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

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

P. T. Forsyth: Prophet of the Cross

by Marvin W. Anderson

Dr. Anderson, Professor of Ecclesiastical History in Bethel Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, was awarded the degree of Ph.D. by Aberdeen University in 1964 after a period of research under the supervision of Professor A. M. Hunter. It was Professor Hunter who first awakened his interest in Peter Taylor Forsyth. One token of this interest was Dr. Anderson's Gospel and Authority: A P. T. Forsyth Reader, published in 1971. We welcome this further survey to some of Forsyth's best writing, and not least the examination of Kähler's influence on his thought.

So he saw more perfectly the Ditch that was on the one hand, and the Quag that was on the other; also how narrow the way was which lay betwixt them both; also now he saw the Hobgoblins, and Satyrs, and Dragons of the Pit, but all afar off; for after break of day they came not nigh; yet they were discovered to him, according to that which is written, "He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death".

I. ON FIRST READING FORSYTH

1. *The Moral Rock*

The more we know about cosmic forces, antres vast, deserts horrible, alps of thick ribbed ice, seas, continents, vastitudes of every kind; of geological ages, stellar spaces, solar storms; of creature agonies, of social miseries, devilish wickedness, civilized triumphs, historic heroisms, the grandeur of genius and unquenchable love; of all the passion, for evil on the one hand, or, on the other, for the Eternal, Immortal, and Invisible good—so much the more we must feel how awful is the holy love of God, that has secured the grand issue forever, that surmounts all principalities and powers, things past, present, and to come, every other omnipotence; surmounts, nay exploits, them all in the Holy One of God, who by His cross is the same world-conqueror yesterday, today and forever. It is a tremendous claim. And the improbability of it is either a pious absurdity; or it is the quiet irony of a God who has it already done in the hollow of His hand. Like every ultimate interpretation of life it is a matter of insight—insight into the world, the Christ, and the Cross.¹

One first observes this insight in Forsyth's sermon of 1896. There Forsyth observes that if "Father" is Christ's faith, "Forgive them" is His work.² As the elder son in the parable of the prodigal would not accept that pardon without a price, so does the Church insist on the cost of forgiveness, shriveling the magnanimity it

¹ *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (Eerdmans), 228-229.

² *God The Holy Father* (Independent Press), 5; cf. Kenneth Hamilton, "Love or Holy Love? Nels Ferré versus P. T. Forsyth", *Canadian Journal of Theology* 8 (1962), 229-236.

parades. Forsyth protests that an attitude like that of the elder brother destroys faith!

The condition of forgiveness is answering the grace and freedom of it with a like free, humble, and joyful heart. It is taking the freedom of it home, and not the cost. It is committing ourselves to God's self-committal to us. It is taking God at His word—at His living word, Christ—His urgent, reticent, gracious, masterful word, Christ.³

All of Forsyth is in his definition of evangelical theology as holiness: "It is a matter of grace meeting sin by sacrifice to holiness, more even than of love meeting need by service to man."^{3a}

One ought to turn in the same volume to the sermon *The Living Christ*. "We need," says Forsyth, "a heart amidst our heart and its ruins and its resurrection. That is the Christ we need, and, thank God for His unspeakable gift, that is the Christ we have". This dual theme of the Holy Father and the Living Christ leads one to Forsyth's "experience of theology".⁴ Medieval Christianity stood on the authority of the Church, the Reformers on that of the Bible and later Protestantism on the confessions. Forsyth claims that it was an immense step forward when Schleiermacher appealed to the godly conscience. How is it then that in churches of the evangelical experience a distaste and distrust of theology has begun to spread? Forsyth describes several reasons for the range of that distrust.

It is a weakness of experimentalism that "They can carry an election with men easier than rest in an election of God".⁵ Then too the preaching of one's own experience is fatal to faith. "Look to the Gospel and it will see to the experiences. Don't beg men to believe in Christ; put before men a Christ that they cannot help believe".⁶ Forsyth suggests in the third place that the malaise of dependence must be corrected by obedience, i.e., Schleiermacher's theology of experience must be corrected by Ritschl. The experience of theology alone explicates the Christian Gospel. Faith for Forsyth means judgment and obedience, an obedient experience which belongs to Christ, however, and not to the Christian. Forsyth deplores a dependent experience in theology which vitiates the quality of the gospel. "But even the positively Christian experience of a quite new life cannot be the basis either of a gospel or of a theology. What can be such a basis is Christ's experience and that of those in first and direct contact with His person and work".⁷ Finally, *Pectus*

³ *God The Holy Father*, 17-18.

^{3a} B. G. Worrall, "The Authority of Grace in the Theology of P. T. Forsyth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 25 (1972), 58-74.

⁴ "The Place of Spiritual Experience In The Making of Theology", *Revelation Old and New* (Independent Press), 68-80.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

fecit theologum. The whole man is a sinner before God. All of this Forsyth summed up in an address to the Congregational Society of England and Wales assembled at Leeds in 1905.⁸

I have found my rock, my reality, my eternal life in my historic redemption. And what is moral rock, real existence, and spiritual mastery for me is also the authority and charter of the church, the living power in all history, the moral foundation of Society, and the warrant of an infinite future for the race.⁹

2. *The Living Power*

P. T. Forsyth in a notable passage describes the living power which transformed him "from a Christian to a believer, from a lover of love to an object of grace".¹⁰ Robert McAfee Brown examines that passage in "The 'Conversion' of P. T. Forsyth".¹¹ In the selection of essays which follow Forsyth sets down four themes of divine power for theology. They are Judgment, Obedience, Authority, and Revelation. That these are the work of Christ, not the Christian makes them evangelical. A reading of *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* confirms that Forsyth held to an objective atonement as the answer to God's judgment, a holy cross as Christ's obedient response to the Holy Father, a social salvation as the scope of God's grace and the apostolic interpretation of Christ in the Epistles as integral to the Gospel accounts of Jesus.

Two articles help one to observe the scope of Forsyth's theology. Principle Sydney Cave describes his writings,¹² while George Jackson surveys his preaching.¹³ Forsyth's writings as a whole set forth a moral theology. Forsyth defines man's personality and God's purity as moral authority: "We have the ground of all things in the goal of all things".¹⁴ W. L. Bradley comments that "His is a penetrating insight into the fundamental weakness of modern thought; he sees that what man needs first is authority, not liberty; and he realizes that unless the Church recaptures the authoritative note of the Gospel it will fail in its task".¹⁵ Forsyth's transfer from liberalism to a vital faith is marked by the 1896 sermon, "The Holy Father and The Living Christ".¹⁶ Brown however points to several factors

⁸ "The Grace of God as the Moral Authority in The Church," *The Church, The Gospel and Society* (Independent Press), 67-127.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁰ *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (Independent Press), 193.

¹¹ *Congregational Quarterly* 30 (1952), 236-244.

¹² *Congregational Quarterly* 26 (1948).

¹³ *Interpretation* 7 (1953), 323-337.

¹⁴ *Principle of Authority*, 2.

¹⁵ *P. T. Forsyth: The Man and His Work*, 273.

¹⁶ Samuel J. Mikolaski, "The Theology of P. T. Forsyth", *THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY* 36 (1964), 27-41.

prior to 1896 which changed Forsyth. Forsyth's daughter quotes her husband's statement that

He was a theologian, but as a theologian he was *sui generis*, and totally unlike the other theologians with whom I was acquainted. As I came to know him more intimately there gradually grew up in my mind the conviction that he was a prophet—the greatest prophet of our times—a second Amos, an Amos with the vision of the Cross. And it is as the prophet of the Cross that I have regarded him ever since.¹⁷

It is refreshing to read Forsyth. What follows is a brief survey to enable the theological student who first reads Forsyth to do so for himself.

II. PROPHET OF THE CROSS

1. Evangelical Criticism

T. W. Manson charged liberalism with failure to interpret the Bible as the Word of God. Forsyth faults evangelical theology with failure to interpret the Bible by the Gospel. "Luther by the Bible delivered us from the bondage of the Church. But there are ways of treating the Bible which make us welcome the man or the movement that by the Gospel will deliver us from the Bible".¹⁸ The greatest question of the age is a genuine spiritual authority which is found not in the Bible, but in the Gospel. P. T. Forsyth spoke in accents ecumenical and evangelical when he wrote, "The Gospel of God's historic act of grace is the infallible power and authority over both Church and Bible."¹⁹

Salvation history raises the historian above the annalist, said Forsyth in 1905. No law of nature or history can grant insight into the absolute value of society or the mind of God. "It is his Redemption that makes Jesus the Christ, and precious. The fact of Christ's life would be valueless (except to the historian of religion); the fact of his death would be of little moment (except to the martyrologist), apart from its function between man and God, its revealed meaning, its theological meaning as Atonement, Redemption, Reconciliation".²⁰ So to use the Gospel is the highest criticism of the Bible. Only this synthetic principle will give analytic and literary higher criticism its true place. Such a synthetic principle we need, and it is the Gospel.

Forsyth's key word is purpose. Criticism, Gospel, Christ, Bible, Church and Redemption—all these exist for a purpose. Jesus Himself is the God who acts. To realize this is not the whole of the revelation since "The deed needs to be brought home". Forsyth cites John (20: 31) to illustrate this purpose. "The tradition of

¹⁷ *Work of Christ* (Fontana Library), 28.

¹⁸ "The Evangelical Churches and the Higher Criticism", *Contemporary Review* 88 (1905), 575.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 574.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 578.

Christ we owe to a company of preachers, not to a jury of historians".²¹ Again Forsyth insists on the unity of the New Testament. "The evangelist with his narrative was but an acolyte of the apostle with his Gospel".²² Kerygmatic history might better describe what Forsyth considers the record of the New Testament to be. That there can be no opposition between Paul and Jesus means that Forsyth follows Martin Kähler in asserting the normative position of the Epistles. "In the Gospels Christ appears as acting, in the Epistles the same Christ interprets His own action. And both the manifestation and the inspiration are necessary for the fulness of revelation as redemption, for its effect as a revelation to us".²³ Forsyth would use the Gospel to evaluate the New Testament because Christ did the same for the Old Testament. He used it as a means of grace to reveal God's saving purpose, "the long purpose and saving scope of God's salvation". Jesus read His Bible in this way, claims Forsyth, that we might realize the evangelical purpose and work of God.

Rather than fragment it, only this highest synthetic criticism can preserve the unity of the Bible. Not the whole Bible, but the Bible as a whole compels one to grasp that which makes Jesus to be the Christ. "It is the regnant Gospel of a gracious God as moral Redeemer".²⁴ The Gospel is alive and objective. One can distinguish it but never detach it from the Bible. One difficulty in understanding Forsyth lies in his dual use of the word Gospel. Gospel means for him, "the mighty saving act of God in Christ; and it means the news of that act by the word of apostolic men".²⁵ Is it not a superficial Christianity which uses Gospel in the second sense only? Forsyth thinks it is, and rails against an orthodoxy which stakes its Gospel upon the absolute accuracy of a rationalistic view of the Bible. This is to commit in a Protestant form the Roman error which stakes the sacrament on the valid ordination of the priest. The Evangelical criticism is the highest, to criticize faith by faith. "Christianity will not stand or fall by its critical attitude to its documents, but by its faithful attitude to its Gospel."²⁶

2. *The Consequences of Faith*

The first moment in the Christian life is when a man sees Jesus Christ and Him Crucified; the second moment is when he finds the cross, which his own iniquity has caused, in his own heart, but the third and last moment is when, looking on the world, he sees it as Jesus sees it, struggling, toiling, sinning, suffering, and finds its unutterable need his burden, and the supply of that need his task.²⁷

²¹ *Ibid.*, 581.

²² *Ad loc.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 584.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 588.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 593.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 598.

²⁷ *The Work of Christ*, 226.

This task Forsyth finds to be the heart of the Gospel since "We are in the world to act and take the consequences".²⁸ Those consequences are to toil, to sin and to suffer. In 1908 Forsyth contributed a discussion of the consequence of faith to the *Hibbert Journal*. Protestantism has two streams which arise from different sources, the Reformation and the Enlightenment. Each has its rationale; the one has need of the other. It is a question of which must be dominant. "We find our charter in history, and not in human nature; in the Word, and not the world. The seat of revelation is in the cross, and not in the heart."²⁹

What role then does experience play in Christian theology? How does Forsyth explain what he meant in 1905 when he said that an experience of theology and not a theology of experience is necessary for the Free Churches? Forsyth meets the problem of objective communion with Christ in two ways, personal and historical. Certainty is not rational, but moral since "Another becomes my moral life". It is not being saved by the apostle or his experience, nor by the Church and its experience, but by what saved both the apostle and the Church. Secondly, Christ has entered and changed history. What makes an individual experience certain is "the decisive act of an eternal person saving a world". "I am forgiven and saved by an act which saves the world".³⁰ This evangelical succession stands over the individual experience, and over them all stands Christ as Lord.

Finally, asks Forsyth, what consciousness did Christ have of His Gospel in Matthew (11: 25 ff.), the central passage for Christ's self-consciousness? Yet even that is not sufficient to reach the historic reality, since one must find a means of stepping off the last verge of direct documentation "on to sure moral ground where the documents cease".³¹ The very nature of that faith and its documents compels this. This self-consciousness is in Christ for a moral purpose, argues Forsyth. If that death were no moral outlet for victory, were that violent and premature death the end, Christ could neither have nor give the peace of God. "He was there to do that which all the accounts declare was done in the Cross—to conquer for mankind their eternal life."³²

3. Pastoral Task

Principal James Denney did not agree with all that Forsyth wrote. Yet one senses his agreement with Forsyth in letters sent to W.

²⁸ *The Cruciality of The Cross* (1909 edition), 121.

²⁹ "The Distinctive Thing in Christian Experience", *Hibbert Journal* 6 (1908), 486.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 495.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 497.

³² *Ibid.*, 499.

Robertson Nicoll. On January 15, 1898, Denney wrote of *The Holy Father and the Living Christ* that "it is a book of real experience, a rediscovery of the Gospel, worth as much as most of the other little books put together".³³ Again in 1907 he wrote, "The merit of Forsyth is that he returns to his N.T.,—I delivered unto you *first of all* that Christ died for our sins".³⁴ This was Forsyth's pastoral task. Forsyth seeks to show how the old and the new, the act of God and the attitude of men toward it, determine the pastoral task. In two sermons of 1913 and 1916 Forsyth describes the burden of the spiritual teacher for the spiritual needs of the churches.

The current taste in preaching would bring the gospel down to the people's level rather than bring them up to the gospel. "It does not reach those deep levels of the moral soul where the ore is got from which the great theologies were cast in a furnace".³⁵ Matthew (13: 52) is his first text: Christ Himself lived in such a time as the writer describes, when the old was vanishing, the new would vanquish and "the old verb in the present tense" could also be the power of the Christian teacher.

The past is a prophecy. The case of Paul shows Forsyth how a great spiritual teacher can be marked by this quality. "The old has the new in its womb". The parable of history in Matthew 13 contains the meaning and destiny of the world. Christ found the past one huge parable, says Forsyth—a story with a meaning greater than the story. Not as the brief hymn closing Goethe's *Faust* has it, "All that is passing is parable only". That is part but not all of the Christian view. Has not the past a sacramental reality whereby something spiritual is done and conveyed? It is not a matter of plain speaking but of paradox. "Inspiration is insight". The need for a spiritual leader is precisely for his insight into paradox. "The cross which is the measure of the world is the supreme paradox in the world and the greatest irritant to common-sense. And, if there were no such obscurity of utterance on the part of God, where would be the need of insight as the grand faculty of the spiritual leader?"

Christ's habit of parable utters Eternity in time. For Him to have clarified his illustrations, interpreted his allegories or changed his style would have been disastrous. "That would have been education made easy, grace trivialized, kindergarten theology". Such teaching would ease the believers' strain and arrest their spiritual development. Christ never told the disciples he was the Messiah; He made the discovery inevitable. This, says Forsyth, is the pastoral task: to set forth things old and new for the people of God. "Things new and

³³ *Letters of Principal James Denney to W. Robertson Nicoll* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1921), 11-12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁵ *Christian World Pulpit* 84 (1913), 232.

old" means "the Eternal purpose and redeeming power which is ever there yet never there; ever doing, never done; ever perceived but never seen; ever open to the anointed vision, ever apparent to the common eye". The Christian teacher reconciles by interpreting the old anew. "It is the old Eternal God in Christ that turns the world upside down. And the changeless is the source of all change". The narrow mind which would burn the creeds and destroy the churches is the narrow soul. May Christ deliver us from that evermore!

The spiritual needs of the churches can be met by such insight into the Holy Love of the Gospel. That evangelical note launched the Church and floats it. Forsyth would not compromise unity which must rest on the work of Christ. Sentimentalism has smothered the gospel in the Free Churches. What then do they need but real sacramental preaching? "Are we presented with a Christ who makes us do something just to relieve our full hearts, or are we being goaded to do certain things for a Christ of whose excellence we tire?"³⁶ The cause of such impotence is deeply spiritual. "What is wrong concerns our grasp of revelation rather than our amount of religion, which often abounds when the type of revelation is law".³⁷ The pastoral task, the spiritual need and the revelation that makes a church is not the success of its believers in living up to it! It is not the nature of faith but of grace that concerned Forsyth. So long as men are mystics who sigh for the lovely darts of longing, they shall remain but lovers of love; Forsyth became a Christian when he became the object of grace. Such new men is the greatest spiritual need of the Church, for "When we are tired with trying to *impress* people, we may return to the doctrine of a Gospel which regenerates both us and them."³⁸

4. *Biblical Theology*

Forsyth felt strongly about the Bible. One ought to regard it so highly that one could not help but believe its infallibility.³⁹ No clearer case for a biblical theology in Forsyth can be found than in his article, "Revelation and Bible".⁴⁰ Evangelical criticism, the experience of faith and the pastoral task all led Forsyth to a theology in which he defines Christ as the content. "From Paul to John it is declared that Jesus was the gospel, and offered himself as such, and that none come to the Father but by him and in Him".⁴¹ The

³⁶ *Christian World Pulpit* 89 (1916), 252.

³⁷ *Ad loc.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 255.

³⁹ *Positive Preaching and The Modern Mind*, 26.

⁴⁰ *Hibbert Journal* 10 (October, 1911), 235-252.

⁴¹ *Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, 102.

words of Matthew (11: 27) are *verba Christi*, "the fourth gospel in nuce."⁴²

Revelation consists of God's pure act of redemption, God's true word of revelation in the apostles and the Bible as a monument of this two-fold revelation. Revelation for Forsyth is not evaluation or illumination or merely the Bible. It is a matter of insight and of self-interpretation. That is His Word.⁴³ Complete redemption stems from apostolic preaching: "God smote upon the world in Christ's act of redemption; it sounded in the apostles' word of reconciliation; and it reverberated, and goes on doing in the Bible."⁴⁴

In the apostolic interpretation one has God's true but not pure word of interpretation since the sense is sound, but the form is not perfect. When one asks whether Forsyth is doing justice to the biblical data his answer can take but one direction—Forsyth appeals to teleology, a theology of purpose. *Heilsgeschichte* for Forsyth—and the words "salvation as history" are found in his writings—means theodicy. This insight saves Forsyth from the monism which retreats to a canon within the canon. From this saving purpose of God Forsyth moves in two directions: to the goal of all things which is the ground of all things, and the ground which is the goal. One might say that Forsyth's view of the activity of God ranges back and forth from pre-existence to the eternal cross.

And the centre of majesty has passed, since Calvin, from the decrees of God to His act, to the foregone establishment in Christ's cross of a moral kingdom without end, which is the key and goal of history.⁴⁵

Forsyth says of that redemptive purpose: "If the act of salvation was bound up with a crime, need we be startled if its Word is mingled with error?"⁴⁶ As illustration Forsyth comments on the parable of Dives and Lazarus. In the drapery of the parable there is no topography of a future state. Behind all the scenery are two ideas, the kingdom of heaven which means the inversion of the moral values of the natural order, and grace which still has a moral basis. "The soul's fate was settled by a moral revelation rather than a miraculous."⁴⁷

What does Forsyth mean by moral revelation? That is his contribution to biblical theology. The moralizing of dogma which is a major task in *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* means taking seriously the reality of grace. In contributions to the *Hibbert Journal* and the *London Quarterly Review* of 1906 Forsyth explores this

⁴² *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴³ "Revelation and Bible", 243.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 243-244.

⁴⁵ *Faith, Freedom and the Future*, 277.

⁴⁶ "Revelation and Bible", 245.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 250.

task. One should keep in mind as well that *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* was prepared before 1900. These essays of 1906 express Forsyth's understanding of the moral task for theology.

5. *The Reality of Grace*

The marrow of Christianity is the reality of grace. Three things are implied, a great concentration, a great simplification and a great emancipation. The concentration is Forsyth's contribution to Free Church theology, concentration not to a point, but to a power. "He brought little for the world of thought; for the moral world, where reality lies, He brought everything . . . Christ was neither a thinker before a problem nor a poet before a dream, but a doer before a task."⁴⁸

The new problem is not a real religion, but a real God, the Holy One whose atonement becomes present reality in the moral world of personal sin and redemption. Not indifference but conviction is necessary for freedom. "And it is only the certainty of faith in grace that can give us freedom of thought about God".⁴⁹ Forsyth asks if there is a moral power in history apart from the rational or cognitive reality which would escape from life's moral crises.

The greatest fact of history is neither man's ruin nor his struggle, neither the human tragedy nor the human epic, but the Gospel, the divine, composite, and continuous fact of God, sin, redemption, and eternal life—a holy God, a solitary, ruined race, a grace atoning, forgiving, redeeming, reconciling all, and an everlasting kingdom.⁵⁰

Forsyth's concern with the greatest fact of history found expression in John Newton's hymn "Prayer Answered by Crosses". It was "one of the greatest and most realistic utterances of Christian experience".⁵¹ So also in 1906 Forsyth defines grace as "the forgiving, redeeming act of holy love to human sin, an act ultimate and inexplicable. It is not mercy to our failure, or pity for our pain, but it is pardon for our sins!"⁵² Pardon is the primal reality of grace as Forsyth describes three views of the Christian faith current in 1906. One detaches the historic Jesus from the living Christ while a second would find the ground of Christian faith in the historic Jesus, whose inner life is the historic Christ. Forsyth moves to a third, following Martin Kähler in the emphasis that the object of faith is the whole New Testament Christ. This saving grace is simply for Forsyth the objective statement of the Reformation emphasis on

48 "A Rallying Ground for the Free Churches", *Hibbert Journal* 4 (1906), 829-830.

49 *Ibid.*, 843.

50 *Ibid.*, 832-833.

51 *Positive Preaching and The Modern Mind*, 106.

52 "The Churches' One Foundation", *London Quarterly Review* 106 (October, 1906), 197.

justification by faith. "It is necessary that our faith be stated, not in terms of itself and the love it works to, but of its source and object—the God who in Christ is not merely loving to the loveable, but gracious to the malignant."⁵³

This ground is the basis of unity for all churches. Religious pardon secures Christianity more than moral reformation or ethical decision could ever do. Salvation is a *justificatio injusti*, "A forgiveness unaffected by the good in the sinner, and wholly due to the free grace of God". There can be no saving doctrines of unity lifted bodily from the Bible but only a single doctrine of salvation concerned with faith.

It is Catholic to worship orthodoxy stiffly with the old people. And it is Catholic to worship love joyfully with the young. The Protestant, the New Testament, idea of faith is the penitent worship with tears and spikenard, with shame and glory, of God's justifying grace. In Protestantism the foundation of all Christian theology has been and must be the antithesis of grace and sin, of gospel and law.⁵⁴

That justifying grace and penitent worship with tears, shame and glory is nothing else than the Holy Cross. As Forsyth was to say ten years later, "We have been too much with the religious troubadours and too little with the knights of the Holy Cross."⁵⁵

6. Authority of the Holy Cross

Forsyth gives a story from a Belgian newspaper to illustrate the holy love of God in the Cross. Two passenger trains hurtle toward each other at breakneck speed. Because of frost, switches could not be thrown at the station to clear the tracks. A catastrophe loomed imminent until a switchman threw himself flat between the rails to hold the switch open as the train thundered over him. When the trains had passed each other safely he quietly returned to work. Forsyth gives the analogies in this story to the work of Christ and then points to the differences.

This man in a true sense died and rose again. None of the passengers knew that their lives had been saved or to whom they owed their safety until they thrilled in response as they opened their newspapers. Forsyth relates this figure to emphasize the differences between the Cross of Christ and all acts of human heroism. What were the differences? Christ's death was on behalf of those in whom the power of responding had to be created. He makes a claim on our wills in a way the Belgian could not for the passengers. In the Holy Cross there is a tension and conflict between the holy love of God and the disobedience of man.⁵⁶

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 196-197.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁵⁵ *The Christian Ethic of War*, 128.

⁵⁶ *The Work of Christ*, 11-16.

Authority stems directly from the Cross which "draws us into a repentance which is a dying with Him, and is therefore a part of the offering of His death, and then it rises as in newness of life to a fellowship in His resurrection".⁵⁷ Writing of that authority in 1905, Forsyth claims that there is no real authority for Protestant theology since the collapse of Scriptural infallibility. "In the strict use of words, there is no such thing as saving truth".⁵⁸ Christ as Redeemer through the Holy Cross is the only authority for Protestant theology. Authority in the Cross is threefold: encounter with Christ, moral reality and submission to the historic grace of Christ. The ethical consequence of its loss is catastrophic for the race, while its recovery is God's new creation. "Redemption . . . makes a new conscience for the race, with an authority seated in the source of the new creation—in the grace and Gospel of God in Christ's Cross". That salvation *homo viator* will never read nor realize until it be revealed to him by God. Mankind is not just on the wrong track, but the train has been derailed.

The cross became Forsyth's final security because "He has opened my grave and made me live . . ." ⁵⁹ Secondly, it took a world's salvation to save an individual, therefore the world is saveable, though not worthy. P. T. Forsyth reminds the Church that in converting the world, there are conversions to be brought about within her pale and especially upon her ideas. The word *Evangelical* needs restoration from its fallen state in two ways, to be moralized from the gospel and not idealized from the Bible.

First of all, the gospel is superhuman even more than supernatural. It is not the cry of nature but of humanity, human misery not historic miracle that fills the air. "Christianity needs to some extent to be saved from its own moral success . . . we must insist on the New Testament idea of the *miraculous nature of the Christian life*, whether we entered on it by a sudden break with our past or not."⁶⁰

The keynote is authority, not freedom. "A gospel of grace should come to the church and society of today more as a gospel of authority than as a gospel of freedom".⁶¹ There is more freedom than the Church knows how to use. The true and final seat of authority is the question of the hour whose answer is the Holy Cross. Ever since the freedom which arrived at the Reformation the only path lies ahead, through the ruins of the Reformation to an inward compulsion, a credible authority. When Luther transferred the supreme problem

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁵⁸ "Authority and Theology", *Hibbert Journal* 4 (October, 1905), 69.

⁵⁹ *Missions in State and Church*, 340.

⁶⁰ "The Cross as the Final Seat of Authority," *Contemporary Review* 76 (October, 1899), 591.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 592.

to the personal conscience, "It was in these very ruins that the new life and the new reign arose. The new creation must begin from the soul's chaos and night. Whether you take Peter, Paul, or the Lord of both, the new man arises from a broken man, the new church from a broken Church, and the victory of faith is on the field of blood."⁶²

The Redeemer is now the kingdom. The Christ places men in a Church to take the place of a Church that places men in Christ. Protestantism has only half-realized that ideal—only a more radical faith can meet Christ's demand for control of will and life. The real and final seat of authority for Forsyth is the Cross of Jesus Christ where the miracle of grace displaces the Bible, Church, reason or the heart as final authority. If Schleiermacher corrected Calvin and Ritschl corrected both, the gospel corrects the apostolic deposit and all subsequent theological discourse.

The Holy Cross as the seat of authority is moral and ethical rather than formal and rational. It is redemptive not revelatory, social not individual, historic as well as eternal. It stands forth as an individual in an act. To place ultimate ethical authority in an institution would be Jesuitism and a denial that "The kingdom itself is first constituted by the king; and the conscience of society is a personal holy will."⁶³ "The train of history is not simply late, but there has been an accident, and an accident due to malice and crime."⁶⁴ So must the coming Church be an Evangelical Church.

The Church of the future is the Church of one article . . . And the concentration of the Evangelical Churches upon that infinite and creative point of Redemption alone is the one answer by which protestantism can meet a claim so bold, thorough, and commanding as the dogma of Papal Infallibility."⁶⁵

Such an Evangelical Reformation is nourished by the Holy Cross.

7. *The Life of Christ*

One can do more than speculate as to Forsyth's views on the quest for the historical Jesus. James Smart claims that Martin Kähler made no impact on British theology between 1890 and 1920.⁶⁶ On the contrary it seems that P. T. Forsyth depended heavily on Kähler's *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche biblische Christus* of 1896. Such evidence gives Forsyth's views on the life of Christ contemporary significance as an early British rejection of Herrmann in favour of Kähler.⁶⁷ The revival of interest in Forsyth

⁶² *Ibid.*, 597.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 602.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 606.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 608.

⁶⁶ *The Interpretation of Scripture*, 282.

⁶⁷ On the importance of such a rejection see J. M. Robinson, "The Bultmann School of Biblical Interpretation", *Journal for Theology and Church*, 1 (1965), 12-19.

means an alternative theology to the Bultmannian and post-Bultmannian discussion of the historical Jesus. Chapter IV, "The Testimony of Christ's Self-Consciousness", in Forsyth's *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* contains his impressions of Martin Kähler. Since I can find no discussion of Kähler's influence on Forsyth, it will be helpful to comment on it before turning to the two articles which Forsyth wrote subsequent to *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*.

Forsyth describes T. Zahn and M. Kähler as follows: "It would not be too much to say that the latter two are among the most powerful minds of the world in the region—one of theology, and one of scholarship".⁶⁸ Neither of the two most recent studies of Forsyth notices this influence.⁶⁹ What Kähler had to say in 1896 is crucial for grasping what Forsyth said about the life of Christ in statements like "It is the whole Biblical Christ that is the truly and deeply historic Christ."⁷⁰

Martin Kähler (1835-1912) was born son of a pastor in Neuhausen near Königsberg in 1835, the year D. F. Strauss published his famous *Leben Jesu*. At Heidelberg Richard Rothe introduced Kähler to New Testament studies à la Tübingen, where later J. T. Beck rekindled his love for the Bible. Kähler taught at Halle until 1912, publishing more than 165 works. Paul Tillich praises Kähler as his mentor.⁷¹ Forsyth's critique of Herrmann's *Glaubensgedanken* which viewed the resurrection as a thought of faith comes via Kähler. Forsyth in his article "The Inner Life of Christ" rejects Herrmann's retreat to Christ's inner life.

For Forsyth and Kähler the attempt to go behind the sources to analyze the inner self-consciousness of Jesus is impossible since it proceeds on the false assumption that Christ's sinless being can be interpreted by an analogy from sinful human nature. Since the only Jesus we know is the apostolic witness to the Christ by the Spirit of Christ, for Kähler the *historic* Christ is the Jesus who really lived, not what God is saying through the *historical* Jesus. It was the genius of Forsyth to glean Kähler's alternative to "decapitation as a cure for headache".

The essence of Christianity is not in the bare fact, but in the fact and its interpretation. It is not in a mere historic Jesus, evidentially irresistible, but in a Christ evangelically irresistible, a Christ who is the mediator of the grace of God.⁷²

⁶⁸ *Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, ix.

⁶⁹ John Rodgers, *The Theology of P. T. Forsyth* (Independent Press, 1965) and S. J. Mikolaski, "P. T. Forsyth", in P. E. Hughes (ed.), *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology* (Eerdmans, 1966). Mikoloaski mentions only two of the articles we cite here.

⁷⁰ *Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, 169.

⁷¹ *The Protestant Era*, xiii ff.

⁷² *Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, 168.

Emil Brunner claims that forty years of critical research have not changed Kähler's view on the position of the Bible as Revelation.⁷³ Forsyth saw with Kähler that the fundamental error of the Old Quest was to exclude the sovereignty of God. Thesis 9 provides us with Forsyth's hermeneutical key.

The Bible is not merely a record of the revelation. It is part of it. It is more true that God's great Word contains the Bible than that the Bible contains the Word. The Word in Christ needed exposition by the Bible. The Gospels find their only central interpretation in the Epistles.⁷⁴

One turns with quickened interest to two articles of 1911 and 1919 which contain Forsyth's mature comments on the life of Jesus. "The Soul of Christ and the Cross of Christ" sets forth what Forsyth conceives the confessional task of the Church to be. Forsyth appears as a prophet of the Cross. The missionary task of the Church in 1911 was centrifugal in that its young preachers impoverished the old disciples. Forsyth claims that such preaching "is more familiar with the reformer's perpetual energy than the saint's everlasting rest".⁷⁵ Forsyth quotes James Denney at Edinburgh in 1910 who said, "We cannot send reinforcements because we do not make recruits". Such impotence on the part of the Church is there for historical reasons. The Kingdom of God as the New Humanity created in Christ Jesus challenges the mission "wild for the Empire."

Forsyth draws the issues about the rock of the faith, its rise and its range. "Shall we keep both the catechumens and the members upon the inner life of Christ and the impressions it makes on us, finding there both the origin of faith and its ground?"⁷⁶ That would be fatal to the faith and "To do that is to alter the whole message of the Church. And to displace thus the Cross of Christ is also to truncate His soul."⁷⁷

Does one push the Gospel? asks Forsyth. That results in a Church grown too missionary for its success. One rather preaches the Cross which creates faith by the taste of grace. "Where has God placed the true foundation of faith? Is it in Christ's soul or in His Cross? If we take the whole New Testament Christ, He has placed it less directly in the historic fact of the person than in the apostolic word of the Cross".⁷⁸ That apostolic word had something more to preach than a change brought about by the inner life of Jesus. How, asks Forsyth, is it that Peter healed the cripple within a few weeks of his denial? It was "a living hope by the resurrection of Christ from the

⁷³ *Reason and Revelation*, 273 M.I.

⁷⁴ *The Church, The Gospel and Society*, 68. cf. Hugh Anderson, "Existential Hermeneutics: Features of the New Quest", *Interpretation* 16 (1962), 132-134. *London Quarterly Review* 116 (October, 1911), 195.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 211.

dead" (1 Peter 1: 3). This mysticism of the Cross is the power of the resurrection.

Martin Kähler, not Albrecht Ritschl, was the source of Forsyth's insight into the world, the Christ, and the Cross. This Prophet of the Cross would have men yet confess with him that "If life be a comedy to those that think, and a tragedy to those that feel, it is a victory to those that believe."⁷⁹

*Bethel Theological Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota*

⁷⁹ *Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, 338.