

**THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS  
AND  
THE WORK OF CHRIST**

by

**PT Forsyth**

**THE CRUCIALITY OF THE  
CROSS  
AND  
THE WORK OF CHRIST**

by

**PT Forsyth**

**Quinta Press**

**Weston Rhyn**

**2008**

## **Quinta Press**

Meadow View, Quinta Crescent, Weston Rhyn,  
Oswestry, Shropshire, England, SY10 7RN

*The Cruciality of the Cross* first published in 1909

*The Work of Christ* first published in

Layout © Quinta Press 2008

ISBN

P.T. FORSYTH

# THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

BY

PT FORSYTH, MA, DD

PRINCIPAL OF HACKNEY COLLEGE, HAMPSTEAD

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON MCMIX (1909)

---

ii

RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED, BREAD STREET  
HILL, F.C., AND BUNGAY SUFFOLK.

---

iii

THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

PREFACE

THE first two chapters of this book were given in substance as the opening address of the Third International Congregational Council at Edinburgh in July 1908.

The third was really an undelivered section of the first, and it appeared in the *Hibbert Journal* for April 1909. It is here by the kind permission of the Editor.

And the fourth appeared in an unfinished form in the *Expositor* for September 1908.

All are much revised, amended and expanded.

iv

v

CONTENTS

PAGE

I

THE ATONEMENT CENTRAL TO THE NEW TESTAMENT GOSPEL 11

II

THE ATONEMENT CENTRAL TO CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE 75

III

THE ATONEMENT CENTRAL TO THE LEADING FEATURES OF MODERN THOUGHT 109

IV

THE MORAL MEANING OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST 175

P.T. FORSYTH

vi

I

FORGIVENESS THROUGH ATONEMENT THE  
ESSENTIAL OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

I. IN RESPECT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

II. IN RESPECT OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

III. IN RESPECT OF MODERN THOUGHT

2

3

ONE of the acutest problems of the Church at this moment is that raised by the pressure of the critical method upon the New Testament. It is not only how to apply to the New Testament the criticism which has been so fruitful with the Old Testament. That is intricate enough, and much more intricate for the New Testament than for the Old Testament. But the problem is more than intricate. It is profound and spiritual. It comes nearer than Old Testament problems do to the centre of the soul, the word of conscience, the essence of faith, and our eternal hope. It makes a call upon the personality more than the ability. Its conclusions make a confession of faith and not a statement of view. We have to apply criticism to the New Testament, regardless of the fact that we have there what we do not have in the Old Testament. We have everything clustering round a historic

4

personality with whom the soul is in direct and living communion today, everything gathered round a final and eternal act of God as the consummation of that personality—an act which fundamentally altered the whole moral relation of the race to him. We have to do in the New Testament with the person of Christ and with the cross of Christ. And in the last issue with the cross of Christ, because it is the one key to his person.

In approaching this subject let us be clear about our starting-point. It is the Church and its moral faith. The truth of Christianity cannot be proved to the man in the street till he come off the street by owning its power. In our modern psychology we start from the primacy of the will, and we bring everything to the test of man's practical and ethical life. And so, here also we start ethically from the holiness of God as the supreme interest in the

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

Christian revelation. The standpoint taken by the Church is that which I believe to be the position of the New Testament. That

5

book represents a grand holiness movement; but it is one which is more concerned with God's holiness than ours, and lets ours grow of itself by dwelling on his. Christianity is concerned with God's holiness before all else; which issues to man as love, acts upon sin as grace, and exercises grace through judgement. The idea of God's holiness is inseparable from the idea of judgement as the mode by which grace goes into action. And by judgement is meant not merely the self-judgement which holy grace and love stir in man, but the acceptance by Christ of God's judgement on man's behalf and its conversion in him to our blessing by faith.

By the atonement, therefore, is meant that action of Christ's death which has a prime regard to God's holiness, has it for its first charge, and finds man's reconciliation impossible except as that holiness is divinely satisfied once for all on the cross. Such an atonement is the key to the incarnation. We must take that view of Christ which does most

6

justice to the holiness of God. This starting-point of the supreme holiness of God's love, rather than its pity, sympathy, or affection, is the watershed between the Gospel and the theological liberalism which makes religion no more than the crown of humanity and the metropolitan province of the world. My point of departure is that Christ's first concern and revelation was not simply the forgiving love of God, but the holiness of such love.

So viewed the atonement is central –

- I. To the New Testament Gospel;
- II. To Christian experience;
- III. To the leading features of modern thought.

And by centrality is meant something far more than that the doctrine is the pivot of an adjusted and balanced system of thought, something much more vital and effective for moral life and the life of the soul. By centrality is meant finality for human history and

7

destiny. It is meant that when Jesus died for our sins he died once for all, that he did not merely signalise in a classic way the expiation all must dree, and illustrate and cheer every man's atonement for his own misdeeds. It is meant beyond that, first, that in the atonement we have primarily the act of God, and the act of God's holiness; second, that it alone makes any

P.T. FORSYTH

repentance or expiation of ours satisfactory to God; and third, that as regards man it is a revolutionary act, and not merely a stage in his evolution. It is further meant that our view of what Christ was and did, must be the view that does most justice to the holiness of God and takes most profoundly and seriously the hallowing of his name.

A true grasp of the atonement not only meets many positive features of the present age, but above all it meets the age in its need and impotence, its need of a centre, of an authority, of a creative source, a guiding line, and a final goal. It goes with our best positive

---

8

tendencies, and it meets our negative need, our lack of a fixed point. All around us is in a growing flux; change is everywhere; and it may or may not be development according as our fixed standard and goal may be. With no centre, either for its own action or for our estimate, it means disintegration. And especially does our religion need a moral centre. It grows on the one hand evolutionary, and therefore inevitably unearnest; and on the other hand sentimental. It harps on love till it reaches the condition of those decently demoralised people who read nothing but the literature of love, dwell on nothing else, slacken every moral fibre by the submission to this of every other interest in life, and finally gravitate to a chief interest in its morbid or immoral forms. Fraternity grows at the cost of fidelity, the democratic sympathies and pities monopolise the moral world, the moral type changes, and another scale of virtues fills the ideal. "Among the working class," says Miss Loane from a long

---

9

experience as district nurse, "generosity ranks before justice, sympathy before truth, love before chastity, a pliant and obliging disposition before a rigidly honest one. In brief," she continues, "the less admixture of intellect required for the practice of any virtue the higher it stands in the popular estimation." But what does that mean but the retreat of the protestant type of life before the Roman, of the evangelical virtues before the catholic, of heroic faith before humanist, of Paul before Pelagius. It means the removal of authority from a positive centre in Christ's redeeming act to what I might call a diffused centre in the heart, from a new moral man once for all in the cross to the man periodically renewed in kindly sacraments. What is lacking to current and weak religion is the very element supplied in the atoning cross as the reconciling judgement of the world.

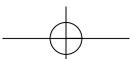
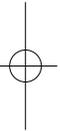
That is the general theme which I would enlarge.



THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

---

10



P.T. FORSYTH

11

---

## THE CENTRALITY OF THE ATONEMENT TO THE NEW TESTAMENT GOSPEL

---

12

13

### I

**I**N regard to Christ's cross, and within the New Testament, we are today face to face with a new situation. We are called upon, sometimes in the tones of a religious war, to set Jesus against Paul and to choose between the historic and the biblical Christ. We are bidden to release Jesus from Paul's arrest, to raise him from that tomb in which he was buried by the apostle of the resurrection, and to loose him and let him go. The issue comes to a crisis in the interpretation of the death of Christ. To treat that death as more than a martyrdom, or to allow it more than a supreme degree of the moral effect upon us of all self-sacrifice, is called a gratuitous piece of theology. To treat it as anything more than the seal of Jesus's own faith in the love of God, or in his prophetic message of reconciliation is to sophisticate. To regard it as more than the closing incident in a life

---

14

whose chief value lies in its history (which all the time criticism slowly dissolves), is a piece of perverse religious ingenuity much more like the doctrine of Transubstantiation. To regard it as having anything to do with God's judgement on man's sin, or as being the ground of forgiveness, is a piece of grim Judaism or gloomy Paulinism. The death of Jesus had no more to do with sin than the life of Jesus; and Jesus in his life made no such fuss about sin as Christianity has done. The death of Jesus had really no more to do with the conditions of forgiveness than any martyr's. Every man must make his own atonement; and Jesus did the same, only on a scale corresponding to the undeniable greatness of his personality, and impressive accordingly.

Such teaching removes Christ from the Godhead of grace and makes him but a chief means of grace to fellow-seekers. But a Church of the Gospel is not a band of

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

15

disciples or inquirers, but a community of believers, confessors, and regenerates in Christ's cross. An evangelical Church has stood, and stands, not only for the supreme value of Christ's death, but for its prime value as atonement to a holy God, and as the only atonement whereby man is just with God. The atonement which raises that death above the greatest martyrdom, or the greatest witness of God's love, is for us no piece of Paulinism.

Of course, we have all felt the reticence of the Gospels on that doctrine. But how can we avoid feeling its real presence in them except by coming to them with a dogmatic humanism, or a heckling criticism, or a conscience mainly æsthetic? Why, the most advanced New Testament criticism is now concerned to show that the main interest of the evangelists is not biographical, but dogmatic on such matters as baptism and atonement and the last things. The Gospels stand at least on the atoning deed, they were written

16

for a Church which was created by it, and they give singular space to it. Even in John, Jesus is not a disguised God urging people to pierce his veil; he is there to do a work that only his death could do, as a corn of wheat must die to bear. And the Epistles are full of the meaning of that deed.

And where did their interpretation of its meaning come from? From Paul's rabbinism? From the Judaism of his upbringing? From the fanciful speculations of his environment? Was it an interpretation or an importation? Well, where does Paul himself say he got the atoning conception of Christ's death? He received it from the Lord? What does that mean? Was it really but some flash of insight peculiar to his own genius or his idiosyncrasy? Was it a feat of ingenious interpretation? No doubt it took, in certain lights, the colour of his rabbinic mind; but was it in essence just an original and daring application of Judaic theology to

17

the crucifixion? Was it a brilliant construction, a re-orientation of his traditional theology, whose flash he mistook for a special revelation? No, in its substance it was a part of the Christian instruction which completed his conversion at Damascus. It was from his teachers that he had the atoning interpretation of Christ's death. He delivered to his Churches what he received among the fundamentals (ἐν πρώτοις) from earlier Christians (1 Corinthians 15:3, 11:23), that Christ died for our sins, that his blood was shed for their remission, that his death set up a new relation or covenant between

P.T. FORSYTH

God and man, and that all Israel's history and Bible meant this. In the year 57, that is, he states that such was the common faith of the apostolic community when he was converted, three or four years after Christ's death. It was nothing he developed or edited, but it was something which came from Jesus himself. Paul received it from the Lord because it

---

18

came to him from those who had so received it at first.

And how came the apostolic circle to have this view of Christ's death? Could *they* have foisted on the cross an interpretation so audacious? Must they not have been taught by Christ so as to view it in such forms as are echoed in the ransom passage and at the Last Supper? Must they not have been taught, then, by Christ either during the forty days or from within the veil? They declare they were taught many new things by him from heaven. We have the same idea, with natural enough variants, in Peter, in John, and in Hebrews. No; the first teacher of the atonement was the Christ who made it. It is no Paulinism, except in certain side lights. Had the apostles held the humanist view that what mattered was but the life, character and teaching of Christ, would they have given the hand of fellowship to Paul when he came to them with the view that biography mattered little compared with Christ's death?

---

19

Would Paul have taken their hand, with that gulf between them? And what a gulf! It is at bottom all the gulf between the genial Judaism of Hillel which let Christ go to his death as a fanatic and the Christianity which found in his death his deity. The whole history of the Church shows that there can be no standing unity of faith, spirit, or fellowship between those to whom Christ's death is but a great martyrdom and those to whom it is the one atonement of the world and God, the one final treatment of sin, the one compendious work of grace, and the one hinge of human destiny.

We have been warned against the idea that Christ taught about himself or his work as an essential element of his own Gospel. We are told that he is detachable from his Gospel, if not in history yet in principle. We received it through him, to be sure, but we do not necessarily have it in him. But let us leave the question whether he taught himself, and go back to the prior question.

---

20

Does the Gospel, does Christianity consist primarily of what Jesus taught? Is that the whole Gospel? Is it the focus of it? Or the standard? Is the Gospel

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

confined to the Galilean ministry? Are we to test every teaching of an apostle by what is left us of the teaching of the Master—either by that alone or by that in chief? Where in the New Testament do we find the authority for that limitation? Where does Jesus impose it? It is surely clear that those he taught never understood him so. If they had, could they have done anything else than go about retailing that teaching, with a lament at its premature arrest? But is that what they did? The prime thing, and the earliest thing, we know about their teaching (I have just said) is that Christ crowned Israel by dying for the world's sins. It has not the note of regret, nor has it the note of transmitted precept. When precepts were wanted they made new ones for the occasion, on the free evangelical principle, and not on the canonist. They

21

applied the redemption to particular junctures freely, in the spirit; they did not make a casuistic application of Christ's maxims. They did not attack Jew or Gentile even with the parables. James himself, who might have been expected to abjure the Pauline method, and take the strictly ethical line, does not draw his precepts from the armoury of synoptic injunction, or treat Christ as the Chief Rabbi of Israel. Nay, they did not even work with the mere personal impression made on them by Jesus, with the magnetism of a personality whose acts or whose words another Rabbi might criticise. They worked with his person as itself the message, and the final message. They worked with a faith which was not a piece of impressionism but the worship of their new creator, and which therefore did not fade as an impression does, but grew as a new life. Whether Christ taught himself or not, what he gave, what he left behind, was himself above all; and himself as no mere impressionist but as

22

the Saviour, the New Creator. His legacy was neither a truth nor a collection of them, nor a character and its imaginative memory, but a faith that could not stop short of giving him the worship reserved by all the past for God alone. And what caused this? What produced this result, so amazing, so blasphemous for Jews? It was the cross, when it came home by the resurrection through the Spirit. It was then that Jesus became the matter and not merely the master of gospel preaching. It was then that he became Christ indeed, then when he became perfected! Perfected! He became the finished Saviour only in the finished salvation. And, for those who worshipped him first, all he was to them centred in the cross and radiated from there. It was the Christ who was made sin for them in the cross that became for them God

P.T. FORSYTH

reconciling the world to himself. He was all to them in the cross, where he died for their sin, and took away the guilt of the world, according to their Scriptures. It was then

---

23

that he finished the universal task latent in their national religion, and dealt once for all before God with the sin of the world. That was the starting-point of the Gospel, that made it missionary, made the Church. It is the content of the Gospel. And it is always to there that the Church must come back, to take its bearings, and be given its course.

The very silence of Christ makes his atonement the holiest place of Christian faith. But it was not absolute silence. It was reserve. And he broke it in Paul. The exposition in the Epistles is the Saviour's own work upon his work. He becomes his own divine scholiast. If he lived in Paul submerging Paul (Galatians 2:20) then Paul's word here was a continuation of Christ's work. It is Christ, the Lord the Spirit, giving that account of himself which in the Gospels was restrained, partly for want of an audience that could understand or a disciple that could apprehend. His earthly silence is not so surprising. If he showed himself after his

---

24

resurrection only to the disciples, if he refused to make it a miraculous appeal to the sceptical world, so, in the still holier matter of his cross, he may well have been reserved, even to his own. The great doers are greatly dumb. And Christ was straitened in the doing of the mighty work. But his Church—it is no wonder that his Church has been prompt to praise it, keen to pierce it, and eager to construe it. For the Church is the organ which cannot but speak and praise when the Master's silent touch on the keys sets free its soul.

It is sometimes said that the great question of the hour for the Church's belief is Christological; it is the question of Christ's person. That is true. But it is the question of the cross all the same. We know the Incarnation only as the foundation of the cross. It is from the base of his cross that the stair descends to it. For the question of the Christ is the question of the Saviour. It is not a metaphysical question, but a religious. It is

---

25

not philosophical, but experimental. It is theological chiefly as being ethical—as turning on sinful man's practical relation to the ethic of eternity, which is the conscience of a Holy God. The question of Christ is not the question of a divine hypostasis, but of a divine Saviour. Technically spoken, the Christology turns on a Soterology.

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

But the question of a Saviour is the question of a salvation. It turns on an experience, and not only on an experience, and the experience of a historic person, but upon what is for us a *revolutionary experience*, and not a mere impression, however deep. It turns on a new creation. The soteriology turns on a soteriology. The centre of Christ is where the centre of our salvation is. He is Christ, he is God, to us in that he saves us. And he is God by that in him which saves us. He is Christ and Lord by his cross. Christian faith is our life-experience of complete forgiveness and final redemption in Christ. It does not *include forgiveness*; it is forgiveness.

26

Its centre is the centre of forgiveness. Only the redeemed Church, the Church that knows the forgiveness, has the key to the Saviour. His blessings are the key to his nature; they do not wait till the nature is first defined. No philosopher, as such, has the key, no theologian, no scholar, no critic; only the believer, only the true Church. And we have it where the evangelical experience has always found its forgiveness—in the cross. Our faith begins with the historic Christ. But not with the biography of Christ (except for propædeutic purposes). We begin, in principle if not in method, with Christ the crucified. We begin with the Church's saving faith in Christ, and not with the modern man's fair verdict on him. We do not begin with a writer's picture of Christ the prophet, but with the work of Christ the Saviour, continuous in the Church that it made, and made the mother of our own soul. Mere historic knowledge can create no salvation; which is not given by certainty about a historic fact, nor

27

by any intelligent grasp of it, but by faith in it, by faith in that within it which is super-historic. And faith finds in this fact of the cross worlds more than a prophet's martyrdom. It finds the depth of God in action, and not merely the depth of the martyr's convictions. The Christ that we trust all to is not one who died to witness for God, but one in whom God died for his own witness, and his own work on us. God was in Christ reconciling. The prime doer in Christ's cross was God. Christ was God reconciling. He was God doing the very best for man, and not man doing his very best before God. The former is evangelical Christianity, the latter is humanist Christianity. Christ's history, his person, can only be understood by his work, and by a work that we apprehend in our moral experience even when we cannot comprehend it by our intelligence. We believe with the unity of our

P.T. FORSYTH

person much that we cannot yet reduce to logical unity. And our soul, our self, finds itself in him long before

---

28

our mind does—just as, in the case of his own life, he but gradually appropriated and realised by experience the content of his own personality. The Christ we worship is Christ as forgiver, as redeemer, as new creator, and as judge of all. His relation to the God of thought is something we can wait for; it is a question of the metaphysic, or the theosophy, of Christian faith and ethic. Personal faith may overleap the centuries and go straight to the Bible Christ. But reason with any belief in evolution cannot do so. The science, the theology, of faith cannot do so. It is bound to develop the creed of the Church and not to discard it like some novelist turned theologian without capital. It is bound to correct and adjust as it develops the creed. To turn it out of doors and start on one's own account on nothing is intellectual pertness. And the Church's belief in the divinity of Christ is the result of her experience of justifying faith, of being restored and raised into the communion of God by union

---

29

with his Christ in faith. To be united with Christ is, in our experience, to be united with God. Therefore, Christ is God. I am redeemed in Christ, and only God can redeem.

Our chief natural legacy from the past is distance and alienation from God. The chief problem of the present (and of every present) is to reduce and destroy that. It is reconciliation. But reconciliation is no æsthetic, or educational, or impressionist affair. It is not a revival. It is not a question of touching a certain number of individuals, and gathering them for salvation out of a lost mankind. It cannot be done by a magnetic temperament, a noble character, or a lofty sage. It means changing a whole race's relation to God. For good and all that could only be done from God's side; and it was done in the cross. We have to be redeemed into that reconciliation, and redeemed as a race. It was a work that had to be done, and not merely a personal influence that was to be conveyed. Christ did not die simply to affect

---

30

men but to effect salvation, not simply to move man's heart but to accomplish God's will. All we may do to reconcile men to God is but the following up of a great and final deed of God—the cross.

It is the cross, then, that is the key to Christ. None but a Christ essentially divine could do what the Church beyond all other knowledge knows the

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

cross to have done for its soul. The divinity of Christ is what the Church was driven upon to explain the effect on it of the cross. Nothing less could explain the new creation, which is so much deeper than any impression on us, and calls for an author so much more than prophetic, hortatory, or impressionist in soul. The atonement of the cross is the key that opens the door, but the house we enter is not made with hands. It is the very heart of God we have in Christ. We are not landed in a vestibule but straight in the sanctuary of the place. This Son of God is God the Son.

---

31

## II

In the life of Dr Dale it is mentioned that in his closing years he was much impressed with the remark of a friend that it was high time the word grace returned to our preaching. He felt that it had been ousted by the word love, in our vehement reaction from theological orthodoxy. And he knew that any gospel of love which was not dominated by the idea of grace had but a short and feckless life before it.

Now, though the idea of grace has returned to our preaching, it has not returned to an extent that would have satisfied Dr Dale. And one reason for that is that the attention of the Christian public in the interval has been deflected. It has been deflected towards social sympathies, at the cost of personal, experimental, and I will say ethical religion. At the cost of ethical religion, I will say. For we have lost the sense of sin, which is the central issue of all ethic because it turns on

---

32

the relation of the conscience to the conscience of God. And apart from sin grace has little meaning. The decay of the sense of sin measures our loss of that central Christian idea; and it is a loss which has only to go on to extinguish Christianity.

It is reported from most quarters in England that there is a serious decline in Church membership. For this several explanations are given. But it is well to face the situation, and to avoid extenuation. And if we do, we may discover that the real cause is the decay, not in religious interests or sympathies, but in personal religion of a positive and experienced kind, and often in the pulpit. Religious sympathies or energies are not Christian faith. Faith is Christian certainty. We have become familiar with the statement (so welcome to easy religion) that there is as good Christianity outside the

P.T. FORSYTH

Churches as in. This is not quite false, but it is much more false than true. It would be true enough if Christianity meant decent

---

33

living, nice ways, precious kindness, business honour, ardent philanthropy, and public righteousness. But all these fine and worthy things are quite compatible with the absence of personal communion with God, personal faith as Christ claims it, in the sense of personal experience of God in Jesus Christ, personal repentance, and personal peace in Christ as our eternal life. Yet that is God's first charge on us if Christianity be true. And it is the kind of Christianity which alone makes for a Church and its membership. A Christianity merely ethical, refined, or sympathetic certainly makes for the social state, if you can keep it up; but the Christianity that makes for the Church is of a much more intimate, personal, and positive kind. And its presence is the only guarantee for the maintenance of the moral strength and beauty of society at the last. While its absence must not only diminish the roll of membership but reduce interest in the great religious issue between Church and State. The reports that

---

34

come in are as clear about the cooling of that interest as they are about the drop in the membership of the Churches. The decay in membership of the Church is due to a decay of membership in Christ. Our social preoccupation has entailed real damage to personal and family religion. For even among those who remain in active membership of our Churches the type of religion has changed. The sense of sin can hardly be appealed to by the preacher now, and to preach grace is in many (even orthodox) quarters regarded as theological obsession, and the wrong language for the hour, while justification by faith is practically obsolete. Well, it may be wise not to preach too often about grace, though we cannot preach too much (indeed, what have we at last but grace to preach?); but it is fatal if our reserve is because we do not have it, instead of because we reverence it, if the reason be defect of truth and not its economy.

I know what is said in reply, and it is said with much force. It is said that the sense of

---

35

sin has not departed but has only changed its form. We are more dull to individual sin because we are more alive to social sin. We have public compunction instead of personal repentance.

To that remark I would answer two things.

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

First. Public compunction does not move to seek forgiveness, which is the prime righteousness of the Kingdom of God, but to pursue redress and reform. And redress and reform is not what makes Christianity. Christianity is a religion of redemption, but that is a religion of amelioration or assuagement. It is engrossed with the wrong done to our brother and not to our God, and it is therefore to that extent the less religious.

But second. The tendency is welcome in so far as this, that we cannot stop there. The more public we make the sin, the more social and racial, so much the more are we driven upon a treatment of it which is ethical and not temperamental, which is racial as well as personal, and not only racial but divine.

---

36

Now there is no treatment of it which satisfies these demands of the soul, the conscience, society, and God, but the atonement in Christ's cross. In the old juridical theories the social, or racial, aspect of the atonement, its connection with the moral order, is one of the great truths. And the more these theories become unsatisfactory on other grounds the more should the truth of their social sense of sin be developed in terms of modern society. But then the more sin is socialised so much the more imperative becomes the necessity of an atonement. As man grows the sin grows. The kingdom of evil grows with the kingdom of good. Sin, self, exploits every stage in the progress of society. It becomes unified, organised, and it must therefore be dealt with at a centre. The social organism has a common and organic sin. And a collective sin must have a central treatment. The more I lament and amend social wrongs the more I must realise before God the responsibility for them of me and mine. It is

---

37

not only the Plutocrats. If it is man that is wronged it is man that has wronged him, it is man that has sinned, man that is condemned. You cannot split up the race. You insist, indeed, on its solidarity. Its unity and solidarity is one of the commonplaces of modern thought. Surely, therefore, if sin there be, man is the sinner. The wrong inflicted on man sets up a corresponding responsibility on man at his centre. There must be a central and solidary treatment of sin and one where responsibility is borne in man, even though it be vicariously. And any atonement becomes a matter of judgement, and not mere repentance or reparation. That seems inevitable if we believe in responsibility, and also believe in the unity of the human race. It seems logical.

P.T. FORSYTH

But there is much more than logic in it. It comes home far more mightily and solemnly from the belief in another unity, the belief in the absolute moral unity of God, in a word, a real belief and a real sense of his holiness.

---

38

To bring sin home, and to bring grace home, we need that something else should come home which alone gives meaning to both—the holy. The grace of God cannot return to our preaching or to our faith till we recover what has almost clean gone from our general, familiar, and current religion, what liberalism has quite lost—I mean a due sense of the holiness of God. This sense has much gone from our public worship, with its frequent irreverence; from our sentimental piety, to which an ethical piety with its implicates is simply obscure; from our rational religion, which banishes the idea of God's wrath; from our public morals, to which the invasion of property is more dreadful than the damnation of men. If our Gospel be obscure it is obscure to them in whom the slack God of the period has blinded their minds, or a genial God unbraced them, and hidden the Holy One who inhabits eternity. This holiness of God is the real foundation of religion—it is certainly the ruling interest of the Christian

---

39

religion. In front of all our prayer or work stands "Hallowed be thy name." If we take the Lord's Prayer alone, God's holiness is the interest which all the rest of it serves. Neither love, grace, faith, nor sin have any but a passing meaning except as they rest on the holiness of God, except as they arise from it, and return to it, except as they satisfy it, show it forth, set it up, and secure it everywhere and forever. Love is but its outgoing; sin is but its defiance; grace is but its action on sin; the cross is but its victory; faith is but its worship. The preacher preaches to the divinest purpose only when his lips are touched with the red coal from the altar of the thrice holy in the innermost place. We must rise beyond social righteousness and universal justice to the holiness of an infinite God. What we on earth call righteousness among men, the saints in heaven call holiness in him.

Have our Churches lost that seal? Are we producing reform, social or theological, faster

---

40

than we are producing faith? Have we become more liberal than sure? Then we are putting all our religious capital into the extension of our business, and carrying nothing to reserve or insurance. We are mortgaging and starving the future. We are not seeking first the Kingdom of God and his

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

holiness, but only carrying on, with very expansive and noisy machinery, a “kingdom-of-God-industry.” We are merely running the kingdom; and we are running it without the cross—with the cross perhaps on our sign, but not in our centre. We have the old trade mark, but what does that matter in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, if the artesian well on our premises is going dry?

To bring *sin* home, and *grace* home, then, the *Holy* must be brought home. But that again can be done, on the scale of the Church and the world, only by replacing the cross at the centre of Christian faith and life, as an atonement not indeed to outraged dignity, nor

---

41

to talionic justice, but to this holy love. The centrality of the cross belongs to it only as a holy and atoning cross. Only if Christ atoned for the world did he culminate in the cross, and do the great thing there. And it is as an atonement that the Church has kept the cross at its spiritual centre. This is still the moral problem of the Church in relation to society, to keep the gospel of the cross at the centre. The form, indeed, of the Church’s moral problem will always depend on the social conditions of the hour; but the substance of it is always the same. It is practical. It is to place the moral centre of society upon the moral centre of the soul, upon the centre of the moral universe. And what is that but to place the conscience of society on Calvary? What is our task today? It is to take the mass of men (and not only the masses)—inert and hopeless some, others indifferent, others hostile to God—and to reconcile them with God’s holy will and righteous kingdom; but to reconcile them less with the *ideal* of a

---

42

kingdom of God than with his way of it. They are keen enough about a kingdom which glorifies human ideals, but the trouble is about God’s ideal and God’s way, about Christ and his cross as the way as well as the goal. The task is to destroy our national and social dislike of that enthusiasm of the cross, to supplant lust by that higher ardour, to bend the strongest wills to the obedience of the holiest, and by moral regeneration to restore men both physically and socially. This is a tremendous task. It is the whole object of history. It is far beyond socialism. And no laws can do it, and no change of circumstances, but only Jesus Christ. It is the fruit of his work, of his holy love, his holy spirit, and his holy Church, all flowing from his holy cross. Let us not mistake the kindly fruits of the cross for the moral principle of it. The fruits will not give the principle, but the principle will give the fruits. And the

---

P.T. FORSYTH

more we are preoccupied with social righteousness so much the more we are driven to that centre where the

---

43

whole righteousness of God and man found consummation, and adjustment, and a power and a career, in the saving judgement of Christ's cross. Public liberty rest on inward freedom; and the cross alone gives moral freedom, and moral independence, to the mass of men, who were left to slavery even by the heroic moral aristocracy of stoicism. It is the cross that makes moral worth an infectious power, keeps character from being self-contained, and gives a moral guarantee of a steady social future. The cross is the spring, not of self-possessed and individualist righteousness, but of that creative and contagious goodness which makes possible the social state. Only at the centre of the cross does the man find himself in his kind, and both in God. A creative, missionary, and social ethic springs only from religion; and it springs most from the religion which is able to clothe us with the power of the creative, loving, outgoing God.

---

44

### III

When we speak of the centrality of the Atonement, I have said, we mean much more, worlds more, than its place in a religious system. We are speaking of that which is the centre, not of thought, but of actual life, conscience, history and destiny. We speak of what is the life-power of the moral world and its historic crisis the ground of the Church's existence, and the sole meaning of Christ himself. Christ is to us just what his cross is. All that Christ was in heaven or on earth was put into what he did there. And all that man's moral soul needs doing for it eternally was done centrally there. Neither cross nor Christ is simply a historic fact by which we order our mental calendar; they make the sun in our heaven, the force in our world. They make our vital centre, not as mere facts, but as sacraments; not for their occurrence, but for their significance; not because we reckon from them but because we live from them.

---

45

It is sometimes said, "There are several theories of the Atonement, but we have to do with the fact, and not with our understanding of it." This frame of mind is the root of all that is most feeble and ominous in our Churches today. The one thing we need is to understand the Atonement, with a life's understanding, with a vital conscience. There it is that Christ comes to

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

himself for good. There, as it were, he finally finds his tongue, and takes command of the deep eloquence of moral things. Christ, I repeat, is to us just what his cross is. You do not understand Christ till you understand his cross. Nor have you measured the moral world. Such a fact as Christ or his Atonement only exists as it is intelligible, as it comes home to us with a moral meaning and a moral nature. It is only by understanding it that it becomes anything else than a martyrdom, that it becomes the saving act of God. It is only by understanding it that we escape from religion with no mind, and from religion which is all mind,

---

46

from pietism with its lack of critical judgement, and from rationalism with its lack of everything else.

If I may be pardoned for another reference to Dr Dale, he said that one of our great needs was more preaching about Christian ethics. Well, since his time that need has been largely met, especially in the religion of social ethics. Perhaps, indeed, it has been overdone, considering the amount of insight into ethical principle which we mostly have at command. We have been made to attend to the Christian life, in the sense of Christian conduct, at the expense of the Christian life in the inner sense of justifying faith. Ethic has been externalised. The effect of faith in conduct has been ethicised, but the nature of faith in experience has not; it has been sentimentalised. The centre of gravity has been transferred from the cross to the parable of the prodigal. So that what we need is the ethicising of religion itself, and not simply of the fruits of religion. We want a religion

---

47

ethical in itself, in its nature, genius and effect; we want more than a manner of life which is morality suffused with piety. And to ethicise religion there must be restored to it, from its centre, that note of judgement which it has lost, that note of supreme reference to a holy God. The moralising of Christian conduct is not the moralising of Christian faith. Yet it is the faith that needs moralising most. If conduct is wrong, it is the religion that needs reforming; the life will follow the faith. And to reform our religion we must be driven, not only to its centre but into its centre. You seek the ethicising of religion, its rescue from theology and sentiment? Well, you can only get it by theology. The prime need of religion today is a theology. No religion can survive which does not know where it is. And current religion does not know where it is, and it hates to be made to ask. It hates theology.

P.T. FORSYTH

The ethicising principle of religion must be the creative element at its source. Has it

48

a moral source? To answer that question is theology; and it is a theology of judgement. Ours is an eternal faith, and it can only be moralised by the eternal righteousness, *i.e.* by its source in a holy God. The source of an eternal faith can only moralise that faith if there be established at its centre with might what reigns in the universe by right—the moral majesty, the holiness of God. That is theology; but it is also essential Christianity, so far as a Church's witness is concerned. I am not speaking here about individual religion.

Yet so far have we got from this supreme concern of Christ, that when the effort is made to give it its true place for his work on earth, some minds, demoralised by their very religion, cry out against theology, and metaphysics, and academics. It is a cry charged with the ruin of the Christian future. There is nothing that need surprise us in the failure, the ebb, of any Church which treats the holiness of God as a piece of theology,

49

and its centrality to the conscience as a piece of metaphysic. What is the worth to the Christian gospel of a piety which calls the theology of holiness academic? Protest as you like against the language of pure thought, and the inaccessibility to relative man of the unconditioned absolute in the ethic of pure thought. Protest strongly against making salvation depend on assent to the metaphysics of Trinity. But when we have come to be so saturated with the religious impressionism of the hour that an ultimate concern of heart, soul, and mind with the holiness of God is a strange tongue to us, when we call the satisfaction of that holiness a mere piece of theology, then the kid is seethed in its mother's milk, and the soul sodden with the very religion that should be its food. Of course most men, even religious men, are unfamiliar with the holiness of God, but the unfamiliar is not the academic.

We are paying bitterly now, and we shall pay more bitterly yet, in the bewilderment of

50

our youth, for that neglect by the Church to educate its ministry in its own subject at the plastic time, which makes such talk possible. When preachers denounce theology, or a Church despises it for literary or social charm, that is to sell the cross to be a pendant at the neck of the handsome world. It is spiritual poverty and baldness, it is not the simplicity in Christ, to be sick of grace, judgement, atonement, and redemption. The holiness of God has

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

become a spent force if a gospel which turns entirely upon it is called metaphysical or academic.

## IV

Let us not be ashamed of the cross of Christ, for there alone the final and public righteousness of God is revealed to our growing faith. A moral order of the world is our one modern certainty, among those who are certain of anything. And if, as we Christians believe, this moral order reflects the nature

51

of a holy God (without exhausting his being) then the supreme interest of the world lies there, in that God. All the bearings of an ethical faith like Christianity therefore must be taken from there. Christianity is only true if it deal with this, and it is only final if it come to final terms with it. The cross of Christ has more than a passing place only if it give final effect to this holy thing, and is understood in relation to it. It has no meaning as an incident, none except as it is understood; none as a piece of history, only as it is superhistoric. It is presented to our conscience, and not to our sympathies or tastes. It is not an impressive spectacle but a decisive act, with the moral order of God's holiness for its central issue and first charge. The application of this is the one thing needful for the internal troubles of our religion today. An enlightened Judaism can preach a gospel of forgiveness, but our Christian religion has primarily to do with the terms of forgiveness; not with God's readiness to forgive, but with his way

52

of redemption; not with his willingness, but with his will; and with his will not merely as his aim, but as his deed; not as intended, but as achieved. The feeble gospel preaches "God is ready to forgive"; the mighty gospel preaches "God has redeemed." It works not with forgiveness alone, which would be mere futile amnesty, but with forgiveness in a moral way, with holy forgiveness, a forgiveness which not only restores the soul, but restores it in the only final and eternal way, by restoring in the same act the infinite moral order, and reconstructing mankind from the foundation of a moral revolution, God reconciles by making Christ to be sin, and not imputing it (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Christian act of forgiveness at once regards the whole wide moral order of things, and goes deep to the springs of the human will for entire repentance and a new order of obedience. This it does by the consummation of God's *judgement* in the central act of mercy. Do not think of God's judgement as

P.T. FORSYTH

53

an arbitrary infliction, but as the necessary reaction to sin in a holy God. There alone do you have the *divine* necessity of the cross in a sinful world—the moral necessity of judgement. A judgement upon man alone would have destroyed him. And a judgement borne by God alone would be *manqué*, it would be wide of the mark, as being irrelevant to man's experience and regeneration. But borne by God in man, in such a racial, nay cosmic, experience as the cross of Christ, it is the creation of a new conscience, and of the new ethic of the race. When Christ died, all died. Dying with Christ is not a mere ethical idea, complete only as we succeed in doing it. It is a religious or mystic idea, which is ethical as taking effect in a holy act, where, however, it is already complete in principle. It is not applying the principle of salvation to life; the foregone salvation becomes our life; and practical Christianity is freely living it out, and not merely squaring life to it laboriously. The judgement involved is one that

54

fell on Christ once for all. It is not a judgement in individual men, but in man in Christ. It is not the sum total of our self-judgements under Christ's light; rather say, all our self-judgement is but inspired by the complete judgement on Christ once for all. It is on us according as we are in him, yet not as a judgement, but as a grace; not as a punishment, but as salvation, not as a scourge, but as a cross.

Without such a cross and its Atonement we come to a religion of much point but no atmosphere, much sympathy and no imagination, much kindness and no greatness, much charm and no force—a religion for the well-disposed and not for the rebel, in which we love our neighbour, but not our enemy, and not our judge; a religion for the sensitive, but not for the world. When the world-cross goes out of the centre of religion, religion in due time goes out of the centre of man's moral and public energy. The public then goes past the preacher because he is not strong

55

enough to arrest and compel them. He has too much to say and too little to tell. He hangs to his age by its weakness, and not by its strength. He does not reach its soul with such gospel as he has. The pathos of Christ takes the place of his power. We canonise the weak things of our Christian world in our haste for rapid success with the many. Religion becomes too æsthetic, too exclusively sympathetic, too bland, too naturalistic. Our very Christmas becomes the festival of babyhood, Good Friday the worship of grief, and

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

Easter of spring and renewal instead of regeneration. To use the old theological language, under an obsession of culture and its pensive delicacies we become dominated by the passive obedience of Christ instead of his active. We treat the cross as a passion only, instead of a principle, or as a moral principle instead of a decisive deed. Christ becomes a pathetic, tender, helpful and gracious figure rather than a mighty. We prefer the flavour of the evening service to that of the morning.

---

56

The religion that is driven out of business and our energetic hours takes refuge in our tired hours and our evening time. And it takes on that hue. It acquires that passive type—even in the preachers too often, whose active business it should be. We tend to overprize the subdued, composed, and vespertinal type of religion, whose patron saints are outside the evangelical succession with Francis and Fra Angelico; or we are engrossed with the genial, brotherly, and bustling type. And all the time the Church is dropping into a vague Arianism: it is losing faith in the incarnation, faith in the real presence of the redeeming God, and therefore faith in a strenuous and historic ethic. Is it wonderful that it should be deploring a decline which it cannot stay by all its religious galvanism and its forced enterprises? The idea we are offered is a kingdom of man, with God to serve it, rather than a kingdom of God, with man to serve it. It is a consecration of the natural man by God instead of his redemption *to* God. It

---

57

trusts to man's Christian culture instead of his conversion. The God within exploits the God without. The divinest humanity is aided by a most humane divinity. The historic facts of our faith become not so much unique organs of God's self-revelation, as means of making us aware of the good God within us, and living up to him. We do not so much owe our soul to the fact of Christ; we impose on that fact the soul within us, the humane soul, crude, but still very capable, dim, but unlost; and so we really receive but what we give. Revelation is then not an objective authority, given at a point once for all; it is but a subjective way of treating history. The course of history is the real revelation. The deification of a point in it, of a person in it, is only a passing mythology, forced on us by a psychological necessity, though it may be very valuable when properly guarded. But Jesus cannot be regarded as an objective revelation. He lives while we believe.

P.T. FORSYTH

58

The tendency to dwell upon the passive obedience of Christ is but the theological way of expressing the tendency to dwell on God's sympathy and to ignore his salvation. There is little doubt that the sympathetic tendency is the more popular today, and to press salvation in a real sense is to be accused of a reactionary bias to theology. But a God who is merely or mainly sympathetic is not the Christian God. The Father of an infinite benediction is not the Father of an infinite grace. We are often warned of the dangers of anthropomorphism, especially by those who are preoccupied with the superpersonal element in God. But what we need much more today is a caution against anthropopatism, or a conception of God which thinks of him chiefly as the divine consummation of all our human pity and tenderness to man's mischance, bewilderment, sorrow and sin. A being of infinite pity would not rise to the height of the Christian God. And a religion of far more sympathy than we have

59

yet felt would not be the Christian religion. It is needless to dwell on the preciousness of sympathy. The man who needs none is something less than human; and the man who receives none remains so. But a sympathy which has no help in it mocks us with an enlargement of our own sensitive impotence, which means so much better than it can. And yet a sympathy which could only help would not secure us against the fear that all its help might be at last in vain. It might not reach me, or not my worst need; or it might be arrested in some future by a power more mighty to foil than to help. We must have a sympathy that can not only help but save, save to the uttermost, save for ever, and not only bless but redeem. Nay, far more, we must have, for the entire confidence of faith, a sympathy that has redeemed, and already triumphs in a conclusive salvation. If God, indeed, could not sympathise, he would be less than God, There would be a region, large or small. into which he could

60

not pass. There would be an insuperable obstacle set to Almighty God by a something which by so far reduced his power and resisted his access. He would be a limited being, tied up, as impersonal things are, by their own nature, and incapable of passing beyond it. But all the same, if God were all sympathy, if his divine power lay chiefly in his ability to infuse himself with superhuman intimacy if feeling into the most unspeakable tangles and crises of human life, then also he would be less than God, and we should have no

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

more than what might be called a monism of heart. Even a loving God is really God not because he loves, but because he has power to subdue all things to the holiness of his love, and even sin itself to his love as redeeming grace. A sympathetic God is really God because he is a holy, saving, redeeming God; because in him already the great world-transaction is done, and the kingdom of his holy love already set up on his foregone conquest of

61

all evil. The great and crucial thing is done in God and not *before* him, in his will and not in his presence, *by* him and not *for* him by any servants, not even by a son. It is an act of his own being, a victory in his own immutable and invincible being. And to be saved, in any non-egoistical sense of the word, means that God gains his own victory over again in me, and that I have lost in life's great issue unless he do. God's participation in man's affairs is much more than that of a fellow-sufferer on a divine scale, whose love can rise to a painless sympathy with pain. He not only perfectly understands our case and our problem, but he has morally, actively, finally solved it. The solution is for ever present with him. Already he sees, and for ever sees, the travail of his soul and is *satisfied*. All the jars, collisions, contradictions, crises, pities, tragedies and terrors of life are in him for ever adjusted in a peace which is not resigned and quietist, but triumphant and exultant;

62

and nothing can pluck us from his hands. All history, through his great act at its moral centre, is, in God, resolved into the harmonies of a foregone and final conquest. And our faith is not merely that God is with us, nor that one day he will clear all things up and triumph; but that for him all things are already triumphant, clear, and sure. All things are working together for good, as good is in the cross of Christ and its saving effect. Our faith is not that one day we shall solve the riddles of providence, and see all things put under us, but that now we see Jesus; and that we commit ourselves to one who has both the solution of every tragic thing and the glory of every dark thing clear and sure in a kingdom that cannot be moved, and, therefore alone, moves for ever on.

Our current religion of sympathy is but a section, and not the central or effectual section, of a religion which is a religion of redemption; and of achieved redemption, else

63

it must at last cease to be a religion at all.

That, and only that, is the fullness of the evangelical gospel.

P.T. FORSYTH

But in all the subjectivism I have named are we not slowly passing to another religion, a religion which starts with man's spiritual nature and not with God's self-revelation, with humanity and not with history, where man becomes "his own Holy Ghost"? We are bidden to study human nature, not the Bible, not Jesus Christ, except to look there for classic cases of spiritual humanity and high prophetism. The Bible becomes then but a valuable deposit of that irrepressible spiritual energy in man which in every age takes its own form, and finds no kind of finality in any age. That, of course, reduces Jesus to a mere historic link instead of a perennial presence; and his cross to one of the crises we have surmounted, or are in process of doing so.

The greatest personality is but a node in the great evolution. Man needs  
but evolution

---

64

and not revolution. He only needs that his face be cleared, and not turned steadfastly to Jerusalem.

Let us see exactly where the point is, and let us be quite fair to the kind of liberal religion in view. It does not, of course, exclude God. It does not say that the religious development of man is a smooth or an automatic thing. Progress still needs the help of, God, or whatever stands for God. It needs even the act of God. The origin of faith within man is an act of God. But the point is that this act is not a revolution in man, not a new creation, not a regeneration, not an absolute redemption but only a release, an impulse from God, the extrication of our best, a delivery of the innate spirituality and goodness of man with which history is in travail until now. It is not a salvation from death but only from scanty life. There is no real critical life-and-death catastrophe in the moral history of the race; but what we have is a deep consistent progress, harmonious on

---

65

the whole, each step attaching to the step before. We have the happy perfecting of those decent, just, or tender instincts which are the original righteousness of human nature, the gradual surmounting by moral culture of sense and self. God is our helper and no more. He is not a real sense, but only a figurative sense, our Redeemer. He helps us to realise our latent spiritual resources and ends. There is no break with self and the world, only a disengagement from an embarrassing situation.

It should be clear that this is another religion from that of redemption; and it has no room or need for atonement. And if it be true, then Christianity is not so necessary as we were led to think. Its whole complexion is changed.

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

Nothing so very serious has taken place. Things can be bad enough, but not so bad as all that. Human nature is very mysterious but there is nothing marvellous, miraculous, in God's relation to it, nothing perilled on an eternal edge, nothing

---

66

like a new creation, nothing that needs much penetration or agony of holy thought. Incarnation becomes a metaphor. These greatest words are felt so great and useful because they can be made to mean anything. Well, faith in the incarnation is bound to become a metaphor, and to sink, if we count it mere theology to take it seriously that God was in Christ reconciling the world, and to press on to understand the mighty God thus hallowed in the atoning cross. It is bound to sink, so as to become the incarnation of man instead of God, if in the cross we see but the extreme suffering of the most loving man instead of the supreme act and victory of the most holy God. If Christianity do not make a revolution in human nature we make a revolution in Christianity. A religion centring wholly in the graciousness of Christ, or his submission, or his spiritual insight can be no foundation for a commanding ethic or a triumphant faith. It lacks the virile note. Christ did not come as a grand spiritual

---

67

personality, but as the Redeemer. It was not to spiritualise us that he came but to save us. Moral verve is bound to relax if the religion of the cross become but a hallowed addition to life's spiritual interests or touching moods, if it do not carry the stamp of moral crisis and personal decision for death or life. Ethic is bound to grow less strenuous, even while we bustle about ethical conduct, if the sublime ethical issue of the universe is not the marrow of our personal divinity and the principle of our personal religion. We can find a strong foundation only in that centre where the holy God both bears our load and performs his new creative act. If in the cross we have but the greatest of love's renunciations instead of the one establishment of God's holy will, if we have but the divine Kenosis and not also the divine Plerosis, then the sense of God's presence in the cross, and in the Church, and in the world's moral war, is bound to fade. The eternal ruling God cannot be a God in a passive or touching cross merely. A

---

68

religion of simple service is no religion to rule a world like this. We shall come to feel that in such a cross, a cross that only stands for sacrifice, there is no God, but only a victory of God's foes, another and a tremendous case of

P.T. FORSYTH

the world crushing the good and just, another case of the soul's defeat by fate. Then, of course, Christianity must die. "The cross is either the life of our religion, or it is the death of all religion. Either it is the supreme atonement, and so the final guarantee of God's Fatherhood and its victory; or else it is a mere martyr death, and so an eclipse of that fatherhood, its greatest historic eclipse, which would mean its extinction." Christ would then have publicly trusted a God who did not publicly give him the victory. Such a pathetic, mystic, and martyred Messiah could stir the sympathy of many, but he could not win the worship of the world. He could impress but not forgive; he could move men but not redeem them; he could criticise society but not judge

69

the world. A king the world could just crucify is no king the world could fear; it needs a king who in his cross judged the world, and did not simply find his fate there. There is nothing central, nothing creative for life in such a fate. There may be much in it to appeal to our sympathetic and religious side, but nothing to establish faith, nothing to ethicise it for ever from a creative centre, nothing to fortify us against the unholy, nothing to set conscience and holiness on the throne of the world. If Christ died to saving and central purpose, then he died as the act of God. His death was God's act in the sense that it was the moral activity of God. God was in Christ and his death, acting there, setting up an everlasting kingdom, and not simply inflicting a racial penalty, nor simply suffering a racial fate.

Moreover, a pathetic cross sends our active sympathies mainly to Christ's teaching and his miracles. If we see in Christ and his cross chiefly the passive and the affecting

70

side, and not the active and creative side; if we see Christ's love enduring judgement more than God's holiness triumphant in judgement and doing in it the grand, nay, the one moral act of the world; if we see but that endurance, no wonder the active vigorous world turns away from the cross to the teaching of Christ and his beneficence. For these are acts of will, positive deeds with active beneficent effect. It is no wonder a cross of pathetic and appealing suffering, a cross of mere sacrifice, should become decentralised in favour of these. But these have no permanent value for us in themselves, but only as expressions of Christ's person. The great thing is not that they were said or done, but said or done *by him*. And yet they were not great enough to be an adequate expression of a person so mighty. And the person of Christ would be dumb and inert for us in the world's last crisis, apart from its active

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

assertion and cosmic triumph on the cross. The cross, therefore, was no martyr passivity of the

---

71

finest prophet, led like a lamb to the slaughter; it was the work of a Messiah king with power over himself. Christ never merely accepted his fate; he willed it. He went to death as a king. It was the supreme exercise of his royal self-disposal. The same great picture which presents the sheep before the shearers dumb deepens before its close to one who poured out his soul unto death. And when we obscure that, when we pity where we should worship, melt where we should kneel, or kneel where we should rise to newness of life, it is no wonder if faith become a mere affection, or a mere ethical ritual of conduct, and cease to be the absolute committal of ourselves to communion with him for ever. It is no wonder then if it cease to be the practical and eternal consignment of our spirit into his hands who has redeemed us as our Lord God of Truth. Faith is really self-disposal. But currently it is not. It is any one of a multitude of things, but not that, except in some

---

72

feeble or breezy sense which does not save the moral asthenia of the Church. The Church has lost much moral tone even in its occupation with ethical subjects. And why? It has lost power to guide the instinct of self-sacrifice when it reduces the cross to nothing else. Has it not lost religious weight in the weightiest matters with the weightiest people? And the deep cause is its modern failure to understand the cross, to see in the judgement of the cross God's righteousness, God's holiness, coming finally to its own, and to realise this as the one object for which man exists or the world. This failure is bound to tell when acting on the scale of a Church, however secure many fine souls may feel living in a coterie and painting angels in their solitary cells.

It is only as God's act, then, that Christ's death can regain or retain a central place in faith. Second, it is only as an act revolutionary for man. And farther, it is only as an act in which his holiness gives the law to his

---

73

love, and judgement makes grace precious. Holiness must be the first charge on the Saviour. If we spoke less about God's love and more about his holiness, more about his judgement, we should say much more when we did speak of his love. And we should keep that supreme in our faith which was supreme in Christ's, in that saving hour when the sense of love was dimmed,

P.T. FORSYTH

when communion failed, and nothing was left but faith by which to save the world.

It is round this sanctuary that the great camp is set and the great battle really waged. Questions about immanence may concern philosophers. And questions about miracles may agitate physicists. But the great dividing issue for the soul is neither the Bethlehem cradle nor the empty grave, nor the Bible, nor the social question. For the Church at least (however it be with individuals) it is the question of a redeeming atonement. It is here that the evangelical issue lies. It is here, and not upon the nativity, that we part company

---

74

with the Unitarians. It is here that the unsure may test their crypto-unitarianism. I would unchurch none. I would but clear the issue for the honest conscience. It is this that determines whether a man is Unitarian or Evangelical, and it is this that should guide his conscience as to his ecclesiastical associations. Only if he hold that in the atoning cross of Christ the world was redeemed by holy God once for all, that there, and only there, sin was judged and broken, that there and only there the race was reconciled and has its access to the face and grace of God—only then has he the genius and the plerophory of the Gospel. If he hold to Christ as this head, then, whatever views he may hold on other heads, he is of the Gospel company and the Evangelical pale. Only thus has he a real final message for the age. Only thus is he more than one that has a lovely voice and can play well on an instrument for the ages' pleasure—and its final neglect.

THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

75

II

**SO THE ATONING CROSS IS CENTRAL TO THE NEW TESTAMENT GOSPEL. BUT IT IS CENTRAL ALSO TO CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE**

76

77

I

**T**HERE are two sets of admissions that should be made after what I have said. One concerns the history of the doctrine, the other concerns its place in individual experience.

(I)

As to the doctrine in history, we ought to admit the value of much of the socinian and rationalist criticism of it. The value is negative and corrective, but it is value. The ecclesiastical form of the doctrine is the source of most of the prejudice against it. And I mean particularly the forms it took among the Protestant scholastics of the 17th century. Many of these forms will not bear the light of Scripture any more than of reason. They are more aristotelian than apostolic. I do not say they depart from the New Testament doctrine, because it would be hard in the present position of New Testament

78

knowledge to say the New Testament had a complete doctrine. But it has a principle and a norm which is positive enough to enable us to rule out many notions which misrepresent God's grace. For instance, we can no longer treat the atonement as a deflection of God's anger, as if the flash fell on Christ and was conducted by him to the ground, while we stood in passive safety, with no part or lot in the incomprehensible process. We can no longer speak of a strife of attributes in God the Father, justice set against mercy, and judgement against grace, till an adjustment was effected by the Son. There can be no talk of any mollification of God, or any inducement whatever, offered by either man or some third party, to procure grace. Procured grace is a contradiction in terms. The atonement did not procure grace, it flowed from grace. What

P.T. FORSYTH

was historically offered to God was also eternally offered by God, within the Godhead's unity. The Redeemer was God's gift. Farther, we

79

must not think that the value of the atonement lies in any equivalent suffering. Indeed, it does not lie in the suffering at all, but in the obedience, the holiness.<sup>1</sup> It is both a moral and a psychological impossibility that an amount of suffering equivalent to what we deserved should ever have been undergone by Christ or any holy personality in our stead. Again, we must speak very differently about the transfer of guilt; and never as if it were a ledger amount which could be shifted about by divine finance, or a ponderable load lifted to another back. We have to be cautious in using the word penalty in connection with what fell on Christ. We must renounce the idea that he was punished by the God who was ever well pleased with his beloved Son. The chastisement of our peace was upon him indeed; he entered the penumbra of our penalty; but if we think there is no chastisement left for us when we are in him, we have against that

<sup>1</sup>I develop this later in the closing chapter.

80

idea the whole classic Christian experience, which finds the truest, deepest, and bitterest repentance in the course or end of the Christian life rather than at the beginning. But it is one of our present misfortunes that so much criticism of the popular doctrine with its abuse of repentance, is conducted by people who seem not to know what bitter repentance, spiritual brokenness and total humiliation mean. I would rather repent truly with a Salvationist theology than criticise that theology with a judicial superiority which needs no repentance.

(2)

But in respect of personal experience, do we deny all true faith which does not grasp the atoning cross? Surely not; so long as that cross is not denied or denounced; and so long as the experience of particular individuals is not made the measure of the message of the Church.

I hope I take due account of the effect of

81

Christ's person, word, and deed upon individuals before the cross. I often recall Zaccheus, the Magdalen, Peter, and, I may add, Judas. And today still the life, the words, the acts, the death of Christ have a precious power to rouse men, to break, heal, and restore them to him, without direct reference to his atoning work. The saving action of Christ for many individuals begins

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

therein his life, and especially today; and it only attains late unto the resurrection from the dead. We do ill to force the ripe experience of the cross on those who can as yet feel but its dawn. Any theology of atonement must be adjusted to the indubitable fact that Christ's forgiveness may and does reach personal cases apart from conscious reliance on his atoning work, or grasp of its theology. To do otherwise would be to show ourselves the victims of a pedantic dogmatism or a theological papacy. To preach Christ is indeed fundamentally to preach his atonement; but it is not incessantly to preach about

82

it. We must always preach it, but we need not always preach about it. Only it must not be denied or denounced, never ignored or levelled down to the category of man's efforts to atone his own sins. It is true there are historic stages and junctures when to preach Christ in the more theological form is the only preaching relevant to the mental and moral situation. It was so at the Reformation. But today it may be more needful in certain positions to preach the Christ of the cross than the cross of Christ. There is a strategy in the holy war. It is the last crisis that calls the reserves to the front. But whether we preach the Christ who atoned or the atonement of Christ it is still an atoning Christ and an atoning cross we preach. To preach only the atonement, the death apart from the life, or only the person of Christ, the life apart from the death, or only the teaching of Christ, his words apart from his life, may be all equally one-sided, and extreme to falsity.

I will only stop to remark here that the

83

more the conscience is affected by Christ's words or behaviour, the more is that standard generated within us which demands the atonement in the cross. It was the Christ of the latent cross that said these words, and did these things. It was the Christ who himself was driven by his experience to recognise that the crowning thing he came for was to die. And another remark must be made. What we are chiefly concerned with is the great message and experience of the Church; and that cannot be whittled down to the experience of individuals and their early stages. It is a minimal gospel, set on numbers, that is paralysing the cross. Preach the total Christ therefore in the perspective of evangelical faith, but with immediate stress on that aspect most required by the conscience of the hour. For the Reformation age the ethical concern may have been satisfaction and its true form; for our age, with

P.T. FORSYTH

another public ethic, it may be judgement as the demand of a social righteousness.

---

84

For that age the interest was far more directly theological and juristic, now it is more psychological and ethical. Then it was the Christ of the two natures cohering in one person that gave value to the cross, now the stress is the Christ of the one, holy, obedient personality. The unity we prize in the Saviour is one realised not metaphysically but personally, a unity by and in the cross as the crowning moral act both of God and of humanity in Christ. But a point of unity we must seek if our faith is to be unified, if life is to be unified out of its present distraction, if religion is to have a vital core, and cease to be a frame of pious moods or morals. Our relation to God must be a real one and not subjective. It must turn on a positive fact and act, which gives it both reality and unity; and on a fact of history. It is not enough to say this fact is the person of Christ. If his be not a mere loose-hung personality, with a religious casualism, just doing perfectly whatever turned up each day, the person must

---

85

itself have a principle of unity. This principle cannot, with our data about him, be psychological; even with more data, perhaps, it would still be beyond our comprehension psychologically. "Du gleichst dem Geist den du begreifst nicht mir." But it is a theological unity, converging on his death and the consummation there of all that made his person what it was, all that took him out of the category of other men, and made the ground of our salvation. He saved us by his difference from us. He did not redeem us because he represented us; rather he represents us because he redeemed. It is true he could not redeem man without representing him. But had he redeemed man by only representing him, man would be self-redeemed in the human classic. It is the atoning death of Christ as the representative of God in man that makes Jesus a complete and closed personality with a final action on the world. It is the offering to God in man of a holiness possible only to God. He died

---

86

once for all, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to his finality of God.

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

## II

But after these admissions let me lay the more stress on the necessity of this atonement for that maturer Christian experience which gives us the true type of faith.

The conscience has many functions, and the atonement of Christ satisfies or stirs them all. It strikes light from many angles, and it is presented in the New Testament in various complementary ways. But its chief action on the conscience is to pacify its accusations with the love and grace of God. Faith is above all the life of a conscience. It is the life of a conscience which is stilled and established by the forgiveness of God in the faith that there is now no condemnation. True enough, as I have said, this may take a real, though an incipient form, in the deep impression made by the tender mercy of the kindly Christ. But many never rise

---

87

above this level. It is enough for them to respond to Christ's gracious way with the sinners he met. They place themselves among the sinners he forgave and healed during his life. They do not ask where he places them. To some he was not healing but severe. And they may question the need of any atonement. The assurance from Christ of God's forgiveness is enough for them. But that is a very naive and all too simple faith for such a conscience as ours, and such a world. Let its value for certain individuals not be denied. Who would be exacting with the simple souls? But surely it condemns them to be perpetual moral minors. And it keeps faith at the lay level. Ours is indeed a lay faith, but the Church could not live on it at lay level. If such people go on to think and ask questions (as they should for their soul's life), in passing from disciples to regenerates, must they not begin to have certain misgivings? (Bachmann.) Must they not, for instance, say to

---

88

themselves at some time: "Those cases that Jesus forgave were but single cases; is mine quite parallel? If he forgave them must he also forgive me? Is God's forgiveness just a series of acts, one for each soul? If so how do I know where they may stop, whether they will reach to me? How shall I realise that his forgiveness is one great racial act into which I am built, so that when one died all died and all were redeemed?" Moreover, the soul goes on to think thus: "As I grow in Christ my sin grows on me, and the tremendous thing in my pardon grows on me. The damnability of my sin grows on me, and with it the incredibility of grace. How do I know not merely that God is willing to forgive but that he has forgiven, that what is so incredible is equally

P.T. FORSYTH

unalterable?" Still farther. The believer sins after he has been forgiven. "Am I fit," he says in his repentance, "to stand with those that Jesus forgave? They did not betray him. I have sinned against a light and an experience they

89

never had. I am a chief of sinners. I have sinned my mercy." Moreover, there rises on his soul a deepened sense of Christ's \*demand. His forgiving words to special cases lose force compared with the exigence of his general demand and the holiness of his standard. His judgement grows more serious than it seemed in our first forgiveness. How shall we stand? Better people than we he left outside his kingdom. And so we oscillate between the goodness and the severity of God. We are tossed from the one to the other. They alternate as it were according to our mood, they are not entwined and fused. They thwart each other, and get in each other's way; they do not sustain each other. And the conscience finds no rest till it find in the cross the one final act in which both are reconciled and inwoven, with the grace uppermost. I meet the atonement where the sin of the whole world is taken away, which carries in it the foregone forgiveness of sins that I dread and yet am sure I shall do.

90

There are various ways in which a man finds it hard to take home the forgiveness he craves by a general declaration of God's love. Some may not feel so much the greatness of their sin as the incredibility of anything so vast as God's love. There may not be grievous blots on their life, yet they feel that the state of the world's conscience must call out God's judgement on the race, including them. On the other hand if there be such blots in life, and especially if a man sins after his forgiveness in a grievous way, he gets such a shock in the revelation of sin's tough and subtle power that it needs something very final and decisive to assure him of its destruction. He must then have a grace which is not simple and self-evident—for "lightly come, lightly go." He must have a finished work, and a God who has made a full end. A conscience in his state, as soon as it thinks on a world scale, must have a grace and salvation which is not benignant only, but gathers up the total moral situation in one act, and settles the great

91

strife for good and all. He must have more than a full forgiveness, he must have a complete redemption. And that means one that pursues, captures, and subdues to God's holy purpose those consequences of our sin also which have long gone beyond our control or knowledge, and are out on the world doing

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

evil work at compound interest on their own account. 1 A man needs something to make him confident that his past sin, and the sin he is yet sure to commit, are all taken up into God's redemption, and the great transaction of his moral life is done. The real complete forgiveness is the appropriation of the world's atonement.

It is not easy. Theological belief may not be so hard. But for a man to make Christ's atonement the sole centre of his moral life, or of his hope for the race, is not easy. Nothing is so resented by the natural self as the hearty admission of man's native lostness and helplessness, especially when he thinks of all the heroisms, integrities, and charities

---

92

which ennoble the race. It is not always pride, it is often a mere natural self-affirmation. It is a native self-respect, which makes him shrink from submitting himself absolutely to the judgement of another. Even in his repentance he does not want to lose all self-respect. He feels he cannot amend the life of conscience, and repair the old faults, without some remnant of self-respect to work from. His new shoots must come from the old stump, which must not be rooted out. He is fighting for the one remnant of a moral nature which if he lost he fears he would be less than a man. He does not easily realise what a poor thing his self-justification must be compared with his justification by God, his self-repair beside God's new creation. He does not feel how sterile the stump is, how poorly his moral remnant would serve him for his moral need, how that recuperative vitality is the one thing he lacks, how absolute God's grace is, and how complete is the moral re-creation in Christ. He palters with a

---

93

synergism which is always trying to do the best for human nature in a bargain with God. And he does not realise how this starves and pinches the conscience itself, compared with the moral fulness of a total gift of grace and a new man in Jesus Christ. There are thus a thousand influences of no quite ignoble sort which may arrest a man's total committal of himself and his kind to the new creation in Christ's cross. And it seems a reasonable self-respect which solicits him to reserve a plot of freehold in his interior where his house is his castle, and he can call his soul his own, even at the challenge of the holy and allsearching judge. He does not, perhaps, venture to say that God and the soul are co-equal foci in the moral ellipse, but he struggles, sometimes pathetically, to set up what is as impossible morally as mathematically—a

P.T. FORSYTH

subsidiary centre; which is a contradiction in terms. There is but one centre, one Lord, one cross, one faith, and one spirit of a new life in Christ Jesus.

94

### III

It has been asked concerning Christ., Was his will to die one with his will to save? Is there any doubt about the answer the Church has given to that question from first to last? The salvation has always been attached to Christ's death, from New Testament days downward. This has not indeed passed without challenge, especially in recent times; but the challenge has not affected the catholicity and continuity of the Church's witness as a whole to that truth of its foundation. And the salvation is attached not to Christ's death as an incident of history or even as an object lesson of grace, but as the effectuation of grace—not, indeed, its procuring but its achievement, its putting in action. It is not the fact of Christ's crucifixion that saves, but the inner nature of that fact as understood, and not simply swallowed, by faith, understood as the atonement which makes reconciliation possible (2 Corinthians 5:19-21).

95

Such is the witness of you may say the whole Church about its central relation to its creator, its living tenant, and perpetual Lord.

But this suggests a serious question. It is declared that, if we be true to the true Christ of the Gospels we shall relegate a final atonement in the cross to the region of those apostolic theologoumena, which like an evil weed seized and held the Church in a fatal plexus for so long. That means that Jesus did not understand his will to save to be one with his will to die. His death was either an arrest of his saving work, or an otiose sequel to it. It was a mere anecdote of his life, not its *dénouement*. And the serious question that then results is this, How came such a teacher., such a prophet, to be so deeply, so long, and so continuously misunderstood? If Christ's atoning death is not the central effect of his person, and the central thing to our faith, if that notion of atonement has overlaid Christ's real gospel,

96

how has the whole Church come totally to misread its creator, and to miss what for him was central? There has surely been some gigantic bungling on the Church's part, some almost fatuous misconception of its Lord, a blunder whose long life and immense moral effect is quite unintelligible. An error of that kind is no misprint but a flaw. It is not mistake but heresy. And, as it

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

concerns the centre and nature of faith, it must destroy any belief in the guidance of the Church by the Holy Spirit—which, however, is not a very lively faith among those whose challenge here occupies us.

But leaving that, I will keep the question upon lines which represent a less doctrinal interest. What a poor thing human nature must be to have been affected so mightily, nay in a great measure revolutionised, by a mistake so deep and complete. What a poor and untrustworthy thing human nature must be, to have found in such a moral blunder the charter of a new ethic, the foundation of a

97

new humanity, and the secret of eternal life. The Church has done its Lord many a wrong, but none so grave as this, to have determinedly perverted his legacy, and grieved his spirit in regard to the central object of his mission on earth. It has often travestied his methods, misconstrued points of his teaching, and even compromised his principles; but these things have been done against its best conscience and its holiest spirits. These errors have passed, and been reformed, and renounced. But this perversion I speak of, if perversion it be, is greater than these, less culpable possibly, but even greater as a perversion. For it has been the misrepresentation of Christ's central gospel by the Church's best and wisest. It has been a more total and venerable perversion than even the papacy. For even had all such passing ills and historic abuses been cured, this travesty of Christ's central intent would still have gone on, and gone on with all the force lent by a purified Church, and all the

98

spell of saintliness to wing the central lie. If the cross was but little to Christ in comparison with his real work, if it was a mere by-product of his mission, a mere appendix to it and not its purpose, a mere calamity that befell it and not its consummation; and if his Church has yet made it central, seminal, creative, and submersive of all else, then the enemies who swore Christ's life away did him no such bad turn as the train of disciples whose stupidity has belied him over the whole world for all time. And those browbeaters who would let him say nothing did his cause less harm than those apostles who made him say what he did not mean.'

1 I would here anticipate a remark that may occur to some to the effect that I am allowing too much to the authority of the Church, and that if the arguments I apply in respect of the nature of redemption were applied to polity we should be delivered into the hands of Rome and an episcopal succession. In reply I would point out that the Church stands to the nature of its generative redemption in a relation quite different from that which it has to every other doctrine.

P.T. FORSYTH

It was the one thing that created the Church, and therefore the Church's verdict upon it has an authority quite interior and superior to her views on all besides. We may take the constitution of the Church, the ritual of the Church, or its theological system at any stage; and not one of these has the same creative relation to the Church as Christ's atoning death. We may even select from the system of Catholic truth the doctrine of the Incarnation. That truth, central as many find it, has no such centrality as the principle of atoning forgiveness. The doctrine of the Incarnation did not create the Church; it grew up (very quickly) in the Church out of the doctrine of the cross which did create it—in so far as that can be said of any doctrine, and not rather of the act and power which the doctrine tries to state. The doctrine of the Incarnation grew upon the Church out of its experience of Atonement. The Church was forced on the deity of Christ to account for its redeemed existence in Christ. We can experience the redemption as we cannot the incarnation. I have already said that the soterology sprang from soteriology—the creed of the person grew up in a Church which had been created by the experience of his salvation. The authority of the Church, therefore, in respect of the manner of its salvation is primary compared with its authority in regard to the constitution of its Saviour; and far more in respect of its polity or its practice. Its testimony as to the cross is its witness to its own life. Here Loisy is right enough. There is a *continuum* in the Church which takes precedence of every specific view the Church may hold. It is the continuous, supernatural, eternal life. Only that life is not an indefinite vitality, without feature or content, and capable of almost any. But it is life as the new creation, carrying in its very heart its mark of origin, and having the seal of proceeding from the cross as the action of God's holy love on sinful man. My point then would be this. As the witness of an illiterate saint to God's grace in the redemption which has made him what he is has a value for the objective nature of that redemption that belongs to no other piece of his theology, so with the large testimony of the household of faith. Its witness to the divine act which called it into being and made it what it is, is on another footing from any matter of its polity or speculation. The Church might have gone widely wrong on grave points like these without wrecking its own existence; but to have gone so widely wrong on the point I am treating would be for the Church to commit suicide, to cease to be the thing that God once made, to cease witness to the Gospel that made it, and practically to deny the Lord that bought it. For that there would be no repentance. The Church of the papacy and the mass was reformable; but a Church that renounced universally its atoning redemption would not be reformable. It would be extinct, however long it kept the name to live. All turns on the cross (*i.e.* the total person of Christ put into the cross) being the power creative of the Church, and on the Church's relation and witness to this source and secret of its life.

99

But we cannot stop here. There is worse to follow. What was Jesus about to leave

100

such a blunder possible? What a *gauche* Saviour! What a clumsy teacher! How

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

101

awkward a prophet! How unfinished with the work given him to do. Regard it. Suppose the central thing committed by the Father to Christ's charge was not the atoning task; suppose he himself is not central to his own Gospel, yet he departs and leaves a body of disciples who do believe his atonement to be the great work, and his person their God. And these have grown and spread into a Catholic Church, which, amid many distractions and divisions, still founds upon this evangelical rock, and is the greatest product of humanity. Well, I say, if there be this central perversion of him by the body of his disciples and apostles, first and last, then and now, what are we to think of him? If he so discharged his real mission from God, and so gave his message during three years of public and responsible life, that a central misunderstanding at once swamped that message as he really meant it, and smothered his word in his cross, what kind of testimony

102

was that he bore, and with what face would he return to him that sent him? If his cross cost him not only his life but his mission, his true message from God, and if his holiest apostles of the cross have been among the most active obscurantists of his real kingdom, surely when he consented, or even submitted, to death he signed away his commission, he consented too soon to die, he died before he had taught or secured his lesson, and he accepted the one thing that foiled his true intent. The hour that he should return to the Father was not ripe when he thought it was. Never did he think his death would be captured, exaggerated, and exploited like that to obscure the Father and the kingdom. I say, if he left his disciples convinced that a death which was to him a side interest was his supreme bequest, and if the net result of his act all these ages has been to deepen and spread the mistake, then was he any fit trustee for the purpose of God? Observe this, too. The mistake is

103

most deeply held and hallowed by those most near his own saintliness; its effect has been to generate that sanctity as nothing else has; and it is only discovered to be a mistake late in history, by men who, however good, have more sense of what is rational than of what is holy. Well, noting this, can you suppress the question whether sainthood to Christ is good service to God? If, I say, the saints nearest to him have done most to decentralise in favour of the cross what was really dearest to him; if his greatest cloud of witnesses becloud his real word, and help but as the crowd helps at a fire; if those who know they are saved only in his blood are in effect one with those who were guilty

P.T. FORSYTH

of his blood in silencing his real testimony—what are we to think of him who so mismanaged things as to allow the blunder to be possible, who left his work in a condition that permanently spoiled it, and bequeathed to his best believers the doom of perverting the counsel of God?

---

104

Nay farther, if the effect of Christ has been that the Church has worshipped a Redeemer on the cross when it should but have hearkened to God's prophet in his words, if it gave him worship where it owed him but attention, what must be the frame of mind in which he now lives and sees the misbirth that has come of the travail of his soul? If the Church was left by him in such a state that it has gone on living on another centre than what was really his and God's, how shall we conceive the bitter regret with which he now views his old effort in the light of experience and of heaven? He who, we thought, had redeemed Israel botched the work, and left it to harden into a mere theology. And he who, we thought, ever lived to make intercession for us, must ever live in petition for himself, that God would graciously forgive the well-meant failure he must sadly own. If the effect of the Church's evangelical faith upon Christ in heaven were to surprise and disappoint him by its central

---

105

note, then, before the Father, he would have to apologise for this diminution of his glory; he would have to lament that the work was not put into better hands, and given to one without the genius of being misunderstood most by those who loved him best. And what before God he would have to confess for us, and deplore for himself, would be not only the diminution of God's glory but its unhappy eclipse by his own. He has been taken and made a king in spite of himself; and a king whose effect has been, not to hallow the Father's sole and suzerain name, but to obscure it by his own. to divide the worship and deflect the work of God.

I trust these thoughts will not be deemed extravagant. They are efforts to think to the end, and to think with the foundation of faith, the intelligence of conscience, and the experience of life. They are not the exercises of an ideology. They are efforts to recall our minds to the actual crisis, to the need for concentration, decision, finality, and

---

106

footing, to defend the Church from the university, to secure an evangelical faith against a faith but rational, to rescue the apostles from the apologists, and plead for a pistic creed against an academic. They are efforts, furthermore, to call in our minds from dawdling and dabbling in eternal things; to protect

THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

them from the current susceptibility, discursiveness, and distraction; to guard them from a too mobile sympathy, which answers every novelty, joins every society, reads the latest thing, and sows itself on every wind; to secure them from a morbid and dainty vivacity which has a brisk interest in everything, and may even reach a curiosity about the Eternal; to shelter our minds from the humane optimisms in which the devil whispers that devilry is dead and the perfection of manly culture is at hand. I would force our concern on one vast world issue in which time is won or lost for eternity, and the whole human soul for the all-holy God. We handle matters where to be right is to be

---

107

right upon a final, sublime, and eternal scale. But to be wrong there is to fly from orbits of celestial range, and do damage at last to the inhabitants of heaven as well as the dwellers on earth. To be right here is to secure the Church's future, to be wrong here is to doom it. But for the Church to be right here is for the Church continually to cry." Holy, Holy, Holy, O Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us and grant us Thy salvation."

---

108

P.T. FORSYTH

109

## III

## The Atonement Central to the Leading Features of Modern Thought

110

111

## I

THERE are several tendencies in the modern mind which seem to converge upon something more objective and central than that mind can itself provide. Humanity cannot explain itself. It does not carry in itself the chart of its own drift or the key of its own destiny. It moves to a point outside itself, to a point in God. The Christian creed says this point is in history, but not of it. It is the Kingdom of God in the cross of Christ. The crucifixion, of course, is a historic fact, like Jesus, but the cross, the Atonement, like the Christ, is superhistoric. And it is in this superhistoric consummation—the kingdom in the cross—that many of our finest modern aspirations should come to unity and rest.

These features are such as the passion for (1) unity of conception; (2) cosmic range; ill

112

(3) social righteousness; (4) mercy, pity, and kindness.

1. There is no feature that more marks the mind of today than the craving for unity, and especially for unity of conception. It dominates the higher science; it is at the root of the hasty refuge some take in monism. It determines the higher Churchmanship; it inspires the search for a real authority. And it moulds the higher politics; it moves in the aspirations for brotherhood and the ambitions of democracy.

2. Nay, the passion for unity rises to a cosmic scale. Under the guidance of modern science we escape from abstract universals and we exult in cosmic realities and the cosmic imagination. Planetary systems are now more numerous than stars were once thought to be. Space not only swells, but its distension is organised. And human destiny itself expands in proportion. The soul that renounces a historic God is yet invited to lose itself in a cosmic emotion or an enthusiasm

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

113

of humanity. The all submerges the God of the all, the all-presence the All-Father, or the All-Father the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. With this goes the modern passion for righteousness—not merely for personal goodness, but for boundless good, for social righteousness. The demand grows for a reconstruction, a revolution if need be, of the social order in the interest of an ideal righteousness of no private interpretation. Public justice slowly but surely bears down private interests. It emerges more clearly as the dividing line between the two great parties. It seizes some people so vehemently that it becomes their religion; and personal religion wanes in consequence, and, with it, the membership of the Churches. There was never an age when the passion for public righteousness covered so many, or promised so much.

4. Add to this the humanitarian passion for mercy, pity, tenderness to the weak, consideration

114

for life or suffering. You can get money for hospitals when you can get it for nothing else. The children of the community were never so cared for, and the young had never such chances. The submerged have at last emerged. We awake to the valuable products that can be extracted by new machinery from the wastage and wreckage of society. We have the politics of pity, or at least of sympathy—threatening at times even to swamp the politics of justice and the sanity of law. There is, of course, much that points the other way still, but there never was so much pointing that way, the way of mercy, pity, and love.

Take such features, then, as these alone—the passion for a unity or a centre, the passion for righteousness, especially social righteousness, the passion of sympathy or pity, and the passion which moves to conceive of such things on a cosmic scale. And then consider, on the other hand, the increased confusion in life, the loss of a centre of unity,

115

the disagreement about the form of righteousness, the inadequacy of philanthropy, the sense of oppression by the vastitude of the cosmos. Take all the moral confusion and the soul-schism which lead first to deliberate yet passionate pessimism in the midst of our conquest of the world, and then to the settled despair which multiplies suicide. It is an age of very great spiritual derangement and moral dissolution, in spite of its spiritual instincts and ethical ardours. And to this confusion is offered by the Church the threefold unity of the cross—the holy love and grace of God, the saving judgement on sin,

P.T. FORSYTH

and the new Humanity. My interpretation is that those great groping lines of social tendency I named above draw together to this point, which history provides but not history alone, nor can mere humanity explain it. They find their focus in God's act of Christ's cross—where they not only meet and blend, but where they are fused and vitalised for a new future in the one burning centre of man

---

116

and the world and God. The cosmic passion (2) of a merciful (4) justice (3) at the heart of the whole world (1) is realised only in the cross as the crowning act of a holy and gracious God—a God holy because he is the whole goodness of existence, and gracious because of the merciful love with which he goes out to save us into his own holiness.

1. To take the matter of unity. This cross will appear and remain the central issue of Christian doctrine only if it can be shown to be central to the ethic of the soul and of the race. It is only central to faith because it is central to conscience, and to the dramatic conscience of the race, nay, of God. What is the Atonement but the satisfaction of the conscience—God's and man's—the adjustment, the pacification, of conscience, and especially God's? It is the core of our religion, because it is the crisis of man's moral drama and the solution of that moral tragedy which is his collision with the holy. "Pain," says a fine literary critic in speaking

---

117

of lyric art, "cannot be conquered till it is expressed." This is still more true of evil. Sin could not be conquered till it was expressed. And that was what Christ did in God and God in Christ. He brought evil to a moral head and dealt with it as a unity. He forced a final crisis of the universal conscience to decide it for good. He forced battle unto victory once for all, for the race and for eternity. So we have here the burning focus of the great ethic of mankind. The great ethic! Some men miss that unity, that central issue, for lack of sensibility to the great ethic. They may have much ethical fervour and insight in questions of personal casuistry, sectional ethics, or social righteousness. Others miss its poignancy, for all they are masters of its history in thought. "It is strange how often men who brilliantly describe the ideas of history are quite unable to gauge the spiritual phenomena of their present." But all ethics or civics are affairs of less range and depth than the last moral

---

118

juncture and final destiny of the total race, with which the great prophets and dramatists are concerned. All our collectivisms are but sectional within

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

the grand moral crisis of collective Humanity. And more and more today we are impressed with two things with the problem and destiny of Humanity as one, and with that issue as above all things moral in its nature. The whole social problem is at bottom a moral problem. And the moral problem is at bottom religious. It turns not merely upon man's normal or ideal state but upon his actual moral relation to God and God's personal unity of holiness. And religion ceases in the end to be moral if it become more of an evolution than a crisis, a dilemma., and a choice.

Have you read Mr. Thomas Hardy's great work *The Dynasts*? Have you marked here as elsewhere his apotheosis of a huge, blind, blundering force, which he dare not call he, behind man and the world? But surely the elemental energy which suffuses a race like

119

ours with a central ethical genius, however stunted, can be no mere brutal It. Surely it must be a God, an ethical God, a holy God. If man be a he and God be an It, then man is his own God. And what must be the moral end of a self-idolatrous Humanity, of a Napoleonic humanity? What can men do there but bite and devour one another, red in tooth and claw? But after all, the first, last, and supreme question of the soul, of religion when it is practical, is not, "How am I to think of God?—he or it?" but it is, "What does he think of me? How does it treat me?" More positively it is, "How shall I be just with God? How shall I stand before my judge?" That is the final human question—how to face the eternal moral power. What is it making of us? What is he doing with us? What is he going to do? That is the issue in all issues. That question of judgement is where all other questions end. It is the central question in religion, How shall I stand before my judge?

120

So much is this the case, so inevitable, capital, and final is this function of judgement, that if God be not owned as man's judge, man becomes God's. Where man is not felt to be on his trial before God, God is put on his trial before man, and summoned to explain himself to the conscience of the time.

They talk to us so of an immanent God  
 As if man were the true Transcendent;  
 As if man were the judge of all the Earth,  
 And God the poor defendant.  
 As if God were arraigned with a very black case,  
 On the skill of his bar dependent,  
 And "I wouldn't like to be God," says one,

P.T. FORSYTH

“For his record is not resplendent.”<sup>1</sup>

More and more we are driven to see this, as the interests of life grow less academic and more active, less philosophic and more ethical, less speculative and more practical, less artificial and more real. Here is the goal of all that drift to Realism, for which, on the whole, we have to be so thankful today.

---

<sup>1</sup> It is some reminiscence that I have cast into these lines.

121

The last reality, and that with which every man willy-nilly has to do, is not a reality of thought, but of life and of conscience, and of judgement. We are in the world to act and take the consequences. Action means and matters everything in the world. It occurs in a world constructed for action and for judgement upon it. The question is not about our views; nor is it about our subjective state—how do I feel? but of our objective relation—how do I stand? And it is the relation of a will to a will, a conscience to a conscience, unless the foundation and goal of life is non-moral. The last reality is a moral reality unless life’s morality is by-play; which, to its honour, English scepticism does not believe. It has to do with a moral situation, with the moral position of the soul to the race and the race to whatever stands for God. There lies the real unity of life. It is the question of the conscience and its Lord, of sin and righteousness, of the unholy and the holy. The net and total drift of human concern bears

122

us down more and more remorselessly on that central issue. Society, in so far as it acts at all, or is concerned about worthy action, is being driven most reluctantly, amid violent and even hysterical resistance, to that ultimate ethical crux, where the theologians are waiting for it (themselves with a changed and softened temper) round the cross of Christ.

## II

One of the favourite topics for discussion, amongst people who still discuss such things, is the question: “Is religion necessary for morality?” There never was a time when society as a whole cared so much for conduct as at the present day. People are more agreed on the necessity of morality than on the necessity for religion. Yet with all this interest in morality on the part of both heterodox and orthodox, there is a frequent incapacity for handling moral ideas with insight and power. This age has more interest in moral subjects than capacity for handling

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

123

moral ideas, more taste for ethics than faculty. The modern habit of thinking, keen as it is on moral topics, has lost the knack of dealing with moral realities; the only order of ideas where it seems at home is the region of the physical sciences, the measuring and observing sciences of matter and of force. Even psychology sinks to experiment and mensuration, and passes from the study to the laboratory. And the mind so bred brings its habitual methods to bear on metaphysics and the social sciences, on morals, and history with much confidence. But those methods do not fit the case; and within the last few years the scientific mind itself has grown more conscious of their inadequacy. Philosophy must take up the work which empirical science has to lay down.; and philosophy in turn must abandon its greatest matter to ethics, and for the purposes of life leave speculative for moral methods. We cannot deal with the ideas of the higher mathematics by the methods that

124

serve us so well among the lower organisms. If we have to examine such a thing as moral freedom, we cannot simply bring to bear on the quest the methods which served in dealing with the expansion of gases. So also if we apply to historical development only the principles which regulate legal documents we do not treat the subject fairly. Very much depends on putting the right questions. And one notices with regret the occasional inability of some able minds to interrogate aright the moral man. When the conscience is questioned by congenial methods, and by a mind versed and apt in moral ideas, there is a voice and a verdict in it quite unheard by the ear that has only been refined to measure the tickings of an astronomical clock. There is the delicacy of sympathy and there is that of observation; and moral questions demand sympathetic treatment. Moral matters are inward, not outward. Outward observation may register the consequences of a moral act, but it cannot grasp the inner character, the

125

nature and process of the moral act itself. It is motive that finally determines morality, not consequence; and motive is something to be gauged only by an inward and sympathetic eye. I can judge your acts, which are mere expressions, far more easily and safely than I can judge you, who are a person and a soul. I can guess or observe the results of your action far more easily than I can divine the motives you had in doing it. Yet these alone give it true moral value. Politics are utilitarian but ethics are not. We are not as much at

P.T. FORSYTH

home in the study of the soul as we are in the study of the brain; and we are more backward in reading the living conscience than in reading the exploits of past conscience in politics or history. We feel the importance of morality for outward society, but we do not interpret well its testimony to inward and spiritual realities. We are more agreed about right acts than upon what makes a right soul. We are ready to make greater sacrifices for our outward freedom, our individual freedom

---

126

among men, than for our true moral freedom with God. We prize morality as a dealer might prize a Turner, not as a Ruskin would; we prize it for what it will fetch, the advantages it may be reckoned to bring for social or individual well-being, rather than its value to God. We even say that sin is an injury only to man and not to God. The strange, unstable conjunction of the age is the co-existence of a high morality with a lowered sense of a living God. Conscience has become a finger-post more than a voice; it points, but does not speak to us; it directs, but does not reveal.

Let us be heartily thankful for this general respect paid to morality. It is a good thing to have, and a clear gain upon sheer selfishness and pagan worldliness. But let us welcome it also on higher grounds. Our souls' destiny in life is independent of philosophy or science for its foundations. It stands rooted in our conscience, whether our private or social conscience. Only let society

---

127

confess the primacy of conscience, and, provided thought be free, it is a mere matter of time till it declare the supremacy of God. If conscience is an absolute social need, God cannot remain a mere social luxury. For, whether morality involves religion or not, conscience involves God; and under his guidance it will evolve him before all eyes.

I would bear you back upon your own conscience, and bid you listen to its voice. Our moral coinage, whose is its image and superscription? We must have a common starting ground. Man is more than a consciousness, he is a conscience. He is not only aware of himself, he is critical of himself. There is in the soul a bar, a tribunal; our thoughts and actions are ranged before it; judgement is passed there upon what we have been and done. Every one who believes in morality believes in the conscience as the power we have of passing moral judgement upon ourselves. Talk of public opinion! What is it in severity and power to private opinion

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

128

—a man’s most private opinion of himself? And we treat him—our judicial self—with much respect. His praise will carry us a long way; his censure cast us down. It will divide and set us against ourselves, and destroy the joy in every other part of us. We fear this judge, this critic, in our own heart; we go as far, at times, as to hate him. If we could get at him we would put him out of the way. We would bribe him. And we even try that, but always with incomplete success. We would blind him, throw dust in his eyes, sophisticate him; and that is partially successful at times. We would kill him, and that we think sometimes we do. But we wake up to find it is a delusion, and he has been fooling us. Some have even tried, having failed in every other way, to kill this voice by killing themselves; but there has never been any certainty that this was a success. “For in that sleep of death what dreams may come must give us pause.” And we have an uneasy surmise that the dream beyond may be worse than the

129

waking here, that there is a self we cannot kill, that the persecuting voice only reappears after the silence in another quarter, like the subterranean ghost of Hamlet’s father, who made a conscience for him. We cannot get rid of this judge. He is not in our power. We cannot unmake him, though he be against ourselves. Then we did not make him. He is an incorporate part of our own being, our other self wedded to us for ever. What a strange thing we are—two, yet one! Two that cannot agree—one that cannot be severed. Our enemy is of our essence, taken from under our very heart. We are one by being two. We are unhappy both because we are two and quarrel, and because we are one and cannot part. Neither of us can go out of the other’s hearing. We may cease to attend much to each other, but we are always within call. And every now and then, in the depth of our neglect, we are called, and we quail. And it is then that some men curse the voice they thought gone, and do the desperate

130

things which outsiders think so inexplicable. Ah! people did not know what went on inside the spirit’s house. They saw us walk out together, the two of us, us and our conscience, and we seemed on good terms with each other, seemed quite one. They heard nothing of the bitter quarrels indoors, the reproaches, the revilings, and the revilings again. But one day there is a crisis and a great to do. The man is gone, and his partner is not to be found. When they went they went together. We cannot get out of this critic’s

P.T. FORSYTH

hearing, or leave our moral partner's presence. We are wedded under laws which allow of no divorce, for any incompatibility, cruelty or infidelity.

Who is this judge that follows us like our shadow? We did not appoint him. We did not give him his place. He is there in spite of us. He is no fiction of our imagination, else we would not be so afraid of him; we would not so dread our own creature. We fear him because he is in a position to threaten us or to ennoble us; because he does not

---

131

suggest, but command. Temptation is only suggested, but duty is commanded. Sense solicits, but the soul enjoins. The place which we cannot help assigning to conscience (whether we admit it or not) is a place given it by another power than ourselves. But it is a power akin to us. It is our other. Conscience is something spiritual, a thinking being, a living moral mind.

And what follows from the fact that this spiritual "other" is our judge? Could any judge be a real judge who was not vested with power to enforce his threats and give his reward? Could one have the farce of a powerless judge in one's most serious affairs? It is impossible. This judge is one clothed with power; the judge of humankind must be invested with superhuman power to enforce the law he lays upon the human conscience. He must have all power—for the command of duty is an absolute command. The judge must have absolute power. There must be no crevice of the universe into which the

---

132

culprit could creep and reckon on escape. And for such a moral being who has all power over man we have but one name—God. Conscience is the Word of God within us; and moral responsibility means responsibility before God, the living God, and Christ, his living Grace.

For there is no possibility of going to the bottom of the matter and leaving out Jesus Christ. This error of so many thinkers is a historic evasion. Christ was and is the conscience of mankind and of God. He called himself man's final judge. Was he deluded? He stands in the whole race as conscience does in each man. But he also means that the Eternal conscience is the Eternal love, that judgement is, in the heart of it, grace, that the judge is on our side and is our Redeemer. It is only love that can do justice, it is only grace that can right all wrong. The righteous Lord whom we cannot escape is our Saviour. Wrongs make far more sceptics than science; and the wrongs of history are

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

133

being set right by a historic Redeemer. The moral malady of the race is mastered by the Saviour of the conscience. It is in history and in conscience that our hope lies. The conscience cries for forgiveness, and history brings to it the cross. There is the foundation of the soul and the security of the conscience, in the cross of history made ours in faith's experience of mercy. We must all come at last not to rational conviction but to this insight and venture of faith.

## III

Life must be ethicised, all say; faith must do it, most say. But what is to ethicise faith, and especially Christian faith? The cross, must we not say? For can any faith be moralised except by its object? If there were a new religion it would have to grow out of the best religion we have—out of Christianity. And Christianity has grown out of the cross. The core of a new creed would be something still

134

immanent not in the world but in the cross. Have we anything else for it but the cross and its cruciality (however newly read) as the re-creative centre of our moral world—the cross which is the central act of God's holiness, and the centre of the central moral personality, Christ? Solve Christ's cross and you solve all life. At that point concentrates what would be life's moral problem even if there were no God—supreme goodness and supreme calamity. But with a God it must be his goodness and his calamity there—unless he be impotent or indifferent. Which if he be not, then the presence of his goodness means the conquest of his calamity; which, again, could only mean the recovery of what he lost and whom he lost. There God's controversy with man draws to a head in the unity of reconciliation, which solves the tragedy of guilt and grief. There also we solve not only life but God. Whatever solves life solves God in the same act. Not indeed that it solves his constitution,

135

but it solves his purpose. There the moral nature of God lives in the unity of an eternal redeeming act. "All's love and all's law"—there is but one spot in the world where that is entirely true; and the spot is Christ's atoning cross, the power centre of the moral world. And there, in that one eternal act of creative righteousness, is what gives unity to the life of all lives—the life of

P.T. FORSYTH

Jesus himself. The cross is central to him who is the central moral figure of such a race.

Was the cross not central to him? Where else shall we find the centre of that life? It must have one. Without a centre it would not be a unity. Its goodness would lie floating many a rood. And without a unity it would only be large in its notions but inadequate in power. Christ would be an ambitious ineffectual. Where in him, then, does our faith find its unity? Where is the great meridian for reckoning a personality so vast? That unity could not lie loose and immanent in scattered words of spiritual wisdom, casual deeds of

136

human kindness, or stray influences on certain souls. Is it in his character? It is impossible for us, with all the insight of imagination, aided by all the resources of scientific criticism, to trace in the character of Christ the psychological unity which a modern taste demands. His character is an infinite paradox, too large for our lens to take in one picture. Besides., we are denied the data. For the character of Christ was not the interest of the evangelists. So the only unity we can find is not psychological—in the tracing of motivation, for instance—which would be only æsthetic; but it is moral, it is practical, it is in a thing done; done with the total personality, and done once for all between God and man. In a word, it is a theological unity. It is the evangelical unity. There is no help for it. We must go there at last, to the cross, where Jesus went before us. Our thought must follow his feet his conscience, his obedience, the total *nisus* of his personality, to the cross.

137

The unity of his life was not in its cohesion but in its consummation; not in its consistent symmetry, but in its crucial effectual close, in the great, unique, and flowering act of atonement. If his death was more than a martyrdom, forming but the closing episode of his life (and if it was no more, why do the Gospels give it such space and place?) then it was atonement. In such a racial crisis we cannot dally with the intermediate shades of possibility. Do not say it was Reconciliation only. It was Atonement. For when a relation like that of God and man is altered, it is altered on both sides. And, besides, there can be no ultimate reconciliation of a race to a holy God without atonement. God's moral order demands atonement wherever moral ideas are taken with final seriousness; and man's conscience re-echoes the demand. So much so that if men do not believe that God atoned they will invent all kinds of cruel and pagan devices to atone him—just as we saw that men judge him if he do not judge

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

138

them. But his own moral order and moral nature demand an atonement. "The real and eternal dignity of Humanity is so bound up with this cosmic order of holiness that man would be diviner if he were broken maintaining the honour of that holiness than if his mere existence were secured by ignoring it." The New Testament at least cannot sever Atonement from Reconciliation. The greatest passage which says that God was in Christ reconciling says in the same breath that it was by Christ being made sin for us. The reconciliation is attached to Christ's death, and to that as an expiation. For reconciliation there means more than changing the temper of individuals; it means changing the relations between God and the race. It was a far mightier matter than subduing any mass of individuals. And it certainly drew on Christ at his centre. So, if the death of Christ was not a mere martyrdom on his life's extreme and negligible verge, when his best faculties were already spent and his best work behind

139

him, then it was the atonement at his life's true centre. His whole life was crowned here; it did not simply subside here in a dying fall. He came for the purpose of giving his life a ransom. Was not his will to save one with his will to die? Or was the saving thing substantially done before he died? Was his death an otiose appendix? Was it not the revelation of his life's revelation, his life finding its object at last, his soul coming home to its own rest in the thing for which he was here? If we take care what we mean, it is more true to speak of the atoning life of Christ than of his atoning death. He is the atoning person, whose crisis, effect, and key is in his death. That act of his is the clue to all his action; because it was latent in it; for he was born as the result of a death he died in heavenly places before the foundation of the world (Philippians 2:1-12). His life of loving help to man was all produced under a divine "must" whose key is there. And his acts of blessing on earth

140

produce a greater effect than they can by themselves explain. Behind everything he was and did here was the volume of a premundane volition (however unconsciously), as the geyser's force might be due to its source in a great and hidden lake high in inaccessible hills. The ground-tone of his soul throughout was less a humane sympathy than a divine obedience, an emptying of himself at the Father's feet, of which his daily beneficence was but the passing expression. just as all the transcendent acts that God does are but mere expressions of his one great immanent eternal act of love. Goodwin

P.T. FORSYTH

finely says: "As man, being sinful, sought out many inventions, so God, being loving, sought out a world of inventions to show his love." But the one eternal love that carries them all is in the brief and endless cross of Christ. His service of man was but index of his one perpetual and complete oblation to a holy God, his one continuous outpouring of his soul to death, consummated

---

<sup>141</sup>

in suffering on the atoning cross. He himself learned (if I may say so under the shelter of Hebrews) to construe all his life from the death whose divine necessity grew upon him, and for whose accomplishment he was straitened in all else. In his death he himself found himself fully. And his expiring groan was also the relieved sigh of self-realisation. So that, if we are to choose the less of two errors, it is more true, with Paul, to let the life of Christ pale in the light of the cross than to let the cross and its atonement be lost behind his historical life.

Wherever we find the moral unity of Christ, there we find also the moral centre and the spiritual focus of the race whose spiritual representative he is. More and more we come to see that the centre of that supreme soul coincides with the central drama of man's whole historic conscience. And more and more (as I must go on to show) we are made to feel that the missing note in recent religion is just that keynote of judgement in his cross

---

<sup>142</sup>

—judgement which, being twined with grace, makes the red thread both in the world's history and in the soul of Christ.

#### IV

2. To take the next line. It converges to the same point. There is no issue so vital to human society as righteousness. A society rises in the scale in proportion as righteousness is felt to be central and supreme. The right of the stronger may indeed be curbed by a social order which secures a balance of interests; but a mere balance of interests is too mechanical to be the law of a society essentially moral; and as we ascend the scale we mark the growth of this one interest over all the rest—the ubiquity and prevalence of righteousness. It is the interest which is above all others humane and ethical. It deals with an ideal, and it makes it a reality for the conscience. And what it hears in the conscience is the social voice. Morality for the modern thinker is at least the total demand

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

143

of the social will. It may be more, but it is that at least. It is a voice to the individual indeed, but a voice with a social word and a public note. The most hopeful thing in modern life is the growth of this ethical note, the progress of the passion for righteousness, and the elevation of the idea beyond individual integrity to social justice. The idea of righteousness carries us up from the mere decent man, through the upright man, to the truly social man; from the goodness of a man to the righteousness of a community; nay, beyond that, to a universal community thus just and right. But do we stop there? Surely all these still mean obedience to a law, a power, a standard, an authority. What of that power and authority itself? Where is the moral authority which is its own authority? Where is the goodness that is self-fed, self-ruled, self-moved, self-sufficing on an infinite scale? Where is the conscience that accounts for itself, and swears by itself because there is none greater? Are

144

we not planted before the ineffable presence of one who is for ever fed from within with all the moral strength he needs, and is therefore the centre and foundation of the universe—the changeless, self-sustained, absolute, and Holy One? Is not the Holy God the heart of things and the head of things—the eternal good, central, self-poised, unmoved amid the millions of souls that lift to him their eye, their need, their cry, their trust, or their hate, as his holiness goes out in love? Would entire faith be possible without that eternal and holy goodness, changeless behind all the love we trust? A love that could change we might love, but we could not trust it, however intense. It is the holiness within love that is the ground of such trust in it as makes religion. It is this holiness that enables us to meet the love of God with faith, and not merely with gladness; to trust it for ever, and not only welcome it at a time. And the Christian plea is that eternal holiness is no where secured and satisfied but in the sinless

145

cross, which is therefore at the centre of life and things.

Our thought must take that line and that flight. In our pursuit of unity we expand from social justice to cosmic law, and pass from man's relation to man up to his relation to the universe; and so we are driven to its God. There may or there may not be other inhabited worlds than this, or other intelligences than man's; but surely the whole of God's righteousness is not exhausted in human justice. Were the whole race organised to the completest social justice

P.T. FORSYTH

and kindness, surely, till it was in due communion with his holiness, it would still be something less than the fullness of the whole counsel of the Universe. It would be unjust *to God* still. Unless, indeed, the race be the God. Unless our *Grand Etre* is Humanity, and there be no perfection beyond the unity of the race in love, order, and progress. But is there not a righteousness which is as much more than social as social is more than

146

individual? The doctrine of the Trinity rose from the soul to say there is. Is there not a holiness as far above the stage of justice as justice is above integrity? Is cosmic not something wider even than social? And righteousness equally cosmic, social, and personal—what can it be but absolute holiness, righteousness as vast as a cosmos which science shows us to be infinite, and as social as the personal relations within a triune God?

This is a singular thing to me. We are in an age which teems with cosmic science, expands with cosmic ideals, and glows with cosmic emotion. That on the one hand. On the other hand, it is an age that thrills to the ethical ideal and the social passion of righteousness. How is it that for the holiness of a universal, triune, and therefore social, God there should be, even among the religious, so many that are either indifferent or shy? I have even found hostility. It is strange that there should be such *borné*, not to say vulgar, aversion for the theologian. He is simply an

147

ethicist on a more than cosmic scale upon the authority of Christ. He is the rational expositor of a cosmic righteousness revealed as the infinite holiness. He faces, he inhabits, a world of moral realities whose action is perfectly sure and infrangible, which is not mocked, and whose laws in their kind are no more to be defied with impunity than those of Nature; for God spared not his own Son. That is the world of an absolute holiness. To the theologian the changeless holiness of God stands for the like capital to that which the physicist finds in the uniformity of nature. Press, therefore, the centrality of righteousness, and social righteousness, on the one hand. Rise to the cosmic range of thought on the other. The more you do both, as our age does, so much the more central for the cosmos, for universal existence, for all reality, must be the absolute righteous reality—*i.e.* the Holy God, the Holy Trinity; and the more stable and unsparing must be both his demand and his deed. These meet in the

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

148

cross. If in his deed he spares not his own Son it is because the welfare of the universe is bound up, above all else, with the unsparing nature of his holy, loving law, whereof that willing Son is the historic witness, warranty, and “co-efficient Creator.”

From another point of view, I do not find it quite easy to understand how it should be that many noble champions of a social righteousness can sit down under such an arrest of thought as they accept. Or it is an arrest of moral experience., all the more surprising in so much moral enthusiasm. Your passion for public righteousness or social justice (I would crave leave to say to them) you nourish as a universal ideal. And more. Your conflict is sustained by the vision of an ideal which is not merely æsthetic; that is, it is not duly met by your contemplation alone. But it is ethical and practical. It descends upon you with the force of a demand. Your moral ideal does not simply exist to be beautiful in some corner, or even in some central spot,

149

like a marble dream in some *salon carré* of the world’s Louvre. But it descends on you out of heaven from God, or what for you is God. It comes to you with no mere spectacular effect, but with compelling power. It lays its demand upon you to translate it into effect. It makes you not its amateurs but its organs and champions. It lies and presses upon your conscience, and not merely your imagination. But such an imagination of righteousness is not only so large as to be cosmic, nor only so weighty as to be exigent, but it is fine, piercing and pervasive in proportion. The breadth and the height and the depth of it are equal. The more lofty the righteousness is, and the more universal, so much the more subtle, searching, and exacting it must be. Can you have a telescopic infinity which is not microscopic as well? Can you think of a moral ideal for the whole world which is not urgent also on each whole soul? You feel the exigent, revolutionary demand of this general and eternal righteousness

150

on society; you feel the mockery that current society offers to that ideal. How is it that, with your passion for moral thoroughness, it does not search and abash your own conscience more than appears? How, if it be so imperative for society, does it find so much that is impervious in you? (I speak but of what you allow to appear.) The society it tries to its base includes you as a moral monad. How are you so sceptical about its inquisition of you, so stoical in the self-respect of your apostolate, or so reticent about any

P.T. FORSYTH

humiliating or shattering visitations of you, however rare? Your apostolate of that unearthly righteousness is most convinced, sincere, and earnest. How do you escape the guilt, the fear, the repentance of it? Where has moral fear gone from the cultured world? Does the moral power only deal with social affairs, with a collective responsibility? How does your ethical sensibility react at wrongs but fail at sins? Have you none? Or no light that throws them up as sins, and burns

151

and brands them into you? How is it that your indignation shows so little trace of reacting and deepening into humiliation? The parable you take up against society in the name of public righteousness, how is it that you are not driven to turn it upon yourself? (Do forgive me, but there is no discharge in this war, and men must press each other hard here.) Are you really able to face your own conscience, your own moral memory, with the same confidence as that with which you perhaps confront the egotists and capitalists who keep man from his social paradise? Does the moral analysis you apply to rend them never turn upon you with so much the more deadly subtlety as your standard is higher than theirs, and as you are better able to read yourself than them? How is it that the demand of entire social righteousness upon society fails to become the demand of complete, infinite holiness upon you? Is the moral world less than absolute and eternal—and penetrating, unsparring, accordingly? You are so worthily

152

exigent, I do not understand why you are not more so; why, as you are so uncompromising, you are not more thorough; why your ethic is not co-extensive with your personality, why it is not a positive personal religion as it is a social theory for you; why, as you are undoubtedly modest, you have never gone on to humility; and why, with that modest sense of unworthiness, you do not feel yourself damnable, if only as a member of a solidary race which, if there be condemnation at all, is under a collective and inclusive condemnation.

Can it be that your moral standard, high and wide as it is, needs still to be truly universalised by theology of a practical kind? You have a high ideal, which you insist on laying upon all souls. Your motto is "Thorough." Do you not need (do forgive me if I am thorough too) one more high, more subtle, more comprehensive, more uncompromising, more holy, which will force its way into your whole soul, even to the rending of it,

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

153

it may be? Your large moral world needs to rise heavenward in its ethical note till it break into a spiritual world whose height and depth and breadth are equal—a world as thorough in its spiritual penetration as it is in its moral exigence. Does your moral ideal pierce as much as it presses? Are its eyes as fiery as its wings? Would it not press much harder if it pierced much more? Does it search as powerfully as it urges? Has it power as it has weight and worth? Does your ideal of righteousness not need, ere it can master the soul, to become the ideal of a holiness before which you cannot stand? Is righteousness possible for society till holiness gets its own?

You are too engrossed with the soul's conduct instead of the soul's quality. Your society would be but a mosaic of souls instead of a body of Christ. You would change men without changing the inmost heart, change conduct and relations without changing life. You would increase men's power of will without altering the style of will. But "the

154

supreme ethic," says Weinel, "is not, like other ideals, beyond our power in its height, so much as it is beyond our own will in its nature." You are working on the level of the self-respecting moral gentleman, of the admirable English university product, who is in a position to live comfortably on his moral means, absorb spiritual ideas, and ignore spiritual powers as if they were no nearer than London neighbours. But the moral issue of the world is fought in a far more inward region than that, and turns on a far more inward crisis. "There are no *rentiers* in the moral life." And the battle-field of Christianity is not the clean and solvent soul of the moral *rentier*, the moral gentleman, but it is the moral bankrupt. There are far more of these than the refined English gentleman or lady knows, far more than writers on social subjects know, far more than is realised by those who handle the final moral issue with no other equipment than liberal thought and current culture. The moral crisis of society

155

is in a region which you may know little of. You are bred, perhaps, in the sober, unbitten, and untragic atmosphere of intellectual West Ends, where evil is a study and not a curse. You have never felt the bottom drop out of your own soul, the ground give way beneath your own moral nature., while flying voices scream that Macbeth has murdered sleep. You are masters of current ethic, but dilettanti of the moral soul. You have never had the experience which would give you intimate knowledge of the life that lies

P.T. FORSYTH

outside your ordered ways and kindly sets. You know no more than to say that a tragic repentance is rare now and the sense of sin being outgrown, or that there are few people who live in actual personal relation with Jesus Christ, or are governed by his will. Why, there is not a section of the Church, and certainly of the Free Churches, that could not show them in thousands. You have not the experience of the priest in the confessional, or the trusted pastor in his intercourse with his flock. I

---

156

would go a long way round to avoid offending you, but how can any detour prevent me from saying that, high, wide, and fine as your moral range is, you lack some experience of men, and some moral sensibility at spiritual pitch? You respond to a supreme good, but you do not to the Holy of Holies. Your supreme good is but in the making. Your righteousness far exceeds scribe or Pharisee, but you do not rise to thorough self-judgement; nor from that to the consciousness of the perfectly holy Self that judges even your judgement of yourself. A few even outdo my audacity with you in a kind of intellectual levity with us. They venture to lecture the theologians with an ill-veiled contempt for their methods, if not always for their beliefs. They lecture them both on their spirit and *their subject*, without giving any indication that they have themselves studied, in a scientific way, either a book of the New Testament or a single metaphysical master, or a single theological classic. Nay, they have been

---

157

known to propound a theology publicly, giving clear indication that to them epistemology is a foreign country, moral philosophy an unknown region, and ethical ideas quite tractable with a cosmic calculus. But I willingly admit few have this confidence. And they cannot well be treated on my present line. They treat the problems of metaphysic with a mere hypophysic, and wield a calculus of the subliminal more than the absolute, one more appropriate to the powers of a mystic, gnostic abyss than to the Eternal and Living God.

What lies incumbent on society to your mind (if I have your leave to return to you) is a law of righteousness. Yes, but what is it that lies incumbent, urgent, searching upon you for society nay, for the sake of the power which is above society? Society is a collective and impersonal entity, and a law is all very well for that. But the soul is no mere impersonal entity. And the power that should rule it is no mere moral order, and no scheme of righteousness,

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

158

and no Church, nor society. It must be another soul, the righteous source of rights and home of duties, self-sufficing in its righteousness, a soul absolutely holy, and holy unto infinite love. Would it not be possible to gain the whole world for righteousness and lose our own soul? If you say that that is absurd, that to lose the soul in such altruism is to find it, I recall that the supreme Teacher of that doctrine spoke only of losing the soul "for my sake and the gospel's," not for our neighbour's. And might I further remind you that, by the most enlightened and modern interpretation, that peril of a soul lost for public righteousness was the essence of the temptation of Christ himself? His tremendous sense of moral power presented to him the possibility of conquering a social righteousness in man for God on lines which ignored the holy will of God in the cross. What might he not have done for a reformed society, by a Cromwellian empire with an Ironside army, or by such service of man

159

as made the regeneration of the mature Faust? But where would his own soul have been then, in the face of his calling of God, whose grace to him was to make him taste death for everyman? There are things which we may not sacrifice to the most promising and beneficent of social causes. Neither men nor women may unsex their soul for any dream or phase of the Righteousness of God. But why should they not if social effect be all?

Over all your judgement of yourself or your society in righteousness is the judgement of your righteousness by the holiness<sup>1</sup> of God. And practically that is the holiness of God in Christ. But you present me, perhaps, with two difficulties. First, that you find the divine love in the mind of the Christ of the Gospels, but not the divine holiness; for he does not

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps I ought to have been explicit before now that by holiness is not meant anything so abstract or subjective as mystical absorption, but the whole concrete righteousness of existence, self-sustained at white heat. For our God is a consuming fire.

160

speak of it. And second, that criticism has so reduced your data that it is very little we can say about the consciousness of Christ. But are we, then, come to this, that we cannot speak with any force of conviction about Christ as the first moral figure in history? You will not go so far as that, perhaps. But if he be the first, is Humanity such a poor thing, even its most eminent, that he has been unable to prevent his choicest followers for two thousand years from a moral blunder so great as that of finding in him the very incarnation of the holiness of God., and in his cross its supreme and complete assertion?

P.T. FORSYTH

They have not preached him as the world prophet of social righteousness; they have persisted in finding him the incarnation of God's holiness; and they have made his effect on social righteousness to depend on that. Have they made a tremendous moral mistake? Was idolatry of himself the chief legacy of our greatest man to posterity?

I have in my venturesome mind not the

---

161

popular religious dilettanti of asocial reformation upon ethical lines, but earnest and accomplished students of that matter. And yet I must make hold to say, reluctantly and with great respect, that their obsession by the theological antipathy has made them such victims of theology (by its negation), and has so narrowed their mind thereby, that they have never taken due measure of Christ as a moral fact, still less as a moral factor in history. They have indeed been interested in the historical Christ, and they have owned the spell of his character in the procession of prophets. Carlyle did, for instance. But they have not dealt as seriously with the moral meaning of the fact as with its moral effect or its æsthetic or historical aspect. They have never integrated him into the moral philosophy of history, into the spiritual organism of the race—as theology has at least tried to do. The historic or the ethical sense will carry a man far. But it will not carry him as far as the person of Christ takes him, if he m

---

162

give to that path a mind unstunted by scientific methods, or unstupefied by religious sentiment. You cannot treat Christ adequately by the historic sense, psychic research, cosmic emotion, the canons of natural ethic, or tender affection. The only adequate treatment of a fact so unique as Christ is the treatment proper to the moral nature of such a fact, the treatment it elicits and inspires, the treatment to which in the first disciples we owe anything that we know about him, the treatment by faith. You must trust him ere he seem worthy of your trust. He is really God only to the faith which has confessed him as Saviour. His incarnation is an evangelical and not a logical demand. The Church's views about his person were forced upon those whom he not only impressed but regenerated, forced on them by the logic of living faith poring on the new creation that had passed them from death into life. It was only the scientific forms of these views that were affected by the philosophy of

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

163

the hour, which did not, and cannot, give the certainty of their substance. It was a real redemption, making the Church's experienced life of faith, that Athanasius sought to express by the metaphysical Trinity. And the experienced verdict (and not merely the orthodox deposit) of his living Church in history is, that he is the incarnate holiness of the world and of Eternity; that Christ is no mere part of past history, but the soul of the race's total life; and no mere starting-point for the ideal, but the living object of each age's absolute faith. To trust him is not a leap in the dark, but it is a venture none the less. It is a venture of courage and not of despair, of insight and not of bewilderment. In an age like this the greatest moral courage lies, not in challenging faith, as the crude public believes, which believes in little more than pluck. That is cheap heroism now. But true courage lies in pursuing, amid the dulness of the public, the desolations of criticism, the assaults of foes, and the treason of friends, such faith as

164

still places the precious soul, the wondrous age, and the cosmic world for ever and ever in those hands which twenty centuries ago were nailed for our advantage to the bitter cross. To do that with open eyes today is a very great achievement of the soul, a very great venture of faith, and a very great exercise of moral courage of the silent and neglected sort. The world knows nothing of its debt to those who for the soul's sake are incessantly facing and laying the spectres of the mind.

## V

3. If now we turn from the passion for unity, which carries us from a soul to a world, and from a world to the cosmic soul of God; if we further turn from the passion for universal righteousness, which carries us up to the supreme and holy judgement upon the cross; if we turn to the passion of human kindness, we are borne on., with the same high compulsion, to the Grace in the cross.

The effective sympathy of man for man

165

has historically sprung from the grace and pity of God. I say the effective sympathy. The Stoics had a fine humanism which spread to include the whole race; but it was only in idea. It could not translate itself into action. Its finest representative was the severest of persecutors—I mean Marcus Aurelius. The real and active philanthropy of men has sprung from "the philanthropy of

P.T. FORSYTH

God.” If you say it has taken long to grow, I remind you of the practical and popular benevolence of the first Christian centuries, and the silent beneficence and pity that make the sweetest note in the long history of the Church—so much of it unsweet. Appropriating, correcting, and hallowing the humanism of the eighteenth century by rooting it in God, this Christian humanism took, in the nineteenth, a new lease of life. And it has now come to a point of strain where it must draw deeply upon the inspirations of grace if it is to survive the disillusionments that await a democracy merely human, and a socialism chiefly concerned

166

with comfort. The rights of man are but revolutionary and sterile without the grace of God. As in France and America, they do not make brotherhood, so much as a negative, *borne*’ and prickly liberty. The love of man for man owes more to the grace of the cross than to any other influence. And no other influence can keep it alive or preserve it from futile sentiment. Those who see most of men, who have most intimately and practically to do with them, and who therefore see shrewdly into the average man, are not among the great lovers of men. Nor are we ourselves sometimes, when the strain of their contradiction grows tense, till we come out of the holy place where we met with God’s love. When the capitalist stops his charities because his property is threatened by legislation we learn how short in the fibre is the charity which is not founded on the love and pity of God. The real test of the love of man does not come till we love our enemies. The love of our enemy is only the love of our

167

neighbour true to itself through everything. For an employer to love the strikers that have ruined his business after a long and bitter war is not in nature. Yet that is the kind of tax to which the love of man is at last exposed. And there is only one source in the world to feed it and keep it alive—which is God’s love of his bitter enemies, and his grace to them in repaying their wrong by himself atoning for them on the cross. Central to all our humane kindness at last is the grace of the cross. The grand human strike against God would ruin both the workers and the Master did he not, in his love’s tremendous resource, find means over their heads to save both his cause and theirs out of the wreck.

Human misery is too great for the human power of pity. No heart but that of holy God is equal to inviting into it all that labour and are heavy laden, to pitying on an adequate scale the awful tragedy of man or measuring man’s

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

suffering with that informed sympathy which is the condition of healing it.  
None

168

can pity our human case to saving purpose but a God who treats it with more holy grace even than heart pity, and who is stronger to save our conscience even than he is quick to feel our wounds. Our suffering can only be finally dealt with by him who is more concerned about our sin; who is strong enough to resist pity till grief has done its gracious work even in his Son; and who can endure not only to see the world's suffering go on for its moral ends,, but to take its agony upon his own heart and feel it as even the victims do not, for the holy purpose, final blessing, and the far victory of his love. And this is what we have in the atoning cross of Christ. On the world scale we have it there alone. And the grace of the cross is as central to our human compassion as its judgement is to our public righteousness. The greatest human need is not only holy love, but holy love.

169

## VI

This ethical, cosmic, eternal estimate of Christ cannot be based on his biography alone, or chiefly, but upon his cross, as we shall again find when we have surmounted the present fertile obsession by "the historical Jesus." Such an estimate is a judgement of value, a confession of faith, nay, a personal self-assignment. It is impossible to treat Christ adequately, except theologically and personally. Personally, for it is the theologian's hard and high fate to cast himself into the flame he tends, and be drawn into its consuming fire. And theologically, for we find the key of Christ's life in his work, find his work to be the cross, and find the cross to be God's atonement of himself, his satisfaction of himself and his reconciliation of the world, and especially of our own soul, once for all. The spiritual interpretation of Christ centres in the cross; and in the cross as a sacrifice offered by God more than to God,

170

but to God more than to men. It is offered to the holiness of God before it is offered to the service of men. To both, indeed, but in that order. It is certainly not simply the classic case of man's service of man. That gives us a broad Christian but not a full Christ. And nothing but the fullness of Christ can replenish Churches emptied by mere orthodoxy or mere breadth. To banish the Atonement from the creative centre of Christianity is in the

P.T. FORSYTH

long-run so to attenuate Christ as to dismiss him from Christianity, and condemn him to be outgrown. As it was the cross that universalised Christianity, so also it is the cross that is the permanent and creative thing in it. All its faith, theology, and ethic are created and organised from the evangelical centre there. And this divine atonement to infinite holiness through loving judgement when its idea is truly ethicised is the only thing that can appeal at last to the heart of the modern passion for righteousness when it is thorough with itself, a

171

passion which is so much more deep than its own conscienceness goes. We avoid this centre only by our plentiful lack of moral wit, by the lack of evangelical experience, or intellectual thoroughness, or moral sequacity. Can we really think of righteousness without judgement, of a universal righteousness without a universal judgement—whether you put it in the pictorial shape of a last great assize or not? Must that judgement not arraign every soul? You cannot think (unless you fall to thinking of justice as mere utilitarian arrangement) of a universal righteousness which is not founded upon righteousness eternal and absolute, *i.e.* upon divine holiness. Can you think, then, of universal judgement except as the relation to that holiness of every soul? And not only of every soul, but of the whole soul ranged before the whole God and the holy God? Could a personal soul be judged by a mere historic process? Does it not call for a personal God? And if there be any religious protagonist of the sinful race—I

172

own I tax you, and I am sorry, but it has taxed me more—must he not stand vicariously before the judgement of that God, and take home that Love under the moral conditions of a righteousness so universal, a holiness so absolute, and a sin so grave? This is what (in the Church's faith) Christ did, and did once for all. It is the supreme service he rendered to social righteousness, and consequently to eternal—if we could but for an hour get far enough away from social problems to take their measure and proportion, feel their foregone solution., and so find rest and power for our souls. He put his corporate race in right relation to a Holy God.

All this lifts Christ far above the level of a historic figure. A mere historic, stationary Christ is but a transitory Christ—which is a paradox. But you cannot tell the truth about the cross without a lie of the paradox. A Christ who stood fixed only at a point in history would be, by his very fixture, a transitory

THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

---

173

Christ, because but a temporary,; because he would be outgrown and passed by the moving race. A Christ merely ideal, stationed at a fixed point on earth but magnified to an ideal upon the clouds, would become a *Brockengespenst*. He would be a mirage

whose very grandeur and purity would shame us far more than help us. And he would shimmer before us like an aurora, when we needed to be warmed and reared by a perennial sun.

The new passion for righteousness, then, must end upward in a new sense of judgement; and especially among the religious, if their ethic is to grow more delicate and penetrating as well as more urgent. Social righteousness, unaccompanied by moral delicacy, inner penetration, and self judgement, could easily become another phase of Pharisaism. Love without holiness lends itself but too easily to dissimulation, to unreality. But to give God's judgement its due place in public righteousness is to raise ethic

---

174

to religion, righteousness to holiness, and to make some kind of atonement inseparable from real faith on any social scale; and certainly on the social scale of a Church transcending and outstaying all the societies of men.

What is our social ardour to live on after a few disillusioning generations? What moral reserve are we providing for the vicissitudes of the great business of history?

---

175

P.T. FORSYTH

## IV

**What is Meant by the Blood of Christ?**

176

177

IT is a question which today is often asked how a phrase like “the blood of Christ” could be presented in such ethical terms as appeal to an age like our own. May I suggest the lines of a reply?

## I

It would not have mattered a whit if no drop of blood had been spilt, if Jesus had come to his end by the hemlock or by the gallows. The imagery under which we speak of the situation would have been changed that is all.

Nor would it have mattered if, instead of losing but some of his blood, he had bled to death. Whether no blood was shed, or every drop, was immaterial. That could only concern us if the virtue was in the blood as

178

a substance, as it might be kept and applied in a reliquary. Had that been so., the sacrifice would not have been complete if a drop had remained in the body; while (on the same supposition) if not a drop had been shed there would have been no sacrifice at all.

There is, indeed, very little about the theory of the matter in the Old Testament. “Theories as to the meaning of ritual,” says Dr. Bennett, “only arise after the origin of the rite has been forgotten.” The chief hint is in Leviticus 17:11, as we shall see. But nowhere in the Old Testament does the value of the sacrificial blood lie in the blood itself. Nor does it lie in the suffering that might go with bloodshed. Nor does the final value lie even in the life symbolised by the blood, rich as we shall see that idea to be. We go behind and above even that to the obedience of faith answering God’s will of grace. The value of the sacrificial rite lay wholly in the fact of its being God’s will, God’s appointment, what God ordained as the machinery

179

of his grace for national purposes. Let it not be forgotten that in the Old Testament what confronts God is the people much more than the soul. It is of grace that he consents to receive the proffered life and reckon the gift for public righteousness. In the Old Testament the acceptance is acceptance.

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

## III

On the other hand, blood or none, it would have mattered a whole world if Jesus had met his death naturally, by accident or disease. Everything turns, not on his life having been taken from him, but on its having been laid down. Everything, for his purpose, turns on the will to die. But, none the less, for that purpose, it had to be a death of moral violence (inflicted, that is, by human wickedness and the wresting of the law), to give its full force to both man's sin and Christ's blood. "Men of Wood," in the Old Testament, were not mere killers but murderers.

180

So that we say it would have mattered a whole world if the death had not been violent and wicked, if Jesus had died of disease in his bed, or by accidental poison.

## IV

It follows that the acceptable and valuable thing to God was not mere demise, in whatever form. The Lord and Giver of life can have no pleasure in life's extinction. The death, even of Christ, could not have had divine value if it had meant any acceptance of even a martyr death which involved extinction and the dissolution of his personality. His death was precious in God's sight as the conquest of death, as the negation of death, as the ironic antithesis of death, the surmounting of its accepted arrest, the capture of its captivity. It is death as transition, not extinction; yet it is transition not as mere metamorphosis, that is, not as a mere step in a large process, not as a new stage of even

181

moral growth, not as a fresh stadium in the normal evolution of a personality. There is involved in it a crisis. Take the case of resurrection. We do not get the full import of the idea of the resurrection if we see in it only a survival of personality, any more than if we treat it as a mere reanimation. Neither vital resuscitation nor mere personal persistence does justice to Christ's resurrection. It crowns a real moral crisis and achievement. It seals a decisive moral act. His death and resurrection really form two sides of one act. Christ's resurrection is but the obverse of the real personal crisis in his death. And his death is redemptive only as a personal moral deed. It is moral conquest only as it is a crucial moral achievement, in which his personality was not only unscathed but consummated; and not only consummated but effectual, victorious, and decisive. The shedding of blood means this finality.

P.T. FORSYTH

It means something which touches the scat of life—as we might now say,  
puncture of the

---

182

heart. It means the total surrender of a personality from its centre by the one means wherein personality both receives effect and produces effect—by means of a personal act of conquest which requires (but also releases) the whole resources of the personality. What God seeks is not a religious tribute or present, costly but partial; his self-complete holiness requires, to meet and satisfy it, a total holy self, in a real act or deed of gift once for all, the absorption and oblation of the whole self in a crucial and objective achievement. The essential thing was not self-sacrifice (which might be wilful, and often is wilful, as well as futile, or even mischievous), but sacrifice of the central self—not sacrifice by self but of self, and of the whole self, sacrifice not merely voluntary but personal, loving, and entire. Not till then is it striving unto blood. And we end by noticing that the offering of self here was the offering of a holy self to a holy God from sin's side; and that sacrifice, therefore, involved, in some

---

183

form, the idea not only of substitution but of judgement. What Nathan (so early) required from David in God's name was not only repentance and confession but satisfaction (2 Samuel 17:7, 13, 14).

I should like to go into more detail on these heads.

## V

Jesus appeared among a people whose mode of execution was not as it is with us, but either by stoning or crucifixion. That is to say, it was with effusion of blood. That in the first place. In the second place, he appeared in an age and stage when the effusion of blood formed part of the religious ritual also—and indeed its central rite. In this external respect the criminal and the religious procedure concurred as they now do not. And, in the third place, for the great majority of the worshippers in Christ's day, the origin of the rite was quite forgotten; its genius, therefore, was ill-understood; and,

---

184

accordingly, serious people had inevitably begun speculating, and framing theories of it, which Christianity took up, corrected, and enriched. By almost all Judaism the rite was taken as an *opus operatum*, as if the blood in itself had an atoning value, or, at least, as if the performance of the bloody rite had this value, and had it as mere compliance with a divine regulation instead of

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

congenial answer to a divine gift. The symbolic significance had gone. The why of the prescription did not trouble the general mind, though it did occupy the theologians of the day. The New Testament writers, therefore, whose whole spiritual world was now lit up and reorganised by the regeneration of the cross, had to take the current rite and the current language, and to restore to both the profound, moral, and spiritual religion of the Old Testament. We have still to do the same. We have still to treat in this way many of our own ancient ideas and terms, in spite of shallow and scrupulist protests

185

from intellectualists rigidly righteous against playing with words or paltering with them in a double sense.

## VI

There is nothing that is more necessary to note in regard even to the Old Testament sacrifice, there is nothing that more differentiates it from all pagan sacrifice, than the two truths, one speculative and one positive, set out in Leviticus 17:11. "The life of the flesh is in the blood: and *I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life.*" The two truths fundamental to the revealed (as distinct from the popular and pagan) idea of sacrifice are, therefore, these.

(1) The positive truth is that the sacrifice is the result of God's grace and not its cause. It is given by God before it is given *to* him. The real ground of any atonement is not in God's wrath but God's grace. There can be no talk of propitiation in the sense of mollification,

186

or of purchasing God's grace, in any religion founded on the Bible.

(2) The speculative and explanatory truth is that the pleasing thing to God, and the, effective element in the matter, is not death but life. The blood was shed with the direct object, not of killing the animal, but of detaching and releasing the life, isolating it, as it were, from the material base of body and flesh, and presenting it in this refined state to God. (We allow, of course, for the current belief, in whose language the cultus was cast, that the blood was the scat of the life as no other element of the body was.) The creature had not to suffer. And it had to die only incidentally, in the course of getting away the life for a blessed purpose of God with man. The shedding of blood was certainly not a wreaking of punishment indifferently on guilty or innocent.

P.T. FORSYTH

This idea is quite foreign to the Bible. No fair critic of Christianity ought to regard it, and no informed one does. To urge it is only a piece of the intellectual levity

---

187

and jaunty ignorance that so often go with much aggressive criticism, especially of the popular kind. In the Old Testament, moreover, the slaying of the creature was not intended to free the offerer from the death penalty; because for the great sins that meant death and exclusion from the community there was no sacrifice. Instead, therefore, of being a gross conception, the Jewish use and speech of blood in this connection was a refinement on all other ritual—if we will but read with the historical sense. The flesh was eaten when drained of the blood; the blood could never be thus consumed. It was too sacred.

## VII

We go a step farther in reading the Levitical praxis when we note that the material sacrifice was, and was meant to be, but an outward symbol of the real inner sacrifice, which was the offerer's self-oblation. The victim, or the gift, signified the inward

---

188

and hearty submission of the donor to God's prior gift and provision. It was the living symbol of a life, i.e. of an obedient will. Man's gift to God was an individual appropriation of God's public gift to man in the provided way of access. The sacrifice as a mere tribute was worthless, a mere tax paid by unwilling fear. It must come freely. It must be the symbol and sacrament of the worshipper's self-surrender to God's positive will in the sacrificial act. Indeed, even when freely given, it was but a response, it was not absolutely spontaneous. It was not the worshipper's invention, it was God's prescription; the initiative was his. It was not a gift to God, but an appropriation of God's gift in the institution itself. All religion exists only as some kind of response to some kind of revelation. It is not fantastic ingenuity nor arbitrary originality. Man is most original in his religion; and yet his religion is the least original thing he has.

It is a very crude kind of scepticism now

---

189

which regards the claim of divine authority for the Levitical system as a priestly fraud. It was part expression of an elect *nation*, whose inspiration took form in institutions as well as prophets. And the prophets who denounced

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

sacrifice did so only when it was made an *opus operatum* and the ritual became a religion in itself. They were as one-sided, and yet as historically necessary, as our own Puritans, like Milton, who for the hour could only cope with Rome by denouncing ideas so truly divine (when not monopolist) as those of a liturgy or an episcopate.

Thus we have two things. The worship was ethical in its nature. And it was responsive and obedient in its form. The ritual act was valuable only as the organ of the ethical obedience. The sacrifices were consecrated by self-sacrifice. It was the offerer's will that lay on the altar. What was precious was not the thing, not the elements, but the act. It is thus that Protestantism truly construes each of its sacraments. The elements matter

---

190

little, or their state. Fruit or water would do as well. The essential thing is the communal act, the act of communal obedience, in which the priest is the organ of a community priestly without him, and he is but the channel of God. The whole Hebrew system strove to keep down the place and value of the gift, and to worship, in spirit (i.e. *in actu*) and in truth, a seeking, acting, and giving God. Hetacombs were unknown. A widow's mite could be more sacramental than a nation's mint. The act was the precious thing. And the act treated not as a mere individual function, but as a deliberate exercise of will and self-disposal within a divinely instituted community—an act always responding in moral kind to the act of God's corporate will and grace which ordained it. It is God that makes religion and not man. Faith itself is the gift of God, being the echo of the Christ he gave to our race? and to each man only as a member of that race so redeemed. We are saved only on God's terms of a social

---

191

redemption. Every man is saved only by the act which saved man.

## VIII

What is offered up, therefore, is life in its most intimate, spiritual, and moral form. This does away with several unhappy notions. It does away with the notion that the pleasing, satisfying, atoning thing to God is suffering. It destroys the idea of Atonement as consisting in equivalent pain; as if the work of Christ was to suffer in a short time, by his divine intensity of being, the pains of the endless hell which we had earned. Suffering becomes a mere condition, and not a *factor*, in the sacrificial act. And then, as we have just seen, we get rid of the idea that the essence of the sacrifice? the *donum*, was

P.T. FORSYTH

any *thing*, any piece of property. It must be life. Blood means essential, central., personal moral life. Human sacrifice was so far right. Debased and dreadful, it yet had an instinct of right. Where it was wrong was in the con

192

comitant idea that any person could have property in another person—as slave, child, or wife. The wrong idea was not that life was the sacrifice, but that a man could have any such property in souls as he could dispose of even for sacrifice, that he had sacrificial property in them, that he could do with them what he could really only do with himself, and not with himself even by way of mere immolation or suicide. The tacit and false assumptions in such immolation were (1) that souls could be the offerer's property (and therefore religious means instead of ends), and (2) that the highest sacrifice was a payment of property, even property so prized as human chattels. It was true that sacrifice by blood meant sacrifice of precious life. But our will is our dearest life, the thing we cling to most and give up last. Our will alone is our ownest own, the only dear thing we can and ought really to sacrifice. The blood as life means the central will, the self-will, the whole will, in loving oblation. This is the

193

sacrifice even in God. The cross does not in the New Testament exhibit God as accepting sacrifice so much as making it. And it is never in the New Testament represented as the extremity of suffering, but as the superlative of death; it is not the depth of agony but the height of surrender; and that again is represented as the triumph of eternal life. It is the absolute active death of self-will into the holy will of God; but also by that will; the complete, central, vital obedience of the holy to the holy in a necessary act on the Eternal scale. A necessary act. It was in an act, and not in a mere mood of resignation. And in an act not gratuitously done (however voluntarily), not blindly done just to get some outlet for an irresistible instinct of self-sacrifice. It was an act made necessary by the organic pragmatism and moral unity of Christ's whole life; which was a whole life rooted in the organic context and moral necessity of a national history; which history again was integrated

194

into the spiritual necessity of God's holy purpose for the whole race and its redemption. Christ must die not simply of the blindness and blunders of men, but because by God's will he was the incarnation of that holiness which, as it moves through history, necessarily makes sin so sinful and wickedness so furiously to rage. The must was not merely in, the Jewish nature, but in the

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

nature of holiness, as soon as it came to close quarters with human sin. The real nature of the Incarnation lies in what might (with some violence perhaps) be called the moral polarity, the reciprocal identity, of Christ's holiness with the holiness of God. The holy God alone could answer himself and meet the demand of his own holiness. So Paul felt in his own relation to Christ's holiness. "Not I, but Christ living in me."

We make sacrifices, and costly ones, which yet do not draw blood from us. They do not come home. They do not go to the very centre of our life. They do not touch the

---

195

nerve or strain the heart. A man may devote the toil of a self-denying life to a book of stupendous research on the gravest subjects, which yet makes no call on his inmost self, and is not written with his blood but only with a sweating brow. We get the toiler in calm research, the genius of scholarly combination perhaps, but not the man. But when we speak of the blood of Christ we mean that what he did drew upon the very citadel of his personality and involved his total self. The foundations of his great deep were broken up. His whole personality was put into his work and identified with it; not merely his whole interest or ambition. The saving work of God drew blood from Christ as it drew Christ from God—and not from God's side only but from his heart. Christ's work touched the quick of God; as it touched the quick also of his own divinest life, and stirred up all that was within him to bless and magnify God's holy name. He poured out his soul unto

---

196

death. God, in his insatiable holy love, was exigent even on him, and spared not his own Son. Man's sin drew upon all God's Son, and taxed the Holiest to the height. It made call upon what is most deep in Christ and dear to God—himself, his person, his vital soul, his blood. The love of God is only shed into our hearts in the shedding of that most precious blood.

## IX

We have risen to a stage when sacrifice, in the ritual sense, in the sanguinary sense, has long had no real place in our religion or worship. The language of sacrifice, therefore, has no meaning for us, except as it covers acts or requirements which are at heart ethical. But in passing to this stage we are not simply repudiating Hebraism. We are interpreting it. We are not casting its old clothes. We are liberating the moral soul of Hebraism. We can now treat history far more sympathetically

P.T. FORSYTH

197

than Carlyle did. We are setting free the idea it carries, and disengaging its true genius. We are not making a construction. We are not reading a later thing into Hebraism. We are seizing on an element which the great Hebraism always had at its core and foundation, and which only the popular religion and its debasements submerged,<sup>1</sup>—the element of initial and proffering grace on the one hand, and of obedience answering by faith's self-offering on the other. God made the first sacrifice, to which all man's sacrifices are but response. Our best is but the faint echo of his. And we can never come to a depth of sacrifice where God has not been before us and outdone us. If we make our bed in hell he is there.

1 The whole secret of treating the Old Testament is the art of disentangling the divine revelation from the popular religion, even within the prophet's own mind, and marking how the one gradually emerged through the other, and shed its shell. There are many fragments of the shell still adhering, even in the revelation of the New Testament, which it is the business of modern criticism to detach.

198

This is the meeting-point of the priestly and prophetic streams in the Old Testament. To obey everywhere is better than sacrifice. The good priest would have said that as honestly as the good prophet. For the ritual was but an act of obedience. That was its real worth. It was only hearty obedience, and not mere compliance, that gave sacrifice any divine value, and raised it above being a mere subsidy from us, or a mere exaction by God. The sin-offering becomes in its nature a thank-offering. It was a case of ethical obedience with the true priest no less than with the true prophet. It was the surrender of the will. Only in the one case it took the form of worship, and in the other of conduct. And for life the one is quite as needful as the other. The obedience of the whole man and the fulness of his life demand both, especially on a national scale—but each has its own place, and neither can be substituted for the other. Thus Christ consummated the priest no less than the prophet of the sacred

199

community. It is one-sided to see in him only the victory of the prophetic line. His offering of himself was the Eternal Spirit of his people's past returning, in complete satisfaction, to God who gave it.

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

## X

While we can never cease to speak or think of the blood of Christ we must take much pains to interpret its true idea to our modern conditions. If we speak of the sacrifice of Christ we must construe it in the ethical terms presented by its own dominant holiness and demanded by the modern passion for righteousness; and we must for this end avoid such a use of imagery as discourages that effort—like the first verse of Cowper’s fine hymn, “There is a fountain filled with blood.” It is not a mere matter of taste that moves our protest against it.

But do we succeed in this attempt to ethicise when we regard the death, or the

---

200

cross, of Christ as the supreme glorification of heroic self-sacrifice, moving, and exalting, and purifying us, as the genius of tragedy is? Or do we succeed even when we regard the cross simply as the *manifestation*, the great object-lesson to us, of God’s love under the arduous conditions of sacrifice? Or do we succeed when we regard its first and sole object as being to move mankind to repentance, and thus to supply the condition of forgiveness, instead of being itself God’s act of forgiveness? Is there anything conveyed by the extreme phrase “the blood of Christ” which is not conveyed by the idea of sacrifice, or the idea of revelation, or the idea of a *Busspredigt*? Yes. There is one whole side—the side indicated by the words, Judgement, expiation, or atonement; the side which, ever since Anselm, has magnified the weight and sinfulness of sin, as the sense of God’s holiness rose. And this is a side which it is absolutely impossible to drop from Christianity without giving the Gospel quite away

---

201

in due time. Individuals, of course, can remain Christian while they discard it, but the Church cannot.

We may and we do show love, pity, and kindness to those around us with a divine ingenuity and assiduity. But that is not redeeming love. The genius of all philanthropy is not redemption but amelioration. Charity does not reconcile; only justice does—as the bitter spirit of rebellion at the end of the age of philanthropy shows. It has not the element of sin, righteousness, judgement, and new creation. It is not the holy, searching, sanctifying love which made the cross of Christ. It has not the ethical note of judgement. Indeed, there is no weaker feature in much current kindness or affection than its impatience of judgement, of real criticism., and its lack of courage to bear,

P.T. FORSYTH

or to exercise, it in a helpful and saving way. Very few, for instance, of those who love the people nor would see them wronged, love in such a way as implies courage to tell their

202

clients to their face of the things in them which are more fatal to their progress than all disabilities. And the deadly effects of parental weakness in this way have long formed a moral commonplace—now more common and more in place than ever. The appetite for praise is much more keen than for perfection (which is another name for holiness, Matthew 5:48), and love doubts love which ventures on rebuke. So religion takes, in this respect, the colour of the time; and in preaching a love without judgement it swamps conscience in heart, and laps the sin in a warm mist of kindness for the sinner. Much more is here involved than any orthodoxy. One only cares to deal with a false theology because it is the fatal source of false religion, false ethic, and a false public note. And a true theology is of such moment because it embodies those ethical powers and acts which sit at the centre of human life and mould the whole course of human history to its destiny. A true theology is the moral philosophy of

203

the Eternal, the ethic of the Eternal; and at the present bewildered hour it is more needed than religion, for the sake of religion. What religion needs most of all is to regain the moral salt of judgement.

## XI

When we speak of the blood of Christ, then, we mean that what he did involved not simply the *effort* of his whole self (as it might be with any hero taxed to his utmost), but the *exhaustive obedience and surrender* of his total self. But, on the line of judgement just named, we have to go farther, in a direction indicated in a passing way already (p. 193). We have to say that it involved obedience of no gratuitous and arbitrary kind, no “voluntary humility,” no self-willed, self-chosen obedience, no self-created task, as the manner of some great devotees is; but it obeyed the necessity of an actual historic and spiritual situation. It represents no mere historic necessity, rising

204

from Christ’s relation to Israel and its past. But there is a divine must which Israel’s history itself was set to serve and failed. It was complete obedience on a universal scale to the moral requirements of grace, *i.e.* to a holy grace, to what the holiness of grace required in a situation of racial sin. The sacrifice of

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

Christ was inevitable by his holiness in such a world. Holiness must suffer in the midst of sin. And it was a sacrifice made to the Holy. It was not offered to man but *for* man, even when we magnify to the utmost its immense effect on man. It was first offered to holy God, to hallow his name and make it honourable.

But in saying this what do we say? We have passed upward from the idea of *sacrifice* to the graver and more ethical idea of *judgement*. We recall the fact that the effusion of blood was a mark not merely of temple ritual but of criminal execution. It was involved not merely in the cultus but in the civil code and social order based on God's righteousness. And full self-sacrifice to a

---

205

holy God involves by analogy the submission of self to the moral order and judgement of God. Holiness and judgement are for ever inseparable. To ignore them or to sever them is the central failure of theological liberalism. The note of judgement runs through the whole genius of Israel's history as surely as do sanctity, submission, salvation and the Kingdom—and especially on its prophetic side. God must either punish sin or expiate it, for the sake of his infrangibly holy nature. Do let us take the holiness of God centrally and seriously, not as an attribute isolated and magnified, but as God's very essence and nature, changeless and inexorable. The holiness of God is a deeper revelation in the cross than his love; for it is what gives his love divine value. And it is meaningless without judgement. The one thing he could not do was simply to wipe the slate and write off the loss. He must either inflict punishment or assume it. And he chose the latter course, as honouring the law

---

206

while saving the guilty. He took his own judgement. It was a course that produced more than all the effect of punishment, and in a better, holier way. It was vindicative and not vindictive. It re-established the holiness; it did not just confound the sinner. Expiation, therefore, is the very opposite of exacting punishment; it is assuming it. Nor is it exacting the last farthing in any quantitative sense. That is not required in a full, true, and sufficient satisfaction. The holy law is satisfied by an adequacy short of equivalency, by due confession of it and not by exaction; by due confession which fully gauges the whole moral situation, as neither sin nor love alone could do; by practical confession in an experience as holy to God as it was sympathetic to

P.T. FORSYTH

man; and by practical confession of God's holiness far more than man's guilt.'  
What a holy God requires is

<sup>1</sup> Here McLeod Campbell and Moberly seem to me to come short. They do not get their eye sufficiently away from the confession of sin.

207

the due confession of his holiness before even the confession of sin.

And this is the only sense in which Christ could confess from his inmost experience, could confess with his blood. His practical and entire confession of holiness from the midst of the sinners he loved is the divine significance of his blood. No obedience to a holy God is complete which does not recognise his judgement, and recognise it in the practical way of action, by accepting it—not necessarily in amount but in principle; not equivalently, as to amount of suffering, but adequately, as to confession of sanctity; and it confesses it practically, silently, in act and suffering. And who but God could adequately confess in action the holiness of God? And who but the sinless could confess the sin of man? Who else but the holy could realise what it meant as sin?

Love in sacrifice means pain. But for holy love it means moral pain. And moral pain is something more than passive.; it is active. It

208

is not the pain of a sting merely, but of wrath; the pain not of a wrong but of rectifying it; not of grief but of judgement. Holiness must in very love set judgement in the earth. We have here to do, then, especially with the order of pain that sin gives to God, in reacting against it, in judging and destroying it. The blood of Christ stands not simply for the sting of sin on God but the scourge of God on sin, not simply for God's sorrow over sin but for God's wrath on sin. It expresses not simply the bleeding of the feet that seek the sinner but the bloodshed of the battle that destroys the prince of this world, that breaks in us the guilty entail, and establishes the holy kingdom. The total self-oblation of man to God means before all else that dread recognition of holiness which from sin's side must be felt as God's wrath and curse; its recognition in experience as judgement; and its recognition on a scale adequate to both God and man in their greatness. The prime question of religion is not how shall I feel a

209

child of the Father, but how shall I stand before my judge, how shall man be just with God? What must I do to be saved? Christ's first business in saving was to honour the Father's holy love. He saved man because he first saved God from being mocked by man. His submission to judgement was not

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

simply his experience of doom and suffering as incidents of life, but his submission to them as God's purpose for him, and his confession of them as expressions of the holiness of God and of his power to make man's wrath praise him. It was not merely a collision with historic forces and social powers in Israel, but the recognition, within these, of the holy wrath of God. It was the power so to deal with man's wrath against God as to accept God's wrath against man, and make sin farther the purpose it seemed to foil. The necessity of Christ's death was created more deeply by God's holiness in him than by the perversity of the men it exasperated. No one could reveal a holy God by any amount

210

of suffering or sacrifice which did not recognise this element of judgement,—did not atone. *No real revelation is possible except as Atonement and Redemption.* I do not mean that Atonement came as a preliminary to clear the ground for the revelation, but that the revelation came and could come only in the form of Atonement.

It is this element of judgement, of Atonement, of dealing with a doom, not to say a curse, that is conserved in the historic and symbolic word blood. It transcends the ritual idea of self-sacrifice not only by indicating the absoluteness and inwardness of it, but by keeping to the front the civil and social idea of judgement. It is not death that atones, but that supreme act and expression of holy, obedient life which does such justice to God's holiness as the Son alone could do; and which is possible only under the conditions of death, and of such death as Christ died. The death of Christ was an experience in his life, yet it was always the

211

dominant, and at last the crowning one, which gave meaning to all the rest even for himself—as he came to learn. It was a function of his total life, that function of it which at once faced and effected the saving, the last, judgement of God. His blood was shed in Gethsemane as truly as on Calvary; but it was on Calvary that it rose to seal all and to found for ever our peace with God. It was there that it rose to establish our evangelical faith in us, to establish it not as an affection simply but as life-confidence and self-disposal, as a faith that turns not upon the filling of the hungry heart but upon the stilling of the roused conscience both in God and man by a complete satisfaction and forgiveness once for all.

P.T. FORSYTH

XII

We associate blood with ultra-realism. A morbid phase of the tendency is found in the crowds that gather to see the stain of an accident, still more of a murder. That is a

212

case where the blood is treated as a thing, for its own sake, and not significantly as a symbol. But as a symbol it stands for moral realism the most poignant, and central, and eternal. In our religion it means that Christ touches us more nearly and deeply than our pain does, or our guilt. What in us harrows the heart in him harrowed hell. "Hell from beneath is moved for Thee to meet Thee at Thy coming." He revolutionises the eternal foundations of our moral world. But it means also that he came from a region in the moral reality of God deeper than sin or grief could shake. It signifies the very heart and Godhead of God, the holy reality of God, an eternal act of the whole God, one drawing on the whole Trinity, therefore a final act in the heavenliest places in Christ. In being "made sin," treated as sin (though not as a sinner), Christ experienced sin as God does, while he experienced its effects as man does. He felt sin with God, and sin's judgement with men. He realised, as God, how real sin

213

was, how radical, how malignant, how deadly to the Holy One's very being. When Christ died at sin's hands it meant that sin was death to the holiness of God, and both could not live in the same world. When he rose it meant that what was to live and rule in the world was the holy God. Dying as man, Christ placed his whole self beside man under the judgement of God. He was beside man in court but on God's side in the issue, confessing God's holiness in the judgement, and justifying his treatment of sin. justifying God! A missionary to the North American Indians records that having seen his wife and children killed before his eyes, and being himself harried in bonds across the prairie amid his tormentors, he "justified God in this thing." I do not know a sublimer order of experience than from the heart to bless and praise a good and holy God in despairs like these. It is to this order of experience that the work, the blood, of Christ belongs. And there is no justification of men except by this

214

justification, this self-justification, of God. Never is man so just with God as when his broken, holy heart calls just the judgement of God which he feels

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

but has not himself earned; and never could man be just with God but through God's justification of himself in the blood of Christ.

We cannot in any theology which is duly ethicised dispense with the word satisfaction. It was of course not a quantitative replacement of anything God had lost, nor was it the glutting of a God's anger by an equivalent suffering on who cares whom. It was no satisfaction of a *jus talionis*. But it was the adequate confession, in act and suffering, "Thou art holy as Thou judgest." That man should confess this vicariously and victoriously in Christ crucified and risen is the reestablishment of God's holiness in the world. We can only understand any justification of man as it is grounded in this justification—this self-justification—of God. The sinner could only be saved by something that thus

---

215

damned the sin. The Saviour was not punished, but he took the penalty of sin, the chastisement of our peace. It was in no sense as if *he fell* chastised or condemned (as even Calvin said), but because he willingly bowed, with a moral understanding possible only to the sinless, under the divine ordinance of a suffering death and judgement which was holily ordained to wait on the sin of his kin. The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. The metaphor denotes the radicality, totality, and finality of the whole action in the realism of the moral world—which even high sacrifice, not resisting unto blood, only slurs or shelves—when it does not toy with it.

It is notable that Christ speaks of his blood only at his life's end, while during life he spoke only of forgiving grace without any such expiation (except in the ransom passage). Why was this so? Was it not, first, because his grand total witness, which death but pointed, was to the grace of God's holy love; and the exposure of sin could only

---

216

come by the light of that revelation? And was it not, second, because his revelation and offer of holy grace without sacrifice and judgement failed of its effect; because even the great, uplifted, and joyful *invitation*, "Come unto me," failed till it was *enacted* from the mighty gloom of the cross; because only the uplifting of the cross, and not the uplifting of his voice, draws all men unto him; because in Christ mere prophetism, stern or tender, found its greatest failure; because, as prophet, he could neither make his own cleave to him, nor make the people see how much more than prophet he was; he could not keep them from murdering their Messiah? But, according to Old Testament ideas, this murder was the consummation of high-handed sin, of

P.T. FORSYTH

the kind of sin that had no expiation, that was unprovided for in the Hebrew economy of grace. There was no grace for the deliberate rejection of grace. There a new expiation must come in, that would cover even this. The death of

---

217

Christ expiated even the inexplicable sin that slew him, and the sin of a whole Humanity whose religious protagonist Israel was.

### XIII

Does it not follow that, when we use such a word as “satisfaction” in connection with the blood of Christ, we do not think of meeting with compensation a mere law formulated or formulable, however holy—far less a divine fury; but of meeting, confessing, justifying a God of holy love with a love equally holy from the side of sinful man?<sup>1</sup> God is met with a love equally holy—a love, therefore, not rendered by sinful man, but by a function of his own love in man; and rendered not by way of compromising the case by some pact, judicial or ritual; but so that the Holy Father comes to rest with infinite moral complacency in the personal

---

<sup>1</sup>The holiness of God is God as holy, just as “the decrees of God are God decreeing.”

218

achievement of the Holy Son, evermore saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Father and Son dwell in each other in mutual personal satisfaction, full and joyful, evermore delighting in each other, and saying each to the other, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.”

Surely we have the same Christian call to rescue words like “satisfaction” from their popular travesties as the Apostles had (with an inspired insight) to save the divine idea of sacrifice and blood for its true, prime, and universal significance from its mere tribal *provenance*, and for a moral atonement from the mere ceremonialism of the day.

## THE END

THE WORK OF CHRIST

# THE WORK OF CHRIST

BY

PETER TAYLOR FORSYTH, D.D.

With a Foreword by JOHN S. WHALE, M.A., D.D. and A Memoir of the  
Author by JESSIE FORSYTH ANDREWS

LONDON

INDEPENDENT PRESS LTD. MEMORIAL HALL, E.C.4.

P.T. FORSYTH

---

FIRST PUBLISHED BY HODDER AND STOUGHTON, 1910

REPRINTED WITH MEMOIR, 1938

REPRINTED, 1946

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR:*

This Life and the Next

The Church and the Sacraments

The Person and Place of Jesus Christ 10s. 6d.

INDEPENDENT PRESS LTD.

---

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

---

## Foreword

*BY THE*

REV. J. S. WHALE, M.A., D.D., *President of Cheshunt College,  
Cambridge.*

**A**s one who began to read theology a year after Peter Taylor Forsyth died, I never had the opportunity of sitting at his feet, nor the privilege of meeting him. My sense of what I missed has grown steadily as I have read and pondered almost everything that he wrote. Good wine needs no bush; to “commend” the brilliant and characteristic book which is here republished

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

would be more than presumptuous; therefore I offer instead the brief tribute of a grateful disciple.

The problem of atonement is vital for all real religion. For Christianity it is not only vital but central. Luther made no mistake when he characterised Christian theology, in distinction from all other theology, as *theologia crucis*. It is this high, evangelical tradition which Forsyth recalled and again made glorious, in all that he said and wrote about the Church and its faith.

“The old orthodoxies can never again be what they were; but one thing in them draws me and sustains me amidst much that is hopelessly out of date. And it is this, that they had a true eye for what really mattered in Christianity; and especially that they did grapple with the final facts of human nature, the abysses of moral experience, the wickedness of the human heart, and its darling self-will. They closed with ultimates. They did not heal lightly the wound of the people... It is the grace of Israel we need; for the grace of Greece fails heart, and flesh and moral will. It is subjective sand when we want objective rock. It does not enable us to keep our feet. We need a hand to lift us by the hair, if need be, and hurt us much in the doing of it, if only it sets us on the Rock of Ages. And the old Puritans (now sixpence a volume octavo) at least do that. And they do it because, with a very criticisable theology, they stood at the centre of things with their religion of the moral Atonement, of a free but most

---

iv

costly Gospel. They grasped what makes God the Christian God—not only a free grace but a costly. It is not only the freedom of his grace, but its infinite price to him that makes God God. ‘By terrible things in righteousness dost Thou answer us, O God of our Salvation’.”

The style is the man, as those will bear witness who heard Forsyth say this and much else in his ever-memorable Address from the Chair before the Assembly of the Congregational Union in 1905. One of his successors in that chair recently described the address as the greatest public utterance to which he had ever listened. Indeed, such was its prophetic insight that if it were republished today it would be found to have gained rather than lost in relevance.

For this prince of the Church did grapple with those final facts of human nature against which sentimental optimism is always powerless. He knew that an undogmatic Christianity is a contradiction in terms. So far from being out of date, his work anticipates by nearly a quarter of a century the “realism” of our modern theology (without the extravagances into which it has been led

P.T. FORSYTH

by the excessive logic of Barthianism). just because he was an able defender of evangelical truth, he warned Protestantism against that dilution and reduction of the gospel which leaves it a trivial, flabby thing. Thoughtful men may not always agree with him, but they cannot read him without being brought forth into a large place, where the gospel of redeeming grace is proclaimed in all its majesty and comfort. Some may wish that his approach to the great themes had been less scholastic and more historical; others may boggle at the metaphysical difficulties involved in his insistence on “solidary sin.” But the marrow of a truly modern divinity is here for all who will feed on it. We who are ministers of the word of God in these difficult and dangerous days can hardly fail to hear in this book, written twenty-eight years ago, what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.

*Cheshunt College, Cambridge, September 25th, 1938,*

J. S. WHALE

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

---

## Contents

	PAGE
FOREWORD	iii
MEMOIR	vii
i THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOD'S SACRIFICE AND MAN'S	
ii THE GREAT SACRIFICIAL WORK IS TO RECONCILE	
iii RECONCILIATION: PHILOSOPHICAL AND CHRISTIAN	
iv RECONCILIATION, ATONEMENT, AND JUDGEMENT	
v THE CROSS THE GREAT CONFESSIONAL	
vi THE PRECISE PROBLEM TODAY	
vii THE THREEFOLD CORD	
ADDENDUM	

---

“There are those who quietly say, as their faith follows their love into the unseen, ‘I know that land. Some of my people live there. Some have gone abroad on secret foreign service, which does not admit of communications. But I meet from time to time the Commanding Officer. And when I mention them to him he assures me that all is well.’”

*(This Life and the Next, by P.T.F.)*

---

“How delightful these brief intimate memoirs are!” said my father, laying down EF Benson’s *Hugh*. “I hope no one will ever write a dreary official full-dress biography of me.” I am not trying to write such a biography. My one concern is that those who never knew him should have some understanding of that vivid, warm, human personality which was the complement of the brilliant intellect and the God-humbled spirit. For I believe that what one of his greatest friends said is true: “Only those who knew him well really understood him, for he never could put the best part of himself into his books.”

Somewhere about the year 1830 a traveller along Speyside might have seen at a bend of the river a young girl dancing to her own shadow in the moonlight. It was my grandmother, Elspet MacPherson. She was born in the heart of the Highlands at Kingussie, the home of her clan, and the Gaelic was her native tongue. At twelve she started her career as housekeeper to a widowed uncle, and was as capable and douce as could be. But her duties

P.T. FORSYTH

done, she threw off her cares with her apron, and was away down to the river to dance. And this characteristic she was to bequeath to her son—a sense of consecration

viii

to the grave responsibilities of life, for ever interpenetrated and made more fervent by a glad and whimsical *joie-de-vivre*.

Elspet became maid and friend in the household of a certain Peter Taylor, a devout and public-spirited citizen of Aberdeen, and one of the founders of the old Blackfriars Street Congregational Church. There you have the explanation of my father's names, and of the fact that he was born and brought up a Congregationalist in a Presbyterian land. The Taylors took university students as lodgers, and among them were George Macdonald and his brother Charles. Elspet mothered them both, and hid their sins from her master when they raised the Sabbath-drawn blinds to read, or came in after ten at night. She was like a daughter to the family, and promised her dying mistress never to leave her master. She would not break her word, for all that she had been tokened to Isaac Forsyth since the Speyside days. So he waited nine years; and when at last they married it was to live under Peter Taylor's roof. The house is still there, at the corner of Marischal Street and the Castlegate, one of the few of its period still remaining, with its high-pitched roof and many narrow windows.

Here, then, on 12 May 1848, my father, Peter Taylor Forsyth, was born, the son of a maid-servant and a postman. Isaac's folk came from the Cabrach, a mountain region on the marches of Aberdeenshire and Banffshire; his mother, a kind and capable woman, was gratefully called a "white witch"

ix

because of her skill in doctoring with herbs. Isaac himself was a sensitive, loveable man, with a passion for book-learning, and a deeply spiritual nature. Elspet, like all Scottish mothers of those days, had high ambitions for her only son; and she had, moreover, wit and energy to further them. Her man's weekly wage was at first only eleven shillings, and there were presently two daughters to provide for as well. Therefore, when Peter Taylor died, and left her the great house close to the harbour—sixteen rooms it had—she filled it with lodgers, students for the most part. Dear knows how she made it pay, for her heart softened towards the eager, penniless lads who came down from the Highlands, and many a one she lifted from despair with the words, "Dinna fash yer heid, laddie; gin ye'll find the siller for the fees, I'll find ye bed and bread." She and her man scraped and saved incessantly for Peter's

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

education, and it was a stern life for them all. Long after, in apology for ignoring my birthday, he wrote: "Forgive a poor boy who never had any birthdays or any presents." But he was a happy boy for all that. There was no play or prank conceivable by impish wits that he was not leader in, up and down the streets, in and out of the wynds and along the quayside. That wide internationalism of outlook which was so strong a characteristic of his throughout life had its beginnings in his eager intercourse with the ships and crews from all shores to be found in the harbour at his door. It was at any rate a great factor in his education. The more formal part of that education had begun in a

---

X

parish school, and was continued at the Grammar School. There the best education in Scotland, and therefore probably in the world, was to be had. He made good at school, even though he did devour sea-stories under the desk-lid in class. At last, with his parents' savings and with bursaries and scholarships, came the University.

His mental discipline, and the set of his mind towards philosophy, he derived from Bain, the great professor of Logic and Philosophy. But all the world of learning was his oyster: and he wrought like ten at the opening of it. And not in class-room or study only. That decade of the [eighteen] sixties was the very heyday of the Victorian giants of literature, art and politics. By the banks of Don he read enthralled George Eliot's *Jubal*, and on the rocks above Spey at Newtonmore he made his first acquaintance with Carlyle and Ruskin, and—far more important to him—Frederick Denison Maurice. His vitality was unquenchable, even by a severe breakdown which cost him a college year—the beginning of that physical delicacy which was never to leave him in life. "I cannot remember since boyhood passing a day without pain; but I think my life a disheartening self-indulgence when I read missionary biography and track its quavering red line of apostolic succession from the *beginning until now*"—so he was to write forty years later. "He was one of the ablest students that Aberdeen University ever boasted," said his class-mate, Robertson Nicoll, after his death. "He was not only a great prize-taker, but he was a brilliant

---

xi

personality. You could not be about the University at that time without being aware of his presence." There was a moment when it seemed as though he might make the Humanities (the Scottish word for the classics and

P.T. FORSYTH

literature) his career. But there were other and deeper influences at work—not least the prayers of Elspet and Isaac. And he was called to the ministry.

By the advice of his friend Robertson Smith (and this name foreshadows the period of his so-called heterodoxy) he spent a semester at Göttingen under Ritschl. That time he described as the most important intellectual factor in his experience. Not only was his mind developed by the philosopher, but he succeeded in acquiring a facility and fluency in German thought and language which he kept up all his life; it was one of his few naïve vanities that when travelling in later years he was always mistaken for a German. He came back to England to enter New College, London. He was already a disciple of Maurice; and that drew him into contact with another devout Maurician, the famous preacher Baldwin Brown, of Brixton. He seems to have been rather a misfit at New College. His health hindered him from attending lectures regularly, and if one may read between the lines of a perfectly courteous letter he wrote to the committee still in the archives, he felt he was wasting his time. However that may be, he was allowed to withdraw before the end of the normal course, at his own request, and probably to the relief of the authorities.

xii

It was while he was a student here that he had met my mother, Minna Magness, an intellectual and cultured girl, educated like himself on very narrow means. She was serene and placid, yet ardently progressive, and with a sense of humour to match his own; and she had a balanced judgement which he trusted implicitly, both in practical and intellectual matters—she managed their tiny income and gave him pocket-money. She had, too, the social experience and *savoir-faire* which he knew he lacked, for she was the beloved governess in a distinguished family. As a devout Anglican of those days, she had scarcely met a Dissenter on equal terms before. Yet he converted her, and so soundly that she chose Baldwin Brown to marry them in 1877. It was one of those ideal marriages of widely differing temperaments where each has a wealth of individuality to give and to receive.

Before their marriage he had received a call from the Congregational church at Shipley, a suburb of Bradford in Yorkshire, and had been ordained there by Baldwin Brown in 1876. It was the goal of a ten years' training and the starting-point of a ministry of forty-five years—twenty-five of them as a working minister and twenty as a college principal, teaching, preaching and writing. Of his five pastorates, four were in great cities—Bradford, London, Manchester and Leicester—and one in a university town, Cambridge. At

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

Shipleigh he began at once to make his name as a challenging and unconventional preacher. He attracted such unexpected people that his church

---

xiii

was nicknamed “The Cave of Adullam”; and the Yorkshire Congregational Union rejected both it and him. There were also grounds of disapproval not entirely doctrinal; one member removed himself to another church because he did not hold with a minister who kept a dog. My father’s next church was at St Thomas’s Square, Hackney, in north-east London. Here again he collected a congregation of heretics and suspects; and here, too, he was rejected by the London Congregational Union. When I look at contemporary portraits of orthodox nonconformist ministers I am not surprised, for in appearance he did not even conform to nonconformity. My baby memories begin during this period, and I see him in the pulpit, wearing a short black coat, shepherd’s plaid trousers, turndown collar and a brilliant tie. (He first began to preach in an academic gown to hide a sling, after breaking his collar-bone in a collision when he was figure-skating on the Serpentine.) London was like wine to him. He was in touch with so many sides of its life—politics, literature, art, music, and even the theatre, taboo to so many Victorian saints. A rich friend took him to Bayreuth, and he was there at the crown of Wagner’s career, the first performance of *Parsifal* in 1882; and henceforth it always seemed to my father a sacrament rather than an opera. All his enthusiasms he put into his preaching, and people of all denominations and of none came from everywhere in London to hear his Sunday evening lectures.

---

From Hackney he went to Cheetham Hill, in north

xiv

Manchester; and here were surroundings rather similar to those in Bradford. He threw himself into all that was best in the public life of his neighbourhood and beyond it. The Manchester Exhibition of 1887 contained a remarkable collection of pictures, and he gave lectures on them to working men at a mission in Ancoats. These lectures were afterwards embodied in his book *Religion in Recent Art*, an interpretation of the Pre-Raphaelite painters and of *Parsifal*. This book—dedicated as his first-fruits to his mother from her first-born—brought him into personal friendship with GF Watts, who discussed the meaning of his own pictures with him, and came to regard him as his best interpreter. All this might suggest that the true pastoral side of his ministry was pushed aside. But it was not so, and again my childish memories

P.T. FORSYTH

help me. I remember countless people of the humble and unlearned sort who loved him because he loved them too, and comforted their sorrows and understood their difficulties and gave them individually the Bread of Life. He loved and understood children; and it was at Cheetham Hill that he introduced the startling innovation of a children's service once a month, taking up the whole time of morning worship. Indeed, his first book of all, in collaboration with a friend, JA Hamilton, was *Pulpit Parables for Young Hearers*. In spite of the rather heavy title, they are fascinating reading.

Then came Leicester. Six full years were spent at Clarendon Park. Again there was the work outside his church, both cultural and political, for he

---

xv

felt called to make his ardent Liberalism effective on election platforms. In addition to all this, he was giving more and more time to theology. He wrote one of the essays in *Faith and Criticism*, the volume which created a stir in 1893. When Dr Dale read it he asked, "Who is this PT Forsyth? He has recovered for us a word we had all but lost—the word Grace." That was the beginning of a friendship, an intimacy indeed, which was a deep joy to my father; it was cut short grievously by Dale's death in the following year.

It is little wonder that this incessant output of energy told upon my father's always fragile health. By the end of the Leicester days he was a very sick man; and in addition my mother, always the strong one of the two, had suddenly become an almost helpless invalid. When Emmanuel church, Cambridge, sent him an enthusiastic call in 1894, he accepted it, but he had to ask for three months' sick leave for complete rest. It did not do what he had hoped, and my mother's sudden death a week after our arrival in Cambridge was an almost unbearable grief.

Thenceforth for three years he lived alone with a schoolgirl daughter, the long hours of solitude intensified by physical and nervous weakness. The forbearance and devotion of his people was very great, and it upheld him. They provided a four-wheeler to take him to church on Sundays, and he drove to visit members who were old or ill; the rest he begged to come to him, and come they did. His

---

xvi

own university of Aberdeen gave him its Doctorate of Divinity in 1895, though owing to illness he had to receive it *in absentia*. At the Congregational Union meetings held in Leicester in 1896 he preached on the words "Holy Father" a sermon which seemed to his hearers to mark a turning point in his thought. This, they felt, was a new Forsyth, who had jettisoned much he had

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

valued in order to safeguard passionately the very core of the Gospel—the holiness of God, the sin of man, and the supreme value of the Cross, Men asked then, as they have asked since, what caused the sudden re-orientation. The answer is that it was not sudden; and that answer my father himself gave in his Yale lectures, ten years later:—

“There was a time when I was interested in the first degree with purely scientific criticism. Bred among academic scholarship of the classics and philosophy, I carried these habits to the Bible, and I found in the subject a new fascination, in proportion as the stakes were so much higher. But, fortunately for me, I was not condemned to the mere scholar’s cloistered life. I could not treat the matter as an academic quest. I was in a relation of life, duty and responsibility for others. I could not contemplate conclusions without asking how they would affect these people and my word to them in doubt, death, grief or repentance... It also pleased God by the revelation of his holiness and grace, which the great theologians taught me to find in the Bible, to bring home to me my sin in a way that submerged all the school questions in weight, urgency, and poignancy.

---

 xvii

I was turned from a Christian to a believer, from a lover of love to an object of grace... I withdrew my prime attention from much of the scholar’s work and gave it to those theological interests imbibed first from Maurice, and then more mightily through Ritschl, which came nearer to life than science, sentiment or ethic can ever do. I immersed myself in the logic of Hegel, and corrected it by the theology of Paul, and its continuity in the Reformation, because I was all the time being corrected and humiliated by the Holy Spirit. To me John Newton’s hymn—‘I asked the Lord that I might grow In faith and love and every grace’—is almost holy writ... My faith in critical methods is unchanged... But the need of the hour is not that... What is needed is no mere change of view, but a change and a deepening in the type of personal religion, amounting in cases to a new conversion.”\*

During those first three years at Cambridge his health grew worse rather than better, and it seemed as though he might even sink into hypochondria. From this he was rescued by my stepmother, Bertha Ison. She was many years younger than he, possessing great charm, and even fascination, of looks and manner, incredible vitality, much wit, and a born gift as a hostess. It was typical of her courage to take over a delicate man who was minister of a large

P.T. FORSYTH

congregation; and she carried her enterprise through more than triumphantly. For she gave him a new hold on life, she renewed the zest he had lost; and

*\*Positive Preaching and Modern Mind, p. 281ff.*

xviii

though he never could become a strong man, her devoted care of him, and perhaps still more, simply her charm and personality, made possible for him the twenty-four years in which his greatest work was done. It was a happy thing to see his face light up when she came into the room; and the dedication of one of his books runs thus: "To my wife, who contributes more than she knows, or I can tell her, to all I try to do."

There can never have been a happier or more harmonious church than Emmanuel, Cambridge, as I remember it, with its perfect balance of town and gown elements working in complete unanimity. There was in those days no Congregational College there, and the church and our home were focal centres for men and women who came up from Congregational families, and for many others. Although professors, fellows and masters of colleges were among his intimate friends, yet, because no degrees but their own were recognised in Oxford and Cambridge, the University could take no official cognisance of him. His regret at being in a university and not of it was tempered by amusement. For he had begun by now to win a reputation as preacher which spread across the Atlantic. In 1899 he gave a still-remembered address in Boston, at the second decennial International Congregational Council, on the theme of "The Evangelical Principle of Authority," beginning with this characteristic sentence: "The Cross is the final seat of authority, not only for the Church, but for all human society." It created a fervour so great

xix

that the vast audience was first silent, and then almost spontaneously turned its long applause into the singing of the hymn (which he suggested) "In the Cross of Christ I glory."

When the principalship of Hackney College, Hampstead, was offered him in 1901, he accepted gladly—and yet not without sorrow at leaving the ministry of a church, a relationship he felt to be precious. But Hackney was a magnificent opportunity. It had recently been recognised as a Divinity School by the University of London. That meant the raising of its entire academic standard. It must henceforth aim at degree work for most of its men—though not for all. One brought up as he had been could have nothing but delight in developing the training of ministers on academic lines, and in

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

stimulating to the utmost the intellectual capacity of his students. But I think it should be stressed that, for all this, he did not at any moment of his principalship put academic attainments first. "Gentlemen, you are not here to graduate in the University of London. You may or may not do that. You are here to graduate in Christ and his ministry"—these are words he actually used at the beginning of one session. If it is true that he stamped his personality upon most of his students, this came about through no desire of his own, for such a petty ambition was foreign to him. He was insistent on decorum and dignity in their proper place. The carpet-slipper standard of appearance or of mind at prayers or at lectures aroused his cutting displeasure, so that he

xx

was held in awe by freshmen, and it is quite probable that for some he wore the mark of the Just Beast. Some, I know, came to think of him as saint when they knew him better. They must have been almost bewildered the first time they watched him enthusiastically enjoying an hilarious college smoking-concert. I sometimes wonder if they ever knew how deeply he cared for their well-being—for their daily concerns as well as their eternal blessedness; how he remembered his own early struggles against poverty and lack of opportunity, and how, in some of those sleepless nights of his, he made plans to smooth their way. In a letter to an intimate he wrote: "They are but in the making, and some of them have enjoyed but poor advantages—like myself. My memory helps me to a good deal of patience with them, and to a desire to be of more use to them in several practical matters than anybody was to me." And in the fulfilment of this desire my stepmother was the perfect colleague, with her gracious charm and vivacity added to deep kindness.

These twenty years at Hampstead were the very flower of his life. They were years of amazing activity, considering his slender physical and nervous resources. Moreover, the principalship of a poorly-endowed residential college does involve certain chafing hindrances, connected with such things as inadequate hot water systems and the like, which cause feuds between kitchen and common-room. Two parts of his work were anathema to him—business committees and the marking of examination papers.

xxi

The greatest burden, however, was the lack of college funds, and the anxiety really told on his health. For the first years he was preaching every week up and down the country to awaken the conscience of our denomination to its responsibility for the colleges. But these were in a sense

P.T. FORSYTH

private matters; and his public life was fuller than ever before with denominational, interdenominational and university concerns. Within his own communion the New Theology controversy distressed him. It was not the first doctrinal dispute he had been concerned in. But let no one imagine that he loved strife for its own sake. He detested it, and it cost him in nervous exhaustion more than anyone outside could imagine. In a letter to me he wrote: "I am truly sorry not to write to you oftener, but I am greatly pressed, and far from well. Besides the lectures there is a great doctrinal row raised by Campbell and others into which I am compelled to go more or less... I am the more vexed because his views are, in my judgement, fatal to Christianity, and it might wreck the career of some of our men." He was involved also in much wider concerns. "I have been entirely unable to write to you... I have been overwhelmed and very rheumatic. Last night I went to a small dinner to meet the Bishop of Birmingham [Gore], Lord Hugh Cecil and two or three more, and talk education. I am to stay with the Bishop when I preach for Jowett in May." Another note is dated from Holyrood House, Edinburgh; he was the guest there of the Lord High Commissioner," Lord Kinnaird,

xxii

whom he knew well. His unflagging work in the cause of unity among the churches was recognised in an invitation to preach at the Church Congress in Southampton. America claimed him again, too, and he gave the Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale in 1907. He took his share in the administrative work of the University of London, becoming Dean of the Faculty of Theology about 1910. And finally, in the midst of all this, his greater books were appearing, at an average of one every year.

The outbreak of war in 1914 distressed him beyond measure. He was already in the clutch of one of those prolonged attacks of utter exhaustion which lay in wait for him almost every summer. He loved the German people, and had always immersed himself in their writers on his own subject; his library was at least one-third German, and for years he had read two German weekly religious papers. Yet he was unflinching in his support of the War, and found it difficult to sympathise with the pacifist position taken up by some of the students. The College was eventually commandeered by the Government. He had the more time for writing, and published six books in the four years, as well as a great many newspaper and magazine articles. The opening words of his pamphlet, "The Roots of a World Commonwealth," are his manifesto: "The decisive thing in my own attitude to the War, like that of millions more, has not been political but moral. It has not been the

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

peril to Britain of a keen rival established on the Belgian seaboard. It has been a matter of conscience and not

xxiii

diplomacy. It has been the deliberate and thorough repudiation by Germany of any moral control when it collided with her national interests, along with the barbarism which that entails. It has been the shameful sacrifice of moral to elemental passion, of the German nation (which is a moral thing) to the German race (which is not)."

At the end of the War he was over seventy; yet he was so completely active in mind that no question of his retiring had arisen. But soon afterwards, in addition to his life-long physical weakness, an insidious wasting disease manifested itself. He struggled gallantly against a gradual dulling of his powers and faculties, and would not give in until the end of 1920. For nearly a year he was a complete invalid, fighting a losing battle. His strong heart kept him alive, though in utter weakness and weariness. At last he drifted away unconsciously at dawn on the fourth Armistice Day—11 November 1921.

He was seventy-three. But he had never grown old. His convictions were deep-rooted and immovable, but his mind never stiffened, and he was abreast of every kind of intellectual and spiritual progress. What kept him from ageing was his never-failing love of his fellows. Those who are better judges than I am have called him a genius in his own sphere. One thing is certain—he had a genius for friendship. And congenial friendship was as necessary to him as air to breathe; he had that kind of nervous make-up to which loneliness is torment,

xxiv

except during work-hours. To his intimate friends he gave a deep and often passionate loyalty. And there was no academic entrance examination to his affection. He respected intellectual integrity; but character, selflessness, humbleness of heart, mother-wit, these won him just as much, wherever he found them. I remember how he delighted in the Syro-Phoenician Woman, for instance, because she combined all these qualities; and he often found her modern counterpart. Choleric temper he had none; malice, bitterness or jealousy were unknown to him. Irritability and sharpness of speech, yes; it could not be otherwise with one of his highly strung nervous temperament, inadequate physical strength, and quick mind. He was aware of it; "more and more one feels that the most necessary thing in the world is patience," he wrote to me in 1912. He rapped our knuckles when we probably needed it; and then that was over and done with, and we much the better for it. He so

P.T. FORSYTH

dearly loved intellectual quickness that he could never resist a chaffing jest (puns were his dear delight); but then he played fair, and rejoiced to be caught out himself. He was a charming colleague, I am told—easy to work with, always tolerant, always sympathetic, never *intransigent*, even in the least degree. He had a swift gay wit, leaping and sparkling like the spray of a fountain; and he had inexhaustible deeps of humour like the spring beneath the fountain. Of Bishop Creighton, whom he had known, he wrote: “He was cheery, witty, ironical; and he suffered fools madly.” So with himself. But

xxv

everything hangs on your definition of folly. To him it was egoism, pretentiousness, superficiality; the pontifical attitude, the facile, the ill-informed; spiritual and moral arrogance rather than mental slowness—these roused him and set his rapier-tongue a-flashing. But how he loved simple goodness and kindness! His letters are full of this delight. He was undemonstrative, even in his own circle; some called him reserved. It was the result of a sensitiveness so acute that he had to provide it with a protective layer. But in his letters he could throw reserve to the winds, and even after many years they glow with love and tenderness, often wittily and whimsically expressed, and salted with absurdities. Indeed, the imp in him never grew up. You would leave him firmly tucked in bed, by the doctor’s orders, quite exhausted: in ten minutes he would be up and creeping softly round the study door to laugh at your startled dismay.

He was none of your helpless head-in-air professors. If he was a good man to go hunting tigers with, as I have heard his friends declare, he was equally a good man to be wrecked on a desert island with, for he was practical, resourceful and ingenious. He was besides a born nurse, and more than half a doctor, swift in emergency and very full of compassion. In trouble or illness or depression his sympathy and spiritual comfort were unfailing. “I am glad you tell me of this depression. I know it well. And how you would be comforted if I could put into your heart the fatherhood it moves in me... In the disheartened

xxvi

hour he is nearer to you than any love of mine could be.”

His literary style is a vexed question, and I suppose will always be so. But there are certain things to point out. He was in the first place a horn teacher as well as writer, and he adjusts his method to his audience. In addressing himself to the general public he certainly required their intelligent concentration, but he wrote clearly and simply—in such small books for

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

instance as *The Soul of Prayer* and *This Life and the Next*. But in writing for trained theological minds—“*ad clerum*”—he demanded everything they had of mental and spiritual grasp, and he credited them with as much as he had himself. At these times he was wrestling with thoughts almost beyond human expression; and he wrote with a physical and nervous intensity which shook the desk, and which after an hour or two left him utterly spent, stretched out white and still upon his study couch, until the Spirit drove him back to pen and paper. Of all his enormous output, every word was written by his own hand, and corrected and re-corrected. He could never dictate—he must feel the pen, he said. He loved words for themselves, having that *Sprachgefühl*—that deep sense of word-values—which is born in every Celt; and like every other faculty of his, it was pressed into the service of the truth. The verdicts on his style fall into two contradictory groups. Some find it difficult, irritating, barbarous, affected, and regard it as “the cause of his inability to reach his generation.” Others—among whom are almost the whole number

---

 xxvii

of his students—find him completely lucid and readable. From which it seems a fair deduction that the real stumbling-block is the idiom of his mind, rather than of his pen. And I am confirmed in this by the estimate of a beloved friend who was a disciple, though not technically one of his own students: “What a mental energy he had! There was something demonic in it. He never approached his themes with the studied grace of the academic. His mind flung itself on them, tearing away everything that was insensible, and pursuing until he got to the heart. His work will remain a puzzle to everyone who imagines that it was deliberate, that it was an affectation. It was just that energy of mind that flung him upon his themes, that kept him catching glimpse after glimpse of the truth, that kept him endeavouring with words to keep abreast with the pursuit of his mind. And just because words can never keep pace with mind, his style is difficult. It was the man himself and his passion speaking in it.”

His theological work, and all that it means to his generation and ours, others must appraise. But there was one who was his closest friend and colleague in the later years, my husband, who wrote thus: “He might have been a burning and a shining light in almost any intellectual firmament, but like St Paul, he imposed upon himself the limitation, ‘I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified’... He was a theologian, but as a theologian he was *sui generis*, and totally unlike the other theologians with whom I was acquainted. As

P.T. FORSYTH

xxviii

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... For him the Cross was everything—‘his rock, his reality, his eternal life.’ Apart from the historic act of redemption, there was nothing in Christianity that counted for very much with him. He used all the weapons in the prophet’s armour to confound his opponents. People thought sometimes that some of his blows were too hard, but he felt that he was fighting for the very life of the Faith, and that he had no option but to contend to the uttermost for his soul’s convictions. The new spirit of evangelism in the Church today was made possible by the prophetic work of Forsyth, and when the answering revival comes it will be the harvest of his life’s work.”

“So, I thought, the spirit might look back from its immortal repentance upon the frail body left on earth. And the very repentance, not being hopeless, would not be fierce but tender, and the poor shieling of flesh would receive from across the misty seas of death a reverence we knew not while we lived therein... For it is Love’s native land this, its song is of mercy and justice, its very judgements are full of grace, and its severities make for praise.”

*This Life and the Next*, p. 120.

xxix

## List of Books (excluding Pamphlets)

1886	<i>Pulpit Parables for Young Hearers</i> (with JA Hamilton)
1887–8	<i>Religion in Recent Art</i> (Second Edition 1911)
1893	<i>(Contribution to) Faith and Criticism</i>
1896	<i>The Charter of the Church</i> <i>Intercessory Services</i>
1897	<i>The Holy Father and the Living Christ</i>
1899	<i>Christian Perfection</i> <i>Rome, Reform and Reaction</i>
1901	<i>The Taste of Death and the Life of Grace</i>
1908	<i>Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind</i> <i>Missions in State and Church</i> <i>Socialism, the Church and the Poor</i>

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

	<i>The Inspiration and Authority of Holy Scripture</i> (with Monro Gibson)
1909	<i>The Cruciality of the Cross</i> <i>The Person and Place of Jesus Christ</i> (Fourth Edition 1930)
1910	<i>The Work of Christ</i> (Second Edition 1938) <i>The Power of Prayer</i> (with Dora Greenwell)
1911	<i>Christ on Parnassus</i>
1912	<i>Faith, Freedom and the Future</i> <i>The Religion and Ethic of Marriage</i>
1913	<i>The Principle of Authority</i>
1915	<i>Theology in Church and State</i>
1916	<i>The Christian Ethic of War</i> <i>The Justification of God</i> <i>The Soul of Prayer</i>
1917	<i>The Church and the Sacraments</i> (with HT Andrews)
1918	<i>This Life and the Next</i>

---

## Preface

THESE chapters need to have it said that they were given as extempore lectures from rough notes to a gathering, largely of young ministers, in connection with Rev. Dr Campbell Morgan's annual conference at Mundesley, Norfolk. They were taken down in shorthand and then carefully revised. They took place in July, 1909, immediately after the delivery of my Congregational Lecture on the *Person and Place of Christ*, which they supplement—especially when taken with my *Cruciality of the Cross* a few months before. It will be seen from the conditions that the book cannot pretend to be more than a higher kind of popularisation, though this is less true of the two last chapters, which have been more worked over. The style approaches in parts a conversational familiarity which would have been out of place in addressing theological experts. And as some of the ideas are unfamiliar I have not been too careful to avoid repetition. My hope is to be of some use to those ministers who are still at a stage when they are seeking more footing on such matters than they have been provided with in mere Biblical or Historical Theology. There is no region where religion becomes so quickly theology as in dealing with the work of Christ. No doctrine takes us so straight to the heart of things, or so forces on us a discussion of the

P.T. FORSYTH

merits of the case, the dogmatic of it, as distinct from its scriptural or its ecclesiastical career. No doctrine draws so directly on the personal religion of sinful men, and none, therefore, is open to so much change in the course of the Church's thought upon its growing faith and life. Thus when we consider that here we are at once where the form may change most in time and yet the feet be most firmly set for eternity, we realise how difficult and delicate our task must be. And we are made to feel as if the

*xxxii*

due book on such a theme could only be written from behind the veil with the most precious blood that ever flowed in human veins.

We are in a time when a spirituality without positive content seems attractive to many minds. And the numbers may grow of those favouring an undogmatic Christianity which is without apostolic or evangelical substance, but cultivates a certain emulsion of sympathetic mysticism, intuitional belief, and benevolent action. Among lay minds of a devout and social but impatiently practical habit, this is not unlikely to spread; and particularly among those whose public interests get the upper hand of ethical and historical insight and denude their religion of most of the reflection it demands.

Upon undogmatic, undenominational religion no Church can live. With mere spirituality the Church has not much directly to do; it is but a subjective thing; and its favour with many may be but another phase of the uncomprehending popular reverence (not to say superstition) for the recluse religionist, the mysterious ecstatic, and the ascetic pietist. What Christian faith and the Christian Church have to do with is holy spirituality—the spirituality of the Holy Spirit of our Redemption. The Christian revelation is not “God is a spirit,” nor is it “God is love.” Each of these great words is now much used to discredit the more positive faith from whose midst John wrote them down. Herein is love, not in affection but in propitiation (1 John 4:10). Would Paul ever have written I Corinthians 13 if it had been revealed to him that it was going to be turned against Romans 3:25? And what would his language have been to those who abused that chapter so? Christian faith is neither spirituality nor charity. Its revelation is the holiness in judgement of the spiritual and loving God. Love is only divine as it is holy; and spirituality is Christian only as it meets the conditions of Holy Love in the way the Cross did, as the crisis of holy judgement and holy grace. If the Cross is not simply

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

a manner of religion but the object of our religion and the site of revelation, then it stands there above all to effect God's holiness, and not to concentrate man's self-sacrifice. And except in the Cross we have no guarantee for the supreme thing, the divine thing, in God, which is the changeless reality and irresistible sovereignty of His Holy Love.

---

xxxii

It is upon such faith alone, given by the Cross alone, that a Church can live—upon the faith that founded it—upon a positive New Testament Gospel. Of that Gospel the Church is the trustee. And the Church betrays its trust and throws its life and its Lord away when it says, “Be beautifully spiritual and believe as you like,” or “Do blessed good and think as you please.”

There is a timely saying of that searching Christian genius Kierkegaard—the great and melancholy Dane in whom Hamlet was mastered by Christ:

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

The statement is extreme; but that way lies the Church's salvation—in its ante-Nicene relation to the world, its pre-Constantinian, non-established, relation to the world, and devotion to the Word. Society is hopeless except for the Church. And the Church has nothing to live on but the Cross that faces and overcomes the world. It cannot live on a cross which is on easy terms with the world as the apotheosis of all its æsthetic religion, or the classic of all its ethical intuition. The work of Christ, rightly understood, is the final spiritual condition of all the work we may aspire to do in converting society to the kingdom of God.

P.T. FORSYTH

1

---

## The Difference Between God's Sacrifice and Man's

---

2

3

I

## The Difference Between God's Sacrifice and Man's

**W**HAT I am going to say is not directly unto edification, but indirectly it is so most certainly. Directly it is rather for that instruction which is a need in our Christian life as essential as edification. We cannot do without either. On the one hand instruction with no idea of edification at all becomes mere academical discourse. It may begin anywhere and it may end anywhere. On the other hand, edification without instruction very soon becomes a feeble and ineffective thing. I think a great many of us would be agreed that part of the poverty and weakness of the Church at the present moment is due to the fact that edification has been pursued to the neglect of instruction. We have been a little too prone to dwell upon the simple side of the gospel. All our capital is in

4

small circulation. We have not put by a reserve, as it were. And therefore the simplicity itself has become unsettled and ineffectual, confused and confusing.

I ask your attention to certain aspects of our Christian faith which perhaps do not lie immediately upon the surface, but which are yet the condition of the Church's continued energy and success in the world. I suppose there is nobody here who does not believe in the Church. At any rate, what I propose to say will be said entirely from that standpoint. We believe in the Holy Catholic Church. My contention would be that, apart from such a position as I desire to bring to your notice—some real apostolic belief in the real work of Jesus Christ—apart from that no Church can continue to exist. That is the

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

point of view which I take at the outset. The Church is precious, not in itself, but because of God's purpose with it. It is there because of what God has done for it. It is there, more particularly, because of what Christ has done, and done in history. It is there solely to serve the Gospel.

It is impossible not to observe at the present day that the Church is under a cloud. You cannot take any division of it, in any country of the world, without feeling that that

---

5

is so. Therefore I will begin by making quite a bold statement; and I should be quite prepared, given time and opportunity, to devote a whole week to making it good. The statement is that the Church of Christ is the greatest and finest product of human history. It is the greatest thing in the universe. That is in complete defiance of the general view and tendency of society at the present moment. I say the Church is the greatest and finest product of human history; because it is not really a product of human history, but the product of the Holy Spirit within history. It stands for the new creation, the New Humanity, and it has that in trust. The man who has a slight acquaintance with history is ready to bridle at a statement like that. He says: "Consider what the Roman Church has done; consider how obscurantist many sections of the Protestant Church are; consider the ineffectual position of the Church in modern civilisation—and what nonsense to talk about the Church as the greatest and finest product of human history!" True enough, the authority of the Church is failing in many quarters. And that does not mean only the external authority of what you might call a statutory Church, a great institutional Church, a great organised Church like Rome, for example.

---

6

It means much more than that. It means that the authority of the whole Church is weakened in respect of the inward and spiritual matter which it contains and preaches, and which makes it what it is. The Church is there as the vehicle of the power of the Holy Ghost and of the authority of the saving God—a God, that is, who is saving not groups here and there, but the whole of human society. But a spiritual authority for man altogether is at a discount. Perhaps we have brought that in some measure upon ourselves. Perhaps, too, it was historically necessary. But, necessary or not, it is a matter of fact that our Protestantism has developed often into a masterless individualism which is as deadly to Christian life as an over-organised institution like Rome. Many spiritual people today find it difficult to make their choice between the two extremes. Without going into the historic causes of the situation, let us

P.T. FORSYTH

recognise the situation. Spiritual authority, especially that of the Church, is for the time being at a great discount.

§

The Church is valuable as the organ of Christian grace, and truth, and power. But what do we find offered us in place of the

7

Church? Those who attack the Church most seriously, and disbelieve in it most thoroughly, are not proposing simply to level the Church to the ground in the sense of destroying any religious society. What they want to do is to put some other kind of society in the place of the Church. For they say, as we all say, that it is impossible for religion, certainly impossible for Christianity, to exist without a social body in which it is cultivated and has its effect. Therefore, those who are opposed to the Church most bitterly are yet not prepared to make a total desert. But they put all kinds of organisations, fancy organisations and fancy religions, in its place. Take the great movement in the direction of Socialism. Take the Socialist programmes that you find so plentifully everywhere. What do these various organisations mean? What do all these organisations mean which profess to embody human brotherhood, and are represented by Trades Unions, Co-operation, Fraternities, Guilds, Socialisms? What is it they all confess? That some social vehicle there must be. You cannot promote Anarchy itself without associations for the Purpose. So that the very existence of these rival organisations is a confession of the one fundamental principle of the Church, namely,

8

that the human ideal, that religion in the true sense of the word, cannot do without a social habitation. They put in their own way what we put in our way (and we think a better way), that there must be a Church builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit. Our individualisms have been troubling and weakening us so much that everybody is looking away to some form of human life which shall have the advantages of individualism without its perils. The pietistic form of individualism did in its day great service. But it is out of date. Rationalistic individualism, again, taking shape in political radicalism, has done good work in its day. That also seems going out of date. The value of the new movement is its—shall I say—solidarity; which is a confession of that social, fraternal principle which finds its consummation really, and its power only, in the Church of Christ.

When we look at these rival organisations (and they are many, and some will occur to you which I have not named), we can, I think, gather most of

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

them under one head. In contrast with the Church the various social forms that are offered to us today would build society upon a natural basis, the basis of natural brotherhood, natural humanity, natural goodness—

9

on human nature. And the issue between the Church and the chief rivals of the Church is an issue between society upon this natural basis, and society upon a supernatural basis. Our Christian belief is based upon the work of Christ; and we hold that human society can only continue to exist in final unity upon that same supernatural basis. It is an issue, therefore, between human nature deified and human nature saved; between mere sympathy and faith—faith taken in a quite positive and definite sense. We think that a brotherhood of mere sympathy, however warm it can be at a particular moment, has no stay in it, no eternal promise. The eternal promise is with supernatural faith. Do you ever believe otherwise? I hope you have been so tempted; because having got over it you will be very much better for having gone through it. I wish much more of our belief had gone through troubled scenes and come to its rest; we should make far greater impression upon men if we gave them to feel we had fought our way to the peace and power we have. Well, were you ever tempted to believe that Christianity is just human nature at its best? That is the most powerful and dangerous plea that is put forward just now in challenge of our Christian position

10

and Church. Is the Kingdom of God just our natural spirituality and altruism developed? Is it just the spirit of religion or self-sacrifice, which you often find in human nature, developed to its highest? Is that the Kingdom of God? I trust you believe not—that human nature is not capable, by all the finest sacrifices it might develop, of saving, of ensuring itself, and setting up the Kingdom of God. Take the best side of human nature, that side which moves men to unselfishness and sacrifice, the side that comes out in many a heroic battle, in the silent battles of our civilisation, where the victims get no applause and no reputation for their heroism whatever. Take the best side of human nature, illustrated in every coalpit accident and every such thing, in countless quiet homes of poverty, where lives are being worked down to the bone and ground to death toiling and slaving for others. Take the vast mass of fatherhood and motherhood living for the children only. Take that best side of human nature, make the most of it, and then put this question: “How does man’s noblest work differ from Christ’s great work?” That is the

P.T. FORSYTH

question to which I desire to attract your attention today. How does man's best work differ from Christ's great work?

---

11

Let me begin with a story which was reported in the Belgian papers some years ago.

Two passenger trains were coming in opposite directions at full speed. As they approached the station, it was found the levers would not work, owing to the frost, and the points could not be set to clear the trains of each other. A catastrophe seemed to be inevitable; when a signalman threw himself flat between the rails, and with his hands held the tie-rod in such a way that the points were properly set and kept; and he remained thus while the train thundered over him, in great danger of having his head carried away by the low-hung gear of the Westinghouse brake. When the train had passed, he quietly rose and returned to his work.

I offer you some reflections on this incident. It is the kind of incident that may be multiplied indefinitely. I offer you certain reflections, first, on some of its analogies with Christ's work, and secondly, on some of its differences.

1. This man, in a very true sense, died and rose again. His soul went through what he would have gone through if he had never risen

---

12

from the track. He gave himself; and that is all a man can give at last. His deed had the moral value which it would have had if he had lost his life. He laid it down, but it did not please God to take it. Like Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, it was complete and acceptable, even though not accepted. The man's rising from the ground—was it not really a resurrection from the dead? It was not simply a return to his post. He went back another man. He went back a heavenlier man. He had died and risen, just as if he had been called, and had gone, to God's presence—could he but remain there. This is a death and rising again possible to us all. If the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ do not end in producing that kind of thing amongst us, then it is not the power of God unto salvation. These moral deaths and resurrections are what make men of us. "In deaths oft." That is the first point.

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

---

2. The second point is this. Not one of the passengers in either of those trains knew until they read it what had been done for them, nor to whom they owed their lives. It is so with the whole world. Today it owes its existence, in a way it but poorly understands, to the

---

13

death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the permanent element in Christianity—the Cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And yet it is nothing to all them that pass by. Under the feet of those travellers in Belgium there had taken place one of those deeds that are the very soul and glory of life, and they had no idea of it. Perhaps some of them were at the very moment grumbling at the stall of the railway for some small grievance or other. It is useful to remember, when we are inclined to grumble thus, what an amount of devotion to duty goes to make it possible for us to travel as safely as we do—far more than can be acknowledged by the payment of a wage. These people were ploughing along in safety over one of the railway staff lying in a living grave. I say it is so with the whole civilised world. Its progress is like that of the train; it seldom stops to think that its safety is owing to a divine death and resurrection, much more than heroic. The safety of that train was not due to the mechanism. The mechanism had gone wrong. It was not due to organisation, or to work done from fear of punishment. Heroic duty raised to martyrdom saved the whole train. And the world's progress is saved today because of a death and resurrection of which

---

14

it knows little and mostly cares to know less. "*Propter Jesum non quaerimus Jesum.*" The success of Christ hides him. It is the death of Christ that is the chief condition of modern progress. It is not civilisation that keeps civilisation safe and progressive. It is that power which was in Jesus Christ and culminated in his death and resurrection. When people read the Bible, and get behind the Bible, and that principle comes home to them, it may sometimes be like the shock that those travellers would receive when they read in the newspaper of their risk and deliverance.

---

3. Another point. And I am now coming on to the difference. This man died for people who would thrill with the sense of what they owed him as soon as they read about it. His act appeals to the instinct which is ready to

P.T. FORSYTH

spring to life in almost every breast. You felt the response at once when I told you the story. Some of you may have even felt it keenly. Do you ever feel as keenly about the devoted death of Christ? Perhaps you never have. You have believed it, of course, but it never came home to you and gripped you as the stories of the kind I instance do. You see the difference between Christ's

15

death and every case of human heroism. I am moving to answer that question I put a moment ago as to whether the development of the best in human nature would ever give us the work of Christ and the Kingdom of God. I have been illustrating one of the finest things in human nature, and I am asking whether, if that were multiplied indefinitely, we should yet have the effect which is produced by the death of Christ, or which is still to be produced by it in God's purpose. No, there is a difference between Christ's death and every case of heroism. Christ's was a death on behalf of people within whom the power of responding had to be created. Everybody thrills to that story I told you, and to every similar story. The power of response is lying there in the human heart ready—it only needs to be touched. There is in human nature a battery charged with admiration for such things; you have only to put your knuckle to it and out comes the spark. But when we are dealing with the death of Christ we are in another position. Christ's was a death on behalf of people in whom the power of responding had to be created. We are all afraid of death, and rise to the man who delivers us from it. But we are not afraid of that worse thing than death from which Christ came to

16

deliver us. Christ's death was not a case of heroism simply, it was a case of redemption. It acted upon dull and dead hearts. It was a death which had to evoke a feeling not only latent but paralysed, not only asleep but dead. What does Paul say? "While we were yet without strength, Christ died for us"—without power, without feeling, as the full meaning is.

Let me illustrate. Take a poet like Wordsworth. When he began to publish his poetry he was received, just as Browning was received later, with ridicule and contempt. The greatest critic of the time began an article in the leading critical organ of the day by saying, "This will never do." But it has done; and it has done for Jeffrey's critical reputation. Lord Jeffrey wrote himself down as one who was incapable of gauging the future, however much he might be capable of understanding the literature of the past. Some of you may remember—I remember perfectly well—the same kind of thing in the penny

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

papers about Browning when he was fighting for recognition. I remember, when I was a student, reading articles in luminaries like *The Standard* which sneered and jeered at Browning, just as smaller men today would sneer at men of like originality. But

---

17

Wordsworth and Browning have conquered. I take another case. Turner was assailed with even more ridicule when he exposed his works to the British public. What would have happened to Turner if Ruskin had not arisen to be his prophet I do not know. His pictures might not even have been mouldering in the cellars of the National Gallery. They might have been selling at little second-hand shops in back streets for ten shillings to any one who had eyes in his head. Wordsworth, Browning, and Turner were all people of such original and unprecedented genius that there was no taste and interest for them when they appeared; they had to create the very power of understanding themselves. A poet of less original genius, a great genius but less of a genius, like Tennyson, comes along, and he writes about the "May Queen" and "The Northern Farmer," and all those simple, elementary things which immediately fetch the handkerchiefs out. Now no doubt to do that properly takes a certain amount of genius. But it taps the prompt and fluent emotions; and the misfortune is that kind of work is easily counterfeited and abused by those who wish to exploit our feelings rather than exalt them. It is a more easy kind of thing than was done by those great geniuses I first named.

Original

---

18

poets like Wordsworth and Browning had to create the taste for their work.

Now in like manner Christ had to make the soul which should respond to him and understand him. He had to create the very capacity for response. And that is where we are compelled to recognise the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as well as the doctrine of the Saviour. We are always told that faith is the gift of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. The reason why we are told that, and must be told it, lies in the direction I have indicated. The death of Christ had not simply to touch like heroism, but it had to redeem us into power of feeling its own worth. Christ had to save us from what we were too far gone to feel. Just as the man choked with damp in a mine, or a man going to sleep in arctic cold, does not realise his danger, and the sense of danger has to be created within him, so the violent action of the Spirit takes men by force. The death of Christ must call up more than a responsive feeling. It is

P.T. FORSYTH

not satisfied with affecting our heart. That is mere impressionism. It is very easy to impress an audience. Every preacher knows that there is nothing more simple than to produce tears. You have only to tell a certain number of stories about dying children, lifeboats, fire escapes, and so on,

19

and you can make people thrill. But the thrill is neither here nor there. What is the thrill going to end in? What is the meaning of the thrill for life? If it is not ending as it should, and not ending for life, it is doing harm, not good, because it is sealing the springs of feeling and searing the power of the spiritual life.

What the work of Christ requires is the tribute not of our admiration or even gratitude, not of our impressions or our thrills, but of ourselves and our shame. Now we are coming to the crux of the matter—the tribute of our shame. That death had to make new men of us. It had to turn us not from potential friends to actual, but from enemies into friends. It had not merely to touch a spring of slumbering friendship. There was a new creation. The love of God—I quote Paul, who did understand something of these things—the love of God is not merely evoked within us, it is “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us.” That is a very different thing from simply having the reservoir of natural feeling tapped. The death of Christ had to do with our sin and not with our sluggishness. It had to deal with our active hostility, and not simply with the passive dullness of our hearts. Our hostility—that is what the easy-going people

20

cannot be brought to recognise. That is what the shallow optimists, who think we can now dispense with emphasis on the death of Christ, feel themselves able to do—to ignore the fact that the human heart is enmity against God, against a God who makes demands upon it; who goes so far as to make demands for the whole, the absolute obedience of self. Human nature puts its back up against that. That is what Paul means when he speaks about human nature, the natural man—the carnal man is a bad translation—being enmity against God. Man will cling to the last rag of his self-respect. He does not part with that when he thrills, admires, sympathises; but he does when he has to give up his whole self in the obedience of faith. How much self-respect do you think Paul had left in him when he went into Damascus? Christ, with the demand for saving obedience, arouses antagonism in the human heart. And so will the Church that is faithful to him. You hear people of the type I have been speaking about saying, If only the Church had been

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

true to Christ's message it would have done wonders for the world. If only Christ were preached and practised in all his simplicity to the world, how fast Christianity would spread. Would it? Do you

---

21

really find that the deeper you get into Christ and the meaning of his demands Christianity spreads faster in your heart? Is it not very much the other way? When it comes to close quarters you have actually to be got down and broken, that the old man may be pulverised and the new man created from the dust. Therefore when we hear people abusing the Church and its history the first thing we have to say is, Yes, there is a great deal too much truth in what you say, but there is also a greater truth which you are not allowing for, and it is this. One reason why the Church has been so slow in its progress in mankind and its effect on human history is because it has been so faithful to Christ, so faithful to his Cross. You have to subdue the most intractable, difficult, and slow thing in the world—man's self-will. You cannot expect rapid successes if you truly preach the Cross whereon Christ died, and which he surmounted not simply by leaving it behind but by rising again, and converting the very Cross into a power and glory.

Christ arouses antagonism in the human heart and heroism does not. Everybody welcomes a hero. The minority welcome Christ. We do resent his absolute command. We do resent

---

22

parting completely with ourselves. We do resent Christ.

---

4. I go back to the word I spoke about the tribute of our shame. The demand is unsparing, remorseless. It is not simply that you are called on by God for a certain due, a change, an amendment, but for the tribute of yourself and your shame. When you heard about that heroism of my story, when you thrilled to it, I wonder did you pat yourself on the back a little for being capable of thrilling to things so high, so fine? When you thrilled to that story you felt a certain satisfaction with yourself because there was as much of the God in you as allowed you to be capable of thrilling to such heroisms. You felt, If I am capable of thrilling to such things, I cannot be such a bad sort. But when you felt the meaning of Christ's death for you, did you ever pat yourself on the back? The nearer the Cross came to you, the deeper it entered into you, were you the more disposed to admire yourself? There is no harm in your feeling pleased with yourself because you were able to thrill to these

P.T. FORSYTH

human heroisms; but if the impression Christ makes upon you is to leave you more satisfied with yourself, more proud of yourself for being able

23

to respond, he has to get a great deal nearer to you yet. You need to be—I will use a Scottish phrase which old ministers used to apply to a young minister when he had preached a “thoughtful and interesting discourse”—you need to be well shaken over the mouth of the pit. The great deep classic cases of Christian experience bear testimony to that. Christ and his Cross come nearer and nearer, and we do not realise what we owe him until we realise that he has plucked us from the fearful pit, and the miry clay, and set us upon a rock of God’s own founding. The meaning of Christ’s death rouses our shame, self-contempt, and repentance. And we resent being made to feel ashamed of ourselves, we resent being made to repent. A great many people are afraid to come too near to anything that does that for them. That is a frequent reason for not going to church.

5. Again, continuing. You would have gone a long way to see this Belgian man. You would have gazed upon him with something of reverence, certainly with admiration. You would have regarded him as one received back from the dead. You think, If all men were like that, the world would be heaven. Well, there are a

24

great many more like that than we think, who daily imperil their life for their duty. But supposing every man and woman in the world were up to that pitch, and supposing you added them all together and took the total value of their moral heroism (if moral quantities were capable of being summed like that), would you then have the equivalent of the deed and death of Christ? No, indeed! If you took all the world, and made heroes of them all, and kept them heroic all their lives, instead of only in one act, still you would not get the value, the equivalent, of Christ’s sacrifice. It is not the sum of all heroisms. It would be more true to say it is the source of all heroisms, the foundation of them all. It is the underground something that makes heroisms, not something that heroisms make up. When Christ did what he did, it was not human nature doing it, it was God doing it. That is the great, absolutely unique and glorious thing. It is God in Christ reconciling. It was not human nature offering its very best to God. It was God offering his very best to man. That is the grand difference between the Church and civilisation, even when

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

civilisation is religious. We must attend more to those great issues between our faith and our world. Our religion has been too much a thing done

25

in a corner. We must adjust our religion to the great currents and movements of the world's history. And the great issue of the hour is the issue between the Church and civilisation. Their essential difference is this. Civilisation at its best represents the most man can do with the world and with human nature; but the Church, centred upon Christ, his Cross, and his work, represents the best that God can do upon them. The sacrifice of the Cross was not man in Christ pleasing God; it was God in Christ reconciling man, and in a certain sense, reconciling himself. My point at this moment is that the Cross of Christ was Christ reconciling man. It was not heroic man dying for a beloved and honoured God; it was God in some form dying for man. God dying for man. I am not afraid of that phrase; I cannot do without it. God dying for man; and for such men—hostile, malignantly hostile men. That is a puzzling phrase where we read in a gospel: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." There is more love in the phrase of the epistle, that a man should lay down his life for his bitter enemies. It is not so heroic, so very divine, to die for our friends. Kindness between the nice people is not so

26

very divine—fine and precious as it is. To die for enemies—that is the divine thing. Christ's was grace that died for such—for malignant enemies. There is more in God than love. There is all that we mean by his holy grace. Truly, "God is love." Yes, but the kind of love which you must interpret by the whole of the New Testament. When John said that, did he mean that God was simply the consummation of human affection? He knew that he was dealing with a holy, gracious God, a God who loved his enemies and redeemed them. Read with extreme care 1 John 4:10.

6. Let me gather up the points of difference which I have been indicating.

First, that Belgian hero did not act from love so much as from duty. Secondly, he died only in one act, not in his whole life, dying daily. There have been men capable of acts of sacrifice like this hero; loose-living men who, after a heroism, were quite capable of returning to their looseness of life—heroes of the Bret Harte type. There have been many valiant, fearless

P.T. FORSYTH

things done on the battlefield by men who in the face of bullets never flinched, never turned a hair; and when they came home they could

27

not stand against a breath of ridicule, they could not stand against a little temptation, and were soon wallowing in the mire. One act of sacrifice is not the same thing as a life gathered into one consummate sacrifice, whose value is that it has the whole personality put into it for ever.

Third, this man could not take the full measure of all that he was doing, and Christ could. Christ did not go to his death with his eyes shut. He died because he willed to die, having counted the cost with the greatest, deepest moral vision in the world.

Fourthly, the hero in the story had nothing to do with the moral condition of those whom he saved. The scoundrel and the saint in that train were both alike to him.

Again, he had no quarrel with those whom he saved. He had nothing to complain of. He had nothing from them to try his heroism. They were not his bitter enemies. His valour was not the heroism of forgiveness, where lies the wondrous majesty of God. His act was not an act of grace, which is the grand glory of the love of Christ. Christ died for people who not only did not know him, but who hated and despised him. He died, not for a trainful of people, but for the whole organic world of

28

people. It was an infinite death, that of his, in its range and in its power. It was death for enemies more bitter than anything that man can feel against man, for such haters as only holiness can produce. Here is the singular thing: the greater the favour that is done to us, the more fiercely we resent it if it does not break us down and make us grateful. The greater the favour, if we do not respond in its own spirit, so much the more resentful and antagonistic it makes us. I have already said that we speak too often as though the effect of Christ's death upon human nature must be gratitude as soon as it is understood. It is not always gratitude. Unless it is received in the Holy Ghost, the effect may just be the other way. It is judgement. It is a death unto death.

I conclude by saying what I have often said, and what often needs saying, that it is not possible to hear the gospel and to go away just as you came. I wish that were more realised. We should not have so many sermon-hunters. If people felt that every time they heard the gospel they were either better or worse for it, they would be more careful about hearing. They would not go so often, possibly; better they

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

29

should not, perhaps. I am not speaking about hearing of sermons. That is neither here nor there. A man may hear sermons and be neither the better nor the worse. But a man cannot hear the gospel without being either better or worse, whether he knows it or not. When you come to face the last issues, it is either unto salvation or unto condemnation. The great central, decisive thing, the last judgement of the world, is the Cross of Christ. The reason why so many sermons are found uninteresting is not always due to the dullness of the preacher. God knows how often that is the case, but it is not always. It is because the sermons so often turn, or ought to turn, upon the miracle of the grace of God, which is so great a miracle that it is strange, remote, and alien to our natural ways of thinking and feeling. It seems foreign to us. It is like reading a guide-book if you have never been in the country. I take down my Baedeker in the winter and read it with the greatest delight, because I know the country. If I had not been there I should find it the dreariest reading. Why do not people read the Bible more? Because they have not been in that country. There is no experience for it to stir and develop. The Cross of Christ, the infinite wonder of it— we have got to learn that. We have got to

30

learn the deep meaning of that by having been there, by the evangelical experience whose lack is the cause of all the religious vagrancy of the hour. We have got to learn that it was not simply magnificent heroism, but that it was God in Christ reconciling the world. It was God that did that work in Christ. And Christ was the living God working upon man, and working out the Kingdom of God.

31

P.T. FORSYTH

32

---

## The Great Sacrificial Work is to Reconcile

---

33

II

## The Great Sacrificial Work is to Reconcile

2 Corinthians 5:14-6:2; Romans 5:1-11; Colossians 1:10-29;  
Ephesians 2:16.

**T**HE great need of the religious world today is a return to the Bible. That is necessary for two reasons, negative and positive. Negatively, because the most serious feature of the hour in the life of the Church is the neglect of the Bible for personal use and study by religious people. Positively, because we have today enormous advantages in connection with that return to the Bible. Modern scholarship has made of the Bible a new Book. It has in a certain sense rediscovered it. You might say that the soul of the Reformation was the rediscovery of the Bible; and in a wider sense that is true today also. We have, through the labours of more than a century of the finest scholarship in all

34

the world, come to understand the Bible, in its original sense, as it was never understood before. These instructed scribes draw forth from their treasury things as new as old. It is the old Book, and it is a new Book. It remains the old Book, and the precious Book, because of its power of unceasing self-renovation. The spirit that lives within the Bible is a spirit of constant self-preservation. One way of describing the Reformation is to say that, since the early Gnostic centuries, it was the greatest effort that ever took place in the Church for the self-preservation of Christianity. Remember, the Church was not reformed from the outside, but from the inside. It was the Church reforming the Church. It was the Church's faith that arose, under the

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

Holy Spirit, and reformed the Church. So it is with the Bible. Whatever renovation we find in connection with the Bible—I do not here mean renovation of ourselves, but renovation of our way of understanding the Book—arises out of the Bible itself. This remains true today, as it was true in the Reformation time, although it is now true in a somewhat different application. The Bible is still the best commentary upon itself.

I have always done much in my ministry in the way of expounding the Bible, and I would

---

35

say to the younger ministers particularly who are here, Do not be afraid of that manner of preaching. I have known young ministers who were over-scrupulous. I have known them say, “If I take a long text people will think it is because I am lazy and do not want the labour of getting a sermon out of a small one.” Never mind such foolish people. Do not be afraid of long texts, long passages. Preach less from verses and more from paragraphs. If I had my time over again I would do a great deal more in that way than I have done. Read but one lesson, and read it with elucidatory comments. Of course some people can do that better than others. There is always the danger that if a person try it who has no sort of knack in that direction, the people will feel they have been let in for two sermons instead of one; and, excellent as these might be, people do not like to feel they have been got to church upon false pretences. It might even give an excuse to certain people for omitting one of the services altogether, on the plea they had put in the requisite amount of attention at one service. I would also admit that if you do this it will not reduce your labour. It will really add what might amount to another sermon to your weekly work. It is no use doing it if you do it on the spur of the moment. If you just say

---

36

things that occur to your mind while you are reading, you may say some banal, or some nonsensical and fantastic things. It means careful preparation. The lesson should be prepared as truly as the prayer should be prepared, and as the sermon should be prepared. You have to work your way through the chapter with the aid of the best commentary that you can get; and you have to exercise continual judgement in doing so lest you be dragged away into little matters of detail instead of keeping to the larger lines of thought in the passage in hand. Then, if you do as I say, there is this other advantage, that you can take a particular verse out of the long passage for your sermon; and thus you come to the sermon with an audience which you yourself have

P.T. FORSYTH

prepared to listen to you. You have created your own atmosphere, and you have done it on a Bible basis.

Now I will confess against myself that sometimes, as I preach about here and there, and have done as I have been recommending you to do, people have come to me afterwards and said, as nicely as they could, that the sermon was all very well, but in respect of the reading of the Scripture, they never heard it after that fashion; they had never realised how vivid Scripture could become. That simply results from paying

---

37

attention to the chapter with the best help. You will find, I am sure, that your congregation will welcome it.

---

Supposing, then, we return to the Bible. Supposing that the Church did—as I think it must do if it is not going to collapse; certainly the Free Churches must—supposing we return to the Bible, there are three ways of reading the Bible. The first way asks, What did the Bible say? The second way asks, What can I make the Bible say? The third way asks, What does God say in the Bible?

---

The first way is, with the aid of these magnificent scholars, to discover the true historic sense of the Bible. There is no more signal illustration of success here than in the case of the Prophets. During the time when theology dominated everything and was considered to be the Church's one grand concern, about one hundred years after the Reformation, when its great prophets had passed away, and the Church had fallen into different hands, the whole of the Old Testament—the Prophets amongst the rest—was read for proof passages of theological doctrines. Now for books like

---

38

the Prophets that is absolutely fatal—fatal to the books and to the Church; and fatal in the long run to Christian truth. There is no greater service that has been done to the Bible than what has been done by the scholars I speak of, in making the Prophets live again, putting them in their true historical setting and position. Dr George Adam Smith, for example, has done inestimable service in this way. And what has been done for the Prophets has also been done for the New Testament. Immense steps onward have been

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

taken; and we are coming to know with much exactness what the writer actually had in his mind at the moment of writing, and what he was understood to have had in his mind by those to whom he first wrote. In this way we get rid, for example, of the idea that Paul was thinking about us who live two thousand years after him. He was not thinking of us at all. He did not expect the world to last a century. It is quite another question what the Holy Spirit was thinking about. Paul was thinking in a natural way about his age and his Churches, about their actual situation and needs. That is another illustration of the principle that if you want to work for immortality you must work in the most relevant and faithful way amid the

39

circumstances round about you. The present duty is the path to immortality. And so also I might illustrate in respect to the Gospels.

The second way of reading the Bible is reading it unto edification. That is to say, we read a passage, and we allow ourselves to receive any suggestion that may come to us from it, and we do not stop to ask whether that was in the writer's mind, or whether it was in the mind of the people to whom he wrote. That is immaterial. We allow the Spirit of God to suggest to us whatever lessons or ideas he thinks fit out of the words that are under our eyes. We read the Bible not for correct or historic knowledge, but for religious and spiritual purposes, for our own private and personal needs. That is, of course, a perfectly legitimate thing—indeed, it is quite necessary. It is the way of reading the Bible which the large mass of the Church must always practise. But it has its dangers. You need the other ways to correct it. All the three must co-operate for the true use and understanding of the Bible by the Church at large. But I am speaking now about its use by individuals, and the danger I mean is that the suggestiveness

40

may sometimes become fantastic. Some preachers fail at times in that way. They get to taking what are called fancy texts, texts which impress the audience much more with the ingenuity of the preacher than with his inspiration. For instance, a preacher in the North, now dead, was preaching against the Higher Criticism and its slicing up of the Bible, and he took his text from Nehemiah, "He cut it with a penknife"! That is all very well, perhaps, for a motto, but for a text it is rather a liberty. It is not fair to the Bible to indulge in much of that at least. If I remember rightly, Dr Parker had

P.T. FORSYTH

a great gift in this way, and more than sometimes it ran away with him. It is a temptation of every witty man, and every ingenious-minded man. But there is a peril in it, the abuse of a right principle. We are bound, of course, to vindicate for ourselves and for others the right to use the Bible in the suggestive way, if we are not to make a present of it to the scholars. And that would be just as bad as making a present of it to a race of priests. But when we read too much in that way it is apt to become a minister to our spiritual egotism, or, what is equally bad, our fanciful subjectivity.

Now the grand value of the Bible is just the

---

41

other thing—its objectivity. The first thing is not how I feel, but it is, How does God feel, and what has God said or done for my soul? When we get to real close quarters with that our feeling and response will look after itself. Do not tell people how they ought to feel towards Christ. That is useless. It is just what they ought that they cannot do. Preach a Christ that will make them feel as they ought. That is objective preaching. The tendency and fashion of the present moment is all in the direction of subjectivity. People welcome sermons of a more or less psychological kind, which go into the analysis of the soul or of society. They will listen gladly to sermons on character-building, for instance; and in the result they will get to think of nothing else but their own character. They will be the builders of their own character; which is a fatal thing. Learn to commit your soul and the building of it to One who can keep it and build it as you never can. Attend then to Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom, and the Cause, and he will look after your soul. A consequence of this passion for subjective and psychological analysis, for sentimental experience and problem-preaching, is that when a preacher begins preaching a real, objective,

---

42

New Testament gospel he has raised against him what is now the most fatal accusation—even within the Christian Church it has come to be very fatal—he is accused of being a theologian. That is a very fatal charge to make now against any preacher. It ought to be actionable in the way of libel. We have come to this—that if you penetrate into the interior of the New Testament you will be accused of being a theologian; and then it is all over with your welcome. But that state of things has to be turned upside down, else the Church dries into the sand. There is no message in it.

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

---

The third way of reading the Bible is reading it to discover the purpose and thought of God, whether it immediately edify us or whether it do not. If we did actually become aware of the will and thought of God it would edify us as nothing else could. No inner process, no discipline to which we might subject ourselves, no way of cultivating subjective holiness would do so much for us as if we could lose ourselves, and in some godly sort forget ourselves, because we are so preoccupied with the mind of Christ. If you want psychological analysis, analyse the will, work, and purpose of Christ our Lord. I

43

read a fine sentence the other day which puts in a condensed form what I have often preached about as the symptom of the present age: "Instead of placing themselves at the service of God most people want a God who is at their service." These two tendencies represent in the end two different religions. The man who is exploiting God for the purposes of his own soul or for the race, has in the long run a different religion from the man who is putting his own soul and race absolutely at the disposal of the will of God in Jesus Christ.

---

All this is by way of preface to an attempt to approach the New Testament and endeavour to find what is really the will of God concerning Christ and what Christ did. Doctrine and life are really two sides of one Christianity; and they are equally indispensable, because Christianity is living truth. It is not merely truth; it is not simply life. It is living truth. The modern man says that doctrine which does not pass into life is dead; and then the mistake he makes is that he wants to turn it into life directly, and to politicise it, perhaps; whereas it works indirectly. The experience of many centuries,

44

on the other hand, says that Christian life which does not grow out of Christian doctrine becomes a failure. If not in individuals, it does in the Church. You cannot keep Christian piety alive except upon Christian truth. You can never get a Catholic Church except by Catholic truth. I think perhaps we all here agree about that. It is of immense importance that we do not think entirely about our individual souls, and that we think more about

P.T. FORSYTH

the Church, the divine will, the divine Word, and the divine Kingdom in the world. It is of supreme importance that we should know what the Christian doctrine is on the great matters.

Now in connection with the work of Christ the great expositor in the Bible is Paul. And Paul has a word of his own to describe Christ's work—the word “reconciliation.” But he thinks of reconciliation not as a doctrine but as an act of God—because he was not a theologian but an experience preacher. To view it so produces an immense change in your whole way of thinking. It secures for you all that is worth having in theology, and it delivers you from the danger of obsession by theology in a one-sided way. Remember, then, that the truth we are dealing with is precious not as a

45

mere truth but as the means of expressing the eternal act of God. The most important thing in all the world, in the Bible or out of it, is something that God has done—for ever finally done. And it is this reconciliation; which is only secondarily a doctrine; it is only secondarily even a manner of life. Primarily it is an act of God. That is to say, it is a salvation before it is a religion. For Christianity as a religion stands upon salvation. Religion which does not grow out of salvation is not Christian religion; it may be spiritual, poetic, mystic; but the essence of Christianity is not just to be spiritual; it is to answer God's manner of spirituality, which you find in Jesus Christ and in him crucified. Reconciliation is salvation before it is religion. And it is religion before it is theology. All our theology in this matter rests upon the certain experience of the fact of God's salvation. It is salvation upon divine principles. It is salvation by a holy God. It is bound of course, to be theological in its very nature. Its statement is a theology. The moment you begin to talk about the holiness of God you are theologians. And you cannot talk about Christ and his death in any thorough way without talking about the holiness of God.

46

Christ and him crucified, that is the historic fact. But what do I mean when I say Christ and him crucified? Does it mean that a certain personality lived who was recognised in history as Jesus Christ, and that he came by his end by crucifixion? That in itself is worthless for religious purposes. It is useful enough if you are writing history; but for religion historical fact must have interpretation, and the whole of Christianity depends upon the interpretation

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

that is put upon such facts. You will find people sometimes who say, "Let us have the simple historic facts, the Cross and Christ." That is not Christianity. Christianity is a certain interpretation of those facts. How and why did the New Testament come into being? Was it simply to convince posterity that those facts had taken place? Was it simply to convince the world that Christ had risen from the dead? If that were the grand object of the New Testament we should have a very different Bible in our hands, one addressed to the world and not to the Church, to critical science and not to faith; and there would not be so much argument amongst scholars as there is. The Bible did not come into being in order to provide future historians with a valuable document.

47

It came for the purposes of interpretation. Here is a sentence I came across once: "The fact without the word is dumb; the word without the fact is empty." It is useful to turn it over and over in your mind.

Paul was almost the creator and the great representative of that interpretation. It was continued on his lines by Augustine, Anselm, Luther, and many another. But what is it that we hear about so much today? We hear a great deal about an undogmatic Christianity. And there is a certain plausibility in it. If you have no theological training, no training in the understanding of the Scripture in a serious way, that is, if you do not know your business as ministers of the Word, it seems natural that undogmatic Christianity should be just the thing you want. Leave the dogma of it, you will say, to those who devote their lives to dogma—just as though theologians were irrepressible people who take up theology as a hobby and become the bores of the Church! It was not a hobby to the apostles. Why, there are actually people of a similar stamp who look upon missions as a hobby of the Church, instead of their belonging to the very being and fidelity of the Church. So some people think theology is a hobby, and

48

that theologians are persons with an uncomfortable preponderance of intellect, who are trying to destroy the privileges secured by our national lack of education and to sacrifice Christianity to mind. People say we do not want so much intellect in preaching; we want sympathy and unction. Now, I am always looking afield, and looking forward, and thinking about the prospects of the Church in the great world. And unction dissociated from Christian truth and Christian intelligence has at last the sentence of the Church's death within itself. You may cherish an undogmatic Christianity with a sort of

P.T. FORSYTH

magnetic easing, a purely human, mystical, subjective kind of Christ for yourself or an audience, but you could not continue to preach that in a Church for the ages. The Church could not live on that and do its preaching in such a world. You could not spread a gospel like that. Subjective religion is valuable in its place, but its place is limited. The only Cross you can preach to the whole world is a theological one. It is not the fact of the Cross, it is the interpretation of the Cross, the prime theology of the Cross, what God meant by the Cross, that is everything. That is what the New Testament came to give. That is the only kind of Cross that can make or keep a Church.

49

---

You will say, perhaps, "Cannot I go out and preach my impressions of the Cross?" By all means. You will only discover the sooner that you cannot preach a Cross to any purpose if you preach it only as an experience. If you only preach it so you would not be an apostle; and you could not do the work of an apostle for the Church. The apostles were particular about this, and one expressed it quite pointedly: "We preach not ourselves [nor our experiences] but Christ crucified." "We do not preach religion," said Paul, "but God's revelation. We do not preach the impression the Cross made upon us, but the message that God by his Spirit sent through a Christ we experience." And so with ourselves. We do not preach our impressions, or even our experience. These make but the vehicle, as it were. What we preach is something much more solid, more objective, with more stay in it; something that can suffice when our experience has ebbed until it seems to be as low as Christ's was in the great desertion and victory on the Cross. We want something that will stand by us when we cannot feel any more; we want a Cross we can cling to, not simply a subjective Cross. That is, to put the thing in another way, what we want today is

50

an insight into the Cross. You see I am making a distinction between impression and insight. It is a useful part of the Church's work, for instance, that it should act by means of revival services, where perhaps the dominant element may be temporary impression. But unless that is taken up and turned to account by something more, we all know how evanescent a thing it is apt to be. We need, not simply to be impressed by Christ, but to see into Christ and into his Cross. We need to deepen the impression until it become new life by seeing into Christ. There are certain circumstances in which we may

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

be entitled to declare that we do not want so many people who glibly say they love Jesus; we want more people who can really see into Christ. We do, of course, want more people who love Jesus; but we want a multitude of more people who are not satisfied with that, but whose love fills them with holy curiosity and compels them habitually to cultivate in the Spirit the power of seeing into Christ and into his Cross. More than impression, do we need a spirit of divination. Insight is what we want for powerless of mere interest and more of real insight. There are some people who talk as though, when we speak of the Cross and the meaning of the Cross, we were spinning something out

---

51

of the Cross. Paul was not spinning anything out of the Cross. He was gazing into the Cross, seeing what was really there with eyes that had been unsealed and purged by the Holy Ghost.

---

The doctrine of Christ's reconciliation, or his Atonement, is not a piece of mediæval dogma like transubstantiation, not a piece of ecclesiastical dogma or Aristotelian subtlety which it might be the Bible's business to destroy. If you look at the Gospels you will see that from the Transfiguration onward this matter of the Cross is the great centre of concern; it is where the centre of gravity lies. I met a man the other day who had come under some poor and mischievous pulpit influence, and he said, "It is time we got rid of hearing so much about the Cross of Christ; there should be preached to the world a humanitarian Christ, the kind of Christ that occupies the Gospels." There was nothing for it but to tell that man he was the victim of smatterers, and that he must go back to his Gospels and read and study for a year or two. It is the flimsiest religiosity, and the most superficial reading of the Gospel, that could talk like that. What does it mean that an enormous proportion of the Gospel

52

story is occupied with the passion of Christ? The centre of gravity, even in the Gospels, falls upon the Cross of Christ and what was done there, and not simply upon a humanitarian Christ. You cannot set the Gospels against Paul. Why, the first three Gospels were much later than Paul's Epistles. They were written for Churches that were made by the apostolic preaching. But how, then, do the first three Gospels *seem* so different from the Epistles? Of course, there is a superficial difference. Christ was a very living and real character for the people of his own time, and his grand business was to rouse

P.T. FORSYTH

his audiences' faith in his Person and in his mission. But in his Person and in his mission the Cross lay latent all the time. It emerged only in the fullness of time—that valuable phrase—just when the historic crisis, the organic situation, produced it. Jesus was not a professor of theology. He did not lecture the people. He did not come with a theology of the Cross. He did not come to force events to comply with that theology. He did not force his own people to work out a theological scheme. He did force an issue, but it was not to illustrate a theology. It was to establish the Kingdom of God, which could be established in no other wise than as he

53

established it—upon the Cross. And he could only teach the Cross when it had happened—which he did through the Evangelists with the space they gave it, and through the Apostles and the exposition they gave it.

To come back to this work of Christ described by Paul as reconciliation. On this interpretation of the work of Christ the whole Church rests. If you move faith from that centre you have driven *the* nail into the Church's coffin. The Church is then doomed to death, and it is only a matter of time when she shall expire. The Apostle, I say, described the work of Christ as above all things reconciliation. And Paul was the founder of the Church, historically speaking. I do not like to speak of Christ as the Founder of the Church. It seems remote, detached, journalistic. It would be far more true to say that he is the foundation of the Church. "The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord." The founder of the Church, historically speaking, was Paul. It was founded by and through him on this reconciling principle—nay, I go deeper than that, on this mighty *act* of God's reconciliation. For this great act the interpretation was given to Paul by the Holy Spirit. In this connection read that great word in 1 Corinthians 2;

54

that is the most valuable word in the New Testament about the nature of apostolic inspiration.

---

What, then, did Paul mean by this reconciliation which is the backbone of the Church? He meant the total result of Christ's life-work in permanently changing the relation between collective man and God. By reconciliation Paul meant the total result of Christ's life-work in the fundamental, permanent, final changing of the relation between man and God, altering it from a relation of hostility to one of confidence and peace. Remember, I am

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

speaking as Paul spoke, about man, and not about individual men or groups of men.

There are two principal Greek words connected with the idea of reconciliation, one of them being always translated by it, the other sometimes. They are *katallassein*, and *hilaskesthai*—reconciliation and atonement. Atonement is an Old Testament phrase, where the idea is that of the covering of sin from God's sight. But by whom? Who was that great benefactor of the human race that succeeded in covering up our sin from God's sight? Who was skilful enough to hoodwink the Almighty? Who covered the sin? The all-seeing God

---

55

alone. There can therefore be no talk of hoodwinking. Atonement means the covering of sin by something which God himself had provided, and therefore the covering of sin by God himself. It was of course not the blinding of himself to it, but something very different. How could the Judge of all the earth make his judgement blind? It was the covering of sin by something which makes it lose the power of deranging the covenant relation between God and man and founds the new Humanity. That is the meaning of it.

If you think I am talking theology, you must blame the New Testament. I am simply expounding to you the New Testament. Of course, you need not take it unless you please. It is quite open to you to throw the New Testament overboard (so long as you are frank about it), and start what you may loosely call Christianity on other floating lines. But if you take the New Testament you are bound to try to understand the New Testament. If you understand the New Testament you are bound to recognise that this is what the New Testament says. It is a subsequent question whether the New Testament is right in saying so. Let us first find out what the Bible really says, and then discuss whether the Bible is right or wrong.

---

56

The idea of atonement is the covering of sin by something which God provided, and by the use of which sin loses its accusing power, and its power to derange that grand covenant and relationship between man and God which founds the New Humanity. The word *katallassein* (reconcile) is peculiar to Paul. He uses both words; but the other word, "atonement," you also find in other New Testament writings. Reconciliation is Paul's great characteristic word and thought. The great passages are those I have mentioned at the head of this lecture. I cannot take time to expound them here. That would mean a long course. Read those passages carefully and check me in anything I say—

P.T. FORSYTH

particularly, for instance, 2 Corinthians 5:14-6:2. Out of it we gather this whole result. First, Christ's work is something described as reconciliation. And second, reconciliation rests upon atonement as its ground. Do not stop at "God was in Christ reconciling the world." You can easily water that down. You may begin the process by saying that God was in Christ just in the same way in which he was in the old prophets. That is the first dilution. Then you go on with the homeopathic treatment, and you say, "Oh yes, all he did by Christ was to affect the world, and impress it by showing it how much he loved it."

57

Now, would that reconcile anybody really in need of it? When your child has flown into a violent temper with you, and still worse, a sulky temper, and glooms for a whole day, is it any use your sending to that child and saying, "Really, this cannot go on. Come back. I love you very much. Say you are sorry." Not a bit of use. For God simply to have told or shown the evil world how much he loved it would have been a most ineffectual thing. Something had to be done—judging or saving. Revelation alone is inadequate. Reconciliation must rest on atonement. For, as I say, you must not stop at "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," but go on "not reckoning unto them their trespasses." He made Christ to be sin for us, who knew no sin." That involves atonement. You cannot blot out that phrase. And the third thing involved in the idea is that this reconciliation, this atonement, means change of relation between God and man—man, mind you, not two or three men, not several groups of men, but man, the human race as one whole. And it is a change of relation from alienation to communion—not simply to our peace and confidence, but to reciprocal communion. The grand end of reconciliation is communion. I am pressing

58

that hard. I am pressing it hard here by saying that it is not enough that we should worship God. It is not enough that we should worship a personal God. It is not enough that we should worship and pay our homage to a loving God. That does not satisfy the love of God. Nothing short of living, loving, holy, habitual communion between his holy soul and ours can realise at last the end which God achieved in Jesus Christ.

In this connection let me offer you two cautions. First, take care that the direct fact of reconciliation is not hidden up by the indispensable means—

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

namely, atonement. There have been ages in the Church when the attention has been so exclusively centred upon atonement that reconciliation was lost sight of. You found theologians flying at each other's throats in the interest of particular theories of atonement. That is to say, atonement had obscured reconciliation. In the same way, after the Reformation period, they dwelt upon justification until they lost sight of sanctification altogether. Then the great pietistic movement had to arise in order to redress the balance. Take care that the end,

59

reconciliation, is not hidden up by the means, atonement. Justification, sanctification, reconciliation and atonement are all equally inseparable from the one central and compendious work of Christ. Various ages need various aspects of it turned outward. Let us give them all their true value and perspective. If we do not we shall make that fatal severance which orthodoxy has so often made between doctrine and life.

The second caution is this. Beware of reading atonement out of reconciliation altogether. Beware of cultivating a reconciliation which is not based upon justification. The apostle's phrases are often treated like that. They are emptied of the specific Christian meaning. There are a great many Christian people, spiritual people of a sort, today, who are perpetrating that injustice upon the New Testament. They are taking mighty old words and giving them only a subjective, arbitrary meaning, emptying out of them the essential, objective, positive content. They are preoccupied with what takes place within their own experience, or imagination, or thought; and they are oblivious of that which is declared to have taken place within the experience of God and of Christ. They are

60

oblivious and negligent of the essential things that Christ did, and God in Christ. That is not fair treatment of New Testament terms—to empty them of positive Christian meaning and water them down to make something that might suit a philosophic or mystic or subjective or individualist spirituality. There is a whole system of philosophy that has attempted this dilution at the present day. It is associated with a name that has now become very well known, the name of the greatest philosopher the world ever saw, Hegel. I am not now going to expound Hegelianism. But I have to allude to one aspect of it. If you are paying any attention to what is going on around you in the thinking world, you are bound to come face to face with some phase of it or other. But I see my time is at an end for today.

P.T. FORSYTH

---

Tomorrow I begin where I now leave off and shall say something about this version of Paul's idea of reconciliation, which is so attractive philosophically. I remember the appeal it had for me when I came into contact with it first. I did feel that it seemed to give a largeness to certain New Testament terms, which I finally found was a largeness of latitude

61

only. If it did seem to give breadth it did not give depth. And I close here by reminding you of this—that while Christ and Christianity did come to make us broad men, it did not come to do that in the first instance. It came to make us deep men. The living interest of Christ and of the Holy Spirit is not breadth, but it is depth. Christ said little that was wide compared with what he said piercing and searching. I illustrate by referring you to an interest that is very prominent amongst you—the interest of missions. How did modern missions arise? I mean the last hundred years of them. Modern Protestant missions are only one hundred years old. Where did they begin? Who began them? They began at the close of the eighteenth century, the century whose close was dominated by philosophers, by scientists, by a reasonable, moderate interpretation of religion, by broad humanitarian religion. Of course, you might expect it was amongst those broad people that missions arose. We know better. We know that the Christian movement which has spread around the world did not arise out of the liberal thinkers, the humanitarian philosophers of the day, who were its worst enemies, but with a few men—Carey, Marshman, Ward,

62

and the like—whose Calvinistic theology we should now consider very narrow. But they did have the root of the universal matter in them. A gospel deep enough has all the breadth of the world in its heart. If we are only deep enough the breadth will take care of itself. I would ten times rather have one man who was burning deep, even though he wanted to burn me for my modern theology, than I would have a broad, hospitable, and thin theologian who was willing to take me in and a nondescript crowd of others in a sheet let down from heaven, but who had no depth, no fire, no skill to search, and no power to break. For the deep Christianity is that which not only searches us, but breaks us. And a Christianity which would exclude none has no power to include the world.

---

THE WORK OF CHRIST

---

63

---

64

---

## Reconciliation: Philosophic and Christian

---

65

### III

## Reconciliation: Philosophic and Christian

PLACE on the board before you five points as to Christ's reconciling work which I think vital:—

1. It is between person and person.
2. Therefore it affects both sides.
3. It rests on atonement.
4. It is a reconciliation of the world as one whole.
5. It is final in its nature and effect.

---

I was saying yesterday that two cautions ought to be observed in connection with this matter of reconciliation. First, we should not hide up the idea of reconciliation by the idea of atonement; we should not obscure the end, or the effect, by the great and indispensable means to it. Second, at the other extreme we are to

---

66

beware of emptying reconciliation of atonement altogether. Two very great thinkers arose last century in Germany—where most of the thinking on this subject has for the last hundred years been done. Much of our work has been to steal. That does not matter if it is done wisely and gratefully. When a man gives out a great thought, get it, work it; it is common property. It belongs to the whole world, to be claimed and assimilated by whoever shall find. Well, there were two very powerful men in Germany much opposed to

P.T. FORSYTH

each other, yet at a certain point at one—Hegel and Ritschl. While they preached the doctrine of reconciliation in different senses, they both united to obscure the idea of atonement or expiation. Now we are to beware of emptying the reconciliation idea of the idea of atonement, whether we do it philosophically with Hegel or theologically with Ritschl. I mention these men because their thought has very profoundly affected English thinking, whether philosophical or theological. I protested yesterday against the practice, so common, of taking New Testament words, and words consecrated to Christian experience, emptying them of their essential content, and keeping them in a vapid use. That is done for various reasons. It is sometimes done because

---

67

the words are too valuable to be parted with; sometimes because a philosophic interpretation seems to rescue them from the narrowness of an outworn theology; and it is sometimes done for lower motives in order to produce a fictitious impression upon people that they are still substantially hearing the substance of the old truths when really they are not.

Especially I began yesterday to call attention to the view which is associated with the philosophical position of Hegel. Being a philosopher he was great upon the idea. The whole world, he said, was a movement or process of the grand, divine idea; but it was a process. Now please to put down and make much use of this fundamental distinction between a process and an act. A process has nothing moral in it. We are simply carried along on the crest of a wave. An act, on the other hand, can only be done by a moral personality. The act involves the notion of will and responsibility, and, indeed, the whole existence of a moral world. The process destroys that notion. Now the general tendency of philosophy is to devote itself to the idea and to the process. Science, for example, which is the ground floor, not to say the basement, of philosophy—science knows nothing about acts, it only knows about processes. The chemist

---

68

knows only about processes. The biologist knows only about processes. The psychologist treats even acts as processes. But the theologian, and, indeed, religion altogether, stands or falls with the idea of an act. For him an infinite process is at bottom an eternal act. The philosophical thinker says the world is the process of an evolving idea, which may be treated as personal or may not. But for Christianity the world is the action of the eternal, divine act, a moral act, an act of will and of conscience.

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

Let us see how this applies to our thoughts about reconciliation. I have already indicated to you that the grand goal of the divine reconciliation is communion with God, not simply that we should be in tune with the Infinite, as an attractive but thin book has it. The object of the divine atonement is something much more than bringing us into tune with God. It is more than raising our pitch and defining our note. It means that we are brought into actual, reciprocal communion with God out of guilt. We have personal intercourse with the Holy, we exchange thoughts and feelings. But this Christian idea of reconciliation, the idea of communion with the living and holy God, is replaced in philosophic theology by another idea, that, namely, of adjustment to

69

rational Godhead, our adjustment to that mighty idea, that mighty rational process, which is moving on throughout the world. Sometimes the Godhead is conceived as personal, sometimes as impersonal; but in any case reconciliation would be rather a resigned adjustment to this great and overwhelming idea, which, having issued everything, is perpetually recalling, or exalting, everything into fusion with itself. But fusion, however organic and concrete, is one thing, communion is another thing. An individual might be lost in the great sum of being as a drop of water is lost in the ocean. That is fusion. Or it might be taken up as a cell in the body's organic process. That is a certain kind of reconciliation or absorption. But moral, spiritual reconciliation, where we have personal beings to deal with, is much more than fusion; more than absorption; it is communion. It is more than placing us in our niche. When we think in the philosophic way it practically means that reconciliation is understood almost entirely from man's side, without realising the divine initiative as an act. But such divine initiative is everything. It is in the mercy of our God that all our hopes begin. Nothing that confuses that gets at the root of our Christian reconciliation. Or, some

70

times, those philosophic ideas are carried so far that God's concern for the individual is ignored. These great processes work according to general laws; and general laws, like Acts of Parliament, are bound to do some injustice to individuals. You cannot possibly get complete justice by Act of Parliament. It is bound to hit somebody very hard. And it has often been doubted by exponents of philosophical theology such as I describe whether the individual as an individual was really present to God's mind and affection at all. And they think prayer is unreasonable except for its reflex effect on us. Thus the whole

P.T. FORSYTH

stress comes to be put upon our attitude to God, and not upon a reciprocal relationship. That is to say, religion becomes, as I described yesterday, a subjectivity, a resignation. In others it becomes a sense of dependence. People are invited to become preoccupied with their own attitude, their own relation, their own feelings toward the unchangeable, but absorbing, and even unfeeling God. Attention is directed upon the human side instead of insight cultivated into the divine side. The result of that practically is that religion comes to consist far too much in working up a certain frame of feeling instead of dwelling upon the objective reality of the act of God. Resignation is,

71

then, my act; but it is not resignation to a sympathetic act of approach in God, but only to his onward movement. But, as I have said before, if we are to produce the real Christian faith we must dwell upon, we must preach and press, that objective act and gift of God which in itself produces that faith. We cannot produce it. Many try. There are some people who actually work at holiness. It is a dangerous thing to do, to work at your own holiness. The way to cultivate the holiness of the New Testament is to cultivate the New Testament Christ, the interpretation of Christ in his Cross, by his Spirit, which cannot but produce holiness, and holiness of a far profounder order than anything we may make by taking ourselves to pieces and putting ourselves together in the best way we can, or by adjusting ourselves with huge effort to a universal process. Religious subjectivity is truly a most valuable phase; and at some periods in the Church's history it is urgently called for. In the seventeenth century it was so called for because Protestantism had degenerated into a mere theological orthodoxy, a very hard-shell kind of Christianity. It was necessary that the great Pietistic movement should arise and correct it. But this is itself a

72

danger in turn; and we have to rise up in the name of the gospel, of the New Testament, and demand a more objective religion; and we have to declare that if ever divine holiness is to be produced in man it can only be produced by God's act through Christ in the Holy Spirit.

The philosophic kind of theology (which is rather theosophy) often ends, you perceive, in turning real reconciliation into something quite different. It becomes turned into the mere forced adjustment of man to his fate; and naturally this often ends in a resentful pessimism. Supposing the whole

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

universe to be a vast rational process unfolding itself like an infinite cosmic flower, you cannot have communion or any hearty understanding between a living, loving soul and that evolutionary process. All you can do is to adjust yourself to that process, settle down to it and make the best of it, square yourself to it in the way that seems best for you, and that will cause you and others least discomfort. But reconciliation becomes debased indeed when it turns to mere resignation. Of course, we have to practise resignation. But Christianity is not the practice of resignation. At least, that is not the

73

meaning of reconciliation. When two friends fall out and are reconciled, it does not simply mean that one adjusts himself to the other. That is a very one-sided arrangement. There must be a mutuality. Theology of the kind I have been describing has a great deal to say about men changing their way of looking at things or feeling about them. If I were preaching a theology like that I should say: "This mighty process, of which you are all parts, is unfolding itself to a grand closing result. It is going to be a grand thing for everybody in the long run (provided, that is, that they continue to exist as individuals and are capable of feeling anything, whether grand or mean). It is all going to work out to a grand consummation. You do not see that, but you must make an effort and accept it as the genius and drift of things; and that is faith. You must accept the idea that the whole world is working out, through much suffering and by many roundabout ways, to a grand final consummation which will be a blessing for everybody, even though it might mean their individual extinction. What you have to do in these circumstances is, by a great act of faith, to believe that this is so and to immolate yourself, if need be, for the benefit of this grand whole;

74

at any rate, accommodate yourself to its evolving movement."

The gospel of Christ speaks otherwise. It speaks of a God to whom we are to be reconciled in a mutual act which he begins; and not of an order or process with which we are to be adjusted by our lonely act, or to which we are to be resigned. If we have an idea of such a Godhead as I have been describing, how does it affect our thought of Christ? Christ then becomes but one of its grandest prophets, or one of the greatest instances and illustrations of that adjustment to the mighty order. He first realised, and he first declared, this great change in the way of reading the situation. What you have to do if you accept him is to change your way of reading the situation, to accept his interpretation of life, and accept it as rationally, spiritually, and resignedly as

P.T. FORSYTH

you best can. Accept his principle. Die to live. But what a poor use of Christ—to accept his interpretation of life, as if he were a mere spiritual Goethe! That is a very attenuated Christ compared with the Christ that is offered to us in the New Testament. That is not the eternal Son of God in whom God was reconciling the world unto himself. That is another Christ—from some hasty points of view indeed a larger Christ;

---

75

for the philosophers have a larger Christ, apparently, one more cosmic. But it is a diluted Christ, and one that cannot penetrate to the centre and depth of our human need or our human personality, cannot reach our guilt and hell, and therefore cannot be the final Christ of God.

---

Whether from the side of the philosophers, as I have been showing, or from the side of certain theologians like Ritschl, who was so much opposed to Hegel, you will often hear this said: that only man needed to be reconciled, that God did not need any reconciliation. Now, I have been asking you to observe that we are dealing with persons. That is the first point I put upon the board. Our reconciliation is between person and person. It is not between an order or a process on the one hand and a person on the other. Therefore a real and deep change of the relation between the two means a change on both sides. That is surely clear if we are dealing with living persons. God is an eternal person; I am a finite person; yet we are persons both. There is that parity. Any reconciliation which only means change on one side is not a real reconciliation at all. A real, deep change of relation affects

---

76

both sides when we are dealing with persons. That is not the case when we are dealing on the one side with ideas, or one vast idea or process, and on the other side a person only.

When Christianity is being watered down in the way I have described, we have to concentrate our attention upon the core of it. All round us Christianity is being diluted either by thought or by *blague*; we must press to the core of the matter. It is true the theology of the Christian Church on this head needs a certain amount of modification and correction at the present day. That will appear presently. But I want to make it clear that the view of the Church upon the whole, especially the great view associated with the Reformation, preserves the core of the matter, which we are in danger of losing either on one side or the other.

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

Let me call your attention, then, to these five points, which you will find immanent in what I have subsequently to say.

*First*, you will note that the reconciliation is between two *persons* who have fallen out, and not between a failing person on the one hand and a perfect, imperturbable process on the other.

---

77

The *second* thing is a corollary from the first, and is that the reconciliation *affects and alters both parties* and not only one party. There was reconciliation on both sides.

*Thirdly*, it is a reconciliation which *rests upon atonement and redemption*.

*Fourthly*, it is a reconciliation of *the world as a cosmic whole*. The world as one whole; not a person here and another there, snatched as brands from the burning; not a group here and a group there; but the reconciliation of the whole world.

*Fifthly*, it is a reconciliation *final in Jesus Christ and his Cross*, done once for all; really effected in the spiritual world in such a way that in history the great victory is not still to be won; it has been won in reality, and has only to be followed up and secured in actuality. In the spiritual place, in Christ Jesus, in the divine nature, the victory has been won. That is what I mean by using the word “Final” at the close of the list.

---

I will expound these heads as I go along. Let me begin almost at the foundation and say this. Reconciliation has no moral meaning as between finite and infinite—none apart from the

---

78

sense of guilt. The finished reconciliation, the setting up of the New Covenant by Christ, meant that human guilt was once for all robbed of its power to prevent the consummation of the Kingdom of God. It is the sense of guilt that we have to get back today for the soul’s sake and the kingdom’s; not simply the sense of sin. There are many who recognise the power of sin, the misfortune of it; what they do not recognise is the thing that makes it most sinful, which makes it what it is before God, namely, guilt; which introduces something noxious and not merely deranged, malignant and not merely hostile; the fact that it is transgression against not simply God, not simply against a loving God, but against a holy God. Everything begins and ends in our Christian theology with the holiness of God. That is the idea we have to get back into our current religious thinking. We have been living for

---

P.T. FORSYTH

the last two or three generations, our most progressive side has been living, upon the love of God, God's love to us. And it was very necessary that it should be appreciated. Justice had not been done to it. But we have now to take a step further, and we have to saturate our people in the years that are to come as thoroughly with the idea of God's *holiness* as they have been saturated with the

79

idea of God's love I have sometimes thought when preaching that I saw a perceptible change come over my audience when I turned from speaking about the love of God to speak about the holiness of God. There was a certain indescribable relaxing of interest, as though their faces should say, "What, have we not had enough of these incorrigible and obtrusive theologians who will not let us rest with the love of God but must go on talking about things that are so remote and professional as his holiness!" All that has to be changed. We have to stir the interest of our congregations as much with the holiness of God as the Church was stirred—first with the justice and then latterly with the love of God. It is the holiness of God which makes sin guilt. It is the holiness of God that necessitates the work of Christ, that calls for it, and that provides it. What is the great problem? The great problem in connection with atonement is not simply to show how it was necessary to the fatherly love, but how it was necessary to a holy love, how a holy love not only must have it but must make it. The problem is how Christ can be a revelation not of God's love simply, but of God's holy love. Without a holy God there would be no problem of atonement. It is the

80

holiness of God's love that necessitates the atoning Cross.

I say, then, that the reconciliation has no meaning apart from guilt which must stir the anger of a holy God and produce separation from him. That is, the reconciliation rests upon a justification, upon an atonement. Those were the great Pauline ideas which were rediscovered in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and became the backbone of the Reformation. They were practically rediscovered. Look at the movement in the history of the Church's thought in this respect. You have three great points: you might name them—the first from Augustine, the second from Luther; for the third, our modern time, we have as yet no such outstanding name. The first great movement towards the rediscovery of Paul was by Augustine. Do you know that Paul went under after the first century? He went under for historic reasons I cannot stay to explain. It is a remarkable thing how he was kept in the canon

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

of Scripture. Paul went under, and for centuries remained under, and he had to be rediscovered. That was done by Augustine. Again he went under, and Luther rediscovered him. And he is being rediscovered again today. Augustine's rediscovery was this,

81

justification by grace alone; Luther's side of the rediscovery was justification by faith alone—faith in the Cross, that is to say, faith in grace. What is our modern point of emphasis? Justification by holiness and for it alone. That is to say, as I have already pointed out, reconciliation is something that comes from the whole holy God, and it covers the whole of life, and it is not exhausted by the idea of atonement only or redemption only. It is the new-created race being brought to permanent, vital, life-deep communion with the holy God. Only holiness can be in communion with the holy God. We have to be saved—not indeed from morality, because we can only be saved by the moral; that is the grand sheet-anchor of our modern theories. However we be saved, we can only be saved in a way consistent with God's morality—that is to say, with holiness. The rescue is not from morality; but it is from mere moralism, from a religion three parts conduct. We are saved through the Spirit of a new life, an indiscernible life in Jesus Christ. That is the grand new thing in Christianity (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Reconciliation, then, has no meaning apart from a sense of guilt, that guilt which is involved

82

in our justification. I am going to try to expound that before I am done. I want to note here that it means not so much that God is reconciled, but that God is the Reconciler. It is the neglect of that truth which has produced so much scepticism in the matter of the atonement. So much of our orthodox religion has come to talk as though God were reconciled by a third party. We lose sight of this great central verse, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." As we are both living persons, that means that there was reconciliation on God's side as well as ours; but wherever it was, it was effected by God himself in himself. In what sense was God reconciled within himself? We come to that surely as we see that the first charge upon reconciling grace is to put away guilt, reconciling by not imputing trespasses. Return to our cardinal verse, 2 Corinthians 5:19. In reconciliation the ground for God's wrath or God's judgement was put away. Guilt rests on God's

P.T. FORSYTH

charging up sin; reconciliation rests upon God's non-imputation of sin; God's non-imputation of sin rests upon Christ being made sin for us. You have thus three stages in this magnificent verse. God's reconciliation rested upon this, that on his Eternal Son, who knew no sin in his experience,

83

(although he knew more about sin than any man who has ever lived), sin's judgement fell. Him who knew no sin by experience, God made sin. That is to say, God by Christ's own consent identified him with sin in treatment though not in feeling. God did not judge him, but judged sin upon his head. He never once counted him sinful; he was always well pleased with him; it was part, indeed, of his own holy self-complacency. Christ was made sin for us, as he could never have been if he had been made a sinner. It was sin that had to be judged, more even than the sinner, in a world-salvation; and God made Christ sin in this sense, that God as it were took him in the place of sin, rather than of the sinner, and judged the sin upon him; and in putting him there he really put himself there in our place (Christ being what he was); so that the divine judgement of sin was real and effectual. That is, it fell where it was perfectly understood, owned, and praised, and had the sanctifying effect of judgement, the effect of giving holiness at last its own. God made him to be sin in treatment though not in feeling, so that holiness might be perfected in judgement, and we might become the righteousness of God in him; so that we might have in God's sight righteousness by our living

84

union with Christ, righteousness which did not belong to us actually, naturally, and finally. Our righteousness is as little ours individually as the sin on Christ was his. The thief on the cross, for instance—I do not suppose he would have turned what we call a saint if he had survived; though saved, he would not have become sinless all at once. And the great saint, Paul, had sin working in him long after his conversion. Yet by union with Christ they were made God's righteousness, they were integrated into the New Goodness; God made them partakers of his eternal love to the ever-holy Christ. That is a most wonderful thing. Men like Paul, and far worse men than Paul, by the grace of God, and by a living faith, become partakers of that same eternal love which God from everlasting and to everlasting bestowed upon his only-begotten Son. It is beyond words.

It was not a case of wiping a slate. Sin is graven in. You cannot wipe off sin. It goes into the tissue of the spiritual being. And it alters things for both parties. Guilt affected both God and man. It was not a case of destroying an

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

unfortunate prejudice we had against God. It was not a case of putting right a misunderstanding we had of God.

85

“You are afraid of God,” you hear easy people say; “it is a great mistake to be afraid of God. There is nothing to be afraid of. God is love.” But there is everything in the love of God to be afraid of. Love is not holy without judgement. It is the love of holy God that is the consuming fire. It was not simply a case of changing our method, or thought, our prejudices, or the moral direction of our soul. It was not a case of giving us courage when we were cast down, showing us how groundless our depression was. It was not that. If that were all it would be a comparatively light matter.

If that were all, Paul could only have spoken about the reconciliation of single souls, not about reconciliation of the whole world as a unity. He could not have spoken about a finished reconciliation to which every age of the future was to look back as its glorious and fontal past. In the words of that verse which I am constantly pressing, “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.” Observe, first, “the world” is the unity which corresponds to the reconciled unity of “himself”; and second, that he was not trying, not taking steps to provide means of reconciliation, not opening doors of reconciliation if we would only walk in

86

at them, not labouring toward reconciliation, not (according to the unhappy phrase) waiting to be gracious, but “God was in Christ reconciling,” actually reconciling, finishing the work. It was not a tentative, preliminary affair (Romans 11:15). Reconciliation was finished in Christ’s death. Paul did not preach a gradual reconciliation. He preached what the old divines used to call the finished work. He did not preach a gradual reconciliation which was to become the reconciliation of the world only piecemeal, as men were induced to accept it, or were affected by the gospel. He preached something done once for all—a reconciliation which is the base of every soul’s reconcilment, not an invitation only. What the Church has to do is to appropriate the thing that has been finally and universally done. We have to enter upon the reconciled position, on the new creation. Individual men have to enter upon that reconciled position, that new covenant, that new relation, which already, in virtue of Christ’s Cross, belonged to the race as a whole. I will even use for convenience’ sake the word totality. (People turn up their noses at a word like that, and they say it smells of philosophy. Well,

P.T. FORSYTH

philosophy has not a bad smell! You cannot have a proper theology unless you have a

87

philosophy. You cannot accurately express the things that theology handles most deeply. The misfortune of our ministry is that it comes to theology without the proper preliminary culture—with a pious or literary culture only. I am going to use this word totality, and say that the first bearing of Christ's work was upon the race as a totality. The first thing reconciliation does is to change man's corporate relation to God. Then when it is taken home individually it changes our present attitude. Christ, as it were, put us into the eternal Church; the Holy Spirit teaches us how to behave properly in the Church.

---

I go on to show that reconciliation has its effect not upon man only, but upon God also. That is a difficulty to many people. And, indeed, we require to be somewhat discriminating here. If you say bluntly that Christ reconciled God, it is more false than true. I do not say it is untrue. It is the people who want plain black and white, false or true, that do so much mischief in these matters. It is the thin, commonsense rationalists, orthodox or heterodox. It is the people who put a pistol to your head and say, "I am a plain man and I

88

want a plain yes or no," that cause so much difficulty. Christ always refused to answer with a pistol to his head. It was the whole manner of his ministry to refuse to give a plain answer when asked a blunt question. We see that in Peter's discovery and confession, "Thou art the Christ," and in Christ's joyful answer, "Blessed Simon." Peter in his confession had crowned what Christ had laboured to live in upon them, but what he had never said plainly in so many words—"I am the Christ." He lived it into them and made them discover it. Repeatedly he was asked, "Give us signs," "Give us yes or no," and he always refused. That would be sight, not faith. A plain yes or no is sight. But faith is insight into Christ. In this region a plain yes or no is somewhat out of place. So, therefore, while it is not false to say that Christ reconciled God, it is more false than true as it is mostly put. You do not get it in the Bible. It would be a useful exercise to go through the Bible and see what proofs you can get of Christ reconciling God. If we talk about Christ reconciling God in the way some do, we suggest that there was some third

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

party coming between us and God, reconciling God on the one hand and us on the other, like a daysman. That is one

---

89

great mischief that is done by the popular theories of atonement. God can never be regarded as the object of some third party's intervention in reconciling. If it were so, what would happen? There would be no grace. It would be a bought thing, a procured thing, the work of a pardon-broker; and the one essential thing about grace is that it is unbought and unpurchasable. It is the freest thing in heaven or earth. It would not be free if procured by some third party. The "daysman" metaphor has been much abused. It is a Scriptural figure, but we get it in the Old Testament, in Job, the idea being that of one who, in the case of a dispute, puts one hand on one head and the other on another and brings two persons together. That is a crude version of the Christian idea of reconciliation. The grace of God would not then be the prime and moving cause. It would not be spontaneous and creative, it would be negotiated grace; and that is a contradiction in terms. Mediation can never mean that. In paganism the gods were mollified. God, our God, could never be mollified. There is no mollification of God, no placation of God. Atonement was not the placating of God's anger. Even in the old economy we are told, "I have *given* you the blood to make atonement."

---

90

Given! Did you ever see the force of it? "I have given you the blood to make atonement. This is an institution which I set up for you to comply with, set it up for purposes of my own, on principles of my own, but it is my gift." The Lord himself provided the lamb for the burnt offering. Atonement in the Old Testament was not the placating of God's anger, but the sacrament of God's grace. It was the expression of God's anger on the one hand and the expressing and putting in action of God's grace on the other hand. The effect of atonement was to cover sin from God's eyes, so that it should no longer make a visible breach between God and his people. The actual ordinance was established, they held, by God himself. He covered the sin. Sacrifices were not desperate efforts and surrenders made by terrified people in the hope of propitiating an angry deity. The sacrifices were in themselves prime acts of obedience to God's means of grace and his expressed will. If you want to follow that out further, perhaps I may be forgiven if I were to allude to the last chapter in my book, *The Cruciality of the Cross* (1909), in which there is a fuller discussion of the particular point, and especially of what is morally meant by the blood of Christ.

P.T. FORSYTH

91

---

But some one immediately asks, Is there then no objective atonement? It is a question worth deep attention. A great many people say Christianity wrecks chiefly on the idea of objective atonement. How cheap the objection is in many cases, how easy and common it is! If you find somebody who is making it his mission in life to pull to pieces the venerable theology of the Catholic Church, and show how poor a thing it is in the light of the thirty years in which he has lived, you will hear it put likely enough in such terms as these: that objective atonement is sheer paganism. The Christian idea of atonement is identified offhand with the pagan idea of atonement, as a Hyde Park lecturer might. And when you have done that at the outset, it is the simplest thing to show how false and absurd and pagan such theology is. It is said further, that the whole Church has become paganised in this way, and has spoken as though God could be mollified by something offered to him. The criticism is sometimes ignorant, sometimes ungenerous, sometimes, culpable. If such language has ever been held, it has only been by sections of the Church, sections that have gone wrong in the direction of unqualified extremes. You have extravagancies, remember,

92

even in rational heresy. Has the Church on the whole ever really forgotten that it is in the mercy of God that all our hopes begin and end? And even if the Church had gone further wrong than it has done about this, we do not live upon the Church, but upon the gospel and upon the Bible. We live in and through the Church. We cannot do without it. We must get back a great deal more respect for it. But we do not live on the Church; we live on the word of the gospel which is in the Bible.

---

What is the real objective element in the Bible's gospel? What is the real objective element in atonement? We are tempted, I say, to declare that it was the offering of a sacrifice to God outside of him and us, the offering of a sacrifice to God by somebody not God yet more than a single man. That is the natural, the pagan notion of objective atonement. But the real meaning of an objective atonement is that God himself made the complete sacrifice.

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

The real objectivity of the atonement is not that it was made to God, but by God. It was atonement made by God, not by man. When I use the word objective, I do not mean objective to you or to me. You are objective to me, and I to you.

---

93

That is not the idea. Let us learn to think on the scale of the whole race. What is objective to that? The deadly kind of subjectivity is the kind that is engrossed with individuals, or with humanity, and does not allow for God. It is the egotism of the race. And the real objectivity is that which is objective to the whole human race, over against it, and not merely facing you or me within it. The real objective element in the atonement, therefore, is that God made it and gave it finished to man, not that it was made to God by man. Any atonement made by man would be subjective, however much it might be made for man by his brother, or by a representative of entire Humanity.

---

But we have a certain farther difficulty to face here. If it was God that made the atonement—which it certainly was in Christianity—then was it not made to man? Can God reconcile himself? And can the atonement mean anything more than the attuning of man to God—that is to say, of individual men in their subjective experience? God then says to each soul, “Be reconciled. See, I have put my anger away.” Can such attuning of himself by God have for its results anything more than individual

---

94

conversion? Now, conversion means much, but it does not mean the whole of Christianity. Reconciliation means the life-communion of the race. But, if God made the atonement, it might seem that the result and effect of this atonement could only be reached gradually by the attuning of individual men to God. It would seem to destroy the totality of the race, or (to employ another word even more useful) the solidarity of the race. That would seem to be the effect; and it is such a serious effect, for this reason: that it affects the universality of Christ’s work. Whatever affects the universality of Christ’s work cuts the ground from under aggressive Christianity, from under missions, whether at home or abroad. They cannot thrive except upon a faith which means the universality of Christ’s work, which means again the solidarity, the organic unity, of the whole human race. And the conversion of a race is a work that exceeds conversion and is redemption. About that the Old Testament and the New Testament are at one.

---

P.T. FORSYTH

But, you say, you do not have the solidarity of the human race in the Old Testament. Well, you do, and you do not. What you have face to face with God in the Old Testament is a collective

---

95

nation, Israel. We shall never read the Old Testament with true understanding until we realise that. That is one of the great things modern scholarship has brought home to us—that the *vis-à-vis* of God in the Old Testament is Israel and not the individual Jew. Gradually, as the Old Testament develops in spiritual intimacy, you have this changing and becoming intensely individual, as in the later Psalms. In Jeremiah it became so especially. The greatest prefiguration of Christ's individual solitude in the Old Testament is Jeremiah. But both of them were representative or collective individuals. They condensed the people. The object that faced God in the Old Testament in the main was not primarily the individual soul, it was the soul of the nation of Israel, even though it was sometimes reduced to a remnant. What took place when Israel made the great refusal of Christ? There was set up another collective unity, the Church, the new Israel, the spiritual Israel, the landless, homeless. Israel, whose home was in him, the universal Israel, the new Humanity of the new covenant. The Church became the prophecy and prefiguration of the unity of Humanity. It is through the Church alone that the unity of Humanity can be consummated, because it is possible only

---

96

through the gospel. And the preacher of this gospel in the world is the collective Church.

We must, therefore, avoid every idea of atonement which seems to reduce it to God's dealing with a mass of individuals instead of with the race as a whole—instead of a racial, a social, a collective salvation, in which alone each individual has his place and part. Our Protestant theology has been too individualist, too little collectivist. And that has had serious social consequences as well as theological. The basis of a social salvation is the final redemption in one act of the total race. And that act was the Cross of Christ.

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

97

---

## Reconciliation, Atonement, and Judgement

---

98

99

## IV

## Reconciliation, Atonement, and Judgement

**T**HE point at which I broke off yesterday was this. I was pointing out that objective atonement is absolutely necessary. Of course, it is quite necessary also that we should know what is meant by an objective atonement. The real objective element in atonement is not that something was offered to God, but that God made the offering. And in this connection I hinted that my remarks today and tomorrow would have to follow the idea also, that God's atonement initially was made on behalf of the race, and on behalf of individuals in so far as they were members of the race. The first charge upon Christ and his Cross was the reconciliation of the race, and of its individuals by implication.

We start today, then, from the position that God made the atonement. This (we saw) suggests

---

100

a number of questions, not to say difficulties. If God made the atonement, but reconciliation meant no more than simply the moving and attuning of individual men in their subjective experience, it might seem as though it destroyed the solidarity of mankind and made it granular. And the peril there is that whatever destroys that, destroys the universality of Christ's work. But that atomism is not the Gospel. To reduce the reconciliation merely to the aggregate of individual conversions would be a total misrepresentation of New Testament reconciliation, which is both solidary and final.

Then there is another difficulty. If we say that the one object of the atonement was not the reconciliation of God, but the reconciliation of man

---

P.T. FORSYTH

to God, then it looks as though the work of Christ became only the grand heliograph from divine heights, the chief word in what I might call a language of signs; as though it were only the leading expression of God's will towards men, instead of something actually done, and not merely said or shown, by God, something really done from the depth of God who is the action of the world, something eternally changing the whole situation, and destiny, and responsibility of our race. If God in Christ

---

101

simply said the most powerful word about his goodwill, his placability, and his readiness to forgive, that would destroy the permanence of Christ—the depth of his work, and the height of his place. Thus God would be *saying* more than he *did*; and we have a natural and proper difficulty in thoroughly trusting people who say more than they do. If Christ were simply an expression of God's love, then his Cross would simply be what is called an object-lesson of God's love; or it would simply be a witness to the serious way in which God takes man's sin; or it might even be no more than the expression of the strong conviction of Jesus about it. We are exposed to the danger there always is when we make revelation a word rather than a deed, something said instead of something done, when we make it manifestation only and not redemption. The work of Christ would be only something educational, or at most impressive. And what happens then? If the work of Christ is only impressively educational, if the need and value of it ceases when we have recognised its meaning, when we have taken God's word for it in Christ that he does really love us, what happens then? Why, as soon as the lesson had been learnt, the work of Christ might be

---

102

left behind. There are a great many people today who are Christian in a way, but have very loose ideas as to what is involved centrally in their Christianity. Many of them are in this position I describe—they think they can ignore Christ, and the work of Christ since they have assimilated the lesson these taught. If the Cross is a kind of practical parable which God set forth of his love and his willingness to save, then when the parable has done its work it can be forgotten. When the lesson has been taught, the example can be put away into the school store-room until we want it again. It is exhausted for the time being, until somebody else comes who needs the same lesson. In that case the work of Christ simply sinks to the level of other valuable events in the history of religion. It is not fontal but episodic. It represents the transition from Judaism to a religion of Humanity. It represents

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

a great movement in the history of religion, when religion ceased to be national and particularist, and became universal, when it ceased to be ritual and became spiritual. The death of Christ would thus be a great monument in the past, which fades out of sight as we surmount it and leave it behind; and it does not retain a permanent meaning and function at the centre of our faith.

---

 103

I said that the work of Christ meant not only an action on man, it meant an action on God. Yet I pointed out that it was more false than true to say that Christ and his death reconciled God to man. I said that we must in some way construe the matter as God reconciling himself. It was out of the question to think of any reconciliation effected upon God by a third party standing between God and man. God could not be reconciled by man nor by one neither God nor man. The only alternative, therefore, is that God should reconcile himself. But then is there not something in that which seems a little forced and unnatural? Did God have to compel himself to change his feeling about us? Did he force himself to be gracious? There is something wrong here surely, something that needs adjustment, explanation, restatement in some way.

Are we obliged to suppose that if God did reconcile himself it was in the sense of changing his own heart and affection towards us? I have pointed out that the heart of God towards us, his gracious disposition towards us, was from his own holy eternity; that grace is of the unchangeable. God in that respect had not to be changed. Was he changed at all then? If

---

 104

his heart was not changed, what remained in him to be changed, what was changed in connection with the work of Christ?

There was a change. And I am going to ask you to recognise here another of those valuable distinctions of which the man without the evangelical experience and its theological discipline is so impatient. As I work my way through the difficulties and questions that present themselves, over and over again I perceive that many of the difficulties that seem so serious to some turn entirely upon some valuable distinction that has been ignored, often for lack of deep religion or due professional education. Of course the man in the street says, as soon as he is asked to distinguish, that that is getting into the region of subtleties. Never mind the man in the street. The distinguished

P.T. FORSYTH

person for him is the person with the least distinction from himself, the person who gives him most satisfaction with least trouble, the person who works in black and white with no shades. Besides, the man in the street is not devoted to his Bible, nor to getting into the interior of the Bible, as you preachers are. We must take our way, God's way, and follow the subtle and searching Holy Spirit as he leads and speaks in and through the questions that arise to our earnest thought

---

105

concerning Christ's death. And the man in the street must be left to the grace which has taken us in from the street.

The distinction I ask you to observe is between a change of feeling and a change of treatment, between affection and discipline, between friendly feeling and friendly relations. God's feeling toward us never needed to be changed. But God's treatment of us, God's practical relation to us—that had to change. I have pointed out that the relation between God and man in reconciliation is a personal one, and that, where you have real personal relation and personal communion, if there is change on one side there must be change on the other. The question is as to the nature of the change. We have barred out the possibility of its being a change of affection, of hatred into grace. God never ceased to love us even when he was most angry and severe with us. It will not do to abolish the reality of God's anger towards us. True love is quite capable of being angry, and must be angry and even sharp with its beloved children. Let us fix our attention more closely upon this distinction of mood and manner.

---

106

Take the parable of the prodigal for illustration. There are those who say you have the whole of the gospel really in the parable of the prodigal son, that that was the culmination of Christ's grand revelation of God. Well, if that were so the wonder to me is, first, that the apostles never seem to have used it; and, second, that having delivered this parable Christ did not at once consider his mission discharged and return to heaven. Or, on the other hand, why did he not continue to live to a ripe and useful age, reiterating in various forms and in different settings this waiting (but inert) love and grace of God? We are moved sometimes to think he might have done well had he not provoked death so early, had he remained, like John, to seventy or ninety years of age continually publishing, applying, and spreading the message

---

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

which he gave his disciples. But you have not the whole gospel in the parable of the prodigal son. What is the function of a parable? It is one of the great discoveries and lessons taught us by modern scholarship, that parables are not allegories, because they exist for the sake of one central idea. While we may allow ourselves, under the suggestion of the Holy Spirit, to receive hints of edifying truth from this or

107

the other phase or detail of the parable, we have chiefly to ask, What was it in the mind of Christ for the sake of which he uttered this parable? Each parable puts in an ample ambit one central idea. Now the one ruling idea in the parable of the prodigal son is the idea of the centrality, the completeness, the unreservedness, the freeness, fullness, whole-heartedness of God's grace—the absolute fullness of it, rather than the method of its action. But however a parable might preach that fullness, it took the Cross and all its train to give it effect, to put it into action, life, and history, to charge it with the Spirit. Those who tell us that the whole gospel is embodied in the parable say, You observe nothing is suggested in the parable about the Cross and the Atonement; therefore the Cross and the Atonement are subsequent and gratuitous additions, confusing the gospel of grace. But that turns Christ into a mere preacher, instead of the centre of the world's history. Bear in mind also that this parable was spoken by the Christ who had the Cross in the very structure of his personality as its vocation, and at the root, therefore, of all his words. That Cross was deep embedded in the very structure of Christ's Person, because nowadays you cannot separate his Person from his vocation,

108

from the work he came to do, and the words he came to speak. The Cross was not simply a fate awaiting Christ in the future; it pervaded subliminally his holy Person. He was born for the Cross. It was his genius, his destiny. It was quite inevitable that, in a world like this, One holy as Jesus was holy should come to the Cross. The parable was spoken by One in whom the Cross and all it stands for were latent in his idea of God; and it became patent, came to the surface, became actual, and practical, and powerful in the stress of man's crisis and the fullness of God's time. That is an important phrase. Christ himself came in a fullness of time. The Cross which consummated and crowned Christ came in its fullness of time. The time was not full during Christ's life for preaching an atonement that life could never make. Hence as to the *method* of God's free and flowing grace the parable has nothing to say. It does not even say that the father went seeking the prodigal. The seeking

P.T. FORSYTH

grace of God we find there as little as the redeeming grace. And so also you have not the mode of grace's action on a *world*. But, speaking of what you do have in the parable, the father knows no change of feeling towards the prodigal; yet could he go

---

109

on making no difference? Could he go on treating the prodigal as though he never had become a prodigal? He did not certainly when he returned; and as little could he before. His heart followed the prodigal, but his relations, his confidence, his intercourse were with his brother. So long as the son is prodigal he cannot be treated as though he were otherwise. Even repentance needs some guarantee of permanence. The father's heart is the same, but his treatment must be different. Cases have been known where the father had to expel the black sheep from the family for the sake of the others. Loving the poor creature all the same, he yet found it quite impossible, in the interests of the whole family, to treat him as though he were like the rest. So God needed no placation, but he could not exercise his kindness to the prodigal world, he certainly could not restore communion with its individuals, without doing some act which permanently altered the relation. And this is what set up that world's reconciliation with him. It was set up by an act of crisis, of judgement.

---

Remember always we are dealing with the world in the first instance and not with individuals.

---

110

I constantly come back upon that, for the orthodox and their critics forget it alike. I suppose the prodigal was a slave, I suppose he had sold himself to that vile work of swine-feeding. When he returned I suppose he ran away from his master. But the prodigal world, of course, could not run away from its master, it could not run away from the power that it was enslaved to. "Myself am hell." Supposing now the prodigal had not been able to run away. Supposing he had been guarded as a convict is guarded, then he could only come back by being bought off. As soon as you go beyond the one theme of the parable, the absolute heartiness of grace, and begin to think of grace's methods with a world, this point must be faced by all who are more than pooh-pooh sentimentalists in their religion. We have to deal with a world in a bondage it could not break. If the prodigal could not have arisen to go to his father; if the elder brother had sold up the whole farm, reduced

---

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

himself to poverty, taken the sum in his hand, followed the prodigal into the far country, and there spent the whole amount in buying his brother's manumission from his master before a judge; and if it was all done by mutual purpose and consent of himself and his father; would not that act

111

be a great and effective thing, not so much in producing repentance but in a harder matter—in destroying a lien and making absolute certainty of the father's forgiveness? He is sure because the father not only says but pays. His mere repentance could not make him, sure, could not place him at home again, could not put him where he set out. His mere repentance could turn his heart to his father, but it could not break the bar and fill him with certainty of his father's love and forgiveness. And that is what the sinner wants, and what the great and classic penitents find it so hard to believe. Now, the parable tells us of the freeness of God's grace, and its fullness, but the Cross enacts it and inserts it in real history. It shows to what a length that grace could go in dealing with a difficulty otherwise insuperable when we turn from a single prodigal to a world. The act which I have described by a New Testament extension of the parable—the act of Christ's Cross—is not simply to produce individual repentance, but it has its great effect upon the relation of the whole world to God. And the judgement, the payment, was on that scale. I will show you later that it was not pain that was paid but holy obedience.

What the elder brother does in the supposition

112

I have made is twofold. First, he secures the liberation, he deals with the equitable conditions of the release. Secondly, he also acts upon the prodigal's heart and confidence. In the first case he meets certain judicial conditions, certain social conditions, ethical conditions, bound up with the existing order, the law of society in which the prodigal was living. But it is said sometimes that there the analogy fails, because the elder son, acting for the father, in my extension of the story, has to deal with a law which is outside his control and outside the father's control; he has to deal with the law of society, with the law of the land where the prodigal was. Whereas, if you come to think about God, there can be no social and moral conditions which are outside his control. There, it is said, your illustration breaks down. God could ignore any such impediments at his loving will. Now, that is just the crucial mistake that you make, that even Kant does not allow us to make. God could do nothing of the kind. So far the omnipotence of God is a limited

P.T. FORSYTH

omnipotence. He could not trifle with his own holiness. He could will nothing against his holy nature, and he could not abolish the judgement bound up with it. Nothing in the compass of the divine nature could enable him

113

to abolish a moral law, the law of holiness. That would be tampering with his own soul. It had to be dealt with. Is the law of God more loose than the law of society? Can it be taken liberties with, played with, and put aside at the impulse even of love? How little we should come to think of God's love if that were possible! How essential the holiness of that love is to our respect for it and our faith in its unchangeableness! If God's love were not essentially holy love, in course of time mankind would cease to respect it, and consequently to trust it. We need not a fond love, but a love we call trust, and for ever. What love wants is not simply love in response, but respect and confidence. In the bringing up of children today one often wishes they had more training in respect, even if less in affection. God's holy law is his own holy nature. His love is under the condition of eternal respect. It is quite unchangeable. It is just as much outside his operation, so far as abrogation goes, as was the law of the far country to the father of the prodigal.

What was there in the work of Christ which went beyond a mere impressive declaration of a God who could not help being gracious, but fell

114

on the prodigal's neck without more ado? It was solidary judgement. I am urging that the difficulty we have in answering that question is due to our modern individualism. Individualism has done its work for Christianity for the time being, and we are now suffering from its after-effects. We do not realise that we are each one of us saved in a racial salvation. We are each one of us saved in the salvation of the race, in a collectivist redemption. What Christ saved was the whole human race. What he bought, if we may provisionally use the metaphor, was the Church, and not any aggregate of isolated souls. So great is a soul, and so great is its sin, that each man is only saved by an act which at the same time saves the whole world. If you reduce or postpone Christ's effect upon the totality of the world, you are in the long run preparing the way for a poor estimate of the human soul. The more you abolish the significance of Christ's redeeming death once for all, the more you are doing to lower Humanity morally, and make it a less precious thing than

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

the cosmic world around us. My plea is that with no atonement, no solitary judgement of sin, you reduce reconciliation not only to sentiment but to a piecemeal series of individual repentances and conversions, leaving it a problem

115

whether the race as a whole will be saved at last. For the universality of Christianity (so dear to Broad Church) you must have that foregone finality which the New Testament offers in the atonement.

I pointed out to you that in the Old Testament, for the most part, what faced God was not this prophet or that saint, this king or that particular juncture, but Israel. I said that in the subsequent phases of Jewish religion, indeed, that idea has its detail filled in; and in the later psalms, in many of those psalms which we know could only have been written after the captivity, you have pious individualism sometimes expressing itself very strongly. But there the two warring notes were—new individualism and old collectivism; and between these there never came complete reconciliation until Christ came and Christ's work. What have we in that great text, John 3:16? "God so loved *the world*"—the world was the prime object of God's love—"God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." Love in the first instance directed upon the world, but directed upon the world in such a way that it should be taken home in every individual experience. Mark the two words, "the world" and "whosoever."

116

Dwell upon the contrast. God loved not this or that individual, or group of individuals, only. "God so loved the world" that he did something to it in such a way that every individual "whosoever" should receive the benefit, and receive it in the only way which made a world of saved individuals possible. You can never compound a saved world out of any number of saved individuals. But God did so save the world as to carry individual salvation in the same act. The Son of God was not an individual merely; he was the representative of the whole race, and its *vis-à-vis*, on its own scale. So that, in Ephesians, the Church, in rising to Christ, had to acquire the fullness of a complete and colossal man. No individual prophet of salvation could save the world. He could not be capable of a pity great enough, or a love. The world could only be saved by somebody as large as the world, and indeed larger. If he could not save the world he could make no *eternal* salvation of any individual. It is universal, eternal salvation every way—universal not by the

P.T. FORSYTH

addition of all units, but in a solidary sense. What we are tempted to think of in our common version of Christianity is a mass of people, great or small, a mass of individuals, each one of whom makes his own terms with God and gets

117

discharge of his sin. It is salvation by private bargain. In conversion every individual makes his own peace with God through Jesus Christ, so that the work of God becomes a mere change of attitude, feeling, or temper on the side of man after man. That is not the New Testament idea.

Again, in speaking of the change in God, Christ has been represented as enabling God to forgive by enabling him to adjust his two attributes of justice and mercy within himself. Some theologians of the Reformation—Melancthon for one—spoke of Christ in that fashion. But we have entirely outgrown that way of thinking and talking about it. It has produced much difficulty and scepticism. What does it proceed upon? It proceeds upon a certain definition of an attribute, as though an attribute were something loose within God which he could manipulate—as though the attributes of God were not God himself, unchangeable God, in certain relations. The attributes of God are not things within himself which he could handle and adjust. An attribute of God is God himself behaving, with all his unity, in a particular way in a particular situation. God is a thinking God, let us say. He has the attribute of thought. Does that mean that the attribute of thought could be taken away,

118

that God could divest himself of it? No. The thought of God is simply God thinking. So also the love of God is not an attribute of God; it is God loving. The holiness of God is not an attribute of God; it is the whole God himself as holy. There is nothing in the Bible about the strife of attributes. Rather remember 1 John 1:9, “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” It is in the exercise of his faithfulness to himself and his observance of justice that he should forgive. It lies in the very holiness that condemns. There is a similar text in the Psalms, “Thou art merciful; Thou givest to every man according to his work.” He is the faithful and just to forgive. There needed no adjustment of his justice with his forgiveness. So also in Isaiah, “A just God and a Saviour.” There can therefore be no strife of attributes.

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

---

What, then, does it mean when we hear about the anger of God being turned away? To begin with, the anger of God means a great deal more than his passion, his temper, his mode of feeling, more than anger as an affection. The anger of God in the Bible means much rather the judgement of God in the reaction of his moral and spiritual order. The judgement of God

119

is perfectly compatible with his continued love, just as a father's punishment is perfectly compatible with his love for his children. The father has to discipline his children. He institutes certain laws, the children disobey; they must be punished, or, using the more dignified term, judged. The anger of God: we shall get the most meaning out of it when we think of it as the judgement of God, the exalted, inflexible judgement of God.

---

Taking a step further, it is judgement on the world. It seems at first sight as though it were meaningless to speak as if God could be wroth with the world and yet gracious and loving to individuals. But I may be very angry with a political party, yet I cherish respect and love for individuals belonging to that party. We must be on our guard against narrow, individual views, against treating individuals according to their public and collective condemnation. We are created, redeemed, judged as members of a race or of a Church. Salvation is personal, but it is not individual. (There is another distinction for you, if you have come in off the street.) It is personal in its appropriation but collective in its nature. What did the Reformation stand for? Not for religious individualism.

120

But I hear some one asking in the back of his mind, Was not the Reformation the charter of private judgement and individual independence? It was nothing of the kind. It was the charter of personal direct faith and its freedom. What the Reformation did was to turn religion from being a thing mainly institutional into a thing mainly personal. The reformers were as strong as their opponents about the necessity of the Church for the soul—though as its home, not its master. They were not individualists. Individualism is fatal to faith. It was the backbone of the rationalism and

P.T. FORSYTH

atheism of the French Revolution. The Reformation stands for personal religion and social religion and not for religious individualism.

There is no such thing as an absolute individual. What is the change that takes place when we are converted? Our change is really from one membership to another, from membership of the world to membership of the Church. When we become a member of the Church we are not really changed from individualism, but from membership of the world. It is membership either way. The greatest egoist and self-seeker is a member of the world. He could not indulge his egotism if it were not for the society in the midst of which he lives and into which he is

121

articulated. He is a member of the world who exploits his membership instead of serving with it. When we are converted we are not converted from a sheer and absolute individual. There never was such a person. Certainly Robinson Crusoe was not. We are converted from membership of the world to membership of Christ. Before our conversion and after we belong. We are not absolute, solitary individuals. We are in a society, an organism. We are made by the past. And our selfish, godless actions and influence go out, radiate, affect the organism as they could not do were we absolute units. They spread far beyond our memory or control. In the same way we are acted upon by the other people. We are members one of another both for evil and for good. When you are told that evil is only selfishness it is worth while bearing this in mind. Even as selfish men, as egoists, we belong—only to a pagan order instead of to Christ. The selfish man is a member of a kingdom of evil. There is no such thing as an absolute individual. Hence, to save us, to reconcile us, involves the whole race we belong to. Before God that race is an organic unity. It is not a mere mass of atoms joined together by various arbitrary relations, sympathies, and affinities. Hence, as the race before

122

God is one, a personal God is able to do for the race some one thing which at the same time is good for every person in it.

But now, if the race is a unity, where does its unity lie? Does it lie in our elementary affections for each other, in the palpable relationships of natural life with our parents, brothers, lovers, and friends? Or is the unity of the race simply its capacity for being organised by skilful engineers? Is the unity of the race like the unity of machines? No. The unity of the race is a moral unity.

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

Therefore it is a unity of conscience. If you want to find the trunk out of which all the loves and practices of humanity proceed, you must go to conscience at the centre. That is where the unity of Humanity lies. It is in the conscience, where man is member of a vast moral world. It is the one changeless order of the moral world, emerging in conscience, that makes man universal. What have you to preach if you have no gospel that goes to the foundations of human conscience? What ground have you for a social religion? The most universal God is one that goes there, not to the heart in the sense of affections, but to the conscience. The great

123

motive for missions of every high kind is not sentiment, but salvation. It is dangerous to take your theology from poets and literary people. You quote, "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." Well, if you are going to build a religion on that, it will have a very short life. In the long run nature means anarchy when taken by and for itself. But it was never meant to be taken by itself. It was meant to go in an eternal context with super-nature. It is not the touch of nature that makes us kin enough for religion, for eternity, but the touch, and more than a touch, of the supernatural—not nature, but grace. What makes the world God's world is the action and unity of God's moral order of which our conscience speaks.

Now, if that order be broken, how can it be healed? If I slit the canvas of this tent it can be patched. I make a fissure, but it is not irremediable. I simply get some one to stitch it up. At the worst I can have a new width put in. But if the moral order, and its universal solidarity, its holiness, is broken, how can that be healed? That cannot be patched up. It is not merely a rent in a tissue, a gap in a process, which the same process goes on to heal into a scar. The moral law differs from all natural law in having in it a demand, a claim, an "ought" of a

124

universal kind. It is all of one piece. We use the word "law" in a loose kind of way. We apply the same word to gravitation and to the moral law of retribution. It is that ambiguity of terms which leads us astray. The moral law differs from every other law in having a demand, and a universal demand, a claim upon us for ever. And that has to be made good as well as the rents and bruises in us from our own collision with it. It is not a gap that has to be made good and sound. It is a claim, because we are here in a moral and not a natural world. It is one thing to make good a gap and another thing to make good a claim. The claim must be met. It will not do simply to draw the edges

P.T. FORSYTH

together by mere amendment, to have God here and man there, and gradually bring them together till they unite. It is two moral persons with moral passions we have to do with. It is moral relationship that is in question, communion, trustful mutuality, is the object of the divine requirement. It is a case of moral, holy reconciliation. It is the expression of God's holy personality whenever God makes his claim. It is himself in holy, changeless personality that says, "Thou shalt." Then the claim can only be honoured by personality of acknowledgement. But what does that mean? Some

125

confession, some compunction—"I have sinned?" That is a poor acknowledgement of God's holiness. It was neither in word nor in feeling that we wounded that, but in life and deed. It must be acknowledged in like fashion—practically. The holiness of God is the sum of all his action and relation to the world; and the acknowledgement of it must be made in like action. Do we acknowledge the holiness of God's infinite law simply when its penalty wrings from poor us a confession of sin? We acknowledge natural law in spite of ourselves when we suffer its penalty amid our rebellion. But the acknowledgement of moral, of holy law is something different. It must be actively acknowledged—acknowledged not in spite of ourselves but by ourselves, with our whole heart; and it cannot be acknowledged simply by individual, or, indeed, any suffering. For divine judgement it must be acknowledged in kind and scale, and met by a like holiness. Mere suffering is no acknowledgement really; it is a pure sequel; it is not a confession of the moral law and its righteousness, only of its power. Mere suffering is no confession of the holiness of God. God, truly, might and does assert his power upon our defiance by making us suffer. But do you think any holiness, any loving holiness, could

126

be satisfied with making the offender suffer? There is only one thing that can satisfy the holiness of God, and that is holiness—adequate holiness. To judge is to secure that at cost of *any* pain both to the judge and the culprit. But the pain is not the end. Nothing, no penalty, no passionate remorse, no verbal acknowledgement, no ritual, can satisfy the claim of holy law—nothing but holiness, actual holiness, and holiness upon the same scale as the one holy law which was broken. The confession must be adequate. Fix that word in your mind. All your repentance, and all the world's repentance, would not be adequate to satisfying, establishing the broken law of holy God. Confession must be adequate—as Christ's was. We do not now speak of

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

Christ's sufferings as being the *equivalent* of what we deserved, but we speak of his confession of God's holiness, his acceptance of God's judgement, being *adequate* in a way that sin forbade any acknowledgement from us to be. For the only adequate confession of a holy God is perfectly holy man. Wounded holiness can only be met by a personal holiness upon the scale of the race, upon the universal scale of the sinful race, and upon the eternal scale of the holy God who was wounded. It is not enough that the eternal

127

validity of the holy law should be declared as some prophet might arise and declare it, with power to make the world admire, as the great and sublime Kant did. It must take effect. Prophets have arisen who have produced tremendous effect by insisting upon the moral ultimacy in life and things. The greatest prophets of the last century, like George Eliot, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Maurice among ourselves had that as a chief note. But it is not enough that the eternal validity and inflexibility of eternal law should be powerfully, searchingly declared. It must take effect. Its breach must be closed up not merely by recognition, but by judgement. It is not enough that the whole human race should come confessing, "We have offended against Thy holy law." That would recognise the holy law and confess its place, but it would not give it its own, it would not bring to pass that which is essential to holiness, namely, judgement. It would not actually establish holiness in a kingdom, in command of history. You cannot separate the idea of holiness and its kingdom from the idea of judgement. In the Old Testament the final coming of the Great Salvation was always connected with a great judgement, which was therefore not a terror, as we view it, but the

128

grandest hope. If the essence of God is that he should be holy, it is equally essential that he should judge. If he sets up actual holiness it must be by actual adjustment of everything to it. It is not enough that we should say, "Thou art our Judge, we submit and are willing to take the penalty. The wages of sin is death." All that is best and greatest in human life turns upon something more than that. There is a phrase which I never tire of quoting, and it is this: "The dignity of man is better assured if he were broken upon the maintenance of that holiness of God than if it were put aside just to give him an existence." The dignity, the very dignity of man himself is better assured if he were broken upon the maintenance of that holiness of God than if it were put aside arbitrarily, just to let him off with his life. This holy order is as essential to man's greatness as it is to God's; and that is why the holy satisfaction Christ

P.T. FORSYTH

made to God's holiness is in the same act the glorifier of the new humanity. Any religion which leaves out of supreme count the judging holiness of God is making a great contribution to the degradation of man. We need a religion which decides the eternal destiny of man; and unless holiness were practically and adequately established

---

129

—not merely recognised and eulogised, but established—there could be no real, deep, permanent change in the world or the sinner. The, change in the treatment of us by eternal grace must rest on judgement taking effect. Man is not forgiven simply by forgetting and mending, by agreeing that no more is to be said about it. To make little of sin is to belittle the holiness of God; and from a reduced holiness no salvation could come, nor could human dignity remain.

---

Here, perhaps, you want to ask me what I mean exactly by saying that the judgement-death of Christ set up a real and actual kingdom of holiness. It is a point which it is easier for faith to realise than for theology to explain. But the answer would lie along this line: What Christ presented to God for his complete joy and satisfaction was a perfect racial obedience. It was not the perfect obedience of a saintly unit of the race. It was a racial holiness. God's holiness found itself again in the humbled holiness of Christ's "public person." He presented before God a race he created for holiness. Remember that the very nature of our faith in Christ is union with him. The kingdom is set

---

130

up by Christians being united with the work, the victory, the obedience, the holiness of the King. Christ, in his victorious death and risen life, has power to unite the race to himself, and to work his complete holiness into its actual experience and history. He has power, by uniting us with him in his Spirit, to reduce Time to acknowledge in act and fact his conclusive victory of Eternity. When you think of what he did for the race and its history, you must on no account do what the Church and its theology has too often done—you must not omit our living union with him. It is not enough to believe that he gained a victory at a historic point. Christ is the condensation of history. You must go on to think of his summary reconciliation as being worked out to cover the whole of history and enter each soul by the Spirit. You must think of the Cross as setting up a new covenant and a new

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

Humanity, in which Christ dwells as the new righteousness of God. “Christ for us” is only intelligible as “Christ in us.” and we in him. By uniting us to himself and his resurrection in his Spirit he becomes the eternal guarantee of the historical consummation of all things some great day. I return to this later.

131

---

Sometimes, when I have been talking about this claim of God’s holiness, a critic has said: “You are treating the holiness of God as though it were a power outside God, tying his hands.” Nothing of the kind. What is meant by the holiness of God is the holy God. We talk nonsense in a like way about the decrees of God. We say they stand for the wretched survival of an outworn Calvinism, as though they were things that God could handle. Do you think that mighty men such as the great Reformers were would have been led into saying the things they did about God if they thought the decrees were simply things God could handle, or things like a doom on God? The decrees of God were to them God decreeing. The holiness of God was God as holy. When that holiness is wounded or defied, could God be content to take us back with a mere censure or other penance and the declaration that he was holy? We could not respect a God like that. Servants despise indulgent masters. Sinners would despise a God who would take us back when we wept, and speak thus: “Let us say no more about it. You did very wrong, and you have suffered for it, and I; but let us forget it now you have come back.” We should not

132

respect that. We should go on, as servants do in the case I have named, to take more liberties still. He would be a God who only talked his holiness and did not put it into force. Now, if our repentance were our atonement, and the Cross were simply an object-lesson to us of God’s patient and tender mercy to penitence, he would be talking, I said, and not acting. He would mention the gravity of our sin very impressively, but that would not be establishing goodness actually in the history and experience of man. The sinner’s reconciliation to a God of holy love could not take place if guilt were not destroyed, if judgement did not take place on due scale, if the wrath of God did not somehow take real effect. You say, perhaps, it did take effect in the unseen world of spirits. But the moral world is not a world of ghostly spirits. It is the unseen side of the world of history and of experience, it is its inner reality and centre. The vindication, the judgement, must take place

P.T. FORSYTH

within human history and experience. It must take place in the terms of human history, by human action, in a place, at some point, on a due scale and with adequate depth. That was what took place in the Cross of Christ. The idea of judgement is not complete without the idea of a crisis, a day of

133

judgement. Now the Cross of Christ was the world's great day of judgement, the crisis of all crises for history. The holy love of God yearning over souls could not deal with individual sinners, there was a cloud between God and the race, till the holiness was owned and perfectly praised by its racial confession, until holiness was confessed much more than sin, until on man's side there was not only confession of sin but confession of holiness from sin's side amid the experience of a judgement on the scale of the race, until the confessing race was thus put in right relation to God's holiness. Then judgement had done its perfect work. The race's sin was covered and atoned by it, *i.e.*, by the God who bore it. Individuals could not be reconciled to a holy God until he thus reconciled the world. Not until sin had been brought to do its very worst, and had in that culminating act been foiled, judged, and overcome; not till then could individuals receive the reconciliation. That was the unitary reconciliation they must receive in detail. God there, in a racial holiness amid racial curse, sets up a racial salvation, which our souls enter upon by faith. It is by himself in his changeless love and pity that it is set up. It is not the Son's suffering and death, but his holy obedience

134

to both that is the satisfying thing to God, the holiness of God the Son. In a sense, a great solemn sense, it is an exercise of God's absolute self-satisfaction, exhibited after a long historic process, amidst the dissatisfaction of a world's ruin. "In his love and in his pity he redeemed them." He set up reconciliation by an act of judgement on his Son, cutting off his own right hand that we might enter into the Kingdom of heaven: "In his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried, them all the days of old." The redemption was a thing that was coming through the whole of Israel's history, and in a remoter sense through the whole history of the world. The changeless holiness must assert itself in such judgement as surely as in the kingdom. You all believe that the holiness of God must assert itself in the Kingdom of God. But how can there be a final kingdom without final judgement? Is not all judgement in the name of the king, even in our human society? Are not king and judge inseparable, as inseparable as king and father? We say today that king and father are inseparable. But king and judge are

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

equally inseparable, especially if you take the great Old Testament idea. Christ submitted with all his heart to God's holy final judgement on the race.

135

He did not view it as an unfortunate incident in his life. He did not treat it as though it happened to drop upon him. But he treated it as the grand will of God, as the effectuation in history of God's holiness, which holiness must have complete response and practical confession both on its negative side of judgement and its positive side of obedience. Christ's death was atoning not simply because it was sacrifice even unto death, but because it was sacrifice unto holy and radical judgement. There is something much more than being obedient unto death. Plenty of men can be obedient unto death; but the core of Christianity is Christ's being obedient unto judgement, and unto the final judgement of holiness. It is being obedient to a kind of death prescribed by God, indispensable to the holiness of God's love, necessitated in such a world by the last moral conditions, and not simply inflicted by the wickedness of men.

Get rid of the idea that judgement is chiefly retribution, and directly infliction. Realise that it is, positively, the establishing and the securing of eternal righteousness and holiness. View punishment as an indirect and collateral necessity, like the surgical pains that make room for nature's curing power. You will then find nothing morally repulsive in the idea of judgement

136

effected in and on Christ, any more than in the thought that the kingdom was set up in him.

To conclude, then, God could only justify man before him by justifying himself and his holy law before men. If he had not vindicated his holiness to the uttermost in that way of judgement, it would not be a kind of holiness that men could trust. Thus a faith which could justify man, which could make a foundation for a new humanity, could not exist. We can only be eternally justified by faith in a God who justifies himself as so holy that he must set up his holiness in human history at any price, even at the price of his own beloved and eternal Son.

I close, then, upon that unchangeable word of God's self-justifying holiness. Even the sinner could not trust a love that could not justify itself as holy. It is the holiness in God's love, I urge, that alone enables us to trust him. Without that we should only love him, and the love would fluctuate. For we

P.T. FORSYTH

could not be perfectly sure that his would not. It is the holiness in God's love that is the eternal, stable, unchangeable element in it—the holiness secured for history and its destiny in the Cross. It is only

---

137

the unchangeable that we could trust; and there alone we find it. If we only loved the love of God, we should have no stable, eternal, universal religion. But we love the *holy* love he established in Christ, and therefore we are safe with an everlasting salvation.

---

138

139

---

## The Cross the Great Confessional

---

140

141

V

## The Cross the Great Confessional

**I**N the days of our fathers Christian belief was more solid within the Church than it is now; and the defending and expounding of Christianity, more especially the defending of it, had to concern itself with outsiders—outside the Church, and outside Christianity very often. Today our difficulties have changed; and a great part of our exposition must keep in view the fact that some of the most dangerous challenges of Christianity are found amongst those who claim the Christian name. There are those who have a very real reverence for the character of Jesus Christ, and they can speak, and do speak, quite sincerely, with great devotion and warmth and beauty, about Christ, and about many of the ideas that are associated with apostolic Christianity. All the same, they

---

142

are strongly and sometimes even violently, antagonistic to that redemption which is the very centre of the Christian faith; and they make denials and challenges which are bound to tell upon the existence of that faith before many generations are over. We do not take the true measure of the situation unless we realise that the thing which is at stake at this moment is something that will not affect the present generation, but is sure to affect two or three generations hence. Those who are concerned about Christianity on the largest scale today are concerned with what may be its position and its prospects then. The ideas at the centre of the Christian faith are too large, too deep and subtle, to show their effects in one age; and the challenge of them does not show its effect in one generation or even in two. Individuals, society, and the Church, indeed, are able to go on, externally almost unaffected, by the way that they have upon them from the past; and it is only within the range of several generations that the destruction of truths with such a comprehensive range as those of Christianity takes effect. Therefore it is part

---

P.T. FORSYTH

of the duty of the Church, in certain sections and on certain occasions, to be less concerned about the effect of the Gospel upon

<sup>143</sup>

the individual immediately, or on the present age, and to look ahead to what may be the result of certain changes in the future. God sets watchmen in Zion who have to keep their eye on the horizon; and it is only a drunken army that could scout their warning. We are not only bound to attend to the needs and interests of the present generation; we are trustees for a long future, as well as a long past. Therefore it is quite necessary that the Church should give very particular attention to these central and fundamental points whose influence, perhaps, is not so promptly prized, and whose destruction would not be so mightily felt at once, but would certainly become apparent in the days and decades ahead.

That is why one feels bound to invite attention, and to press attention, upon points concerning which it may very easily be said, "These are matters that do not concern my faith and my piety; I can afford to let these things alone." Perhaps A, B, and C can, and X, Y, and Z can; but the Christian Church cannot afford to let these things alone. The Church carries the individual amid much failure of his faith; there is a vicarious faith; but what is to carry the Church if its faith fail? Remove concern from these things, and the effect of

<sup>144</sup>

the collective message of the Church to the great world becomes undermined. Then the world must look somewhere else than to the Church for that which is to save it. That is some apology for dwelling upon points which many people would say were simply theological and were outside the interest of the individual Christian. Theology simply means thinking in centuries. Religion tells on the present, but theology tells on the religion of the future and the race.

Moreover, there are always natures among Christian people who refuse, and properly refuse, to remain satisfied with superficial experiences or current views of their faith. They are bound by the spirit that moves within them—by the kind of temperament God has given them they are bound to penetrate to the heart, to the depths of things. Their work does not immediately pay; and while they grind in their mill the Philistines mock and the libertines jeer. But it would be a great misfortune if the whole of the work of the Church were measured by the standard which is so necessary in the world—the standard of what will immediately pay, or promptly tell. It is, of course, a

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

great thing to go back upon the history of Christianity, and to point out to ourselves

---

<sup>145</sup>

and to our people the great things that Christianity has done in the course of history. But you cannot rest Christianity upon that. You can only rest Christianity upon Christ himself, and his living presence in the New Humanity. You can put the matter in this way. You can ask, On what did the Christianity rest of those who believed in the very first years of the Church's life? They had no results of Christianity before them. They had no history of the Church before them. They had not the glorious story of Christian philanthropy before them, nor the magnificent expansion of Christian doctrine, nor the enormous influence of the Christian Church and its effect upon the course of the world's history. On what did they rest their faith? That upon which they rested their faith must be that upon which we rest our faith when we come to a real crisis, and are driven into a real corner. It thus becomes necessary to go into the deep things of God as they are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit, through his inspired apostles, in Christ and his Cross.

---

From what I have said you will be prepared to hear me state that reconciliation is effected by the representative sacrifice of Christ crucified;

---

<sup>146</sup>

by Christ crucified as the representative of God on the one hand and of Humanity, or the Church, on the other hand. Also it was by Christ crucified in connection with the divine judgement. Judgement is a far greater idea than sacrifice. For you see great sacrifices made for silly or mischievous causes, sacrifices which show no insight whatever into the moral order or the divine sanctity. Now this sacrifice of Christ, when you connect it with the idea of judgement, must in some form or other be described as a penal sacrifice. Round that word penal there rages a great deal of controversy. And I am using the word with some reserve, because there are forms of interpreting it which do the idea injustice. The sacrifice of Christ was a penal sacrifice. In what sense is that so? We can begin by clearing the ground, by asking, In what sense is it not true that the sacrifice of Christ was penal? Well, it cannot be true in the sense that God punished Christ. That is an absolutely unthinkable thing. How could God punish him in whom he was always well pleased? The two things are a contradiction in terms. And it cannot be true

P.T. FORSYTH

in the sense that Christ was in our stead in such a way as to exclude and exempt us. The sacrifice of Christ, then, was penal not in the sense of God

<sup>147</sup>

so punishing Christ that there is left us only religious enjoyment, but in this sense. There is a penalty and curse for sin; and Christ consented to enter that region. Christ entered voluntarily into the pain and horror which is sin's penalty from God. Christ, by the deep intimacy of his sympathy with men, entered deeply into the blight and judgement which was entailed by man's sin, and which must be entailed by man's sin if God is a holy and therefore a judging God. It is impossible for us to say that God was angry with Christ; but still Christ entered the wrath of God, understanding that phrase as I endeavoured to explain it yesterday. He entered the penumbra of judgement, and from it he confessed in free action, he praised and justified by act, before the world, and on the scale of all the world, the holiness of God. You can therefore say that although Christ was not punished by God, he bore God's penalty upon sin. That penalty was not lifted even when the Son of God passed through. Is there not a real distinction between the two statements? To say that Christ was punished by God who was always well pleased with him is an outrageous thing. Calvin himself repudiates the idea. But we may say that Christ did, at the depth of that great act of self-identification with us when he

<sup>148</sup>

became man, he did enter the sphere of sin's penalty and the horror of sin's curse, in order that, from the very midst and depth of it, his confession and praise of God's holiness might rise like a spring of fresh water at the bottom of the bitter sea, and sweeten all. He justified God in his judgement and wrath. He justified God in this thing.

So the act of Christ had this twofold aspect. On the one hand it was God offering, and on the other hand it was man confessing. Now, what was it that Christ chiefly confessed? I hope you have read McLeod Campbell on the Atonement. Every minister ought to know that book, and know it well. But there is one criticism to be made upon the great, fine, holy book. And it is this. It speaks too much, perhaps, about Christ confessing human sin, about Christ becoming the Priest and Confessor before God, of human sin and exposing it to God's judgement. The horror of the Cross expresses the repentance of the race before a holy God for its sin. But considerable

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

difficulties arise in that connection, and critics were not slow to point them out. How could Christ in any real sense confess a sin, even a racial sin, with whose guilt he had nothing in common? Now that is rather a

---

149

serious criticism if the confession of sin were the first charge upon either Christ or us, if the confession of human sin were the chief thing that God wanted or Christ did. I think it is certainly a defect in that great book that it fixes our attention too much upon Christ's vicarious confession of *human* sin. The same criticism applies to another very fine book, that by the late Canon Moberly, of Christ Church, *Atonement and Personality*. I once had the privilege of meeting Canon Moberly in discussion on this subject, and ventured to point out that defect in his theory, and I was relieved to find that on the occasion the same criticism was also made by Bishop Gore. But we get out of the difficulty, in part at least, if we recognise that the great work of Christ, while certainly it did confess human sin, was yet not to confess that, but to confess something greater, namely, God's holiness in his judgement upon sin. His confession, indeed, was not in so many words, but in a far more mighty way, by act and deed of life and death. The great confession is not by word of mouth—it is by the life, in the sense, not of mere conduct, but in the great personal sense in which life contains conduct and transcends death. Christ confessed not merely human sin—which in a certain sense,

---

150

indeed, he could not do—but he confessed God's holiness in reacting mortally against human sin, in cursing human sin, in judging it to its very death. He stood in the midst of human sin full of love to man, such love as enabled him to identify himself in the most profound, sympathetic way with the evil race; fuller still of love to the God whose, name he was hallowing; and, as with one mouth, as if the whole race confessed through him, as with one soul, as though the whole race at last did justice to God through his soul, he lifted up his face unto God and said, "Thou art holy in all thy judgements, even in this judgement which turns not aside even from me, but strikes the sinful spot if even I stand on it." The dereliction upon the Cross, the sense of love's desertion by love, was Christ's practical confession of the holy God's repulsion of sin. He accepted the divine situation—the situation of the race before God. By God's will he did so. By his own free consent he did so. Remember the distinction between God's changeless love and God's varying treatment of the soul. God made him sin, treated him as if he were sin; he did not view him as sinful. That is quite another matter. God made him to be

P.T. FORSYTH

sin—it does not say he made him sinful. God lovingly treated him as human sin, and

151

with his consent judged human sin in him and on him. Personal guilt Christ could never confess. There is that in guilt which can only be confessed by the guilty. “I did it.” That kind of confession Christ could never make. That is the part of the confession that we make, and we cannot make it effectually until we are in union with Christ and his great lone work of perfectly and practically confessing the holiness of God. There is a racial confession that can only be made by the holy; and there is a personal confession that can only be made by the guilty. That latter, I say, is a confession Christ could never make. In that respect Christ did not die, and did not suffer, did not confess, in our stead. We alone, the guilty, can make that confession; but we cannot make it with Christian effect without the Cross and the confession there. We say then not only “I did this,” but “I am guilty before the holiness confessed in the Cross.” The grand sin is not to sin against the law but against the Cross. The sin of sins is not transgression, but unfaith.

So also of holiness, there is a confession of holiness which can only be made by God, the Holy. If God’s holiness was to be fully confessed, in act and deed, in life, and death, and

152

love transcending both, it can only be done by Godhead itself.

Therefore we press the words to their fullness of meaning: “God was in Christ reconciling,” not reconciling through Christ, but actually present as Christ reconciling, doing in Christ his own work of reconciliation. It was done by Godhead itself, and not by the Son alone. The old theologians were right when they insisted that the work of redemption was the work of the whole Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; as we express it when we baptise into the new life of reconcilment in the threefold name. The holiness of God was confessed in man by Christ, and this holy confession of Christ’s is the source of the truest confession of our sin that we can make. Our saving confession is not merely “I did so and so,” but “I did it against a holy, saving God.” “I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight,” sinned before infinite holiness and forgiving grace. God could not forgive until man confessed and confessed not only his own sin but confessed still more—God’s holiness in the

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

judgement of sin. The confession also had to be made in life and action, as the sin was done. That is to say, it had to be made religiously and not theologically, by an

153

experience and not an utterance. A verbal confession, however sincere, could not fully own an actual sin. If we sin by deed we must so confess. It is made thus religiously, spiritually, experimentally, practically by Jesus Christ's life, its crown of death, and his life eternal. The more sinful man is, the less can he thus confess either his own sin or God's holiness. Therefore God did it in man by a love which was as great as it was holy, by an infinite love. That is to say, by a love which was as closely and sympathetically identified with man as it was identified with the power of the holy God.

So we have arrived at this. The great confession was made not alone in the precise hour of Christ's death, although it was consummated there. It had to be made in life and act, and not in a mere feeling or statement; and for this purpose death must be organically one with the whole life. You cannot sever the death of Christ from the life of Christ. When you think of the self-emptying which brought Christ to earth, his whole life here was a living death. The death of Christ must be organic with his whole personal life and action. And that means not only his earthly life previous to the Cross, but his whole celestial life from the beginning, and to this hour, and to all eternity.

151

The death of Christ is the central point of eternity as well as of human history. His own eternal life revolves on it. And we shall never be so good and holy at any point, even in eternity, that we shall not look into the Cross of Christ as the centre of all our hope in earth or heaven. It is Christ that works out his own redemption and reconciliation, from God's right hand, throughout the course of history. I would gather that up in one phrase. Christ is the perpetual providence of his own salvation. Christ, acting through his Spirit, is the eternal providence of his own salvation. The apostles never separated reconciliation in any age from the Cross and blood of Jesus Christ. If ever we do that (and many are doing it today) we throw the New Testament overboard. The bane of so much that claims to be more spiritual religion at the present day is that it simply jettisons the New Testament, and with it historic Christianity. The extreme critics, people that live upon monism and immanence, rationalist religion and spiritual impressionism, are people who are deliberately throwing overboard the New Testament as a whole, deeply as they prize it in parts. They say that the apostolic views and

P.T. FORSYTH

interpretations of Christ's work may have been all very well for people who knew no

155

better than men did at so early a period, but we are now a long way beyond that, and we must re-edit the New Testament theology, especially as to Christ's death. I keep urging, whatever we do let us do it frankly, let us do it with our eyes open and with eyes competent to take the measure of what we are doing. The trying thing is that tremendous renunciations should be blandly made, without, apparently, any sense of their appalling dimensions, and of the huge thing that is being so ignorantly done.\*

\*In some cases it seems due to congenital defect. An able member of the "New Theology" group was conversing with my informant, who said, "For me all Christianity turns on the unspeakable mercy of God to my soul in the Cross of Christ." The reply was blankly, "I do not understand it."

The apostles, I say, never separated reconciliation from the Cross and the blood of Jesus Christ. The historic Church has never done so, with all its divisions. And what the Cross meant for the apostles as Jews, with their history and education, was something like this. If you go back to the Old Testament, you find that the whole kingdom of God and destiny of man turns on the treatment of sin. And either the sin was atoned or the sinner was punished. But there were some sins that never could be atoned for, what are described as sins with a high hand, presumptuous sins, deliberate, defiant sins, as distinct from sins of ignorance

156

or weakness, when a man so identified himself with his sin that he became inseparable from it. The man guilty of them was put outside the camp, his communication was cut with the saved community of Israel. He was committed to the outer darkness. There remained only punishment and death. The punishment was expulsion from the covenant, and so from life. And as there is little about immortality in the Old Testament, it was death for good and all. But in the Cross of Christ there is no sin excluded from atonement. I know of course what you are thinking about—the sin against the Holy Ghost. That is far too large a subject to enter on. I can only say that I am not keeping it out of my survey. And I repeat, there is no sin excluded from atonement. Death as punishment of sin was absorbed in Christ's sacrifice. Such was its atoning work that the judgement due to all mankind

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

was absorbed, and the sin of sins now was fixed refusal of that Grace. The Cross bought up all other debts, so to say.

---

To return to my old point. The objection to speaking of Christ's death as penalty is twofold. God could not punish One with whom

<sup>157</sup>

he was always well pleased. Consequently Christ could not suffer punishment in the true sense of the word without having a guilty conscience. If the bearing of punishment were the whole of Christ's work, there was something in that way which he did not and could not do—he could not bear the penalty of remorse. But the whole of his work, was not the bearing of punishment; it was not the acceptance of suffering. It was the recognition and justification of it, the "homologation" of God's judgement and God's holiness in it.

The death and suffering of Christ was something very much more than suffering—it was atoning action. At various stages in the history of the Church—not the Roman Catholic Church only but Protestantism also—exaggerated stress has been laid upon the sufferings of Christ. But it is not a case of what he suffered, but what he did. Christ's suffering was so divine a thing because he freely transmuted it into a great act. It was suffering accepted and transfigured by holy obedience under the conditions of curse and blight which sin had brought upon man according to the holiness of God. The suffering was a sacrifice to God's holiness. In so far it was penalty. But the atoning thing was not its amount or acuteness, but its obedience, its sanctity.

<sup>158</sup>

These pathetic ways of thinking about Christ regard him too much as a mere individual before God. They do not satisfy if Christ's relation with man was a racial one and he represented Humanity. Especially they do not hold good if that relationship was no mere blood relationship, natural relationship, but a supernatural relationship—blood relationship only in the mystic Christian sense. We are blood relations of Christ, but not in the natural sense of that term, only in the supernatural sense, as those who are related to him in his blood, in his death, and in his Spirit. The value of Christ's unity and sympathy with us was not simply that he was continuous with the race at its head. It was not a relation of *identity*. The race was not prolonged into him. The value consists in that life-act of *self-identification* by which Christ the eternal Son of God became man. We hear much about Christ's essential

P.T. FORSYTH

identity with the human race. That is not true in the sense in which other great men, like Shakespeare, for instance, were identical with the human race, gathering up in consummation its natural genius. Christ's identity was not natural or created identity, but the self-identification of the Creator. Everything turns upon this—whether Christ was a created being,

159

however grand, or whether he was of increate Godhead.

---

As Head of the human race by this voluntary self-identification with it, Christ took the curse and judgement, which did not belong to himself as sinless. And what he owned was not so much the depth of our misery as the depth of our guilt; and he did it sympathetically, by the moral sympathy possible only to the holy. Nor did he simply take the full measure of our guilt. His owning it means very much more than that his moral perceptions were so deep and piercing that he could measure our guilt as a bystander of acute moral penetration could. He carried it in his own moral experience as only divine sympathy could. And in dumb action he spread it out as it is before God. He felt sin and its horror as only the holy could, as God did. We learn in our measure to do that when we escape from the indifference of our egotism and come under his Cross and near his heart; we learn to do as Christ did as we enter into living union with Christ. And we then rise above purity—for purity is only shamed by sin—we rise to holiness, which is burdened with sin and all its load. How much more than pure

160

Christ was! How much fuller of meaning is such a word as “holy” or “holiness” than either “pure” or “purity.” Purity is shamed by human sin. Holiness carries it as a load, and carries it to its destruction. In the great desertion Christ could not feel himself a sinner whom God rejects. For the sinner cannot carry sin; he collapses under it. Christ felt himself treated as the sin which God recognises and repels by his very holiness. It covered and hid him from God. He was made sin (not sinful, as I say). The holiness of God becomes our salvation not by slackness of demand but by completeness of judgement; not because he relaxes his demand, not because he spends less condemnation on sin, lets us off or lets sin off, or lets Christ off (“spared not”); but because in Christ judgement becomes finished and final, because none but a holy Christ could spread sin out in all its sinfulness for thorough judgement. I have a way of putting it which startles some of my friends. The

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

last judgement is past. It took place on Christ's Cross. What we talk about as the last judgement is simply the working out of Christ's Cross in detail. The final judgement, the absolute judgement, the crucial judgement for the race took place in principle on the Cross of Christ. Sin has been judged finally

161

there. All judgement is given to the Son in virtue of his Cross. All other debts are bought up there.

It is not simply that in the Cross of Christ all punishment was shown to be corrective. A favourite theme on the part of many of those who challenge the apostolic position about the death of Christ is that it was only the crowning exposition of the great principle that all punishment is really corrective and educative. We cannot say that. There is plenty of punishment that hardens and hardens. That is why we are obliged to leave such questions as universal restoration unsolved. Even when we recognise the absolute power of God's salvation, we also recognise that it is in the power of the human soul to harden itself until it become shrunk into such a tough and irreducible mass as it seems the very grace of God could do nothing with. Certainly there are people here, in this life, who become so tough in their sin that the grace of God is in vain. And I am not sure that among those who are toughest are not some who are much comforted by their religion. You can do something with a hardened sinner. He can be broken to pieces. But I do not know what you can do with a viscous saint, with those

162

who are wrapped in the wool, soaked in the comfort of their religion, and tanned to leather, soft and tough as a glove, by its bitterest baptisms. I once used an expression of these people which was somewhat criticised. I called them "moral tabbies." Is there anything more comfortable, and selfish, and hopeless than a really accomplished tabby? When religion becomes perverted to be a means of mere comfort and dense self-satisfaction, it becomes an integument so tough that even the grace of God cannot get through it, or a substance so flaccid that it cannot be handled.

I find it convenient, you observe, to distinguish between punishment and penalty. A man who loses his life in the fire-damp, where he is looking for

P.T. FORSYTH

the victims of an accident, pays the penalty of sacrifice, but he does not receive its punishment. And I think it useful to speak of Christ as taking the penalty of sin, while I refuse to speak of his taking its punishment. I would avoid every word that would suggest that he was punished in connection with his salvation. It robs the whole act of ethical value to say so. Penalty is made to honour God in the Cross of

163

Christ, and thus it becomes a blessing to us. Not that our punishment is turned to good account in its subjective results upon us, but that Christ's judgement has objective value to the honour of God's holiness. He turned the penalty he endured into sacrifice he offered. And the sacrifice he offered was the judgement he accepted. His passive suffering became active obedience, and obedience to a holy doom. He did not steel his face to the suffering he had to endure, as though it were a fate to which he had to set his teeth and go through it in a stoic way. He never regarded it as a mere infliction. For him, whoever inflicted it, it was the holiest thing in all the world—it was the will and judgement of God. All the Old Testament told him that the Kingdom of God could never come without the prior judgement of God; and he was prepared to force that judgement in his impatience for the Kingdom.\* He answered the judgement of God with a grand affirmative act. The willing acceptance of final judgement was for Jesus the means presented by God for effecting human reconciliation and the

\*See Schweitzer's very remarkable *Quest of the Historical Jesus* (A & C Black)—the last two chapters—where a dogmatic and atoning motive in Jesus is declared by an advanced critic to have been the explanation of his death.

164

Divine Kingdom. The essence of all sacrifice, which is self-surrender to God, was lifted out of the Old Testament garb of symbolism, and was made a moral reality in Christ's holy obedience. In the Old Testament we have the lamb and the various other things brought for offering; but where did their essential value lie? In the obedience of the offerer; in the fact that those institutions were given and prescribed by holy God, however their details were due to man. And the presentation of the victim was valuable, not because of anything in the victim, but because of the obedience and surrender of the will with which the offerer presented it. This is the bearing of sin—the holy bearing of its judgement. This is the taking of sin away—the acknowledgment of judgement as holy, wise, and good, and its conversion into blessing; the absorption and conversion of judgement into confession and praise, the removal of that guilt which stood between God and man's

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

reconciliation—the robbing sin of its power to prevent communion with God.

I should, therefore, express the difference between the old view and the new by saying that one emphasises substitutionary expiation and the other emphasises solidary reparation, consisting of due acknowledgment of God's

165

holiness, and the honouring of that and not of his honour.

Now let me pass as I close today to two or three points I want specially to emphasise.

There is one quotation which I wanted to make at a particular point and did not. The Reformers are still, on the whole, the masters of the great verities of experience in connection with the work of Christ. They had an amazing insight into the morbid psychology of the conscience. They did understand what sin meant, and they said this—the sinner, beginning with indifference, must keep flying from God until he actually hate God as a persecutor, unless he grasp the pursuit as God's mercy. Indifference could not stop at indifference, but goes on through aversion to hate. Even if a man die indifferent in this life, he comes into circumstances where he ceases to be indifferent. If we believe about a future at all, it will be impossible for an indifferent man to remain indifferent when he has passed on there. Indifference is an unstable position. It changes either upward or downward—downward into antagonism, into deadly hate against God, something Satanic; or upwards it passes into acceptance of God's mercy by faith, and all its blossom and fruit, its joy

166

and peace in the Holy Ghost. The Reformers were perfectly right. It is only our dull experience and preoccupied vision which prevent us seeing that it is so.

Then I should like to call attention to this value in such a cross. It is only the judgement sacrifice of the Son of God that assures the sinner of the deep changelessness of grace. Forgiving is not forgetting. Popular theology too often tends to pacify us by reducing the offence. But the Reformers put the matter quite otherwise in saying that justifying faith only goes with a full sense

P.T. FORSYTH

of guilt. You cannot get a full, justifying faith without a full sense and confession of guilt. We always have mistrust in the background of our own self-extenuations. When conscience begins to work and you begin to extenuate, when you try your hand earnestly at justifying yourself to yourself, you have some idea of how much more vast must be God's justification of you before himself. You cannot cease to ask what charge conscience has against you. Then you magnify that to God's charge. If your heart condemn you, his condemnation is greater than that of your condemning heart. Do you consider His conscience?

167

His conscience has to be pacified as well as his heart indulged. And if his conscience be not met, ours is not sure. Has his conscience been met? Conscience has always mistrust in the background if grace is mere remission. Mere remission of sin does not satisfy even us. If conscience witnesses, against our extenuations, to the holy majesty of moral claim, is it to be less severe and less changeless than the claim of God himself? Conscience has in trust God's law and its majesty, which must be made good, as mere remission does not make it. Suppose I transgress and I hear the message of grace, does it tell me the accusing, irrepensible demand of conscience, the haunting fear of judgement, was an illusion? It is doing me very ill service if it does. True, there is now no condemnation for faith; but if the message of grace ever teaches us that the judgement of conscience is exaggeration, is illusion, it is not the true grace of God. If a message of grace tell us there was and is no judgement any more, and that God has simply put judgement on one side and has not exercised it, that cannot be the true grace of God. Surely the grace of God cannot stultify our human conscience like that! So we are haunted by mistrust, unless conscience be drowned in a haze of heart. We

168

have always the feeling and fear that there is judgement to follow. How may I be sure that I may take the grace of God seriously and finally, how be sure that I have complete salvation, that I may entirely trust it through the worst my conscience may say? Only thus, that God is the Reconciler, that he reconciles in Christ's Cross that the judgement of sin was there for good and all. We are judged now by the Cross, and by the Cross we stand or fall. The great sin is not something we do, but it is refusing to make ourselves right with God in Christ's Cross. We are judged in the end by our relation to the Cross of Christ. It is the principle of our moral world. All judgement is committed to that Son. We stand before God at last according as we are

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

owned by Christ. We are confessed by him according to our confession of him. Nemesis on us is hallowed as a part of the judgement on him to whose death we are joined. There is no such thorough assertion of God's holy, loving law anywhere as there, where in the Cross it was given its own, and was perfected in judgement in him who became a curse for us. His prayer for is murderers, or the closing sigh of victory in the midst of that judgement, vouches for ever to this, that it is the same holy will which judges man's wickedness and also loves us

169

and gives his Son for a propitiation for us. Only that holiness which is changeless in its judgement could be changeless also in grace. His grace was so little to be foiled that he graciously took his own judgement. Thus the severity of conscience becomes the certainty of salvation.

But, changeless in judgement! Does that mean exacting the uttermost farthing of penalty, of suffering? Does it mean that in the hour of his death Christ suffered, compressed into one brief moment, all the pains of hell which the human race deserved. We cannot think about things in that way. God does not work by such equivalents. What is required is not an equivalent penalty, but an adequate confession of his holiness. Let us get rid of that materialist idea of equivalents. What Christ gave to God was not an equivalent penalty, but an adequate confession of God's holiness, rising from amid extreme conditions of sin. God's holiness, then, was so little to be mocked, that he actually took his own judgement to save it. He spared not his own Son—his own self. His severity of conscience becomes at the same moment our security of salvation. And the more conscience preaches the changelessness of the judging God,

170

the more it preaches the same changelessness in the grace of Christ.

There is another consequence. Only the eternal Reconciler, the High Priest, can guarantee us our full redemption. "Take, my soul, thy full salvation." You cannot do it except you do it in such a Cross. It is not enough to have in the Cross a great demonstration of God's love, a forgiveness of the past which leaves us to fend for ourselves in the future. Is my moral power so

P.T. FORSYTH

great after all, then, that, supposing I believe past things were settled in Christ's Cross, I may now feel I can run in my own strength? Can I be perfectly confident about meeting temptation? Nay, we must depend daily upon the continued energy of the crucified and risen One. We must depend daily upon the action of that same Christ whose action culminated there but did not end there. His death is as organic with his heavenly life as it was with his earthly. What is the meaning of his perpetual intercession if it does not mean that—the exhaustless energy of his saving act? It is by his work from heaven that we appropriate his work upon earth. He guarantees our perfection as well as our redemption.

---

171

The last step. It is only the atoning reconciliation of a whole world that guarantees the final perfecting of that world by its Creator. How do we know that creation is going to be perfected? How do we know that it is to be to the glory of God who made it and called it good? How do we know the world will not be a failure for God with all but the group of people saved in an ark of some kind? We only know because we believe in the reconciliation of the whole world in Christ's Cross. There is a great deal of pessimism today, much doubt as to whether perfection really remains for the whole world; and you find people in the burdened West drawn to the Buddhistic idea of the human soul's extinction. Some Christians content themselves with individual salvation out of a world which is left in the lurch, or they are satisfied with personal union with Christ securing their own future. But the gospel deals with the world of men as a whole. It argues the restoration of all things, a new heaven and a new earth. It intends the regeneration of human society as a whole. Christ is the Saviour of the world, who was also the agent of its creation. The Creator has not let his

---

172

world get out of hand for good and all. That is to say, our faith is social and communal in its nature. We must have a social gospel. And this you cannot get upon the basis of mere individual or sectional salvation. You can only have a social gospel upon one basis, namely, that Christ saved, reconciled the whole world as a unity, the whole of society and history. The Object of our faith, Jesus Christ, is what our fathers used to call a federal Person, a federal Saviour, in a federal act. All humanity is in him and in his act. It is quite true every man must believe for himself, but no man can believe by

---

THE WORK OF CHRIST

himself or unto himself. The Christian faith fades away if it is not nourished and built up in a community, in a Church. And the Church fades away if it do not hold this faith in trust for the whole world. Each one of us is saved only by the act and by the Person that saved the whole world.

P.T. FORSYTH

173

---

## The Precise Problem Today

---

174

175

## VI

### The Precise Problem Today\*

THERE is a popular impression about both philosophy and theology that the history of their problems is very sterile; that it is not a long development, carrying the discussion on with growing insight from age to age, and passing from thinker to thinker with growing depth, but rather a scene in which each newcomer demolishes the work of his predecessor in order to put in its place some theory doomed in turn to the same fruitless fate. Truly, as Hegel says, if that were so with philosophy, its history would become one of the saddest and sorriest things, and it would have no right to go on. And if it were so with theology, we should not only be distressed for Humanity, but we should be sceptical about the Holy Spirit

---

\*This chapter owes much to Kim, *Herzog*, xx., Art. "Versöhnung."

176

in the Church. It could be the Church of no Holy Spirit if those who translated its life into thought did not offer to posterity a spectacle higher than dragons that tare each other in the slime, or lions that bit and devoured one another.

As a matter of truth and fact, both philosophy and theology have not only a chronicle but a history. They register the highest spiritual evolution of the race. The wave behind rolls on the wave before. The past is not devoured but lives on, and comes to itself in the future. The new arrivals do not consume their predecessors, and do not ignore them; they interpret them and carry them forwards. They take their fertile place in the great organic movement. They modulate what is behind upwards into what is to come. They correct the past and enrich it; and they hand on their corrected past to be a foundation for the workers yet to be.

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

The amateur, or the self-taught, therefore is at a great disadvantage. He does not take up the problem where the scientific succession laid it down. He does not come in where his great co-workers left off. He must start *ab ovo*. He must do over again for himself what they have conspired to do better. He risks "being a fool at first hand." He wastes himself criticising

---

<sup>177</sup>

what has long been dropped, and slaying the long-time slain. He throws away effort in establishing what the competent have agreed to accept. And he misses the right points to attack or to strengthen, because he has not surveyed the ground. Every now and then one meets the capable amateur, whose misfortune it has been to have no schooling in the scientific history or method of the subject, who applied to it a shrewd mother-wit or an earnest but uninstructed conscience, and who perhaps publishes a theory of Incarnation or Atonement which, for all its hints and glimpses of truth, makes no real contribution either to the history or the merits of the case. This is the misfortune of the self-taught who goes straight to his Bible for the materials of his theology, and ignores most of the treatment the problem has received from the greatest minds in the history of the Church or the soul. The Bible is enough for our saving faith, but it is not enough for our scientific theology.

To make the most therefore of godly and able men, who would else be wasted more or less, it is well that we should teach them at the outset to take up the question where they find it, to begin where their best predecessors left off, to work upon results, and to carry

---

<sup>178</sup>

forward the subject in the train of its evolution from the great and growing past. Let us couple up with the past, and repay its gifts by fructifying them for the future. Let us call in our thought, and concentrate it upon the precise question which previous thinkers have left us to solve.

---

There is, thus, another thing we have to do. We have to try to find a due place for those views which, however one-sided, yet do compel attention to aspects that the Church from time to time ignores. We have to meet, satisfy, and exceed such views. Much, for instance, has been done in the lifetime of most of us to correct and extend those views of Christ's work which were so rigidly objective that they became external. It has been urged that the Church long thought too much of Christ's action on God and not enough of his action on man. And what is called the moral theory of the Atonement has

P.T. FORSYTH

therefore been pressed upon us, to replace the ultra-objective and satisfactionary view. And the pressure has often been so hard that an objective theory has been entirely denied as immoral, and denied sometimes with a scorn unjustified by either the mental acumen or moral dignity of the critic.

179

But in spite of this over-pressure, and the occasional insolence that goes with ignorance, it remains our duty to find a proper place in our view of the whole great subject for that effect of Christ upon men which has meant so much for the sanctity of the Church. We have to meet, satisfy, and transcend those pleas which have been called into existence to redress the balance of theological neglect, and to fill out that which was behind in our grasp of the manifold work. Especially we have to adjust our theology of Christ's work to those who observe that the repentance of the guilty is an essential condition of forgiveness, and who go on to ask how we can speak of a finished reconciliation or atonement, by a sinless Christ, who could not possibly present before God a repentance of that kind.

There are certain results which, it may be said, we have definitely reached in correction of what has long been known as the popular view of Christ's death and work. They are modern, and they owe much to Schleiermacher, Ritschl, McLeod Campbell, Maurice and others; but they have also been shown to be scriptural, by a new, objective and scientific investigation

180

of what the Bible has to say on the subject. When we have brought the long history of the question up to date, balanced the books, and taken account of the general agreement on the modern side, we can then go on to ask where exactly the question now stands.

The modifications on which the best authorities are substantially at one we have seen to be such as these:-

1. Reconciliation is not the result of a change in God from wrath to love. It flows from the changeless will of a loving God. No other view could make the reconciliation sure. If God changed to it, he might change from it. And the sheet-anchor of the soul for Eternity would then have gone by the board. Forgiveness arose at no point in time. Grace was there before oven creation. It abounded before sin did. The holiness which makes sin sin, is one with the necessity to destroy sin in gracious love.

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

2. Reconciliation rests on Christ's person, and it is effected by his entire work, doing, and suffering. This work does three things. (1) It reveals and puts into historic action the changeless grace of God. (2) It reveals and establishes his holiness, and therein also the sinfulness of sin. And (3) it exhibits a Humanity in perfect

181

tune with that will of God. And it does more than exhibit these things—it sets them up, grace, holiness, and the new Humanity in its Head.

3. This reconciling and redeeming work of Christ culminates in his suffering unto death, which is indeed more of an act than an experience. Here, in the Cross, is the summit of his revelation of grace, of sin, and of Humanity. And the central feature of this threefold revelation in the Cross is the holiness of God's love. It is this holiness that deepens error into sin, sin into guilt, and guilt into repentance; without which any sense of forgiveness would be but an anodyne and not a grace, a self-flattering unction to the soul and not the peace of God.

4. In this relation to God's holiness and its satisfaction, nobody now thinks of the transfer of our punishment to Christ in its entirety—including the worst pains of hell in a sense of guilt. Christ experienced the world's hate, and the curse of the Law in the sense of the suffering entailed on man by sin; but a direct infliction of men's total deserts upon him by God is unthinkable. His penalty was not punishment, because it was dissociated from the sense of desert. Whatever we mean by atonement must be interpreted in that sense.

182

And judgement is a much better word than either penalty or punishment.

5. What we have in Christ's work is not the mere pre-requisite or condition of reconciliation, but the actual and final effecting of it in principle. He was not making it possible, he was doing it. We are spiritually in a reconciled world, we are not merely in a world in process of empirical reconciliation. Our experience of religion is experience of a thing done once for all, for ever, and for the world. That is, it is more than even experience, it is a faith. The same act as put God's forgiveness on a moral foundation also revolutionised Humanity. Hence we are not disposed to speak of substitution\* so much as of representation. But it is representation by One who creates by his act the Humanity he represents, and does not merely sponsor it. *The same act* as disburdens us of guilt commits us to a new life. Our Saviour in his salvation is not only our comfort but our power; not merely

P.T. FORSYTH

our rescuer but our new life. His work is in the same act reclamation as well as rescue.

\*Because substitution does not take account of the moral results on the soul, and for a full account of the cause we must include all the effects. To do justice to the whole of Christ's work we must include the Church, and in justification include sanctification.

183

6. Another thing may perhaps be taken as recognised in some form by the main line of judicious advance in our subject. The work of Christ was moral and not official. It was the energy and victory of his own moral personality, and not simply the filling of a position, the discharge of an office he held. His victory was not due to his rank, but to his will and conscience. It lay in his faithfulness to the uttermost amid temptations morally real and psychologically relevant to what he was. It was a work that drew on his whole personality, and was built into the nature of that personality as a moral necessity of it. What he did he did not do simply in the room and stead of others, he did it as a necessity of his own person also—though its effect for them was not what it was for him. He fulfilled an obligation under which his own personality lay; he did not simply pay the debts of other people. He fulfilled a personal vocation.

And his faithfulness was not only to a vocation. It was to a special vocation, that of a Redeemer, not merely a saint. The immediate source of his suffering was not the sight of human sin, and it was not a general holiness in him. It was not the quivering of the saint's purity at the touch of evil. But it was the

184

suffering of One who touched sin *as the Redeemer*. He would not have suffered for sin as he did, had he not faced it as its destroyer. Not only was this his vocation as a moral hero, but his special vocation as Saviour. It was the work of a moral personality at the heart of the race, of One who concentrated on a special yet universal task—that of Redemption.

His perfection was not that of a paragon, one who could do better what every soul and genius of the race could do well. He was not all the powers and excellencies of mankind rolled into one superman. But his perfection was that of the race's Redeemer. It was interior to all other powers and achievements. It was central both for God and man. He made man's centre and God's coincide. He took mankind at its centre and laid it on the centre of God. His identification with man was not extensive but intensive, it was not discursive and parallel, so to say. It was morally central and creative. He was not Humanity on its divine side; he was its new life from the inside. The

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

problem he had to solve was the supreme and central moral problem of guilt; and the work could only be done by the native action of a personality moral in its nature and methods, moral to the pitch of the Holy.

185

It is an immense gain thus to construe Christ's work as that of a moral personality instead of a heavenly functionary. It brings it into line with the modern mind and into organic union with the moral problem of the race. It enables us to realise that every step of the moral victory in his life was a step also in the Redemption of the whole human conscience. And we grasp with new power the idea that his crowning victory of the Cross was the victory in principle of the whole race in him—that Justification is really one with Reconciliation, and what he did before God contained all he was to do on man. It makes possible for us what my last lecture will attempt to indicate—a unitary view of his whole work and person.

7. After these great modifications and gains, we have cleared the ground to ask with some exactness just where the question at the moment stands. What was the divinest thing, the atoning, satisfying thing, the thing offered to God, in Christ; the thing, therefore, final and precious in what he did? The permanent thing in Christianity must be that which gives it its chief value to God. We are now beyond the crude alternative that so easily besets us, "Did Christ's

186

work bear upon God or on man?" Neither alone would be a true Reconciliation. Neither Orthodoxy nor Socinianism has it. But we have to ask this: "Can we combine the truth in each alternative? Can we reach the value of Christ's saying work to God (*i.e.*, its true and final value) if we exclude its effect within man? Must we not take that in? *Nihil in effectu quod non prius in causa*. Must we not include the effect to get the full value of the cause, and give a full account of it?"

Now, let us own at the outset that the first things we must be sure about are the objective reality of our religion, its finality, and its initiative in God's free grace independent of act or desert of ours. But if we start there, it looks as if we were shut up to the first of the crude alternatives, as if the idea of Christ's work as acting on God only gave the best effect to these conditions. It looks as if the old theory alone guaranteed a salvation finished on the Cross, one wholly God's in his grace, one that ensures a full and objective release of

P.T. FORSYTH

the conscience. These things are not secured by what we do, but by Christ's work on the Cross. Moreover, that work was done for the whole of mankind, and was complete even for those who as yet make no response. And, besides, that first alternative is

187

a view that seems to have the letter of Scripture with it. It does look as if we could not have full security except by trust of an objective something, done over our heads, and complete without any reference to our response or our despite.

But the difficulties begin when we ask what the objective something was. How describe it? For that purpose the old doctrine used juridical forms. But these are not large enough for the dimensions of a modern world, or for its deepened ethical insight. How exactly could the obedience of Christ stand for the obedience of all? It was the fulfilment of his own personal vocation; how does it stand for the obedience of every other person? Or how does the suffering of Christ restore the moral order, especially one he never broke? If you treat it as punishment, that punishment alone does not restore the moral order. And, if we say he did not do that, he did not restore a moral order, so much as acknowledge and confess the holiness of God in his judgement, is not the value of that recognition still greatly impaired by the fact that it is not made by the guilty but the Guiltless, who is not directly affected by the connection between sin and suffering. A finished religion would then be set up without the main thing—

188

the acknowledgment by the guilty. That acknowledgment, that repentance, would then be outside the complete act, and would be at best but a sequel of it; whereas we ought to give a real place in a complete work of Reconciliation to our repentance (which some extremists say is all that is required), or to Christ's moral action on us. Do we not need to include in some way the effect in the cause, in order to give the cause its full and final value, *i.e.*, its value to God. The thing of price done by Christ for God, must it not already include the thing done upon men? Does not Christ's confession of God's holiness include man's confession of his sin?

Let us return to that idea of the moral order which is at the bottom of this objective theory. We ask whether the moral order is what the Bible means by the idea of the righteousness of God. The righteousness of God is not only

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

holy but gracious, not only regulative and retributory, but also forgiving and restoring. It seems, indeed, in the Gospels to need no other condition of forgiveness than repentance. This is so; and it is all very well, we have seen, for individual cases. But we have to deal, as Christ at last had to deal, with the forgiveness of a

189

world, the pardon of solidary sin. And we need to be sure, as Christ alone with his insight could be sure, that the repentance is true and deep. There it is that we are carried into questions which the Cross alone can answer. How shall I know how much repentance is deep enough? Where find a repentance wide enough to cover the sin of a guilty world? Could Christ offer that? No; directly, he could not. He could not offer it as a pathos, a personal experience, for he had no guilt. But, then, guilt is much more than a sense of guilt. And the essence of repentance is not its intensity or passion but the thing confessed. It is therefore the holiness more even than the sin that holiness makes so sinful. It is the due and understanding acknowledgment of the holiness offended. And this only a sinless Christ could really do, who was also sympathetic enough with men to do it from their side. And only the sinless could realise what sin meant for God.

Farther, this acknowledgment is not simply verbal, nor simply a matter of profound moral conviction and admission, but it must be a practical confession, as practical as the sin. It must place itself as if it were active sin under the reaction of the Divine holiness; it must be

190

made sin. That is, it must accept judgement as the only adequate acknowledgment of the holy God in a sinful world; it must allow his holy law to assert itself in the Saviour's person in the form forced on the sinner's Friend. He bore this curse as God's judgement, praised it, hallowed it, absorbed it; and his resurrection showed that he exhausted it.

But would his acceptance of judgement for us be possible, would it stand to our good, would it be of value in God's sight for us, if he were not in moral solidarity with us? How could it? What God sought was nothing so pagan as a mere victim outside our conscience and over our heads. It was a Confessor, a Priest, one taken from among men. But then this moral solidarity is the very thing that also gives, and must give, him his mighty and revolutionary power on us. What makes it possible for him to be a Divine victim or a Divine priest for us also makes him a new Creator in us. His offering of a holy obedience to God's judgement is therefore valuable to God

P.T. FORSYTH

for us just because of that moral solidarity with us which also makes him such a moral power upon us and in us. His creative regenerative action on us is a part of that same moral solidarity which also makes his acceptance

191

of judgement stand to our good, and his confession of God's holiness to be the ground of ours. The same stroke on the one Christ went upward to God's heart and downward to ours.

Is this not clear? Christ could make no due confession of holiness for us in judgement if he were outside Humanity, if he were a third party satisfying God over our head. The acknowledgment would not be really from the side of the culprit, certainly not from his interior, his conscience. The judgement would not really be the judgement of our sin, which would therefore be still due. To be of final value the atoning judgement must be also within the conscience of the guilty. But how is the judgement, the self-condemnation, the confession within our guilty conscience to be offered to God as an ingredient of Christ's reconciling work and not its mere sequel? It is not yet there. Or else it is nothing worth offering by way of atonement when it is there. Is there any way of offering our self-condemnation as a meritorious contribution to forgiveness? Can it be included in the Divine ground of forgiveness in a guiltless Christ? Repentance is certainly a condition of forgiveness. But Christ could not repent.

192

How then could he perfectly meet the conditions of salvation? The answer is that our repentance was latent in that holiness of his which alone could and must create it, as the effect is really part of the cause—that part of the cause which is prolonged in a polar unity into the sequential conditions of time.

Not only, generally, is there an organic moral connection and a spiritual solidarity between Christ and us, but also, more particularly, there is such a moral effect on Humanity included in the work of Christ, who causes it, that that antedated action on us, judging, melting, changing us, is also part of his offering to God. He comes bringing his sheaves with him. In presenting himself he offers implicitly and proleptically the new Humanity his holy work creates. The judgement we brought on him becomes our worst judgement when we arraign ourselves; and it makes it so impossible for us to forgive ourselves that we are driven to accept forgiveness from the hands of the very love which our sins doomed to a curse.

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

---

What Christ offers to God is, therefore, not simply an objective satisfaction outside his revolutionary effect on the soul of man in the

193

way of faith, repentance, and our whole sanctification. As the very judgement he bore for us is relevant to our sin by his moral solidarity with us, so the value of his work to God includes also that value which it has in acting on us through that same solidarity, and in presenting us to God as the men it makes us to be. He represents before God not a natural Humanity that produces him as its spiritual classic, but the new penitent Humanity that his influence creates. He calls things that are not yet as though they were. In him a goodness of ours that is not yet, rising from its antenatal spring, brings to naught the sin that is. There was presented to God, in Christ's holiness, also that repentance in us which it alone has power to create. He stretches a hand through time and seizes the far-off interest of our tears. The faith which he alone has power to wake is already offered to God in the offering of all his powers and of his finished work. That obedience of ours which Christ alone is able to create, is already set out in him before God, implicit in that mighty and subduing holiness of his in which God is always well-pleased. All his obedience and holiness is not only fair and beloved of God, but it is also great with the penitent holiness of the race

194

he sanctifies. Our faith is already present in his oblation. Our sanctification is already presented in our justification. Our repentance is already acting in his confession. The effect of his Cross is to draw us into a repentance which is a dying with him, and therefore a part of the offering in his death; and then it raises us in newness of life to a fellowship of his resurrection.

---

He is thus not only the pledge to us of God's love but the pledge to God of our sure response to it in a total change of will and life. We see now how organic, how central to Christ's gospel of Atonement is Paul's idea of dying and rising with him, how vital to his work is this effect of it, this function of it. For such a process, such an experience, is not a mere moral sequel or echo of ours to the story of the Cross, it is no mere imitation or repetition of its moral greatness; nor is it a sensitive impression of its touching splendour. To

P.T. FORSYTH

die and rise with Christ does not belong to Christian ethic, to the method of Jesus, but it has a far deeper and more religious meaning. It is to be taken into his secret life. It is a mystic incorporation into Christ's death and resurrection as the standing act of spiritual existence. We are

195

baptised into his death, and not merely into dying like him. We do not echo his resurrection, we share it. As his trophies we become part of Christ's offering to God; just as the captives in his procession were part of the victor's self-presentation to the divinity of Rome. God leadeth us in triumph in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:11). It is, indeed, for Christ's sake we are forgiven, but for the sake of a Christ who is the Creator of our repentance and not only the Proxy of our curse. And it is to our faith the grace is given, yet not *because of our faith*, which is no more perfect than our repentance. It is to nothing so poor as our faith or our repentance that new life is given, but only to Christ on his Cross, and to us for his sake who is the Creator and Fashioner of both. Our justification rests on this atoning creative Christ alone. And when the matter is so viewed, the objection some have to the phrase "for Christ's sake" should disappear.

No martyrdom could do what the death of Christ does for faith. No martyrdom could offer God in advance the souls of a changed race. For no martyr as such is sure of the future. It is easier to forget all the martyrs than the Saviour; and their power fades with time, while his grows with the ages. With the

196

martyr's death we can link many admirable reflections, exhortations, and even inspirations. What it does not give us is the new and Eternal Life. It is not the consummation of God's saving purpose for the world.

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

197

**The Threefold Cord**

198

199

## VII

**The Threefold Cord**

**T**HERE are three great aspects of the work of Christ which have in turn held the attention of the Church, and come home with special force to its spiritual situation at a special time. These are—

1. Its triumphant aspect;
2. Its satisfactionary aspect;
3. Its regenerative aspect.

The first emphasises the finality of our Lord's victory over the evil power or devil; the second, the finality of his satisfaction, expiation, or atonement presented to the holy power of God; and the third the finality of his sanctifying or new-creative influence on the soul of man. The first marked the Early Church, the second the Medieval and Reformation Church, while the third marks the Modern Church.

And if you fall back upon the New Testament, where all the subsequent development of the Church is in the germ, as a philosophy might be

200

packed in a phrase, you will find those three strands wonderfully and prophetically entwined in 1 Corinthians 1:30, where it is said that Christ is made unto us (2) justification; (3) sanctification; and (1) redemption. The whole history of the doctrine in the Church may be viewed as the exegesis by time of this great text of the Spirit.

Now, it is not meant that in the period specially marked by one of these aspects the other two were absent. In various of the medieval theologians you find all three. And it is a good test of the native aptitude of any theologian, and of his evangelical grasp, that he should find them all necessary to express the fullness of the vast work, and its adequacy to anything so great and manifold as the soul. But what we do not find in the classic theologians of the past is the co-ordination of the three aspects under one comprehensive idea,

P.T. FORSYTH

one organic principle, corresponding to the complete unity of Christ's person, who did the work. We do not find such a unitary view of the work as we should expect when we reflect that it was the work of a personality so complete as Christ, and so absolute as the God who acted in Christ. Yet we must strive after such a view, by the very nature of our faith. A mere composite or eclectic theology means a distracted

201

faith. A creed just nailed together means Churches that cannot draw together. We cannot, at least the Church cannot, rest healthily upon medley and mortised aspects of the one thing which connects our one soul with the one God in one moral world. We cannot rest in unresolved views of reconciliation. As the reconciliation comes to pervade our whole being, and as we answer it with heart and strength and mind, we become more and more impatient of fragmentary ways of understanding it. We crave, and we move, to see that the first aspect is the condition of the second, and the second of the third, and that they all condition each other in a living interaction.

Now the object I have in view in this lecture is to press a former point as furnishing this unity—that the active and effective principle in the work of Christ was the perfect obedience of holy love which he offered amidst the conditions of sin, death, and judgement. The potent thing was not the suffering but the sanctity, and not the sympathetic confession of our sin so much as the practical confession of God's holiness. This principle (I hope to show) co-ordinates the various aspects which have been distorted by isolation. This one action of the holy Saviour's total person was, on its various

202

sides, the destruction of evil, the satisfaction of God, and the sanctification of men. And it is in this moral medium of holiness (if I may so say) that these three effects pass and play into each other with a spiritual interpenetration.

Thus Christ's complete victory over the evil power or principle. His redemption (1), is the obverse of his regenerating and sanctifying effect on us (3). To deliver us from evil is not simply to take us out of hell, it is to take us into heaven. Christ does not simply pluck us out of the hands of Satan, he does so by giving us to God. He does not simply release us from slavery, he commits us in the act to a positive liberty. He does not simply cancel the charge against us in court and bid us walk out of jail, He meets us at the prison-door and puts us in a new way of life. His forgiveness is not simply retrospective, it is, in the same act, the gift of eternal life. Our evil is

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

overcome by good. We are won from sin by an act which at the same time makes us not simply innocent but holy.

So also we must see that the third—our regenerate sanctification—is the condition of the second—the complete satisfaction of God. The only complete satisfaction that can be made to a holy God from the sinful side is the sinner's restored obedience, his return to holiness. Now,

203

the cheap and superficial way of putting that is to say that penitent amendment is the only satisfaction we can give to a grieved God. But future amendment does no more than the duty of the future hour. And rivers of water from our eyes will not wash out the guilt of the past; nor will they undo the evil we have set afloat in souls far gone beyond our reach or control. Yet it remains true that nothing can atone to holiness but holiness. And it must be the holiness of the sinner. It must also be an obedience of the kind required by the whole situation, moral and spiritual. It must be the obedience not of improvement but of reconciliation, not of laborious amendment but of regenerated faith. But faith in what? Faith in One who alone contains in himself a holy obedience so perfect as to meet the holiness of God on the scale of our sin; but One also who, by the same obedience, has the power to reproduce in man the kind of holiness which alone can please God after all that has come and gone. No suffering can atone. No pain can satisfy a holy God; no death, as death. Yet satisfied he must be; else the freedom of grace becomes but an arbitrary and non-holy thing, a thing instinctive to the divine nature instead of a victory of the divine will. Also consider

204

this: much of your difficulty in connection with satisfaction will yield if you keep in view that what we are concerned with is not the satisfaction of a demand but of a Person, not of a claim by God but of the heart and soul of God. I know it is easier to discuss and adjust statutory claims than to grasp the manifold action of a living and eternal Person. So I am afraid I must be very theological for a moment and tax you accordingly. The chief reason why so many hate theology is because it taxes; and there is nothing we shrink from like spiritual toil. But let the choice and earnest spirit consider this.

The essence of holiness is God's perfect satisfaction, his perfect repose in eternal fullness. And the Christian plea is that this is Self-satisfaction, in the sublimest sense of the phrase. For us, mostly, the word has an ignoble sense. But that is only because what we meet most is an exclusive self-satisfaction, an individual self-sufficiency. But when we have an entirely inclusive self-

P.T. FORSYTH

satisfaction, an eternal and complete adequacy to himself in the most critical situation, we have the whole native fullness of God blessed forever, with men beneath the shadow of his wing. The perpetual act of holy God is a perpetual satisfaction or accord

---

205

between his nature and his will at every juncture, and a satisfaction from his own infinite holy resource—a Self-satisfaction. God is always the author of his own satisfaction: that is to say, his holiness is always equal to its own atonement. God in the Son is the perfect satisfaction and joy of God in the Father; and God holy in the sinful Cross is the perfect satisfaction of God the holy in the sinless heavens. Satisfaction there must be in God's own nature, whether under the conditions of perfect obedience in a harmonious world, or under those of obedience jarred and a world distraught. God has power to secure that the perfect holy obedience of heaven shall not be eternally destroyed by the disobedience of earth. He has power to satisfy himself, and maintain his holiness infrangible, even in face of a world in arms. But satisfied he must be. For an unsatisfied God, a dissatisfied God, would be no God. He would but reflect the distraction of the world, and so succumb to it.

But a holy God could be satisfied by neither pain nor death, but by holiness alone. The atoning thing is not obedient suffering but suffering obedience. He could be satisfied and rejoiced only by the hallowing of his name, by perfect and obedient answer to his holy heart from amid conditions of pain, death, and

---

206

judgement. Holy obedience alone, unto death, can satisfy the Holy Lord.

---

Now as to this obedience mark two things.

1. It includes (we saw) the idea that in obedience Christ accepted the judgement holiness must pass upon sin, and did so in a way that confessed it as holy from amidst the deepest experience of it, the experience not of a spectator but a victim. His obedience was not merely a fine, perfect, and mighty harmony of his own with God's blessed will; but it was the acceptance on man's behalf of that judgement which sin had entailed, and the confession on man's behalf in a tremendous act that the judgement was good and holy. For the holiness of God makes two demands: first, for an answering holiness in love, and second, for a judgement on those who do not answer but defy.

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

And Christ met both, in one and the same act. He was judged as one who, being made sin, was never sinful, but absolutely well-pleasing to God.

2. And the second point is this: The satisfactory obedience must be obedience from the race that rebelled. Its holiness must atone for its sin. But how can that possibly be? Can it be by mere amendment from us? Can we bring any amendment

---

207

to atone for the past and secure its remission? Could the race do it? Solidary in its sin by its moral unity, could the race earn a solidary salvation? Could you conceive of mankind as one vast sinful soul repenting with a like unity, turning like the prodigal, and deputing the most illustrious spiritual hero of its number to offer its repentance to God in Jesus Christ? If the supposition were possible, that might indeed be a certain welcome offering made to God's holiness; but it would not be made by it. It would be something beyond the resources of holiness, and God would not be the Saviour. He would accept more sacrifice than he had power to make. And it would make the action of Christ a power conferred on him by self-saved man instead of inherent in him from God. His commission would be but to God, not from God. And how should a sinful race offer from its own damaged resources what would satisfy the holiness of God? Or, if repentance could satisfy holiness, how are we to know how much, how deep, repentance would do it, and leave us sure it was done?

---

The holiness that atones, though it return from the race that rebelled, must therefore be

---

208

the gift of the holiness atoned. For if holiness could be satisfied by anything outside itself it would not be absolutely holy. So if holiness can be satisfied with nothing but holiness it can only be with a holiness which itself creates. God alone can create in us the holiness that will please him. And this he has done in Jesus Christ incarnate. But it is in Jesus Christ as the creator of man's holiness, not as the organ of it, as man's sanctifier, and not merely man's delegate. Christ is our reconciler because on the Cross he was our redeemer from sin's power into no mere independence or courage or safety, but into real holiness; because the same act that redeems us produces holiness, and presents us in this holiness to God and his communion. The holiness of Christ is the satisfying thing to God, yet not because of the beauty of holiness offered

P.T. FORSYTH

to his sight in the perfect character of Christ. We are not saved either by Christ's ethical character or our own, but by his person's creative power and work on us. Christ's holiness is the satisfying thing to God, because it is not only the means but also the anticipation of our holiness, because it carries all our future holiness latent in it and to God's eye patent; because in his saving act he is the creative power of which our new life is the product. It is not only that Christ conquered

209

for himself and emerged with his soul for a prey, but, he being what he was, his victory contained ours. If he died all died. It was not only that all the sin of the world, pointed to its worst, could not make him a sinner. It was that by all the holiness of eternity he had power to make the worst sinners saints. Of course, there is no way to sanctification but by deliverance from sin, by being "unsinned." But no sinful man can "unsin" himself, however he amend.

It can only be done by the creation in him of a new life. It can only be done by the sinless Son of God, who lived from eternity in God's holiness, entered man, lived that holiness out in the face of sin, and thus not only broke the evil power by living it down but created that holiness in us by living it in. What is our redemption is thus also our reconciliation. If the atoning thing is holiness (which it is), and not suffering (which it is not), then Christ atoned by an act which created a new holiness in us and not a new suffering. The act which overcame the world intensively for good and all was also the act which slowly masters the world in the extensive sense. His moral and spiritual victory was so deep and thorough that it gives him power to subdue

210

other consciences to his holy self, world without end,

There is an old word used in this connection which there is much disposition at the present to recall and reclaim. It is the word surety, of which some of our fathers were so fond. The word substitute has unfortunate and misleading suggestions, and it has practically been dropped in favour of a word more ethical and more constitutional, like representative. But even that word misleads us to think of Christ as the spiritual protagonist of a democracy, drawing his power from those he represents; and it muffles the truth that his relation to us is royal and not elective, that it is creative and not merely expository. He does not express the natural repentance of the old

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

humanity but creates the penitent faith of the new—"the new man created unto holiness." It is not easy to find a word that has no defect, since all words, even the greatest, are made from the dust and spring from our sandy passions, earthly needs, and fleeting thoughts; and they are hard to stretch to the measure of eternal things without breaking under us somewhere. The word surety itself gives way at a great strain—as does guarantee. Christ's function for

211

us was not simply an assurance to God, from one who knew us well, that for all our aberrations we were sound and could be trusted at bottom. His confession of us was not simply his expression of his conviction, as deep as life, that man, though tough and slow, would in the long-run turn, obey, and confess if properly treated from above. It was not a pledge to God, or an encouragement to man, that Humanity would come right when experience had done its work on his native goodness and his spiritual nature, so much deeper than his sin. It was not a warranty to God that human nature would at last recover its spiritual balance, of which recovery Christ might point to himself as being an earnest, a prelude, a classic illustration. It was not that Christ staked his insight into the deep nature of this most excellent creature man that he would one day rise from his swine, and return from his rebellion, and fall into the Father's arms. Such poor suggestions as these spring from our common and commercial use of a word like surety or guarantee. As if Christ were a third party between two who did not quite believe in each other. As if God by this aid might be led to foresee that man would come to himself in a faith and repentance distant but certain, might credit it to him in advance, and might

212

pardon on that ground. That would destroy grace. And it would give man the satisfaction of satisfying God if he would but give him time to collect the wherewithal.

Christ is no third party, no arbitrator, no moral broker. And he is not the first instalment of man's return to God, its harbinger. In no such sense is he our surety before God. Because his work is not one of insight but of regeneration. It did not turn on his genius for reading us, but his power to create us anew. He himself is the creator in us of what he promises for us. Any surety that Christ gives to God for man is really God swearing by himself; it is the Creator's self-assurance of his own regenerative power.

P.T. FORSYTH

Christ, as the Eternal Son of Holy God, can offer him a holiness which creates and includes that of the race, and does not simply prophesy it.

---

We might put it thus: Christ alone in his sinless perfection can feel all God's holiness in judging sin; and therefore he alone could confess and honour it. No sinful man could do that; and therefore no sinful man could duly repent. The value of repentance is always in proportion to the sense of God's holiness. To

213

confess that holiness is the great postulate in order to confess sin. And the race could duly confess its sin and repent only if there arose in it One who by a perfect and impenitent holiness in himself, and by his organic unity with us, could create such holiness in the sinful as should make the new life one long repentance transcended by faith and thankful joy. This was and is Christ's work. And the satisfaction to God, as it was certainly not his suffering, was also more than the spectacle of his own holy soul presented to God. It was that holy soul (the holier as he faced and conquered evil ever growing more black and bitter)—it was that holy soul seen by God as the cause and creator of the race's confession, both of holiness and of sin, in a Church of the reborn. The satisfaction to God was Christ, not as an isolated character, or in an act wholly outside us and our responsive union with him; but it was Christ as the author of our sanctification and repentance. Our repentance and our sanctity are of saying value before God only as produced by the creative holiness of Christ. Christ creates our holiness because of his own sanctification of himself—John 17:19—and his complete victory over the evil power in a life-experience of moral conflict.

214

You wish perhaps here to ask me this question: Is then the sanctity of a Unitarian who rejects any satisfaction by Christ, any atonement, as the ground of man's holiness, is that sanctity of no account before God? Is the true repentance of those who do not know of an atoning Christianity of little price with him? Far from it. But from our point of view we must regard them as incomplete stages, which draw their value with God from a subliminal union with that completed and holy offering of Christ which he never ceases to see, however far it be beneath our conscious light.

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

---

When therefore we speak of Christ as our Surety, we mean much more than would be meant by a mere sponsorship. We suppose a solidary union of faith created by the Saviour in the sinner, which not only impresses him but incorporates him with Christ. All turns upon that spiritual solidarity. All turns upon the reality of that new life for which Paul had to invent a new phrase—"in Christ." A tremendous phrase, like that other, "the New Creation"—and hardly intelligible to a youthful or impressionist Christianity. The real ground of our forgiveness is not our confession of sin, and not even Christ's confession of our sin, but his agonised

215

confession of God's holiness, and its absorbing effect on us. To be in grace we must be found in him. Our new penitent life is his creation. He contains the principle and power of our forgiveness. And it comes home to us only as we abide in him. In him, and only in him, the normal holy man, the man holy with all the holiness of God, have we the living power of release from guilt, escape from sin, repentance, faith, and newness of life. We are justified only as we are incorporate (not clothed) in the perfect righteousness of Christ, our Regenerator, and not in proportion as the righteousness of Christ has made palpable way in us. It is not as Christ is in us that we are saved, but as we are in Christ. It is this being in Christ for our justification that makes justification necessarily work out to sanctification, and forgiveness be one with eternal life.

We shall be misled even by what is true in the representative aspect of Christ unless we grasp how much more he is, how creative he is, how the solidarity involved in his representation is due to his own act of self-identification and not to natural identity with us. We must take quite seriously that supreme word of a "new creation in Jesus Christ." We need not get

216

lost in discussing the metaphysic of it; but we must have so tasted the new life that nothing but the strongest word possible is just to it.

---

Christ our New Creator! He was not simply a new departure in the history of *ethical civilisation*, by the introduction of an exalted morality. If that was

P.T. FORSYTH

what he came with, he brought much less than the conscience needs; and on countless points he has left us without guidance today. Nor was he simply a great new departure in the history of *religious ideas*. He did much more than bring us a new idea of God. If that was all, again it was not what we need. For we have more and higher ideas of God than we know what to do with, more than we have power to realise. But he stands for a new departure in the history of *Creation*. His work in so far is cosmic. It is a new storey added to the world. It is a new departure in the action which made the universe. It is an entirely new stage in the elevation of human nature, so imperfect in our first creation, to its divine height in holiness. By his moral treatment of our sinful case, which is our actual historic case, we are taken into a share of his superhuman life. That is our salvation. It is life and power

217

we need. It is to be made over again by the Maker's redeeming hand. We are redeemed from the ban of sin's magic circle by the only One who has the secret of the unseen powers; we are joined with the sin-destroying life of Christ. And we are redeemed, by the very nature of that redemption, into the fellowship of his eternal and blessed peace. And that is our Reconciliation. The act that justified sanctifies and reconciles. And that totality of Christ in his Church is what God looks on and is satisfied. We are, as a believing race, in the Son in whom he is always well pleased.

Now what is it that has created so much difficulty for the old Protestant doctrine? I mean difficulty in the mind of Christian believers, and still more in their experience. For we need not trouble here about difficulty from the side of the worldlings or the ethical sentimentalists. But difficulty arose within the pale of the most devout and devoted evangelical experience. Perhaps it has arisen in your own minds. Well, the old Protestantism, as you know, was greatly exercised about the true relation between faith and works. And it had to insist so strongly on the sole value of faith in order to cope with

218

Rome that its later years fell into an excessive dread of good works, lest there should be ascribed to them saving effect. As a result faith was credited with a merely receptive power, or no more beyond that than a power of assent. Men lost hold of the great Lutheran fact that faith is the most mighty and active thing in the soul, that our faith is our all before God, that it is an energy of the whole person, that good works are done by this whole

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

believing person, and that faith by its very nature, as trust in God's love, is bound to work out in love. They misread the moral impulse in faith, its power to recast personality and refashion life. They did not, of course, overlook the necessity of such innovation; but they put it down to a subsequent action of the Spirit over and above faith—almost as if the Spirit and his sanctification were a second revelation, a new dispensation. Which indeed many of the mystics thought it was—like many rationalist mystics today, who think we have outgrown historic Christianity and the historic Christ through our modern light. The old Protestant orthodoxy did not realise that the real source of the Spirit is the Cross. It therefore detached faith from life in a way that has produced the most unfortunate results, both in an antinomianism within the Church, and in a

219

Socinian protest without, which was inevitable, and so far valuable, but was equally extreme. Faith was treated by the positive school then as a mystic power, or an intellectual, but not as a moral. It was not the renovating power in life, but only prepared the ground for the renovating power to come in. It had not in itself the transforming power either individually or socially. Its connection with love was accidental and not necessary—as it must be, being faith in love.

Now, if we translate this experimental language into theological, it means that they did not connect up justification and sanctification. Forgiveness of sin was not identified closely enough with eternal life. Eternal life was detached from identity with that which was the true eternal in life, from faith's practical (*i.e.*, experimental) godliness. Forgiveness did not go, as it should, with renewal of heart and conduct in one act. It delivered from an old world without opening a new and planting us in its revolutionised principles. Faith had, indeed, the power to do works of love, but it was not driven to them so that it could do no other. And this flaw in faith corresponded to a like flaw in the reading of Christ's act which was

220

the object of faith. They treated the work of Christ in a way far too objective. It was something done wholly over our heads. There was not a solidary connection between Christ's work and the Church it created. Attention was concentrated upon one aspect of Christ's work—its action on God. That is quite an essential aspect (perhaps the chief), but it must not be

P.T. FORSYTH

isolated. No aspect of that work must be isolated, as I began by saying. It is the service an accomplished theology does for the Church to keep all aspects in one purview, in the proportion of a great and comprehensive faith. We have today gone to another extreme, and isolated another aspect—the moral effect of Christ on man. So we need not give ourselves any airs of superiority to the old orthodoxy in that respect of onesidedness. And we must also remember that the whole secret of truth in this matter is not what we are sometimes told—a change of emphasis. We have changed the emphasis, and yet we are short of the truth; and the state of the Church's piety shows it. We have moved the accent from the objective to the subjective work of Christ; and we fall victims more and more to a weak religious subjectivism which has the ethical interest but not the moral note. We fall into a subjectivism

221

which is reflected in one aspect of Pragmatism and overworks the principle contained in the words, "By their fruits shall ye know them" (know *them*, whether they are true to the Gospel, not the Gospel and whether it is true to God and reality). So that people say, "I will believe whatever I feel does me good. My soul will eat what I enjoy, and drink what makes me happy." They are their own test of truth, and "their own Holy Ghost." The secret, therefore, is not change of accent but balance of aspects. And the true and competent theology is not only one which regards the Church's whole history and outlook (thinking in centuries, I called it), but it is one disciplined to think in proportion, to think together the various aspects of the Cross, and make them enrich and not exclude one another.

The defect of the old view was, then, as I have said, that it could not couple up justification and sanctification. It could not show how the same act of Christ which delivered from the guilt of sin delivered also from its power. And this was because in the justification too much stress was laid upon the suffering; and suffering in itself has no sanctifying power. You see how

222

our practical experience, when it is well noted, provides our theological principles. We do find that suffering by itself debases, and even imbrutes, instead of purifying; that pain is an occasion rather than a cause of profit. That is a moral principle of spiritual experience. Consequently when excessive attention was given to the suffering of Christ, and the atoning value was supposed to reside there instead of in the holy obedience, the work of Christ

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

lost in purifying and sanctifying effect, whatever it may have done in pacifying or converting. The atoning thing being the holy obedience to the Holy, the same holiness which satisfied God sanctifies us. That is the idea the Reformers did not grasp, through their preoccupation with Christ's sufferings. But it is the only idea which unites justification and sanctification and both with redemption. For the holiness which satisfied God and sanctifies us also destroyed the evil power in the world and its hold on us. It was the moral conquest of the world's evil, amid the extreme conditions of sin and suffering, by a Victor who had a capital solidarity with the race, and not merely an individual connection with it as a member. So that it has been said that we must explain and correct current ideas of substitutionary

223

expiation by the idea of solidary reparation. The curse on man was the guilty power of sin and its train—hitherto invincible. There was but one way in which this could be mastered. A moral curse could be mastered only in a purely moral way, the world-curse by the world-conscience. It could be mastered but by One whose sinlessness was not only negatively proof against all that sin could do, but positively holy; and he was thus deadly to sin, satisfactory to God's loving judgement, and creative of a new humanity in the heart of the old. This was a task beyond mere substitutionary penal suffering as that phrase is now so poorly understood. For that would have been just and effectual only if it had fallen on the arch-rebel, who, with the nobility of Milton's Satan in his first stage, assumed himself all the worst consequences of his revolt to spare the other souls whom he had misled.

The truth is that Anselm, in spite of the unspeakable service he did both to the faith and thought of his time and all time, yet put theology on a false track in this matter. He had too much to say of a supererthical tribute paid to God's *honour* by the composition of a

224

voluntary suffering. Our sin was compounded rather than really atoned. He did not grasp the sacrifice of Christ as made to God's *holiness*; as one therefore which could only be ethical in its nature, by way of holy obedience. This obedience was the Holy Father's joy and satisfaction. He found himself in it. And it was also the foiling and destruction of the evil power. And it was farther the creative source of holiness in a race not only impressed by the spectacle of its tragic hero victorious, but regenerate by the solidarity of a new

P.T. FORSYTH

life from its creative Head. The work of Christ was thus in the same act triumphant on evil, satisfying to the heart of God, and creative to the conscience of man by virtue of his solidarity with God on the one side, and on the other with the race. He subdued Satan, rejoiced the Father, and set up in Humanity the kingdom—all in one supreme and consummate act of his one person. He destroyed the kingdom of evil, not by way of preparation for the kingdom of God, but by actually establishing God's kingdom in the heart of it. And he rejoiced, filled, and satisfied the heart of God, not by a statutory obedience, or by one private to himself, which spectacle disposed God to bless and sanctify man; but by presenting in the compendious compass of his own person a

225

Humanity presanctified by the irresistible power of his own creative and timeless work.

The holy demand of God is always couched in a false form when it is made to call for the expiation of an equivalent suffering instead of a confession of God's holiness, adequately holy, from the side of the sinner under judgement. Heaven and its happiness are wrongly conceived as immunity from judgement instead of joy in the consummation of judgement in righteousness and holiness for ever. It was not clear to the old view that the very nature of justification was sanctification, that the Justifier was so only as One who always perfectly sanctified himself, and was organic, in the act, with the race in its new life. It appeared to our fathers as if sanctification were only a facultative sequel of justification.

Whatever we mean, therefore, by substitution, it is something more than merely vicarious. It is certainly not something done over our heads. It is representative. Yet not by the will of man choosing Christ, but by the will of Christ choosing man, and freely identifying himself with man. It is a matter not so much of substitutionary expiation (which, as these words are commonly understood, leaves us too little committed), but of solidary confession and

226

praise from amid the judgement fires, where the Son of God walks with the creative sympathy of the holy among the sinful sons of men. It is not as if Christ were our changeling, as if his lot and ours were transposed on the Cross. But he was our self-appointed plenipotentiary, and what he engaged for we must implement by an organic spiritual entail. So far his work was as objective as our creation, as independent of our leave; and it committed us

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

without reference to our consent but to our need. When he died for all, all implicitly died. The great transaction was done for the race. But objective as it was, gift as it was to us from pure grace, it was so in its initiative rather than in its method. Essentially it was a new creation of us, but practically the new creator was in us, and the word was flesh. In such a way that he and his are one by faith in a solidarity corresponding from beneath, *mutatis mutandis*, to the solidarity between Father and Son from above.

He and his form an organic spiritual unity—one will in two parties or persons. Mere substitution is mere exchange of parts, in which one is excluded and immune. But the work of Christ is inclusive and committal, by our continuity of life with him through the spirit in a

---

227

Church.\* The suffering of Christ is but the under and seamy side of that solidarity whose upper side is the beauty of our corporate holiness in him. The same law, the same act, which laid our sin on him lays his holiness on us, and absorbs us into his satisfaction to God. In the same act God made him to be sin for us and made us righteousness in him. In the empirical sense we are no more made righteous than he was made sinful. But we are as closely incorporated in the holy world as he was in the sinful. And our holiness is not ours, in the same sense as our sin was not his—in the sense of initiative and individual responsibility for it.

It was as our self-appointed representative that Christ died. He died as the result, as the finale, of the act by which he identified himself with us and emptied himself from heaven. He is our Head by divine right and not by election of

\* In his saving act he so became one with the race that the new Humanity he set up arises in history as the company of those who answer and seal his incarnate act with their faith. By his incarnation and redemption Christ did not simply deify Humanity, as a pagan Christianity had it in the fourth century, nor manifest the essential deity of Humanity as a pagan Christianity has it in the twentieth. But he so took a Humanity predestined for him that those who take him should become the new Humanity in the true Church.

---

228

ours. Our representative, our surety he was not our choice illustration, not our mandatory champion, not our moral deputy, not our friendly sponsor promising that we should one day pay our debt because of his optimistic faith in us. It was not in us that he had faith so much as in himself as the power and grace of God. He did not promise that we would pay (if the metaphor may be allowed); he paid for us, knowing that in himself alone could we raise

P.T. FORSYTH

the vast advance. What was presented to God was not only Christ's perfection, nor was it his confidence in us, but also his antedated action on us, his confidence in himself for us. That was what stood to our good. There was offered to God a racial obedience which was implicit in the creative power of his, and not merely parallel with his, as if he were our firstfruits instead of our Sun.

---

The juristic aspect is a real element in Christ's death. It has a moral core; and we cannot discard it without discarding the moral order of the world as one revelation of that irrefragable holiness of God which must be expressed in judgement and confessed from its midst. The chief defect of the great revolution which began in Schleiermacher and ended in Ritschl has

229

been that it allowed no place to that side of Christ's work. And it is a defect that much impoverishes the current type of religion, beclouds it, and robs it of the power of moral conviction by reducing the idea of sin and dismissing the note of guilt. It makes grace not so much free as arbitrary, because it does not regard in its revelation what is due to the holiness of God. It banishes from our Christian faith the one note which more than any other we have today come to need restored—the note of judgement. When properly construed the juristic element is a great power to lift faith from the mere ethicism to which Ritschl tends into the mystic region which is so essential to make a moral power a religious, to provide a home for the soul as well as a lamp to our feet, and to secure for believers a hidden communion with Christ. It also saves the grace of God from being a mere favouritism to believers, or a mere concession to misery.

There is no doubt we are in reaction from a time when that side of things was overdone. The juristic aspect taken alone, and taken in relation to legal demand rather than personal holiness—such *satisfaction*, when isolated, does not do justice to the aspect in which Christ was triumphant over evil (*redemption*) nor to the

230

aspect in which his work is regenerative for mankind (*sanctification*). And it tended to promote the fatal notion that holiness could be satisfied with suffering and death, or with anything short of an answering holiness effected and guaranteed. The satisfaction in it was offered to a distributive justice

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

rather than to a personal holiness, to a claim rather than a person, to a regulative law rather than to a constitutive life. All that and more is quite true.

But I must ask you to deal sympathetically with those juristic views, to treat them with spiritual insight. It was the vice of Socinianism, and it is the vice of the Rationalism which is its legatee, that it criticised orthodoxy by the fierce light of the natural conscience instead of by the inner nature and better knowledge of the revelation on which orthodoxy founded all. It criticised theology by the natural reason and not by the supernatural Gospel. There is nothing more vulgar than slashing criticism in such a matter. You cannot slash here without cutting the face of some great and true saints to whom these views are dearer than life because bound up with their entrusted Gospel and their life eternal. One of the most damnatory features of popular theological liberalism is the violent

---

231

handling of what it calls orthodoxy, and its total lack of spiritual flexibility and interpretative sympathy—caused largely by the prior lack of theological knowledge and culture. That some orthodoxy is also shallow and insolent is no justification for those whose plea is that they know better. I pray you to listen to the old theology not as fools but as wise, as evolutionists and reformers, not as dynamitards. Consider what was gained for us in it. True, it sometimes presented its gain in false forms, as when it spoke of the equivalence of Christ's suffering to what we all deserved. That was but the form, and the Socinians did good work in the correction of such things. But this at least had been gained—the conviction that it was not the touchy honour of a feudal monarch that was to be dealt with at the head of the world, but the love of a just God. The conviction behind all was the grandest moral conviction possible—that all things are by Christ in the hands of infinite righteousness and holy love. This vast moral step had been taken. Men had come to realise that the result of Christ's work was eternal *right*; and especially that it was right, not in reference to the claims of an evil will, but in regard to those of a will perfectly good. The days were certainly outgrown by this

---

232

juristic theology when there could be any such talk as filled the early Church about dealing with the rights Satan had won over man. Evil has no rights in the soul. From that, indeed, it was a great advance even to Anselm's apotheosis of God's honour. And it was a further advance still beyond feudal dignity when the great and noble categories of jurisprudence were invoked

P.T. FORSYTH

to replace the notion of courtly or military honour which made God and man duellists rather than aught else. It was a vast step in the moralising of theology when its grand concern came to be the establishment of men before a righteous and social judge. Do not speak contemptuously of that step. It is one of our own stages. It gave us rest and uplifting on our journey to where we now stand. We have only had to carry further that moralising of the nature of justice. The whole idea was ethical and social compared with what went before it—at least as much so as ours now marks a farther advance. It was ethical as regards claims by an evil power which can have no moral rights. And it was social in that it brought Christian belief into line with the ruling principles of society as it then was. It is a view, moreover, which has shown itself capable of inspiring some of the deepest,

233

sweetest, and most beneficent piety the world has ever seen. Moreover, it had in it active conditions of moral growth which broke through the packthreads of its own time. We today have only had to carry forward that process of moralising the idea of our relation to God which the jurists began. Their theology had a moral passion which shed the features in it that were ethically defective, and assimilated the moral idea of the Gospel as we are now taught to read it in a Bible rediscovered and reconstrued by the Spirit's action both in the faith and the criticism of the day.

Among these three aspects of Christ's work some minds will be drawn by preference to one, some to another, just as different ages have been. Some souls, according to their experience, will gravitate to the great Deliverance, some to the great Atonement, and some to the great Regeneration. Some ministries will be marked by the influence of one, some of another. That is all within the free affinities of the spiritual life, and the preferential sympathies of the moral idiosyncrasy. And the Church is enriched by the complementary action of such diversities of ministry. But

234

what ought not to be encouraged is any tendency on the part of those who prefer the one line to deny the equal right of the others. And what ought not to be tolerated is the habit of denunciation, by those who see the one side, of the sides they find nothing in; and especially the habit of assuming that the sides they are blind to represent a lower Christian level. Where this is possible there has really been little done for the conscience by the view that is

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

adopted. And it is both absurd and overweening to ask us to believe that those sections of the Church, and those lights of piety, who held to views at present in the background were all theological bigots and moral inepts; that real moral aptitude and theological faculty did not arise till now; that a like devotion obscures such questions; that babes and sucklings perfect theological praise; that wisdom is justified by children; and that it is now the monopoly of those who detach theology from religion, and dismiss it to a historical museum.

If Christ be the Saviour of the world in any sense, the thing he did must be at least as great as the world. And if as great, then no less manifold, and no less the object for first-rate intelligence than the lower objects of experience. Faith in such a Saviour cannot

---

235

continue to live for either heart or conscience if it is detached from mind. Nor can mind submit to be warned on the supreme object of the soul's concern if that object is loved and sought with all our heart and soul and strength. The very type of prayer in the non-theological forms which claim to be Christian shows to what we can sink when faith is stripped of mind and strength. It is only a poor Christ that can be housed in a poor creed, and a feeble prophet that is canonised when a sentimentalised ethic is offered as religion.

---

236

P.T. FORSYTH

237

---

## Addendum

---

238

239

---

## Addendum

### Note To Lecture IV

THERE is a point in pp. 118-9 where, in speaking freely, I have spoken loosely, and I have expressed myself with some want of caution likely to cause misunderstanding of my full meaning. I there say that the wrath of God is not to be taken as a pathos or affection, but as the working out of his judgement in a moral order. My intention was to discourage the idea that it was a mood or temper, and to connect it with the sure changelessness of God's moral nature. But on reviewing the passage I find I have so put it that I might easily suggest that the anger of God was simply the automatic recoil of his moral order upon the transgressor, the nemesis which dogs him and makes hard his way, his self-hardening; as if there were no personal reaction of a Holy God himself upon the sin, and no infliction of his displeasure upon the sinner. This is an impression I should be sorry to leave; for it is one that would take much of its most holy significance and solemn mystery out of the work of Christ.

Was Christ's bearing of God's wrath just his exposure to the action of the vast moral machine? Did he just become involved, as our rescuer, in the mechanism which regulates ethical Humanity, using at times man's anger as its agent? This mechanism might be there possibly without

---

240

the ordinance of a God that it should be so, or possibly as the institution of a deist and distant God who calmly watches his world spin with the motion he gave it. But is God not personally immanent and active in his own moral order? Did Christ just incur the automatic penalty of that order as he strove to save its victims? Was he just caught in the works? Or was there implied, and felt, also the element of personal displeasure acting through that order—the element that would differentiate wrath from mere nemesis, and infliction from mere recoil?

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

Granting then that there was in Christ's suffering the element of personal displeasure and infliction, was it man's or God's? Was his treatment simply the reaction of sinful man against holiness, or was it the reaction of a holy God against sin? Did he himself feel he was yielding to man's dark will, or God's will, darker, but higher and surer? Did he suffer, just as the holiest saint might in a wicked world, the extreme hate of men; or was God's displeasure also upon him? We have abundantly seen that this could not be upon him as his own desert, not as it lies upon a guilty conscience. If he was made sin he was not made sinful; if he was made a curse he was not accursed. And have we not also seen that he who acted in our stead could act with no fitness and no precision if he took on him the mere equivalent of what the guilty would have paid had they never been redeemed (that would have needed a generous arch-rebel), but only if he paid what was appointed as the price of their redemption? The uttermost farthing is not the last mite of their desert but of God's ransom price. But the curse of sin's sequel is most real whatever the amount. And it was certainly on Christ, by his freely putting himself under it beside the men on whom it lay. That curse then—was it an infliction from God, which did not lift, did not cease to be inflicted, even when the Son put himself in its way; or was it something that struck

241

him only from men below and not from God above at all?

Surely as it falls on man at least it is God's infliction. We do not only grieve God but we provoke his anger. There is nothing we need more to recall into our sense of sin at present than this (though we must extend it, as we must extend our redemption, to a racial and solidary wrath of God in which we share). Its absence has slackened and flattened the whole tone and level of Christian life. The love of God becomes real anger to our sin, and to us as we identify ourselves with the sin, to us while, outside Christ, we are no more than members of a sinful race. Is not our satisfaction and increase in well-doing the personal blessing of God? Then surely our misery and infatuation on the other path is his personal anger. If a true evolution carries with it the personal and joyful action of God in blessing its results, is the result of degeneration a mere natural process in the moral region, secluded from God's displeased action and infliction? Is it all his will only as a thing willed, and not as his action in willing it?

Weigh, as men of real moral experience, what is involved in the hardening of the sinner. That is the worst penalty upon sin, its cumulative and deadening history. Well, is it simply self-hardening? Is it simply the reflex

P.T. FORSYTH

action of sin upon character, sin going in, settling in, and reproducing itself there? Is it no part of God's positive procedure in judging sin, and bringing it, for salvation, to a crisis of judgement grace? When Pharaoh hardens his heart, is that in no sense God hardening Pharaoh's heart? When a man hardens himself against God, is there nothing in the action and purpose of God that takes part in that induration? Is that anger not as real as the superabounding grace? Are not both bound up in one complex treatment of the moral world? When a man piles up his sin and rejoices in iniquity, is God

242

simply a bystander and spectator of the process? Does not God's pressure on the man blind him, urge him, stiffen him, shut him up into sin, if only that he might be shut up to mercy alone? Is it enough to say that this is but the action of a process which God simply watches in a permissive way? Is he but passive and not positive to the situation? Can the Absolute be passive to anything? If so, where is the inner action of the personal God whose immanence in things is one of his great modern revelations? Everything you call absolute is in active relation to the whole creation. Go into the psychology of sin as it is understood, not indeed today, but by those in the long, deep history of the moral soul whose experience coincided with a real genius for reading it—true sons of him of Romans 7. Ask such experients if it is never thus—that the anger of God promotes a sin, cherished in the private imagination, to actual transgression; which then shocks, appals, the dallier into the horrified loss of all confidence in the flesh; that out of the collapse may rise a totally new man? God never put sin in the world; but, sin being in the world, with its spreading power, does God never bring it to such a head as precipitates its destruction? Does he never drive the lunatic over a precipice into water where he can be saved and divert him from the quarry edge where he would be dashed to pieces? Did God not so act with Israel (John 12:39)? When sin has once begun, is there no such thing morally possible as the provocative action of God's law? With God's law sin gains life (Romans 7:10) and becomes more sinful. Every law deepens the guilt of defying it. That is the curse of the law. And is that law detached from God, and cut adrift to do its own mechanic work under his indifference? Is it not his curse and anger still, if God be in his law, as we now do believe him to pervade his world?

The love of God is not more real than the wrath of God.

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

243

For he can be really angry only with those he loves. And how can Absolute Love love without acting to save?

Well, if it be so, that God's direct displeasure and infliction is the worst thing in sin's penalty, did the displeasure totally vanish from the infliction when Christ stood under it? Would he have really borne the true judgement on sin if it had? Was Christ's great work not the meeting of that judgement and hallowing it? Did the complete obedience and reparation not include the complete acceptance of God's displeasure as an essential factor in the curse? A holy God could not look on sin without acting on it; nor could he do either but to abhor and curse it, even when his Son was beneath it. Wherein is guilt different from sin but in this—that it is sin, not cut adrift from God and let go its own way and go to pieces, but sin placed under the anger of God, under the personal reaction of that Absolute Holy God which no creature, no situation, can escape? And could Christ bear our guilt and take it away if he did not carry it there, and bear it there, and hallow its judgement there? Did he just throw it down there, leave it, and rid himself of it? Does not the best of sons suffer from the angry gloom that spreads from the father over the whole house at the prodigal's shameless shame? Did God not lay on him the iniquity of us all, and inflict that veiling of his face which darkened to dereliction even the Redeemer's soul? It is not desert that is the worst thing in judgement, but desertion—the sense of desert forsaken by God. The forsakenness is the worst judgement. For with God's presence my sense of desert may be my sanctification. What Christ bore was not simply a sense of the connection between the sinner and the impersonal consequences of sin, but a sense of the sinner's relation to the personal *vis-à-vis* of an angry God. God never left him, but he did refuse him his face. The communion was not broken, but its light was withdrawn. He was forsaken but not

244

disjoined. He was insolubly bound to the very Father who turned away and could not look on sin but to abhor and curse it even when his Son was beneath it. How could he feel the grief of being forsaken by God if he was not at bottom one with him? Neglect by one to whom we have no link makes no trouble.

Even a theologian so little orthodox as Weizsäcker says:—

The moral experience of guilt is too strong to let me say that it can be met by any mere manifestation of grace or of love from God to man—even when that manifestation carries in it the sympathetic suffering of

P.T. FORSYTH

sin's curse, borne merely in the way of confirming the manifestation and pressing the object-lesson.

When repentance helps the believer to peace it is not *ex opere operato*, because he has repented and may now trust grace; but it is because in his repentance he has part and lot in the infinite pain and confession of Christ.

THE WORK OF CHRIST