of home-coming. And this is precisely because there is no confession of holiness, and no recognition of guilt.⁵⁸ There is not even remorse, even while he was in the far country.

Glossing over the depth of Peer's tragedy, Solveig offers cheap, although sincere, grace as she softly sings,

Sleep, my boy, my dearest boy!
I will rock you to sleep and guard you.

The boy has sat on his mother's lap.
The two have played the livelong day.

The boy has lain on his mother's breast
The livelong day. God bless you my sweet.

The boy has lain so closed to my heart
The livelong day. He is weary now.

Sleep, my boy, my dearest boy!
I will rock you to sleep and guard you.⁵⁹

Here, Solveig functions as a kind of natural theology of which Forsyth says: 'We cannot be sure about her. She is only aesthetic. Her ideal is harmony, not reconciliation. She may hold to her fitful breast her tired child, soothe her fretful sons, kindly her brilliant lovers to cosmic or other emotion, and lend her imagery to magnify the passions of the heart; but for the conscience, stricken or strong, she has no word. Therefore she has no Revelation.'⁶⁰ And because she has no revelation, she can neither offer nor bring reconciliation. Indeed, in her eyes, Peer has nothing to repent of, or be forgiven for. He is home now. That is all that matters. Thus Solveig sanctifies Peer in his guilt, leaving him wretched, and so with Buttonmoulder having opportunity to again speak, perhaps even have the final word, and that in spite of Solveig's final hope

that Peer had indeed become a 'home-returner'.⁶¹

Ultimately for Forsyth, however, the home-coming we need 'is not a reconciliation either with our own self-respect or with our neighbour, but with God and His holy love.'⁶² It is not the peace of calm that we need, but rather the restoration of our confidence in the extraordinary gospel of grace. Our reconciliation is concerned neither with lying on Jesus' breast nor with 'just giving him our hearts', but in possessing Christ's fruit in the confidence of our faith, the destruction of our guilt, and the restoration of our indissoluble holy fellowship with the Triune God.

Unlike Ibsen, Forsyth maintains that guilt, real guilt, the kind of guilt that is 'all evils in one',⁶³ is a revelation of God's holiness as seen in the Cross. Given this, it is surprising that Forsyth grants some semblance of revelation of guilt or moral realism to society or to psychology. He notes that the 'great dramatists of the day',⁶⁴ like Wagner and Ibsen, are able to present us with the problem of guilt due at least partly to their denial of any Hegelian optimism. In this they are not only critics but also poets and theologians.⁶⁵ Indeed, it is the lack of 'moral realism' and 'indelible spiritual instincts' in the Church that drives dramatists like Ibsen – even makes them – to 'create a poetic symbolism' capable of giving voice to the reality of the human scene.⁶⁶ They are also able to point us to a truth that some kind of amnesty and deliverance is essential if humanity is to enjoy a future, and even that this calls for some sense of sacrifice, perhaps even death. However, in the final analysis, Forsyth insists, these great dramatists of pessimism are unable to reveal to us the true nature of our guilt or give us 'what we need most, and at bottom most crave'⁶⁷ – not self-extenuation or evolution beyond ourselves, but our regeneration, our reconciliation, our home-coming which is found not in sacrificial death alone, but only in that of an atoning kind. This only comes in One who really stands on the earth (something Ibsen's redeemer never does), who moves into our neighbourhood, and who dies as the Holy securing holiness through an act that simultaneously hallows God's name in all the earth. This is because 'the moral situation of the world is the central issue in it; and it is a situation so tragic that the central reality of the world must act tragically in saving it. God's act in redeeming such a world must be the victory in a moral tragedy which compresses human history. For its Redeemer could not stand outside it and save by fiat.'⁶⁸

As Forsyth notes, many of Ibsen's 'successors

and imitators like Galsworthy and Shaw' are capable of showing up our inconsistencies. Indeed, 'any moral amateur can do that'.⁶⁹

Their works do not leave us as even the gory close of a Shakespeare tragedy does, with the sense of something far more deeply interfused and dimly rounding all. We have from them the sound in our ears of the frayed surf grinding on the broken shore, and dusted with the driven sand; but we have not the murmur nor scent of the infinite sea, beating upon these ragged rocks, and meeting their hideous cruelty with something higher than the soft, the shining, and the fair – whose cruelty can be worse than theirs.⁷⁰

Forsyth's challenge to these poets and playwrights is to arrest something final that has taken place – and that by him whose purity we have soiled, whose love we have despised, whose will we have crossed, and whose holiness we have raped.⁷¹ So, Forsyth insists that Christ's 'first purpose was not Shakesperian – to reveal man to man.' It is higher than that. 'The relief that He gives the race is not the artist's relief of self-expression, but the Saviour's relief of Redemption. He did not release the pent-up soul, but rebuilt its ruins.'⁷²

It was neither Galahad nor Arthur that drew Christ from heaven. 'It was a Lancelot race.'⁷³ And in the final analysis, neither Ibsen nor his imitators 'really get beyond the notion of each man being his own atoner, the notion of a kind of atoning suicide, in a death that satisfied his nemesis but not as holy judgment or Redemption (*Rosmersholm*), and far less as Reconciliation.'⁷⁴ In fairness to Ibsen, he himself admits this lack of resolution in a letter to George Brandes in 1875 when he says, 'Don't urge me, friend, to solve these dark equations; I'd rather ask; my job's not explanations.'⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Forsyth refuses to let him off the hook that easily. Ibsen's tragedy is true, but not tragic enough, not *real* enough. This is because Ibsen lacks one who can 'create in him the repentance which alone must create personality out of such chaotic material as he [finds]. He [has] the conscience to feel the sin of the world, but not the power of remedy.'⁷⁶ His job may not be about explanations, but it could be. That is Forsyth's point. Nevertheless, for the sake of identifying and giving voice to the right questions, Ibsen, and those prophets like him, must be read, and re-read. We need them.

Enter: the Church – learning from apostles, meeting with the world

Reading Forsyth raises the question of whether we evangelicals are too often reluctant, contemptuous or simply lacking in confidence in the truth of the gospel to authentically engage with secular literature and art, preferring instead the (deceptively) safe ghetto of our self-created sub-culture.⁷⁷ In a time when the Church is feeling challenged to identify points of contact between the gospel and the culture (to its own sub-cultures as well as to the world's) to and in which it is called to declare its faith, Forsyth reminds us that pessimists like Ibsen and Nietzsche are 'a gift of God to us',⁷⁸ and that we ignore them at our peril. They are, at core, theologians! Perhaps they are not theologians *of* the Church, but they are certainly theologians *to* the Church.

Their bitter is a tonic to our time. They are the protest of a self-respecting conscience against an idyllic, juvenile, sanguine, and domestic tyranny of Life. It is the great dramatists that are the great questioners, the great challengers, the great and serviceable accusers of current, easy, and fungous sainthood. It is not the learned critics that present the great challenge which draws out the last resources of a Gospel. They are too intellectualist. It is the great moral critics like Ibsen, Carlyle, and their kind. They lay bare not our errors but our shams.⁷⁹

Given that there is a sense in which Christians live with one foot on earth and one already in heaven, I wonder if we are even capable of doing this drawing out, and that we need the Ibsens to do for us what we cannot. It is true that Ibsen preaches but a half-gospel and, as we shall see, half-gospels ultimately have no future. However, it is a half we need to hear, especially since it is the half that is omitted so often in the Church's preaching. To see the revelation of this front half of the gospel seems to require both feet being in the one place, on earth, and that is where Ibsen stands, albeit he is unable (or unwilling) to look up.

Forsyth's treatment of Ibsen serves as a model for how Christians today might engage with the prophets of our own day on Parnassus, whether their work be in the field of music, journalism, film, science, politics, literature, or somewhere else. Admittedly, there is a fine-line distinction between contextualisation and accommodation. But the answer is not to shout louder, nor to 'attack' another's world view but, like Paul on Mars

Hill (Acts 17) and Jesus at the well in Samaria (John 4), to learn to listen, to ask questions, to question with, and to commend people who worship an ‘unknown god’ and the one ‘whose fathers worshiped on this mountain’. This necessary and exciting work of listening, questioning and commending attempts to correlate the questions and answers of the Scriptures (which themselves come out of particular cultures) with the questions and answers of the culture(s) with which we hope to engage. We are compelled by the gospel itself to engage in this dialogue of exegesis in the rich confidence that the Holy Spirit is already at work in all cultures. Indeed, if the Spirit were not active outside the Church (and its culture) then there would be no one in the Church in the first place.

Moreover, if human activity and thought, at its best, reflect something of corporate humanity’s participation in the vicarious ministry of a crucified and risen Christ through the Spirit who gathers up all our questions and tragic groans and offers them to the Father through sanctified lips, then it is imperative that we listen to and learn from today’s prophet-artists – the poets, musicians, sculptors, filmmakers and philosophers – who scratch where people itch (and where they should!). These prophet-artists have an adroitness for articulating ancient theological truths in fresh ways, and give articulate voice to the questions that gnaw at us and to our longings for transcendence. One Ibsen scholar notes, ‘truth is more than a mere logical agreement of thought and fact; it is rooted much deeper, since it originates in the interpenetration of life and thought, and involves the total personality.’⁸⁰ Here reason and empirical engagement leave us wanting, indeed dislocated. We need the dramatists and poets (even those who ‘lie too much’)⁸¹ to unveil for us moral realism, and to show us what drives us to the One who alone is the spring of living water who so satisfies our thirst that we will never be thirsty again. People like Woody Allen, George Steiner, Sting, David Williamson, Leonard Cohen, Bryce Courtney, Brett Whiteley, David Suzuki, Thich Nhat Hanh, a plethora of Sufi poets, and film directors like Ingmar Bergman, Michael Apted, David Fincher all do this well. In this they serve as what older theologians called *ancillae theologiae*, handmaidens of the knowledge (word) of God. Many evangelicals have been guilty of theological obscurantism and of arrogantly ignoring the insights of what Forsyth might call our ‘schoolmasters’.⁸² We have been too slow to accept not only that the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness

thereof, but also that we live in a world already redeemed, and that is being so.⁸³ Is our God big enough to embrace the whole world and its tragic questions with it?

Evangelical theologians, philosophers and university Christian fellowships are increasingly engaged in healthy and vigorous debate on many fronts, particularly with the sciences where a more modernist framework is still likely to be in vogue. We have, however, been somewhat slower, even neglectful and suspicious, to enter into genuine dialogue with the arts – creative writing, visual media, linguistics, dance, architecture, sculpture – particularly where the bridge between the two lies submerged in denser postmodernist fog. Trevor Hart is right to suggest that this suspicion of ‘weavers of fictions and conjurers of illusions... can serve only to detract from the truth rather than to illuminate it.’⁸⁴ Indeed, Forsyth notes that faith without imagination is incomplete, and imagination baseless without faith. We need both. ‘Neither can stand for the other, or do its work’.⁸⁵ Great harm has been done to the Christian faith by neglecting poetic imagination, whether inside or outside the Christian community.⁸⁶

There are, encouragingly, many examples of where such positive engagement is taking place, where long-held suspicions are dissolving, where dialogue is mutually edifying, and where art is valued ‘for arts sake’, for the contribution it makes ‘as art’, and not simply for how it can be harnessed or even ‘baptised’ as a lubricant for what is considered to be of ‘real’ substance.⁸⁷ In the past, Tolkien and Rembrandt and, perhaps, even Mozart, served as prodigious examples of believers whose legs seemed long enough to straddle both worlds without dishonouring the dignity of one for the other. Indeed, is there not a sense in which through doing this their preachments brought heaven and earth together? Could not the best sermon ever preached on Luke 15:11-32 be that 1668/69 oil on canvas hanging in The Hermitage in St. Petersburg – Rembrandt’s *The Return of the Prodigal Son*? And today, many Christians are also engaged in this courageous quest and tradition. Alfonse Borysewicz, Robert Cording, Judith Rock, Makoto Fujimura, Mark Jarman, Luci Shaw, Michael Symmons Roberts and Scott Cairns serve as inspiring models.

I am not suggesting that evangelicals exchange one idol (suspicion of imaginative questioning) for another (philosophical pluralism). I am inviting us to participate in an on-going humble and discerning discourse with these other ‘theologians’ in

order to receive and share positive insights about the gospel and reality. Standing in the tradition of the apostle who worked so fervently to introduce ‘the unknown God’ to the Epicureans (today’s Yuppies, though with considerably more self-discipline) and the Stoics (today’s Greenies) of his day, we too need to be in touch with our culture if we are not only going to build effective bridges for gospel communication but, dare I say it, learn fresh truths about God and his ways with us.

Enter: half-gospels

To rest here, though, would be to fail to tell the whole story. Worse, merely ‘listening’ to culture would be placing us in danger of selling out the gospel and its ‘creative, self-organising, and self-recuperative power’⁸⁸ to a culture that ‘asks but a half-gospel’.⁸⁹ It would be a sell-out to a culture that needs not simply improvement or completion but judgement and redemption, not fulfilment of its perceived needs but the forgiveness of its sins. Ibsen too wants to challenge culture. But ‘the light must come from the fire, not the fire from the light.’⁹⁰ We must do more than speak society’s gospel back to itself baptised in Christian jargon. The Church ought not be a domesticated chaplain to the status quo. ‘It is only the language of the Age that we must speak, not its Gospel.’⁹¹

The Church must, of course, meet the world. But when we do so we must do more than merely greet it and pose an invitation. A crisis has to be forced, a crisis of the will, a confrontation of will and Will, of conscience and Conscience. (And conscience here is not simply the conscience of the individual; it includes society’s conscience as well.) And it is a crisis that ends in both the world and the Church being subdued, reconciled and redeemed.⁹² More than an invitation, the gospel is a command and an announcement. ‘We are tempted to forget’, Forsyth says, ‘that we have not, in the first place, either to impress the world or to save it, but heartily and mightily to confess in word and deed a Saviour who has done both... The kind of religion that carries *us* through the world will say more than all our efforts to carry *it* through the world.’⁹³ And again,

Half-Gospels have no dignity, and no future. Like the famous mule, they have neither pride of ancestry nor hope of posterity. We must make it clear that Christianity faces the world with terms, and does not simply suffuse it with a

glow; that it crucifies the world, and does not merely consecrate it; that it recreates and does not just soothe or cheer it; that it is life from the dead, and not simply bracing for the weak or comfort for the sad.⁹⁴

Indeed, ‘we are more than stray sheep reclaimed. We are those whose defiant iniquity has lain upon Christ for us all.’⁹⁵ Only the Cross and its redemptive power is sufficient to bring about a new creation and to ‘reconcile all things’ to God.⁹⁶ Sinful materiality and culture must be judged and converted, not merely enfolded. Anything less is the sanctification of evil and the death of God in which Nietzsche’s God truly is dead.⁹⁷ This is where, in Forsyth’s view and my own, ‘merely incarnational’ theology leaves us, and God, wanting.⁹⁸

Enter:... to be answered...

There are, of course, no shortage of questions that arise for the contemporary person of faith who is seeking to come to grips with what Forsyth wants to tell us about the treasure we have in Ibsen and his ilk. Not least are questions about the dramatic form itself. How are we to interpret the space around the words, the silences between the lines? What do these say to us about the nature of revelation?⁹⁹ Is the genre of drama, for example, or any art form for that matter, able to serve the necessary revelatory purpose that Forsyth insists that God alone can serve? What about preaching (‘The artist’s grace is not the preacher’s’¹⁰⁰), even when God himself enters the pulpit, as he did in the First World War?¹⁰¹ What do we expect from people like Ibsen? Certainly we do not need another person to tritely tell us that ‘Life is hell but Jesus is the answer!’ So what are the alternatives? Drama *plus* preaching? Drama *as* preaching? Preaching *as* drama? Also, I wonder, given God’s revelation to us of the true nature of tragedy, are Christian artists being honest when they seek to reproduce tragedy artistically? Is it even possible?¹⁰²

Exit: pursued by a bear... [Enter] Shepherd¹⁰³

At the end of the day, artists like Ibsen matter, not because they point upwards, nor because the creation has been inhabited by God, but because creation has been pursued by him (as a bear hunting its prey), and redeemed by him, in his most creative and tragic act. ‘The real incarnation is not in

Christ's being made flesh for us, but in His being made sin for us!¹⁰⁴ Only a Cross can make sense of an Incarnation. Only that which, above all, hallows God's name in the creation, enthrones his holy love and 'destroys guilt in grace'¹⁰⁵ can provide any stable footing for society, or for the arts, or for communities of faith.

Forsyth is convinced that the Cross is where 'all earth's hues are not mere tints but jewels – not mere purpled gleams, but enduring, precious foundation-stones.'¹⁰⁶ And he invites us to consider Ibsen and other apostles to culture as such stones. Far from them being external and mechanical products that God could destroy and remake, God has so created that the very existence and certain future of these apostles, their word and their world is intractably and eternally bound up with his own life and joy. The life of the universe, Forsyth states, is 'the immanence of the Transcendent.'¹⁰⁷ The creation is considerably more than merely God's property. It is his eternal delight and the communication partner of his redemptive love. It is this loving divine will that forms the basis of the affirmation of creation's questions, materiality and cultures, and justifies the Church's mission in the world. To remain timid and unchallenged behind the ramparts of our own communities may offer a (false) sense of security, with considerably less risk of bruising, but it denies us the opportunity of hearing God's word in unexpected places, of the Church being reformed, renewed and recalled by that word, and of reforming, renewing and recalling our world, its cultures and its thought to the obedience of Christ.¹⁰⁸ Here, Forsyth's daughter, Jessie Forsyth Andrews, faithfully echoes her father's thoughts when she offers us this challenge: 'If, as we believe, it cost more to redeem the world than to create it, may we not in all humility find something akin to the redemptive wherever with high purpose we set ourselves to bring order out of confusion – whether it be in a broken life, or a bewildered country, or a torn and stricken world'.¹⁰⁹

The divine secret is neither with the philosopher nor with the poet-prophet.¹¹⁰ And so whereas Nietzsche and Ibsen can only identify the problem, Forsyth points us to Christ. We would certainly be fools not to listen to and learn from Ibsen and his kind. But whereas in Ibsen we see a longing for home, only Forsyth's gospel of blood-soaked grace can finally carry us there, and there to us. To Ibsen and to us today, Forsyth says, 'The practical solution of life by the soul is outside life. The destiny of experience is beyond itself. The lines of

life's moral movement and of thought's *nisus* converge in a point beyond life and history... The key is in the Beyond; though not necessarily beyond death, but beyond the world of the obvious, and palpable, and common-sensible. (Yea, beyond the inward it really is.)'¹¹¹

Forsyth leaves Christians with a model of how we might engage our world, and he schools us in how we may do so with candor and gospel courage.

Notes

- 1 If Nietzsche fails in this quest, then, as John Carroll points out, he 'will have turned into Don Quixote at the end, a normal man, whose only wish is to die.' John Carroll, *The Wreck of Western Culture: Humanism Revisited* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2004), 196; cf. Peter T. Forsyth, 'Intellectualism and Faith', *Hibbert Journal* 11 (January 1913): 327. But Nietzsche, of course, believes that he *has* found a replacement for the crucified Christ: himself! Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is* (trans. R. J. Hollingdale; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979). Jürgen Moltmann reminds us: 'Is not every unbeliever who has a reason for his atheism and his decision not to believe a theologian too? Atheists who have something against God and against faith in God usually know very well whom and what they are rejecting, and have their reasons. Nietzsche's book *The Antichrist* has a lot to teach us about true Christianity.' Jürgen Moltmann, *Godless Theology* (Cited 28 June 2006. Online: <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2007>). See also, Michel Harr, 'Nietzsche and the Metamorphosis of the Divine', in *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (ed. P. Blond; London: Routledge, 1998), 157-76.
- 2 Hermann J. Weigand, *The Modern Ibsen: A Reconsideration* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1953), 125. It is a matter of debate whether Nietzsche should be read as expressing a fundamental indignation with life. He probably would have rejected such a claim himself, preferring to see himself as a predominantly *positive* figure, saying 'Yes' to the world, even as he contradicts it.
- 3 Henrik Ibsen, 'The Verse'. Originally written in German in 1877. Quoted in Ketil Jensehaugen, *Henrik Ibsen as a poet*, (Cited 1 July 2006. Online: <http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jan/27/lit.html>); See Brian Johnston, 'The Dangerous Seductions of the Past: Ibsen's Counter-Discourse to Modernity', in *Modernism in European Drama: Ibsen, Strindberg, Pirandello, Beckett* (ed. F. J. Marker and C. Innes; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 15; Alan Reynolds Thompson, 'Ibsen as Psychoanalyst', *Educational Theatre Journal* 3, No. 1. (March,

- 1951): 34.
- 4 Janko Lavrin, 'Ibsen and His Creation: III – The Strength of his Weakness', *The New Age: A Weekly Review of Politics, Literature, and Art* 24, No. 9 (Thursday, 2 January, 1919): 140.
 - 5 Of course, Ibsen's tragedy and comedy stood very closely together. See Robin Young, 'Ibsen and Comedy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen* (ed. J. McFarlane; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 58-67; Bjørn Hemmer, 'Ibsen and the Realistic Problem Drama', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen* (ed. J. McFarlane; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 68-88.
 - 6 Weigand, *Modern Ibsen*, 126.
 - 7 Also known as *An Enemy of Society*, the play was first performed in Christiania, 13 January 1883.
 - 8 Quoted in Northam, 'Dramatic and Non-Dramatic Poetry', 29. Miller argues that *Enemy of the People* is 'really about Ibsen's belief that there is such a thing as a truth and that it bears something like holiness within it, regardless of the cost its discovery at any one moment entails. And the job of the elite is to guard and explain that holiness without compromise or stint.' Arthur Miller, 'Ibsen and the Drama of Today', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen* (ed. J. McFarlane; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 229. I suspect that if Ibsen lacked reverence for this 'something like holiness' then Forsyth would not have been interested in him at all.
 - 9 Quoted in Janko Lavrin, 'Ibsen and His Creation: VII – The Struggle with the "Ideals"', *The New Age: A Weekly Review of Politics, Literature, and Art* 24, No. 20 (Thursday 20 March, 1919): 328.
 - 10 Peter T. Forsyth, *The Church, the Gospel and Society* (London: Independent Press, 1962), 94.
 - 11 A. E. Simpson, 'P. T. Forsyth: The Prophet of Judgment', *SJT* 4 (1951): 152. Pastoral ministry placed Forsyth in contact with 'damned souls' through which he came to see that there was a tragic element of life, namely guilt, which the liberal gospel had no positive word for.
 - 12 Peter T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind: The Lyman Beecher Lecture on Preaching*, Yale University, 1907 (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1907), 228.
 - 13 I am indebted to Trevor Hart for associating this metaphor with the atonement.
 - 14 Forsyth, *Preaching*, 227-8.
 - 15 Peter T. Forsyth, 'Ibsen's Treatment of Guilt', *Hibbert Journal* 14 (October 1915): 106. Similarly, Forsyth could have turned to Dostoevsky who he, surprisingly, does not mention in any of his books. See also Peter T. Forsyth, "'Henrik Ibsen.'" Review of *The Life of Henrik Ibsen*, by Henrik Jaeger, trans. Clara Bell', *Independent*, literary supplement (6 March 1891): 1. When it was given to the young Swedish actor August Lindberg to direct *Ghost* and play Osvald, Ibsen stipulated that he did not want anything to distract the public's impression that his plays portrayed a segment of real life. For Ibsen, this meant that there should be no other plays, nor orchestral music, performed either before or after his plays, or even in between scenes, lest they serve as a distraction and compromise the sense that what was happening on stage was a glimpse into the real. This also explains Ibsen's fussiness about which actors procured which parts and why he insisted that certain actors be given particular roles, whether it be a major or a minor role.
 - 16 See Peter T. Forsyth, 'The Pessimism of Mr Thomas Hardy', *London Quarterly Review* 118 (October 1912): 193-219; Forsyth, 'Treatment', 105-6.
 - 17 Robert M. Brown, *P. T. Forsyth, Prophet for Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), 134.
 - 18 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 112.
 - 19 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 115; Nietzsche writes, 'In Christianity neither morality nor religion come into contact with reality at any point.' Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ* (trans. R. J. Hollingdale; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 125; and, 'Christianity was from the beginning, essentially and fundamentally, life's nausea and disgust with life, merely concealed behind, masked by, dressed up as, faith in "another" or "better" life'. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (trans. W. Kaufmann; New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 23; cf. pp. 15-6; John W. De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 15-6.
 - 20 Forsyth, *Society*, 100.
 - 21 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 115.
 - 22 Forsyth, *Preaching*, 103.
 - 23 See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 239-63.
 - 24 Miller, 'Ibsen', 231.
 - 25 Forsyth, 'Intellectualism and Faith', 319; cf. Peter T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 119.
 - 26 Forsyth, *Justification*, 210.
 - 27 Forsyth, *Preaching*, 103.
 - 28 Forsyth, *Preaching*, 104.
 - 29 Forsyth, *Preaching*, 105. Forsyth's criticism of Ibsen also extends to his over-individualistic tendencies, his misdiagnosis of the relationship between human guilt and God's gracious redemption, and his failure to reveal the holy because of his analytic rather than prophetic analysis of the human condition. See Forsyth, 'Treatment', 100-12, 117-8, 121.
 - 30 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 120.
 - 31 George Hall, 'Tragedy in the Theology of P. T. Forsyth', in *Justice the True and Only Mercy: Essays on the Life and Theology of Peter Taylor Forsyth* (ed. T. Hart; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 81.

- 32 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 121.
- 33 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 122.
- 34 Peter T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God: Lectures for War-Time on a Christian Theodicy* (London: Independent Press, 1957), 209.
- 35 Hall, 'Tragedy', 95.
- 36 Frank B. Brown, *Religious Aesthetics, A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), as quoted in *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader* (ed. G. E. Thiessen; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 268.
- 37 Peter T. Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus: Lectures on Art, Ethic, and Theology* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), 60; cf. pp. 106, 108-9, 196, 200, 231-2, 234-5, 240-1, 250-1.
- 38 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Towards a Christian Aesthetic* (Carlisle: Solway, 1997): 8. See also Calvin Seerveld, *Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves: Alternative Steps to Understanding Art* (Carlisle: Piquant, 2000), 17-21; Calvin Seerveld, *Rainbows for the Fallen World* (Toronto: Tuppence Press, 2005), 78-155.
- 39 Henrik Ibsen, *The Oxford Ibsen, Volume III: Brand, Peer Gynt* (ed. J. W. McFarlane; trans. J. Kirkup and C. Fry; London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 246.
- 40 Miller, 'Ibsen', 227.
- 41 Forsyth, *Justification*, 208.
- 42 Quoted in Weigand, *Modern Ibsen*, 303.
- 43 Quoted in Weigand, *Modern Ibsen*, 303.
- 44 The line 'the heart-nook of the hidden' is taken from Ibsen's poem, 'The Miner', written in 1851. Henrik Ibsen, *Lyrics & Poems from Ibsen* (trans. F. E. Garrett; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1912), np. Michael Meyer translates the line as 'the heart-chamber of what lies hidden'. Michael Meyer, *Henrik Ibsen: The Making of a Dramatist 1828-1864* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1967), 84. See also John Northam, 'Dramatic and Non-Dramatic Poetry', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen* (ed. J. McFarlane; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 54.
- 45 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One* (trans. R. J. Hollingdale; London: Penguin, 1969), 202-5.
- 46 Forsyth, *Society*, 112.
- 47 Heb. 11:10.
- 48 Peter T. Forsyth, *God the Holy Father* (Blackwood: New Creation Publications, 1987), 10-11.
- 49 Peter T. Forsyth, *This Life and the Next: The Effect on This Life of Faith in Another* (London: Independent Press, 1946), 69.
- 50 Peter T. Forsyth, *The Christian Ethic of War* (London: Longmans, Green, 1916), 171.
- 51 Ibsen, *Brand, Peer Gynt*, 248. Significantly, these words come out of the mouth not of Brand, but of Gerd, the mad gypsy girl who tries to talk Brand into going with her to the 'ice church' in the mountains. But just when the Christian reader might get excited that Ibsen may have perceived something of an answer to the questions he identifies through the mouth of Gerd (cf. 1 Cor. 1:27-29), she turns around and confesses that the 'tree of the cross... this thing [that] was done long years ago' is all a lie taught to her by her father when she was little, and that the priest Brand himself is really 'that Man... the Saviour.' (ibid.)
- 52 Nietzsche saw something of this: 'But he – had to die [*er müsste sterben*]: he looked with eyes that saw everything – he saw the depths and abysses of man, all man's hidden disgrace and ugliness. His pity knew no shame: he crept into my dirtiest corners. This most curious, most over-impertunate, over-compassionate god had to die. He always saw me: I desired to take revenge on such a witness – or cease to live myself. The god who saw everything, even man: this god had to die [*er müsste sterben*]! Man could not endure that such a witness should live.' Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 278-9.
- 53 Ibsen, *Brand, Peer Gynt*, 250. The author of 1 John 4:8 (and 4:16) defines that love in verse 10: 'In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'
- 54 Henrik Ibsen, *Emperor and Galilean: A World Historic Drama* (trans. W. Archer; London: William Heinemann, 1907), 213. This is Ibsen's most Hegelian play. See Bjørn Hemmer, 'Ibsen and Historical Drama', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen* (ed. J. McFarlane; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 12-27.
- 55 Forsyth, *Preaching*, 228.
- 56 See Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:9-11; 2 Pet. 3:9.
- 57 Ibsen, *Brand, Peer Gynt*, 421.
- 58 Although the text does not indicate such, and so it would literally be an argument based on the silent spaces between the lines, it may be possible to argue that Peer does indeed find forgiveness and reconciliation in the arms of Solveig, not unlike how the younger son in Luke 15 finds grace in the wordless embrace of the father. I, however, remain unconvinced of this interpretation of the play's ending.
- 59 Henrik Ibsen, *Peer Gynt* (trans. R. F. Sharp; London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1921), 241.
- 60 Peter T. Forsyth, 'Revelation and the Person of Christ', in *Faith and Criticism: Essays by Congregationalists* (London: Simpson Low Marston, 1893), 100.
- 61 Ibsen, *Brand, Peer Gynt*, 421.
- 62 Peter T. Forsyth, *The Preaching of Jesus and the Gospel of Christ* (Blackwood: New Creation Publications, 1987), 4.
- 63 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 109.
- 64 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 105.
- 65 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 106. Speaking at Aberdeen University in 1906, Forsyth reflected on his student days saying: 'Tones from the solemn masks of the

- Greek dramatists taught us to vibrate with the shock of man's collision with fate. We begun to acquire the sense of the world's tragedy. Shakespeare bore in upon us the connection of tragedy and destiny, the moral nature of doom, the interplay of sin and sorrow... We stood before the old anomaly of life, the pity, the terror, the mystery, the enormity of it all... We learned not only the cosmic problem of the savant, but the moral problem of the sage.' Peter T. Forsyth, 'Principal Forsyth on Church and University: A Striking Address', *Aberdeen Free Press* (24 September 1906): 11. Reprinted three days later in *British Congregationalist* (27 September, 1906): 201-2. In a recent book, David Hart argues that Johann Sebastian Bach is 'the greatest of Christian theologians'. See David B. Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 282-4.
- 66 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 106.
 67 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 106.
 68 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 119; cf. p. 111.
 69 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 106.
 70 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 106-7; cf. Forsyth, *Society*, 102. On the relationship between Ibsen and Shakespeare see Halvdan Koht, 'Shakespeare and Ibsen', in *Ibsen: A Collection of Critical Essays* (ed. R. Fjelde; Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 41-51.
 71 See Forsyth, *Jesus*, 3.
 72 Forsyth, 'Revelation and the Person of Christ', 112-3.
 73 Forsyth, *Society*, 102; cf. Forsyth, *Jesus*, 91.
 74 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 111.
 75 Henrik Ibsen, 'A Rhyme-Letter', in *Ibsen Quotations* (Cited 1 July 2006. Online: <http://www.ibsen.net/index.gan?id=11121081&subid=0>); cf. Vigdis Ystad, 'Suicides in Ibsen's plays' (Cited 1 July 2006. Online: <http://www.med.uio.no/ipsy/ssff/engelsk/menuculture/Ystad.htm#1.%20%22About>). This is not to be confused with 'Rhyme Letter' written to Fru Heiberg in Dresden, in Easter-week 1871.
 76 Forsyth, 'Treatment', 121.
 77 I am reminded here of God's concern for all the nations and cultures of the world (Mk. 13:10; Rev. 7:9; 21:24) and that God's covenant purpose for the creation includes all peoples. Indeed, through Jesus Christ, all nations, as cultures, will come to the obedience of faith (cf. Paul's hope in Rom. 16:26, hence 1 Cor. 9:19-23).
 78 Forsyth, *Preaching*, 104.
 79 Forsyth, *Preaching*, 104.
 80 E. W. Kaufmann, 'Ibsen's Conception of Truth', in *Ibsen: A Collection of Critical Essays* (ed. R. Fjelde; Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 19.
 81 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 149.
 82 Forsyth once referred to the secular university as 'a schoolmaster to bring us to the world's Christ and to leave us with no other refuge than the cross'. Forsyth, 'Principal Forsyth on Church and University', 11.
 83 Ps. 24:1; Jn. 16:33. This does not mean the cessation of the need for discernment. 1 Cor. 10:23-31.
 84 Trevor A. Hart, 'Imagining Evangelical Theology', in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (ed. J. G. Stackhouse, Jr.; Grand Rapids/Leicester/Vancouver: Baker Books/Inter-Varsity Press/Regent College Publishing, 2000), 194. See also pp. 197-8.
 85 Forsyth, *Parnassus*, 232.
 86 See Forsyth, *Parnassus*, 240-1.
 87 Forsyth said of poetry: 'Poetry, like all true art, must have no direct end outside itself, i.e., outside the aim of realising to us the beautiful by inward images, and exciting the appropriate emotions. It impresses, it does not convert or proselytise. If it had another aim, then there would be two supreme ends before it, and out of their collision would rise a discord fatal to Art; or if both ends were not supreme, Art would become a means only, and not an end in itself. It would become a means of edifying us in a religious way. And that for Art would be a degradation, as we see in the case of a multitude of religious pictures and tunes. If the religious effect is uppermost, Art is degraded, and Religion, in the end, is not served. Poetry, therefore, must not aim at a distinctly and directly religious effect. It has a religious element, and it has a religious effect. But these are incidental.' Forsyth, *Parnassus*, 251.
 88 Peter T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments* (London: Independent Press, 1947), 45. Forsyth was critical of the trend for theologians to surrender the distinctives of the gospel to the culture in an effort to accommodate the latest thinking. He wrote: '[The Church] seems at times more concerned to adapt the gospel than to preach its fullness, to bring it down to people's level than to bring them up to it... It seems rather to commend the gospel to the natural man than to set the natural man in the searchlight of the gospel.' Peter T. Forsyth, 'Lay Religion', *Constructive Quarterly* 3 (December 1915): 779.
 89 Forsyth, *Preaching*, 89.
 90 Peter T. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority in Relation to Certainty, Sanctity and Society: An Essay in the Philosophy of Experimental Religion* (London: Independent Press, 1952), 276-7.
 91 Peter T. Forsyth, *Revelation Old and New: Sermons and Addresses* (ed. John Huxtable; London: Independent Press, 1962), 45; cf. Walter Shenk, *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995), 6, 16-7, 44; Peter J. Leithart, *Against Christianity* (Moscow: Canon Press, 2003).
 92 See Forsyth, *Authority*, 145-6, 166, 174; Peter T. Forsyth, *Faith, Freedom and the Future* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912), 8; Forsyth, *Parnassus*, vii, viii; Forsyth, *Preaching*, 76-84, 89, 133;

- Forsyth, *Revelation*, 46; Forsyth, *Sacraments*, 75, 116; Peter T. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 24-5.
- 93 Peter T. Forsyth, 'The Soul of Christ and the Cross of Christ', *London Quarterly Review* 116 (October 1911): 193, 194.
- 94 Forsyth, *Sacraments*, 18.
- 95 Forsyth, *Prayer*, 76.
- 96 Col. 1:20; cf. Forsyth, *Sacraments*, 196-7.
- 97 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs* (ed. B. Williams; trans. J. Nauckhoff; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 109, 120; Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 31-2, 41, 114.
- 98 In Forsyth's day, incarnational theologians were those (largely neo-Hegelians) who embraced the incarnation as *the* dominant theological motif, but (practically) rejected the atonement. Today, there are many who would identify themselves as 'incarnational theologians' who do not ignore the importance, and even centrality, of the atonement. My criticism is of the former kind, some of whom still exist today.
- 99 See Forsyth's discussion on this question in Forsyth, *Parnassus*, 244-5, 247-8.
- 100 Forsyth, *Preaching*, 61.
- 101 Forsyth considered World War I to be God's sermon to a complacent Church that had failed to preach, and implicate the preaching of, the cross – that is, human evil and God's righteousness. He stated that the war was 'caused by a Christian nation's cynical negation of a world-conscience.' *Jesus*, 85; cf. *Justification*, 23, 100-2, 129-30; *War*, 11, 43; Peter T. Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer* (London: Independent Press, 1951), 26; *Sacraments*, 12, 33-4, 37.
- 102 Much of what is acclaimed as 'Christian art' betrays an overly realised eschatology and an inadequate theology of Holy Saturday, and so of the entire *Triduum Sacrum*. Herein lies a challenge to Christian artists to explore what insights tragedy (and comedy) might offer that intimate a Beyond in which the meta-drama might continue. I hope to explore these questions in a subsequent paper.
- 103 This line is taken from William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* (ed. F. Kermode; New York: Signet), 54. Act 3, Scene 3, Line 57.
- 104 Forsyth, *Jesus*, 25; cf. Forsyth, *Sacraments*, 83.
- 105 Forsyth, *Justification*, 107. See also p. 128; Peter T. Forsyth, 'Immanence and Incarnation', in *The Old Faith and the New Theology* (ed. C. H. Vine. London: Sampson Low Marston, 1907), 48.
- 106 Forsyth, *Justification*, 47.
- 107 Forsyth, *Justification*, 75.
- 108 2 Cor. 10:5.
- 109 Jessie F. Andrews, "In a Place by Itself", *Congregational Quarterly* 1 (April, 1923): 161; cf. Forsyth, *Justification*, 94.
- 110 Forsyth, *Justification*, 139. I am not here suggesting that we abandon philosophical enquiry. Nor am I suggesting that we adopt Sallie McFague's idea that to do theology poetically means that we must conceive of Scripture not as a revelation of historical facts and theo-historical truth, but as mere human metaphor describing the divine-human relationship. Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (London: SCM Press, 1983).
- 111 Forsyth, *Justification*, 212, 213.

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