

THE THEOCENTRIC THEOLOGY OF P. T. FORSYTH

To my wife, Diane,
and to my children
Aaron, Aidan, Miriam and Edward

ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων Ἐν ἀγάπῃ

Ephesians 4:2

THE THEOCENTRIC THEOLOGY

OF

PETER TAYLOR FORSYTH

by

PAUL RIDLEY MILLER, B.A., M.DIV.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (1995)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Theocentric Theology of Peter Taylor Forsyth

AUTHOR: Paul Ridley Miller, B.A. (York University)

M.Div. (Emmanuel College)

SUPERVISOR: Professor John C. Robertson

NUMBER OF PAGES: viii, 303

ABSTRACT

The British Congregationalist theologian Peter Taylor Forsyth (1848-1921) attempted to formulate a consciously theocentric theology during the height of Protestant liberalism. He did so in opposition to the two traditions which, he believed, contributed to the liberal outlook -- rationalism which stressed the autonomy of reason and was manifested in the rise of historical criticism, and romanticism which stressed the autonomy of subjective feeling and was prevalent in popular piety. Both these tendencies were *anthropocentric*. They took as their point of departure human religious aspirations rather than the sovereignty and holiness of God.

Holiness is the central category in Forsyth's theology. It defines the other concepts such as grace, redemption and reconciliation. Forsyth attempted to understand holiness in terms relevant to peculiar conditions of modern consciousness. He did so primarily by dealing with Christian experience as the encounter between the two personalities and wills -- the holy will of God and the sinful human will.

Forsyth responded to what he considered to be the illegitimate claims of historical method by developing a dogmatic method. This method, in turn, was applied to the major problem raised by historical consciousness, namely, the person and nature of Jesus Christ. Christology, according to Forsyth's method, is

centred on the atoning work of Christ, not on the historical Jesus.

At the same time, Forsyth considered experience indispensable. He attempted to define experience theocentrically as the result of the encounter with the holiness and grace of God, not of a "religious a priori."

Forsyth's theology suffers from conceptual confusion at several key points, especially in his Christology. However, he has made an important contribution to contemporary Christian thought by reorienting theology towards the objective holiness of God. By providing an alternative to liberalism on the one hand and Protestant orthodoxy on the other, he anticipated many of the issues that preoccupied Protestant thought following the First World War.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to several people without whom this thesis would not have seen the light of day. First, my thanks go to Dr. John Robertson, my Supervisor for his encouragement and constructive criticism. Dr. Peter Widdicombe's insightful and critical comments have been invaluable. I am grateful to Dr. Travis Kroeker for his help in the formulation of the topic for this study. I have written this study remembering with grateful affection the late Dr. David Newman who first introduced me to the work of P.T. Forsyth.

Others have contributed in different ways. To the good people of Norwich United Church for their patience and support over the past five years; and to the people of Bethel Stone United Church who received me as their part-time pastor during my study leave, many thanks.

Finally to my wife, Diane, and to my children, Aaron, Aidan, Miriam and Teddy, goes my gratitude for their forbearance, encouragement and love during the preparation of this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABBREVIATIONS.	viii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: FORSYTH'S CONCEPT OF THEOCENTRICITY	20
Theocentric versus anthropocentric theology	20
Theocentric theology and the "Illumination"	26
Theology both "positive" and "modern"	29
Holiness as the key to theocentricity	50
The development of the concept of theocentricity	60
The concept of holiness and Forsyth's move away from Ritschlian Theology	68
CHAPTER 2: FORSYTH'S THEOCENTRIC METHOD	98
Introduction	98
Dogmatic versus historical method.	101
Appropriation versus verification	120
Theology as dogmatic "concentration"	132
CHAPTER 3: A THEOCENTRIC CHRISTOLOGY	143
Introduction	143
Was Jesus a part of his own Gospel?.	149
The meaning of the Atonement	162
Christological doctrines derived from the centrality of the Atonement	186
CHAPTER 4: A THEOCENTRIC ACCOUNT OF EXPERIENCE	214
Introduction	214
Personality as the foundation of religious experience.	218
Experience as a relation of Subject and Object	223
How experience is mediated	233
Conscience as the seat of experience	245
History as the unfolding of the experience of grace	251
The consequences of a theocentric interpretation of history	266

CONCLUSIONS282
BIBLIOGRAPHY.294

ABBREVIATIONS

These frequently-cited works are abbreviated as follows:

CC.	<i>The Cruciality of the Cross</i>
FFF.	<i>Faith, Freedom and the Future</i>
Foundations.	Thomas Langford, <i>In Search of Foundations</i>
GHF.	<i>God the Holy Father</i>
JG.	<i>The Justification of God.</i>
JR.	Ritschl, <i>The Christian Doctrines of Justification and Reconciliation.</i>
PA.	<i>The Principle of Authority</i>
PPJC.	<i>The Person and Place of Jesus Christ.</i>
PPMM.	<i>Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind.</i>
PTF.	R.M. Brown, P.T. Forsyth: <i>Prophet for Today.</i>
RPC.	"Revelation and the Person of Christ."
WC.	<i>The Work of Christ.</i>

INTRODUCTION

The main thesis of this study is that theocentricity is a comprehensive category for interpreting the theology of Peter Taylor Forsyth. Forsyth believed that the anthropocentric turn away from God towards the human subject which began in the eighteenth century had a disastrous effect not only on the Christian Churches but also on western civilization. For the evangelical, Free Church tradition to which Forsyth belonged, this involved an impossible contradiction. Evangelical Protestantism was grounded historically in the belief in the sovereign grace of God. It interpreted faith as the personal appropriation of that grace leading to a transformed heart and conscience. Anthropocentrism threatened the very life of Protestant Christianity by putting human religious aspirations in the centre and moving the sovereignty of God to the periphery.

The distinctively theocentric aspect which Forsyth emphasized was the primacy of *holiness*. The central categories of Christian theology such as grace, redemption and reconciliation are only understood in their full and proper sense in the light of holiness. Forsyth believed that the theology of his day had lost sight of holiness and that this was the primary reason for its anthropocentric decline.

Anthropocentrism, he argued, occurred in two main forms. It was expressed in the domination of theology either by historical-critical method or by subjective experience. Theology and religion dominated by either critical reason or religious affection undermined the essentially *moral* nature of the Gospel.

Forsyth approached anthropocentric theology, therefore, first as a problem of history. He sought to take seriously the claim that God entered history in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, but to defend the reality of this claim against the reductionistic tendencies of historical criticism. He saw anthropocentric theology secondly as a problem of experience. He sought to deal with the problem of how something that took place in the past can become the source of contemporary experience. As we shall see, he found the answer to both problems in an unequivocal affirmation of the sovereignty and holiness of God.

The main purpose of this study is to make this point. Secondly it is to place Forsyth in his intellectual context. Studies of Forsyth's thought and work tend either to fail to appreciate the centrality of the concept of holiness, or to be insufficiently attentive to the theological climate in which Forsyth lived.

Probably the most comprehensive and, in many ways, the best treatment of Forsyth is Robert McAfee Brown's *P.T.*

Forsyth: A Prophet for Today.¹ Brown interprets Forsyth as the "prophet" of the "positive gospel" of grace.² Forsyth saw the "gospel of grace" as an alternative to "an outworn liberalism" on the one hand and "a stale orthodoxy" on the other.³ Brown suggests that Forsyth's relevance only came to be appreciated in the middle of the twentieth century, forty years after his death. In that sense, he is truly a prophet.

Brown sees grace as the central category in Forsyth's theology:

By the positive gospel Forsyth means the action of a gracious God, who has taken upon himself the consequences of mankind's sin, forgiven man, and thereby re-established the conditions of fellowship and intercourse between God and man.⁴

Brown is certainly correct here. Grace is an indispensable category for Forsyth. However, the meaning of grace is qualified in his theology by an even more fundamental concept, namely, holiness. As I will argue, Forsyth believed that it is the primacy of holiness as a theological concept that makes a theology of grace theocentric. He criticized theologies of grace and reconciliation (Ritschl's, for example), that failed to keep holiness at the centre and did not grasp the moral

¹ (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952).

² *Ibid.*, p.10.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.39

depth of the Christian message. Grace without holiness, Forsyth argued, degenerates into mere sympathy and sentiment.

Gwilym O. Griffith⁵ attempts to bring Forsyth into dialogue with specific contemporary thinkers rather than with generalities such as "liberalism" or "Hegelianism". The particular merit of Griffith's book is that he relates Forsyth to Albrecht Ritschl. Interestingly, he also compares Forsyth on the question of holiness to Rudolph Otto. Forsyth, Griffith argues, does not offer a full explication of the category of "the Holy", but Otto does.⁶ The implied comparison is misleading, however, because Forsyth never speaks, as Otto does, in a general sense about "the Holy", "numinous" reality or a *mysterium tremendum* but only about the holy God of Israel who disclosed himself historically in Jesus Christ.

J.H. Rodgers⁷ makes the cross the central concept in Forsyth's thought. The centre of the Christian message in Forsyth's theology

stated objectively, is, God the Holy Father giving Himself as Holy Love in and through the atoning Cross of Jesus Christ. Stated subjectively, [that centre] is the 'evangelical experience' in which man, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is enabled to hear God's Word in the Good News of the Cross and thus to know himself as a forgiven sinner now living in new life under the Lordship

⁵ *The Theology of P.T Forsyth* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.68.

⁷ *The Theology of P.T. Forsyth* (London: Independent Press, 1965).

of the Risen Christ.⁸

This is a good summary. However, Rodgers misses a sense of why it was the Forsyth believed it necessary to state his theology in such a sharply *theocentric* way. In other words, Rodgers lacks a sense of Forsyth's context. Liberal theology placed a high value on the death of Christ as well. Only the satisfaction of God's holiness illuminates the meaning of the cross, in Forsyth's mind, and Rodgers is insufficiently clear about this.

S.J. Mikolaski⁹ provides a series of descriptions of the main themes of Forsyth's theology. However, he does so without any clear unifying principle, except perhaps the statement that "Forsyth planted the Cross of Christ at the centre of what is Christian."¹⁰ He does not show, however, how Forsyth's theology actually does revolve around this key theme.

The question might be asked, "Why another study of P.T. Forsyth?" It is a legitimate question. Forsyth might be considered a minor figure in twentieth century theology (although he has had a profound effect on many who have studied his work, including the present author.) He lived at a time when British theology was not at a high point in its

⁸ Ibid., pp.243-244.

⁹ "P.T. Forsyth" in P.L. Hughes, ed., *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1966).

¹⁰ Ibid., p.328.

development. However, in my opinion, another treatment of Forsyth is warranted as a contribution to our knowledge of this much-misunderstood period in Protestant theology -- the two decades leading up to the First World War. The interpretation of this period has been coloured by the stern judgments of neo-orthodoxy which saw it as a time of bankrupt liberalism. Forsyth demonstrates that things are not as simple as they appear in our generalizations; for while his judgments on the liberal theology of his day prefigure those of Barth and Brunner, Forsyth belonged to his age and must be regarded as an interpreter of its concerns as well as a critic. Forsyth, though his theology seems rather out of place in his time, was no lonely outsider, no evangelical Nietzsche regarded with puzzlement or suspicion by his contemporaries. He was, by all accounts, one of the most respected and heeded theologians of his time in Britain. If Lord Morley's enthusiastic opinion that Forsyth was "one of the most brilliant minds in Europe"¹¹ was perhaps a little hyperbolic, Forsyth was certainly one of the most brilliant and interesting writers in British theological circles. We do him justice, however, not only when we understand the structure and direction of his thought, but when we interpret him as a man of his time.

Peter Taylor Forsyth was born in Aberdeen, Scotland

¹¹ Griffith, *The Theology of P.T. Forsyth*, p.18.

in the revolutionary year 1848, the son of a postman.¹² He entered the University of Aberdeen in 1864 to study classics but developed an eclectic interest in literature, art, philosophy, and above all, religion. During this period, Forsyth began to read the works of Frederick Denison Maurice, one of the early influences on his thought. In 1870, with the encouragement of the Old Testament scholar W. Robertson Smith, Forsyth went to Germany where he studied with the celebrated Ritschl for a semester. He acquired such complete fluency in German that "it was one of his few naive vanities that when travelling in later years he was always mistaken for a German."¹³ This facility had a significant effect on his theological development because it allowed him to move with ease in the complex world of German theology. Forsyth had access to German theologians who were virtually unknown to most Britons.

After returning from Germany Forsyth entered New College in Hampstead. He was ordained in 1876 in the Congregational Church in Shipley, Yorkshire, a suburb of Bradford. He was a highly successful preacher but was shunned by the establishment Congregational Union of Yorkshire on account of his unorthodox views.¹⁴ Forsyth served four more

¹² Jessie Andrews Forsyth, "A Memoir" in Forsyth, *The Work of Christ* (1910) (London: Independent Press, 1938) p.x. (Hereafter cited as WC.)

¹³ Ibid., p.xi.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.xiii

pastorates in Manchester, Leicester, London and Cambridge. Then in 1901 he became the principal of Hackney College, the Congregationalist divinity school affiliated with the University of London. He remained there until his death in 1921. While at Hackney, Forsyth authored most of his major theological works.

The Britain in which Forsyth lived was going through a period of tremendous upheaval socially, politically and religiously. "The homogeneous England of the mid-Victorian decades broke up at the end of the [eighteen]-eighties. The nineties were a period of unsettlement."¹⁵ This fact was not immediately evident on the surface of things. Lord Salisbury's "superbly patrician"¹⁶ government, elected in 1895 gave the impression that stable values were still firmly entrenched -- values which George Dangerfield has described as centring around "freedom, free trade, progress and the Seventh Commandment."¹⁷ But socially, class power was undergoing a fundamental realignment. In 1906 the Liberal party won a landslide victory, but most significantly fifty-three MPs were elected from the fledgling Labour Party. In 1910 Labour and Irish Mps held the balance of power in a fractious parliament.

¹⁵ Robert C.K. Ensor, *England, 1870-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936). p.304.

¹⁶ Thomas Langford, *In Search of Foundations: British Theology 1900-1920* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969), p.11. (Hereafter cited as *Foundations*.)

¹⁷ *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1935) (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), p.7.

This was a watershed year in British politics. The traditional power of the House of Lords was curtailed drastically, sectarian strife erupted in Ireland, the country was rent by labour unrest, and militant suffragists embarked on a spectacular campaign of vandalism, arson, hunger strikes and civil disobedience. The old England of Gladstonian liberalism and Victorian decorum seemed to have expired for good.

This social upheaval provides the backdrop for rapid religious change. Victorian England has been described as the most religious nation the civilized world has ever known.¹⁸ In the mid-nineteenth century, evangelicals like John Bright and Lord Shaftesbury wielded tremendous influence. The Victorian religious and moral vision centred on the belief in the literal truth of the Bible, certainty of judgment and this life as preparation for the next.¹⁹ These convictions shaped the well-known Victorian climate of moral earnestness.²⁰

With the death of Queen Victoria, a process of change and dissolution that began at least twenty years earlier accelerated. New religious influences that had been permeating the Churches began to produce dramatic consequences. Notable among these were the shift from a reliance on the authority of received tradition towards a

¹⁸ Ensor, p.137.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.137-138.

²⁰ Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1957), pp.228ff.

confidence in the results of science and history. The rising prestige of scientific and historical research was quickly destroying belief in the infallibility of the Bible and the moral and religious culture that such a belief had helped to create. What was different in the early years of the twentieth century was that these changes were taking place not merely among the elite -- the T.H. Huxleys of the world -- but on a widespread and popular level.

The effect was felt particularly strongly in the Free Churches -- the Baptists, Methodists and Congregationalists. The individualistic brand of salvation they had been preaching for three hundred years was giving way to a new social consciousness. By the end of the nineteenth century, many Free Church leaders were realizing that they had become largely irrelevant to their traditional working-class constituencies who were finding meaning and purpose in a secularized labour movement rather than in church.²¹

P.T. Forsyth wrote and worked at a time when the Free Churches were preoccupied with questions of identity and the profound need for a reassessment of their message and role. One path that was chosen by many was that of accommodation to new values and beliefs. Some Congregationalists, in particular, embraced with enthusiasm fashionable ideas such as evolution, the immanence of God, and the social dimension of the gospel. They did so on the

²¹ Langford, *Foundations*, pp.26-27.

principle that "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em."²² They hoped to re-establish the popular relevance of their flagging cause.

Forsyth came to the conclusion that this was the wrong path for evangelical Christianity to take. Only a rediscovery of the theological and spiritual roots of a distinctive tradition would be sufficient to reassert the voice of the Free Church movement. This meant a return to the sources of their tradition, according to Forsyth. These sources were, first and foremost, the New Testament, read afresh, incorporating new insights like the concept of moral personality into biblical interpretation, but recognizing its primary authority for faith. Among the New Testament writings, the Letters of Paul were especially important because they described the experience of atonement and regeneration. Next in importance were the Reformers who had safeguarded the New Testament tradition most faithfully; and especially the English Puritans in whom Forsyth found his own spiritual forebears. Forsyth's attempt to rediscover the theocentric orientation of the first and the seventeenth centuries, not in order to recreate the past, but to adapt that orientation to the special conditions of the modern age.

A systematic examination of Forsyth's writings is a

²² We shall deal below with the most famous of these liberal Congregationalists, R. J. Campbell. Others included Joseph Warschauer and K.C. Anderson. (See Langford, *Foundations*, pp.195-198.)

difficult undertaking, primarily because Forsyth was not a systematic writer. The greatest challenge in dealing with him is the famous (or infamous) "Forsyth style" which most students of his work have noted. Almost all of his books consist of lectures and sermons revised for publication. That in itself is not a problem but it does mean that Forsyth rarely, if ever, wrote a book in which he proceeded to lay out an argument in a linear, systematic way. His unsystematic style should not be taken to mean, however, that he was a careless or confused thinker. Rather than proceeding through a chain of reasoning, Forsyth takes a central concept or concern, and within a particular lecture or essay circles around it again and again, examining now one aspect of the problem, now another until, in his mind, clarity is achieved. From one work to the next, Forsyth returns repeatedly to his key themes of holiness, grace and redemption, exploring them from different angles. A cursory examination gives a first impression of repetitiveness and even confusion, but, as J.K. Mozley commented, "I know of no theologian of the day who has fewer loose ends to his thought."²³ Forsyth's central ideas are stated with remarkable consistency throughout his published career, which lasted, for the most part, from the early 1890s to his death in 1921. The effect on the student of his work is that it is not possible to lay out the argument

²³ John Kenneth Mozley, *Some Tendencies in British Theology (From the Publication of Lux Mundi to the Present Day)* (London: SPCK, 1951), p.182.

implicit in his writings step-by-step. Rather, the approach must be to discern the constant themes that emerge over and over again from his luxuriant prose and to follow him deeper and deeper into their explication.

With respect to the specific topic of this study, Forsyth does not actually use the term "theocentric" very often. Furthermore, it only appears relatively late in his writings, from 1909 onwards. For that reason it may seem odd to suggest that theocentricity stands at the centre of his theological program. However, I believe it can be shown that the theological principles which he came to designate as "theocentric" are clearly present in his work with little substantive change over almost three decades. It is therefore legitimate to call the substance of his thought "theocentric". Furthermore, his diagnosis of anthropocentricity remained consistent as well.

A second major problem is to determine who "influenced" Forsyth. He rarely acknowledged his indebtedness to other thinkers explicitly; and when he did, it was often in the form of a general allusion to another's thought rather than a specific citation. Forsyth was a highly synthetic thinker who assimilated and absorbed others' ideas into his own. Those who have studied him have tended to make passing reference to the "influence" exerted on him by a varied cast of characters without attempting to demonstrate the links.

Among those cited are Kant,²⁴ F.D. Maurice,²⁵ Calvin,²⁶ Kierkegaard,²⁷ Adolf Schlatter,²⁸ Wendt,²⁹ Martin Kähler,³⁰ Wesley,³¹ Friedrich Paulsen,³² Henri Bergson,³³ Wilhelm Windelband,³⁴ Wilhelm Hermann,³⁵ and others. What is lacking, however, is any kind of demonstration that these people actually did contribute to the formation of Forsyth's thought. Keeping in mind the difficulties involved in tracing influences when Forsyth himself gives us so few clues, I will venture to assess the impact made on him by several key

²⁴ Brown, *PTF*, pp.30-31; Clifford Anderson McKay, "The Moral Structure of Reality in the Theology of Peter Taylor Forsyth", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1970, p.3; John H. Rodgers, *The Theology of P.T. Forsyth*, p.268.

²⁵ Brown, pp.30-31; S.J. Mikolaski, "P.T. Forsyth", p.310.

²⁶ Brown, pp.30-31; A.E. Garvie, "A Cross-Centred Theology", *Congregational Quarterly* 11 (1943): 325.

²⁷ Brown, pp.30-31; Rodgers, p.268; Robert Clyde Johnson, *Authority in Protestant Theology*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p.100; A.F Simpson, "P.T. Forsyth: The Prophet of Judgement", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 4 (1951): 152.

²⁸ Brown, pp.30-31.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*; Mozley, *Some Aspects of British Theology*, p.172.

³¹ Mikolaski, p.310.

³² Rodgers, p.268.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.269.

³⁵ Stephen McCray Smith, "Dogma and History: The Creative Ferment in British Christology, 1890-1920", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1980, p.196.

figures. Each of them is explicitly cited by Forsyth as an influence.

The first such figure is Albrecht Ritschl. Ritschl's influence was so formative that I will suggest, with some significant qualifications, that Forsyth was a "Ritschlian" theologian. It was through Ritschl that Forsyth came to see his understanding of the Reformation and of Christianity as a positive, historical religion. However, an influence can be felt negatively as well as positively.³⁶ Forsyth's theology was shaped to a significant degree by his attempt to correct what he saw as Ritschl's inadequacies. While being profoundly affected by Ritschl's approach, Forsyth believed that Ritschl's theology was vulnerable to certain anthropocentrizing distortions. At these points he parted company with Ritschl, while continuing to operate out of a Ritschlian framework.

Lurking behind Ritschl is the imposing figure of Schleiermacher. Protestant theology prior to World War I can be interpreted as an ongoing dialogue with Schleiermacher and

³⁶ Perhaps the foremost example of this in the twentieth century is the relationship between Schleiermacher and Karl Barth. Although Barth believed that the legacy of Schleiermacher had to be overturned, he never stopped wrestling with and debating with him, and he regarded Schleiermacher as one of his theological forebears. See, for instance, his chapter on Schleiermacher in *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, pp.425-473. Barth admitted a similar indebtedness to Wilhelm Hermann, although he regarded Hermann's theology as untenable in many respects. See "The Principles of Dogmatics According to Wilhelm Hermann" in *Theology and Church*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (New York: Harper, 1962).

the radical new developments that he inaugurated.³⁷ Forsyth believed that Ritschl and Schleiermacher were correct in seeing that theology can only proceed on the basis of the historical revelation of Christ as Redeemer -- but only if this statement is interpreted *theocentrically*. Schleiermacher, furthermore, was correct in seeing that inner experience is the crucial criterion in mediating between modern consciousness and historical revelation; but this connection must also be construed *theocentrically*. I will make clear what I mean by this in due course.

A second influence was a group of theologians loosely united around the designation "positive". These theologians attempted to rearticulate classical Protestant doctrine in modern terms. Those who had the most direct bearing on Forsyth were Martin Kähler and Theodor Kaftan. They raised a question of critical importance for Forsyth, namely, how to deal with the apparent incompatibility of modern consciousness and the pre-Enlightenment mindset in which traditional Christian doctrine is expressed.

A third influence was the German theologian Erich

³⁷ Ernst Troeltsch, "Half a Century of Theology: A Review" (1906) in *Ernst Troeltsch: Writings on Theology and Religion*, trans. and ed. Robert Morgan and Michael Pye (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1977, 1990), pp.58ff. See also Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1973), p.425: "The first place in a history of theology of the most recent times belongs, and will always belong, to Schleiermacher, and he has no rival." Also, Barth, "Evangelical Theology in the 19th Century" in *The Humanity of God* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1960), p.12.

Schaeder. Schaeder was almost unknown in Britain and his melancholy and doctrinaire temperament contributed to his marginal status in Germany as well. But Schaeder raised the issue that Forsyth regarded as fundamental -- that a theocentric theology must see that the agent who mediates historic revelation to the present and infuses it with spiritual power is God himself, and not the religious subject. Schaeder was a minor star in the German theological firmament, but Forsyth believed that the greatness of the question and not the greatness of the questioner was of paramount importance. I will argue that Schaeder, in fact, was the one from whom Forsyth borrowed the term "theocentric".

A fourth influence was English Puritanism. It should never be forgotten that Forsyth's primary context was that of British Nonconformity. He spent his entire career either preaching in Congregationalist Churches or preparing men for the Congregationalist ministry. As we noted above, the early years of the twentieth century were a time of institutional crisis for Nonconformists in Britain. Forsyth, by the power of his intellect and his eloquence, kept alive what he believed was the distinctive vision of the Independents of the seventeenth century and their sixteenth century Puritan ancestors -- a vision of religious practice as the expression of the sovereignty of the individual conscience, but the conscience under the higher authority of the holiness of God. The irrelevance of Congregationalism stemmed from its

abandonment of this foundational vision.

I will deal in this thesis with what I have suggested were the two main concerns for Forsyth -- the nature of history and the nature of experience. I will begin by outlining the content of the term "theocentricity" as Forsyth saw it. I will then turn to consider the problem of history, devoting a chapter to Forsyth's theological method and another chapter to the central historical concern of modern theology, namely, how to develop an adequate christology in the face of the consciousness of history. Finally, I will turn to the question of religious experience and show how Forsyth interpreted it theocentrically. I will refer to most of Forsyth's major works, but will concentrate on those which have the greatest bearing on the issue of theocentricity -- "Revelation and the Person of Christ", *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, *The Work of Christ*, *The Principle of Authority*, and *The Justification of God*.

This thesis will contribute to an understanding of P.T. Forsyth by showing the importance of theocentricity as a regulative principle in his theology, and by connecting him to the above figures and suggesting how their influence was assimilated by him. However, it is my hope that it will also contribute to the understanding of Protestant theology in the period from 1890 to the end of World War I by showing where Forsyth stood in the theological debates of his time. Indeed,

I hope this study will contribute to the understanding of the present, because the questions raised by Forsyth are still with us. It remains an open question whether the sovereignty and transcendence of God can really occupy the central place in modern theology, and whether Protestant Christianity can survive if that sovereignty and transcendence are replaced by human values and aspirations.

CHAPTER 1: "FORSYTH'S CONCEPT OF THEOCENTRICITY"

1. *Theocentric versus anthropocentric theology*

Every constructive intellectual achievement possesses an implicitly polemical aspect in the sense that something is always denied as well as affirmed. The thesis of this study is that P.T. Forsyth's positive achievement was his development of a consistently theocentric theology -- an account of the Christian faith centred both formally and materially on the objective reality of God's free, gracious action. What sets Forsyth apart is that he formulated this theology during the heyday of pre-World War I liberalism in an atmosphere that Forsyth himself regarded as fatally anthropocentric. Precisely what he meant by "theocentric" theology can be explored by first considering what he meant by its antithesis -- "anthropocentric theology". Forsyth wrote that

what we are developing at the moment is an anthropocentric Christianity. God and Christ are practically treated as but the means to an end.... The chief value of religion becomes then not its value to God, but its value for the completing and crowning of life, whether the great life of the race or the personal life of the individual.¹

¹ *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (1909) (London: Independent Press, 1930), p.29. (Hereafter cited as *PPJC*.)

Theology is anthropocentric, Forsyth argued, when it treats God as a means to an end and when it places human religious needs and aspirations rather than the will of God at the centre of its concern. Theocentric theology is the opposite of anthropocentric theology. Its beginning and ending is the freedom and sovereignty of God.

Anthropocentric theology raised the problem of the nature of history and historical revelation. Forsyth opposed two tendencies in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theology that were directly related to the development of historical consciousness. First was the tendency to portray Christianity primarily as the pinnacle of the evolution of human religion. The essence of Christianity was conceived of as a problem of the history of the development of religion rather than of the truth of the revelatory events on which it was founded. This approach was closely tied to a belief in the concept of evolution as an explanatory concept of universal validity. It led to the kind of popular, immanentist thinking exemplified by the "New Theology" which we shall discuss below. Forsyth believed, as did most of his Protestant contemporaries that Christianity was, in fact, the highest form of religion in human history. However, he insisted that the source of Christianity's greatness was its consciousness of the moral sovereignty and power of God, revealed through the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, Forsyth stood against the tendency to

bring the objective content of God's revealed will under the dominating control of the methods of critical reason. The emerging history of religions school and the left-wing biblical critics had made God and God's ways into little more than an object of historical inquiry, according to Forsyth. He acknowledged that reason and its critical application were essential tools Christian theology, but distinguished clearly between the method and its transcendent object, and never failed to make the latter the final criterion of religious truth.

But anthropocentrism not only raised the problem of the nature of history but also the problem of the nature of experience. These two issues are closely related because, in Forsyth's mind, the primary experiential question was how to link contemporary religious life to the historic events upon which Christianity was founded. Historical criticism had the effect of alienating religious experience from its historical ground by objectifying Christianity's foundational events and not leaving room for a doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the source of authentic experience. However, in Forsyth's mind the reverse of the tendency of historical criticism to objectify God's revelation was the reduction of contemporary experience to the level of subjective feeling. This subjectivism was prevalent in popular Christianity which had become, according to Forsyth, little more than sublime sentimentality because it limited the nature and activity of

God to his attributes of pity and sympathy. As we will see, Forsyth believed strongly that authentic Christian faith is *experiential* in nature; but experience always refers to an objective reality, and the primary concern of theology is with that reality and not with the experience itself.

These religious tendencies were symptomatic of the modern mind, according to Forsyth. They appeared in a variety of forms and guises, but their impact was to create a Christianity that was strongly anthropocentric, marked by the impulse to treat God as humankind's greatest asset² and the Christian religion as the highest achievement of human culture. The truth, Forsyth argued, was that Christianity was a religion brought into being solely by the free grace of God. God's grace, he maintained, is not a principle immanent within the natural or historical order, able to be discovered or inferred by human piety or ingenuity. God's gracious will is always revealed. We know God only because and insofar as God has chosen to disclose himself to us. Christianity, therefore, has to do primarily with God's transcendent, sovereign freedom and any authentic human experience of God is itself a work of that freedom and sovereignty. Theocentric theology proceeds from the premise that the fundamental reality with which it has to do is the holy will of God, revealed in the cross of Christ and presently active through

² *Faith, Freedom and the Future* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), p.266. (Hereafter cited as *FFF*.)

the Holy Spirit.

Theocentricity, therefore, does not refer to any specific doctrinal content as such, but to a perspective, an orientation towards the object of theology -- namely God. According to Forsyth, there are three moments in Christian consciousness. First, there is the act of God in bringing about reconciliation between himself and sinful humanity, an act which occurs independently of human awareness or appropriation. Secondly, there is religious experience, which is the effect wrought by that act in the human soul. Thirdly -- and only thirdly -- there is theology which is the rational account of the experience of God's act.³ Religion is a dynamic, personal, existential relation between God and human beings. Forsyth believed that he was reappropriating the tradition of the Reformation whose essence was to interpret Christianity as a personal encounter between God and human creatures.⁴

Forsyth believed that Protestant theology had taken a wrong turn in the early nineteenth century. He thought that the theology of Schleiermacher demonstrated clearly how easy it had become to misunderstand fundamentally the dialectical relationship between God and humankind. It is true that

³ "Reconciliation is salvation before it is religion. And it is religion before it is theology." WC, p.45.

⁴ *Rome, Reform and Reaction: Four Lectures on the Religious Situation* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899), pp. 20, 52, 57, passim. Also Brown, *PTF*, p.23.

Forsyth spoke respectfully of the "great regenerative genius" of Schleiermacher⁵ and recognized Schleiermacher's achievement in restoring the element of living experience to Christian thought. However, he charged that theology in the tradition of Schleiermacher tended to resolve the tensions in the divine-human encounter too facilely by, in effect, bracketing the divine pole and proceeding with an analysis of religious consciousness independent of the objective revelation of God thereby elevating religious response to a position of primacy.⁶ Christian faith involves an awareness of the dialectic of transcendence and immanence, of eternity and time, of the divine and the human. This is first of all an historical awareness. It is at the heart of Christianity's central belief: that God became incarnate in a human being, that there was a moment when time and eternity intersected. In an age of high culture Forsyth perceived that it was all too easy to devalue the transcendent reality of God which alone gives validity to experience and religious knowledge. Christian, and particularly Protestant, theology had come to emphasize too much the immanent, human, historical pole of Christian belief -- the pole which is in fact always secondary, dependent and derivative. Protestant theology had done this by subjecting the content of faith to the hegemonous

⁵ "The Place of Spiritual Experience in the Making of Modern Theology", *Christian World Pulpit* 69 (1906): 184.

⁶ Ibid.

claims of historical criticism, and by rejecting what Forsyth believed were the central Christian affirmations of incarnation, atonement and the divinity of Christ as being incompatible with a modern sense of reality. However, as I hope to show, Forsyth was convinced that this position also deprived Christian experience of its real ground. A faith that is merely the reflection of human religious longings is, Forsyth argued, fleeting, ephemeral and without power.

These are the themes and issues we will explore in the following pages.

2. *Theocentric Theology and the "Illumination"*

The anthropocentric impulse was present in Christianity from the beginning, according to Forsyth.⁷ It has always been a temptation to treat God as a mere instrument. However, this tendency became especially prominent in the eighteenth century. Forsyth agreed with Ernst Troeltsch that the eighteenth century, rather than the sixteenth, was the great watershed that divided modern from pre-modern

⁷ Cf. also H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p.31: "The inversion of faith whereby man puts himself into the center, constructs an anthropocentric universe and makes confidence in his own value rather than faith in God his beginning has occurred over and over again in the past and will doubtless occur many times in the future."

consciousness and the "old" Protestantism from the "new".⁸ This century is most often associated with the Enlightenment, that movement in the intellectual history of western civilization that stood for the assertion of human autonomy and, most of all, the supremacy of reason and the intellect. As one student of the period has described it,

the Enlightenment may be designated as that movement in European culture which is characterized by a complete confidence in the power of 'reason' to dispel the obscuring clouds of ignorance and mystery which weighed upon the human spirit; and precisely by doing so, to render men at once happier, and morally and spiritually better.⁹

However, Forsyth saw the Enlightenment as only part of the intellectual and spiritual make-up of the eighteenth century. The German designation "*Aufklärung*", usually translated "Enlightenment", is more accurately rendered "Illumination", according to Forsyth.¹⁰ Illumination is a more comprehensive term because it describes the confluence of the two main streams which form the intellectual background to modern

⁸ *PPJC*, p.187; *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (1907) (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962), p.110.

⁹ A. Robert Caponigri, *A History of Western Philosophy* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963) 3: 272. See also Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp.4-5.

¹⁰ Forsyth referred to "the diversified movement which marked the eighteenth century, and which is compendiously known as the Illumination or the *Aufklärung*." *PPJC*, p.187

consciousness. One stream is the rationalist/critical and the other the romantic/affective.¹¹ Alongside the philosophical tradition of the Enlightenment was the strain of eighteenth-century Pietism that evolved into the nineteenth-century romantic reaction to the supremacy of reason. From the point of view of the Christian gospel, however, both these tendencies were part of the same impulse to see religion as a process of inner illumination, taking place either in the intellect or the affections. Those who asserted the primacy of reason located religious truth -- or, more accurately, the ability to discover religious truth -- in the intellect. Those who reacted against reason asserted the autonomy of the affections, of feeling, of aesthetic impression and religious intuition. However, both these tendencies anthropocentrize Christianity by seeking the authoritative ground of faith within the autonomous subject. They regard religious truth as emerging immediately out of natural reason or direct intuition, according to Forsyth. Broadly speaking, then, the "Illuminationist" tradition defines Christianity *in a primary sense* as the achievement of human religious culture or human religious disposition; and this, Forsyth argued, is the essence of anthropocentrism. On the other hand, what Forsyth called evangelical Christianity -- that is, Christianity in the tradition of St. Paul and the Reformers -- subordinates both the intellect and the affections to the will,

¹¹ *PPMM*, p.111.

particularly to its chief organ the conscience, which in turn is under the authority of God.¹²

Two tendencies emerged from the intellectual upheavals of the eighteenth century, according to Forsyth. On the one hand there was the rationalist/critical tradition which stood for the autonomy of reason and the intellect. Separate from this aspect of the Enlightenment and largely in reaction to it was the romantic/affective stream which, in its religious application, promoted the autonomy of the feelings. Together, these two trajectories of thought and belief combined to produce the sources for the modern liberal outlook in all its variegated forms, according to Forsyth. Liberalism was a mixed blessing in Forsyth's view. It is true that liberalism has succeeded in overcoming the stultifying tyranny of a religious orthodoxy that was based on lifeless dogmatic propositions. However, as we have seen, Forsyth believed that liberalism had failed to maintain the theocentric basis of Christian theology. While acknowledging that there is a healthy and proper kind of liberalism,¹³ this ambivalence towards the liberalism of his time is reflected in Forsyth's attempt to define what he believed were two essential characteristics of a theocentric theology: positivity and modernity.

¹² This is to be discussed fully in chapter 4.

¹³ *PPMM*, p.83; "Theological Liberalism versus Liberal Theology", *British Weekly*, Feb. 10, 1910, pp.557-558.

3. *Theology both "positive" and "modern"*

From the early 1890s on, Forsyth contrasted "liberal" with "positive" Christianity. He used the term "liberalism" to encompass a variety of forms of Christianity which had this in common: they removed the fundamental realities of God and the Cross of Christ from the centre and replaced them with human religious consciousness.¹⁴ One of the difficulties in analyzing Forsyth's work is that his use of terminology tended to be evocative at times rather than technically precise; but it appears clear that he intended to describe "positive theology" as theocentric and "liberal theology" as anthropocentric: "... the Gospel of liberalism ... is in effect but man calling to men, while a positive Gospel is man called by God."¹⁵

Forsyth's use of the language of positivity relates him to certain theological currents in Germany. He followed Ritschl who followed Schleiermacher in demanding that theology take account of the positive nature of Christian revelation. Positive theology, Forsyth wrote, is theology that is sufficiently conscious of "the effectual primacy of the

¹⁴ Klaus Rosenthal, "Die Bedeutung des Kreuzesgeschehens für Lehre und Bekenntnis nach Peter Taylor Forsyth", *Kerygma und Dogma: Zeitschrift für theologische Forschung und kirchliche Lehre* 7 (1961): 238; R.M. Brown, "Conversion of P.T. Forsyth", *Congregational Quarterly* 30 (1952): 336ff.

¹⁵ *PPMM*, p.150.

given."¹⁶ It is the "given" quality of Christianity that is the source of its positivity. Forsyth asserted this in the face of the Idealist tradition which regarded the foundational events of Christianity merely as episodes in the progressive emergence of a timeless ideal in history, and in the face of the so-called "culture-Protestantism"¹⁷ exemplified by Harnack, Troeltsch and others who viewed Christianity mainly as a phenomenon of culture and history and denied the uniqueness of Christian revelation.¹⁸ (See chapter 2 for a fuller discussion.)

Forsyth described Christianity as a positive religion in two senses, first with respect to its *origin*. Christianity originates in the revelation of God. Its source is supernatural and its impetus comes from beyond the realm of natural phenomena. The truth of Christianity cannot be inferred inductively from nature but becomes clear only through the apprehension of revelation which Forsyth referred to variously as an "invasion" or "eruption" of God's presence

¹⁶ *PPMM*, p.143.

¹⁷ This term has tended to be used in a negative sense to describe the reduction of Christian belief to culture. For a sympathetic assessment see George Rupp, *Culture-Protestantism: German Liberal Theology at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977).

¹⁸ Among many references to the relationship between Christianity and western culture in Troeltsch's writings, one could choose to look at "On the Possibility of a Liberal Christianity" (1910) in *Religion and History*, trans. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991), pp.343-359.

in history, or the "inbreaking" of eternity into time.¹⁹ If revelation were discovered to be simply an extension of the natural order, it would not be revelation because revelation by definition is supernatural. This was one of the main presuppositions from which positive theology proceeded.

It follows from this line of reasoning that Christianity is a positive religion in the sense of being *historical*. Forsyth, broadly speaking, used "positive" in the tradition of Schleiermacher and Ritschl. Schleiermacher defined the positive nature of a religion as

the individual content of all the moments of the religious life within one religious communion insofar as this content depends on the original fact from which the communion itself, as a coherent historical phenomenon, originated.²⁰

The positivity of Christianity refers, then, to its historical origin in founding events and its continuity within a concrete religious community. Schleiermacher asserted this historical nature of Christianity against rationalism which viewed it as the highest expression of natural reason or as a system of rational propositions.²¹ Revelation, Schleiermacher argued, does not consist of Scripture or dogma but of concrete

¹⁹ "Immanence and Incarnation" p.56; *PPJC* p.251; *JG* p.75.

²⁰ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S Stewart (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) §11, p.49.

²¹ James Orr, *The Ritschlian Theology and the Evangelical Faith* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), p.44.

historical events and of the consciousness of those events in the life of a religious community. Ritschl attempted to make more explicit the necessary connection of Christianity to founding events and its development within believing communities.²² Positive theology states that an essence of Christianity cannot be abstracted from historical events because it is those events themselves that constitute its essence.

Forsyth realized, however, that there is a certain ambiguity in the assertion that Christianity is an "historical" religion. He argued that Christianity is a positive, historical religion not merely because it traces its origin to certain events in history but because it comes into being and continues on account of the redemptive act of God.²³ History is an inherently moral process, according to Forsyth, because it is the realm in which the human freedom to act in accordance with moral principles is exercised. However, freedom is only authentically free when human beings use it to respond obediently to the holy law of God. History, then, is interpreted as the arena in which God acts to make possible such an obedient response. History is not, as Hegel and the Hegelians thought, an unfolding process whose principle of development was immanent within the process

²² Philip Hefner, *Faith and the Vitalities of History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p.9.

²³ *PPMM* p.138.

itself. Such a view was imported into theology from evolutionary theory which might be able to explain biology but never morality or religion. Christianity emerges from the revelation of God, *given* to humankind in history, not merely discovered or produced by humankind.

Secondly, Christianity is a positive religion with respect to its *nature*.²⁴ By this Forsyth meant that Christianity is a religion of grace. Grace, by definition, is a gift that is given to us by God. Forsyth

came to see that Christianity, while it might be both a demand and a gift, was first of all a gift, the gift of grace, of forgiveness, of newness of life. The demands of faith were demands made to those to whom the gift had been given.²⁵

The Gospel was positive because through it God had given to humankind the effective and final solution to the "moral extremity" of sin and the radical estrangement from God that sin brought about.²⁶ The effect of grace was not merely to make clear the reality of the human situation before God, but effectively to change it. The radical alteration of the relationship between God and humanity brings about a positive, moral effect. Forsyth writes that

²⁴ *PPMM*, p.138.

²⁵ Brown, *PTF*, p.33.

²⁶ *PPMM*, p.158.

[p]ositive Christianity ... is Christianity that recognizes the primacy of the moral in the shape of life, and of holy life. It is Christianity which first adjusts man to the holy and then creates the holy in man....²⁷

Positive Christianity rests on the divine gift of transformative power. It is the power of the Gospel to bring about real moral change, Forsyth argued, that is compromised most destructively by negative criticism which claims to be able to sit in judgment on the truth of revelation and the God who has revealed it.²⁸

Liberal, in contrast to positive Christianity "begins from the wrong end ... with a scheme of creation ... not ... with the new creation. It begins with the world and not the Word."²⁹ Liberalism assumes that there is a fundamental continuity between finite and infinite, or between God and the world. Furthermore, liberalism is a continuation of the rationalist tradition of the Enlightenment. It

starts from certain rational, metaphysical or ethical principles existing in human thought, which determines by science, and not by obedience, whether any revelation, even Christ's, is divine.³⁰

Forsyth was correct in seeing the connection between liberal

²⁷ Ibid., p.139.

²⁸ Ibid., pp.147, 138.

²⁹ Ibid., p.169.

³⁰ Ibid., p.148.

theology and belief in the primacy of reason. Indeed, one student of early twentieth century liberalism has stated that among the characteristic features of liberalism were

the confidence in the human, finite spirit, the reverence for the dignity, competence and authority of the power of human thought and the ability to be able to transcend one's subjectivity in the endeavour to attain to genuine objectivity.³¹

Furthermore, the liberal emphasis on the primacy of thought made rational *method* a central concern.

"Liberal theology" as a scholarly discipline, and "liberal" faith as a faith that knows, are "modern" since they embrace the Cartesian assertion that to be human at all is to be about the enterprise of the cognitive appropriation of reality. The dignity of human beings resides exactly in their ability, God-given, no doubt, to *comprehend*, to get reality into the grasp of the mind.... Such grasp is not arbitrary but methodic, according to Descartes and, consequently the faith that knows not only knows God and creation but also knows *how* it knows. Hence the necessity of affirming confidence in the human mind and its workings, the preoccupation with method (or "methodology") and its objectivity, the reverence for the competence and authority, in one word the "dignity", of the power of thought.³²

Forsyth saw this confidence in the power of human thought to bring all things under its control as one of the main factors contributing to the anthropocentricity of modern Christianity.

³¹ Martin Rumscheidt, Introduction to *Adolf von Harnack: Liberal Theology at its Height* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988, 1991) p.33

³² Ibid., p.34.

It is the bold attempt to seek God within the process of creation or history, both of which had been brought under the sway of scientific and analytical rationality and method. The "dignity" of the power of thought was, for Forsyth, an expression of the essential anthropocentric presupposition: that God could be known and controlled by human rationality. This view was the anthropocentric consequence of the rationalist/critical tradition.

In addition to its confidence in the supremacy of reason, liberalism tended to view God from an immanentist perspective.³³ Divine reality was to be perceived within the world and its processes or events. The doctrine of divine immanence is not without its value, Forsyth argued, because if God were not present in nature or history in some sense, we could know nothing about him whatsoever. But immanence is true only if it is interpreted according to the nature of God, that is, if it is interpreted *morally*. God is present in the world not because the world is divine, but because God has graciously chosen to reveal his holiness through historical acts. God is revealed as supreme moral personality and the essence of personality is to act morally, with a view to moral ends. This is the theocentric framework for a proper interpretation of divine immanence, in contrast to liberalism

³³ The idea of God's immanence in creation was closely associated with the tradition of British Idealism to which Forsyth saw himself as being opposed. See Langford, *Foundations*, p.66.

which "preoccupies us with the physical notion of monistic process, instead of the moral notion of personality."³⁴ Liberalism, whether it focuses on the divine presence in natural evolution, or on the emergence of the divine in human history, represents a pantheistic impulse which has the effect of destroying the relation of God to the world as the relation of Creator to creature.³⁵

Liberalism as Forsyth defined it was closely connected to the acceptance of the idea of evolution. Forsyth recognized that a view of both nature and history based on the idea of development or evolution was part of the furniture of the modern mind. When he wrote about evolution, Forsyth did not address so much the technical, scientific theory of natural selection which Darwin posited as the mechanism by which species evolved, as the kind of popular, often non-critical evolutionary thinking that saw God as more immanent than transcendent and that conceived of the world in general in terms of process. Darwin's fellow-Britons seemed to be particularly enamoured of the concept of evolution as the great explanatory principle of all things and it was the Englishman Herbert Spencer who applied Darwin's ideas to the area of sociology;³⁶ however, developmental thinking was not

³⁴ "Immanence and Incarnation" p.48.

³⁵ Ibid. p.49.

³⁶ L.E. Elliott-Binns, *English Thought, 1860-1900, The Theological Aspect* (Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury Press, 1956), p.66.

limited by time or place, but was present to a greater or lesser extent throughout Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

There was more than one strain of British theology that regarded evolution as a particularly illuminating theological concept. One of the most prominent was represented by a group of Anglo-Catholic theologians who produced the book *Lux Mundi* in 1889. This was a far-reaching attempt to incorporate the idea of evolution specifically into the doctrine of the Incarnation. J.R. Illingworth, one of the *Lux Mundi* group, went so far as to call evolution "the category of the age."³⁷ Illingworth noted that Christians had regarded evolution initially with hostility and suspicion, but that passage of time had demonstrated how important a role it had played in the dialectical process of criticism, correction and synthesis out of which spiritual progress emerged. Illingworth suggested the need for a theology that would combine the ancient patristic theology of the Logos as the principle of Divine Reason immanent in creation with the modern consciousness of evolution as the fundamental concept for the interpretation of both natural and spiritual truth. He saw evolutionary theory as providing the conceptual framework within which this rediscovery of a classical theological position could take place. Illingworth was typical of the

³⁷ "Incarnation and Development" in Charles Gore, ed., *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation* (1889), 5th ed. (New York: John W. Lovell, n.d.), p.158.

widespread late Victorian view that "history is a continuum through which the Divine Life and will were manifested."³⁸

Forsyth acknowledged that evolution as a kind of general attitude had some application to Christian thought because it reminded people that "creation is not yet done."³⁹ Far from being a modern discovery, however, evolution was an ancient philosophical idea that had been resurrected to the benefit of modern people who could now conceive of the universe in organic, rather than merely mechanical terms.⁴⁰ The problem was that evolution, like one of its methodological counterparts, historical criticism, had "become a tyranny."⁴¹ Evolution could be useful to theology provided that its limitations were recognized. The main shortcoming of evolutionary theory was that it left unanswered the question

³⁸ Langford, *Foundations*, p.60. The philosophical position of the history of religions school was similar to this view, that history is the unfolding process through which the divine will is made visible. The essential difference between the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* and the type of effort represented by *Lux Mundi* is the degree to which the British version remained confident that evolutionary thought could be incorporated into orthodox Christian belief without bringing about a theological or philosophical crisis. Troeltsch believed that developmental thinking, as an expression of the modern spirit, had brought about a cataclysmic shaking of the foundations and necessitated a fundamental rethinking of the basis of Christianity. Someone like Illingworth remained serenely untroubled by any difficulties inherent in attempting to be both an evolutionary thinker and an orthodox Christian.

³⁹ "Some Christian Aspects of Evolution", *London Quarterly Review* 104 (Oct., 1905): 209.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.210.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.209; *PPJC*, p.49.

of a "world goal" or a "teleology".⁴² Evolution could not deal adequately, in other words, with the question of the purpose and destiny of the world, but could only describe the process by which history and nature seemed to unfold.

Forsyth was deeply involved in one of the major theological controversies raised by evolutionary thinking. The danger inherent in an uncritical acceptance of evolution in the sense of a divinely immanent principle operating in either nature or history was illustrated, in Forsyth's mind, by the emergence in 1906 of the controversial "New Theology". R. J. Campbell, minister of London's City Temple and one of Forsyth's fellow Congregationalists, gave an address in that year entitled "The Changing Sanctions of Popular Theology." It was published in *The Christian World* and unleashed a storm of protest.⁴³ Campbell attempted to clarify his unorthodox views the following year in a book entitled *The New Theology*. The thesis of this book was that "the fundamentals of the Christian faith need to be rearticulated in terms of the immanence of God."⁴⁴ Campbell started from the assumption that the dividing line between humanity and divinity is a blurred one at best. "Humanity", he wrote, "is Divinity

⁴² Ibid., p.212.

⁴³ John Webster Grant, *Freechurchmanship in England, 1870-1940: With Special Reference to Congregationalism* (London: Independent Press, 1962), pp.132ff.; Brown, *PTF*, pp.26-29.

⁴⁴ *The New Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), p.3.

viewed from below, Divinity is Humanity viewed from above."⁴⁵
The appearance of Jesus Christ, according to Campbell,

reaffirmed the spiritual truth that man's higher self is divine and eternal, integral to the being of God. Jesus was divine, as any man can be, simply because his life was never governed by any principle other than that of love.⁴⁶

Campbell epitomized to Forsyth the dangers of the anthropocentrizing turn in theology. He was symptomatic of the "extraordinary confusion" in the theology of the time.⁴⁷ The New Theology was "like a bad photograph," Forsyth commented -- "under-developed and over-exposed."⁴⁸ He responded to the "New Theology" in an essay entitled "Immanence and Incarnation." The whole principle of divine immanence which was at the heart of Campbell's thought was strictly peripheral to saving faith, he argued. The reason is that God's immanence is a non-moral concept. It does not communicate the essential reality of God which, from the human perspective, is the position of his absolute, holy will over in confrontation with human sin.⁴⁹ The New Theology, Forsyth maintained, compromises the finality of God's revelation in

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.75. Langford, *Foundations*, p.34.

⁴⁶ Langford, p.34.

⁴⁷ Sydney Cave, "P.T. Forsyth: The Man and His Writings", *Congregational Quarterly* 26 (1948): 114-115.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "Immanence and Incarnation", p.50.

Christ because it makes the work of Christ merely an achievement of human piety. The Gospel has to do with God's "invasion of our nature to find us", not his "emergence from nature to find Himself."⁵⁰ The New Theology, Forsyth concluded, is a theology that is determined by theories regarding the nature of the universe, rather than by the revelation of God's moral purpose for the world.⁵¹ It amounts not to a new theology but to a new religion because it alters fundamentally the Christian conception of God and God's relation to the world. A new theology must always be a rearticulation of the "old faith."⁵²

Liberal Christianity, Forsyth argued, fails to be evangelical because it lacks the moral power that is derived from a true understanding of divine holiness. While it is true that liberal theology employed ethical categories in its reading of the New Testament, and regarded Jesus as an ethical teacher, it did not have a profound awareness of the moral situation of humanity, or of the holiness of God. The conflict between holiness and human sin, Forsyth argued, is the sole ground of genuinely Christian ethics. Forsyth argued that Christianity is fundamentally dualistic. It deals with the "collision" of two wills, two consciences, and two personalities, one divine and the other human, one holy and

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.56.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.57.

⁵² Ibid., p.60.

the other sinful.⁵³ Furthermore, it is the distance between these two realities that liberal theology has underestimated in its attempt to mediate between God and the world. Mediation can only occur, according to Forsyth, because of the positive, transforming grace of God. In this way, "positive" was virtually a synonym for "theocentric" in Forsyth's mind because it describes the free, final and effective act of God to overcome human sin, and the faithful and obedient response to that act, both of which together constitute the heart of the Christian Gospel.

It would be a mistake to assume that in calling for a positive theology that reasserted the themes of the Reformation and the New Testament, that Forsyth wanted simply to turn the clock back.⁵⁴ Indeed, Forsyth was as critical of the old Protestant orthodoxy as he was of liberalism. Orthodoxy is a form of rationalism because it equates truth with rational propositions.⁵⁵ In that sense, it is just as anthropocentric as liberalism. It was not a question of resisting modernity and reestablishing orthodoxy but of

⁵³ Ibid., p.50.

⁵⁴ *FFF*, p.186.

⁵⁵ For an excellent study of the development of Protestant orthodoxy see Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979.) Rogers and McKim are particularly concerned to trace the genesis of the American fundamentalist belief that Christianity rests on the doctrine of an inerrant Bible. Their analysis, however, is useful in showing the rationalist foundations of scholasticism and orthodoxy.

formulating an account of the Gospel that was both *positive* and *modern*.⁵⁶

"Modern" and "liberal" were two entirely different concepts in Forsyth's mind. Liberalism, as we have seen, had a mainly negative connotation while Forsyth regarded modernity with sympathetic interest.⁵⁷ Modern theology is theology that is able to communicate the central reality of the Christian Gospel to the modern age. Where Forsyth parted company with liberal theologians was in his insistence that the central reality had not changed, only the conditions in which it was to be heard. In this respect Forsyth was deeply influenced by a trend among a number of German theologians to articulate a *moderne-positive Theologie*. His book *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* was shaped to significant extent by the Lutheran pastor Theodor Kaftan. Kaftan was a General Superintendent of the Lutheran church and brother of the well-known Ritschlian theologian Julius Kaftan. Forsyth patterned the sixth and seventh chapters of *Positive Preaching* directly after Kaftan's book *Moderne Theologie des Alten Glaubens*⁵⁸, acknowledging this dependence in a rare footnote. Kaftan was part of a loose circle of theologians headed by Reinhold

⁵⁶ *FFF*, p.142.

⁵⁷ It is interesting to note that Forsyth saw Ritschl as an example of a "modern", not a "liberal" theologian. Otto Pfleiderer he classified as "liberal". *PPMM* p.142.

⁵⁸ *Moderne Theologie des Alten Glaubens* (Schleswig: Julius Bergas, 1906).

Seeberg⁵⁹ who proposed to develop an account of the Christian faith that was addressed to the modern situation, but continued to be rooted in what Kaftan called "the old faith".⁶⁰ Kaftan began by discussing the common view that the "old faith" and the "new theology" are fundamentally irreconcilable and that to accept one means to reject the other.⁶¹ This is a misconception, he writes. Theology that is truly modern is always a rearticulation of the old faith. By "old faith", Kaftan meant the theology of historic Protestantism that regards Christ as the object of faith, rather than as the paradigmatically faithful man. The catchphrase of the time referred to "belief *in* Jesus" rather than "belief *of* Jesus", meaning that Christians are called to revere God through Christ and not merely to emulate Christ's reverence for God.⁶² Christianity, according to Kaftan,

⁵⁹ Forsyth also acknowledged his indebtedness to Seeberg, along with Richard Rothe, Martin Kähler and Martin Grützmacher. *PPJC*, Preface, p.viii.

⁶⁰ Horst Stephan and Martin Schmidt, *Geschichte der Deutschen Evangelischen Theologie* 2nd ed. (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1960), p.301.

⁶¹ This was essentially the argument made by D.F. Strauss in his last work *Der alte und der neue Glaube* (Bonn: E. Strauss, 1875).

⁶² Cf. Forsyth, "In [the] case of [old Protestantism] we believe *in* Christ, in the other [liberal Protestantism] we believe *like* Christ." *PPJC*, p.189. Forsyth takes up a theme that hotly debated at the time in the second Lecture of *PPJC* entitled "The Religion of Jesus and the Gospel of Christ". This will be dealt with more extensively below.

"stands and falls" with this old faith.⁶³ Where the old faith ceases to exist, Christianity itself ceases to exist. (This became a point of considerable importance for Forsyth.)⁶⁴

From the perspective of the *moderne-positive Theologie*, "modern" refers to the power or the ability of a theology to exert an impact on the present. Modern theology, Kaftan argues, is "one of the forms of modern spiritual and intellectual life [*Geistesleben*]." Theology must stand "in an inner connection with the common stream of life of its age.... Modern theology is theology determined by the uniqueness of modern spiritual and intellectual life."⁶⁵ Kaftan argues that "modern thought, like ancient thought, is a neutral force with respect to the Gospel."⁶⁶ In other words, there is nothing in modern consciousness that is inherently inimical to the proclamation of the Gospel, as many of the critics of the "old faith" argued. Christianity has nothing to fear from the modern age. The forms of expression and thought proper to any age do not contradict the Gospel necessarily, and therefore the Gospel can be effectively translated into the idiom of every age without compromising its positive content. The

⁶³ See *Moderne Theologie des Alten Glaubens*, ch.3, "Daß mit dem alten Glauben das Christentum steht und fällt", pp.40-72.

⁶⁴ "Immanence and Incarnation" p.60.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.74.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

conflict between "the old faith" and "modern theology" arose because people failed to come to grips with the positive content of the Gospel and not because there was something in the Gospel or in the nature of modernity that made such conflict inevitable. Forsyth echoed this view:

Christ, as the standing object of our faith, is the meeting-point of changeless eternity and changing history. In Him the eternal emerges as a fleeting point. But, if He is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever, His final utterance must be expressible at every other such point. His eternal revelation is vocal and relevant for every age. The changeless Gospel must speak with equal facility the language of each new time.... Christianity has a history because it is under the constant renewing of the Holy Ghost. It is a new and independent power of life within the stream of time.⁶⁷

Strauss, Troeltsch and critical liberalism argued that modern theology had to replace the "old faith", that the position of the old faith in the modern world had become untenable.⁶⁸ On the other hand, Forsyth, like Kaftan, contended that the essential, theocentric content of the "old faith" is unperturbed by the new conditions which the modern world presents. This assertion is made on the basis of the conviction that the "old faith" does not itself constitute an

⁶⁷ *PPMM*, pp.140-141.

⁶⁸ This principle is everywhere present in the writings of Ernst Troeltsch. See especially *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions*, trans. David Reid (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1971) 45ff.; *Protestantism and Progress: A Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World* trans. W. Montgomery (Boston: Beacon Press, 1912, 1958) passim.; "The Essence of the Modern Spirit" in Adams and Bense, *Religion and History*, pp.237-272.

aspect of culture but rather confronts all human culture and ingenuity with the revelation of God. However, the insights into the nature of God and human life that have arisen in the modern era can themselves lead to a deeper grasp of the "old faith". Forsyth wrote,

In the face of modern *theories* or dogmas the Word of revelation is autonomous.... But in the face of modern *principles* it discerns in them, and often through their means, the hidden treasures of its own wealth⁶⁹

Modern ideas, in other words, can assist in the interpretation of the gospel provided that they do not come to exert a controlling influence. He argues that

... nothing more worthily marks the modern Church than the idea of evolution, especially in connexion with its own history. But is our belief to be stretched on the pallet of evolution, for instance, and everything to be trimmed down which is beyond that scheme? The Higher Criticism is a gift to us of the Spirit which gave us the Bible. But is the Bible to be put on the rack of mere literary criticism, or historical, or even ethical, and nothing accepted from it but what it emits under such question?⁷⁰

Forsyth attempted to respond to modernity, especially to its scientific methods, not with outright hostility but by carving out an autonomous sphere for religious reality which would be unperturbed by the

⁶⁹ PPMM p.170.

⁷⁰ PPMM, p.169.

destructive effect of criticism. Religious knowledge deals with a different sphere of reality from science. "What science does for our knowledge of things and forces, faith does for our knowledge of persons, our knowledge, above all, of our personal God and His saving will."⁷¹ It was this belief that it was possible to construct a modern theology that retained the supernatural, positive base of the "old faith" which was attacked by the history of religions school in particular, and which was one of the principle bones of contention in the theological climate of the time. The central issue between liberal and, for lack of a better term, "positive" theologians like Forsyth was the latter's argument that the essential character of the Christian message was not radically undermined by modern consciousness. Forsyth agreed with the liberals that the principle of the Reformation was that the heart of the Gospel of grace is independent of the various forms in which it is expressed. The kernel can be distinguished from the husk. Controversy arose over the identity of the kernel. What could, or what must be maintained, if Christianity is to remain Christianity?

4. Holiness as the key to theocentricity

I have tried to show that Forsyth belongs among

⁷¹ *PPMM*, pp.170-171.

those theologians who were convinced that theology could be both positive and modern, that it could maintain the central affirmations of historic faith and address the modern situation. Positivity and modernity, however, were not the essential criteria for judging whether a theology was faithful to God's self-revelation in Christ. Religion and theology had to be theocentric. In order to be theocentric, theology had to place at the centre the concept that described the nature of God most fully and essentially -- holiness.

In 1910 Forsyth delivered a lecture which is published in his book *The Principle of Authority* under the title "Theocentric Religion."⁷² In this essay Forsyth attempts to counteract the tendency to interpret Christianity in terms which place human values and achievements rather than the sovereignty of God at the centre. It should be noted that Forsyth refers to theocentric *religion* rather than theocentric *theology*. That is because of the secondary nature of theology as described above.⁷³ It is religion that is of primary concern because authentic religion consists of the subjective experience of the objective action of God. As I suggested above, Forsyth was critical of theology in the tradition of Schleiermacher because of what he took to be its exaggerated

⁷² *The Principle of Authority in Relation to Certainty, Sanctity and Society* (1912) 2nd edition (London: Independent Press, 1952) pp.362-390. (Hereafter cited as PA.)

⁷³ See above, p.24.

emphasis on religious consciousness.⁷⁴ Having said this, it is also true that he shares with Schleiermacher the conviction that doctrines are to be inferred from the consciousness of grace and salvation present in the believing community.⁷⁵ But in spite of certain similarities, our analysis of Forsyth's essay will show the point at which he found the Schleiermacherian approach inadequate.

Four features of theocentric religion emerge from this essay. First, theocentric religion recognizes the holiness of God as the fundamental datum of the Christian gospel. Secondly, the gospel concerns the reconciliation brought about by God's gracious initiative in Jesus Christ. Thirdly, the revelation of God's action in Jesus Christ brings about its own redemptive effect. Fourthly, Christian experience means the personal appropriation of God's holiness in the conscience, regenerating it and reorienting it towards God. I will outline briefly how Forsyth makes each of these points in turn. I will deal more fully with the second and third of these points in Chapter 3 and the fourth in Chapter 4. In this chapter we will focus our attention on that aspect of the nature of God which Forsyth regarded as the fundamental ground of the theocentric perspective, namely, God's holiness.

⁷⁴ "The Place of Spiritual Experience in the Making of Theology", p.185.

⁷⁵ On this aspect of Schleiermacher's thought, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus -- God and Man*, trans. Lewis Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), p.24.

In "Theocentric Religion", Forsyth begins with the general claim that God is always experienced by human beings in terms of his "value". God cannot be known in his essence but only through his effect on us.⁷⁶ This idea was central to the theology of Ritschl⁷⁷ The application of the concept of value-judgments to Christian theology was the nineteenth century's method of appropriating Melanchthon's dictum that the central fact of Christianity -- namely salvation through Christ -- is not something that is known apart from Christ's "saving benefits" or his effect upon the believer.⁷⁸ However, constructing a theology on the basis of judgments of value was a delicate task because there is always a danger, Forsyth argued, that those who attempt to account for the experience of Christ will fix their interest on themselves and will value God only insofar as he serves human needs.⁷⁹ Our awareness of God begins with our experience of his value for us, Forsyth maintained, but behind that subjective experience

⁷⁶ PA, p.361.

⁷⁷ "Apart from [the] value-judgment of faith, there exists no knowledge of God worthy of this content." Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation: The Positive Development of the Doctrine* (Volume 3 of *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*) trans. A.B. Macauley et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900), p.212. (Hereafter cited as JR.)

⁷⁸ Ritschl, JR, p.396; Forsyth, PPJC, p.279; "Revelation and the Person of Christ" in *Faith and Criticism: Essays by Congregationalists* 2nd ed. (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1893), pp.137-138.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

is always the objective reality, not of God's value to us, but of his *right* over us.⁸⁰ This is the right of the Creator to be worshipped, honoured and obeyed by his creatures.⁸¹

Value, Forsyth wrote, means intrinsic worth. What is of intrinsic worth concerning God is the absolute goodness of his will.⁸² This absolute goodness and rightness of the divine will establishes both the basis for God's relation to humankind and his radical difference from his human creatures. Human beings can be in intimate communion with God because, like God, they possess wills. However, God's will is holy while the human will is not. The value of the divine will is absolute because its goodness is judged by no criterion external to itself. The value of the human will, however, is relative because its motives and actions derive their value only in relation to the will of God. Forsyth employs the term "holiness" to describe the value of God's will and the identity of the divine will and the divine nature. The term "value" when applied to God "means, not God's value to man but His value to Himself. It means the one good thing in the world

⁸⁰ PA, p.361.

⁸¹ "Have we any rights that are not gifts, and lay us under obligation?.... The free Grace of God means that before Him ... we have no rights. If we had rights before God, we should have deserts and grace would not be free. We have nothing we have not received." PA, p.254.

⁸² Ibid., p.362.

made absolute -- a good will."⁸³ God's right to obedience flows from the absolute value of his will and his right to demand that the wills of human creatures should be in line with his. This, says Forsyth, is human autonomy authentically understood; not as independence from the transcendent will of God but as the experience "by which the single soul makes the Holy One the principle of its action and life."⁸⁴ In Forsyth's theology the holiness of God is the ground of all truly moral thought and action. God's value is "the transcendent Ought" and the authentically moral life is the life lived in obedient response to this holiness.

Holiness, then, is one of the key categories in Forsyth's theology and he cannot be appreciated apart from a clear understanding of his use of this word. We will discuss this aspect of Forsyth's understanding of holiness more fully later, but suffice it to say that he saw holiness as a *moral* rather than a metaphysical⁸⁵ category because it has to do

⁸³ Ibid., p.363.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Forsyth did not use the term "metaphysical" in a technically precise way. He tended to use it to mean "speculative." He stands in the Ritschlian tradition of using "metaphysical" as a short-hand for what Ritschl meant by "false metaphysics" which fails to distinguish between natural and spiritual reality and subsumes all reality "superficially under the general category of 'thing'.." ("Theology and Metaphysics" [1881] in *Albrecht Ritschl: Three Essays*, trans. Philip Hefner [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972] p.155) Metaphysics, according to Forsyth, is the "philosophy of totality", the philosophy which deals with the nature of things. However, under the corrupting influence of Hegelian idealism metaphysical reality was reduced to the "totality of

with the inherent goodness and rightness of God's will. Religion, including religious judgments of value, is defined in relation to the holy will of God, and human moral values are entirely dependent upon the recognition of and submission to God's holiness.⁸⁶ Freedom, for example, that most crucial of Protestant moral categories, means God's freedom first. The Gospel concerns the freedom of the grace of God, and human freedom is derived from and dependent upon the freedom of God.⁸⁷ It is the holiness of God rather than human aspirations or achievements that is the ground of authentic religion. Genuine Christianity is not so much an expression of cultural values as it is a relation of wills -- the holy will of God and the sinful human will in need of redemption and recreation.

God's value -- the intrinsic worth of his holy will -- cannot be discovered inductively by reason or through an innate religious intuition but only through revelation.⁸⁸ What God reveals is his holy purpose for the world, and this purpose has its definitive expression in the cross and

thought". (*The Justification of God: Lectures for War-Time on a Christian Theodicy* [London: Duckworth & Co., 1916] p.59.) Thus, while metaphysics does not always carry a negative connotation in Forsyth's mind, practically he tends to use it in a polemical sense to mean "idealistic", "monistic", or "static" rather than "moral" or "dynamic". (*The Justification of God* hereafter cited as *JG*.)

⁸⁶ *PA*, p.363.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.370.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.372.

resurrection of Jesus Christ. The revelation of God in the cross of Christ is the sole norm for Christian doctrine, experience and ethical action. God's holy purpose for the world is that the world be redeemed.⁸⁹ It is in his account of redemption that Forsyth departs most boldly from what he saw as the prevailing doctrine of the time. We will describe in Chapter 2 the way in which Forsyth viewed redemption as the result of the satisfaction of God's holiness. It was characteristic of the liberal Protestantism of Forsyth's day to reject as an outmoded relic of a bygone era a view of the atonement which saw Christ as paying the penalty incurred by human sin at the fall.⁹⁰ Ritschl, for example, interpreted Christ's death not as his suffering the penalty of human sin but as the supreme expression of divine love.⁹¹ But what needed to take place in order to bring about redemption, according to Forsyth, was not only the communication of God's love and forgiveness but the satisfaction of the demands of God's holiness. Indeed, holiness takes precedence over love in the sense that it is God's holiness that defines his love and not vice versa.⁹² Liberal theology tended to elevate the

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.367.

⁹⁰ See, for instance, W.H. Moberly, "The Atonement" in *Foundations: A Statement of Christian Belief in Terms of Modern Thought by Seven Oxford Men* (London: Macmillan, 1912, 1922) pp.282, 283, 299.

⁹¹ JR, p.555.

⁹² PA, p.371.

concept of the love of God in a sense that placed it in opposition to holiness. Divine compassion, it was argued, mitigated or even overrode the demands of holiness. But this can never be, Forsyth argued, or God would cease to be God.⁹³ God's love is an expression of the divine will that sinful humanity be reconciled to his holiness. Such reconciliation cannot take place merely by overlooking sin but only by satisfying the holiness of his will. This is one of the key components of Forsyth's christology. In a daring statement Forsyth argues that salvation is primarily for God's benefit, that God may be glorified and served.⁹⁴ "God is for man only that man may be for God."⁹⁵

The truth of these statements cannot be known anthropocentrically, that is through natural reason or intuition, but only through revelation. Revelation, however, is not mere disclosure, according to Forsyth. God's revelation brings about a transforming effect on the human race. The effect of revelation is the transformation of the conscience as well as the illumination of the intellect. The

⁹³ Forsyth wrote frequently against the liberal tendency to use the parable of the Prodigal Son as the normative description of divine love. This parable, he argued, is not a complete expression of the nature of God because it implies that compassion is able to override holiness. The parable, for all its beauty and profundity, needs to be completed by reference to the fuller biblical picture of God. See *God the Holy Father* (London: Independent Press, 1957), pp.15ff; WC, pp.106-107. (*God the Holy Father* hereafter cited as *GHF*.)

⁹⁴ PA, p.374.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.376.

conscience, in Forsyth's psychology, is the point of practical contact between the human creature and the creative will of God.⁹⁶ Revelation does not elicit an eruption of subjective religious feeling⁹⁷ but effects the objective recreation of the conscience, orienting it away from the self towards the God. This objective effect is one of the main aspects of a theocentric conception of God. It stands in contrast to the prevailing religious mood of the period which Forsyth describes in this way:

What is our faith so often but a religious subjectivity? We are preoccupied with ourselves in the very act in which we should lose ourselves, make ourselves over and sign ourselves away. Our soul is not so much engaged with God as with its own condition, its appreciation of God, its utilisation of Him. Religion is courted and cherished either as a stimulus to a beneficence worth much more, or as a sense of inner harmony rather than of reconciliation with God It may become a religious egotism, ... an exploitation of God's value rather than a confession of His right.⁹⁸

In the actual obedience of Jesus in the incarnation the relation between God and humankind was objectively altered from one of judgment and condemnation to one of forgiveness and grace. The possibility of a "new humanity" became real at a moment in history⁹⁹ through the

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.365.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.369.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.369.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp.374, 386.

union of the divine will and the obedient conscience in Christ. Theocentric religion is religion that is experienced as a real, transformative, regenerative effect in the human will and conscience.¹⁰⁰ However, this effect is only rightly understood insofar as it is realized that its ground and source lie beyond itself in the transcendent holiness of God and the historic action of God in Jesus Christ.

5. *The development of the concept of theocentricity*

Forsyth did not actually use the terms "theocentric" and "anthropocentric" prior to the year 1909, so far as I can tell. However, it is clear that the main outlines of what he came to describe as theocentric theology were firmly in place in his work from the early 1890s onwards. As we will describe in greater detail, Forsyth appears to have taken up the terms after reading Erich Schaeder's *Theozentrische Theologie*, the first volume of which was published in Germany in 1909.¹⁰¹ The main themes of Forsyth's theology, however, remained remarkably consistent from the time of his so-called "conversion" from liberalism to his death. After his semester with Ritschl in 1870, Forsyth became known for a time as a

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.390.

¹⁰¹ See below, pp.91-96.

"liberal of liberals".¹⁰² His sympathies in this direction can be seen in his writings from the 1880s, for example, in a favourable review of the neo-Hegelian Otto Pfleiderer's book on St. Paul.¹⁰³ This changed around 1890. It is not entirely clear what took place in Forsyth's life to bring about this alteration, however. It seems to have been related to a heightened awareness of the practical implications of the realities of sin and grace. Forsyth appears to have become conscious of the spiritual drama of redemption in a much more personal, "existential" way. Perhaps this can be accounted for by the fact that he spent the first half of his career as a pastor rather than a university-based academic. He puts it this way in the most often-quoted passage from his writings -- one of the few places where he gives any insight into his own theological development:

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.... 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 kept close to practical conditions. 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.... 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

¹⁰² Robert McAfee Brown, "The 'Conversion' of P.T. Forsyth", *Congregational Quarterly* 30 (1962): 236.

¹⁰³ "Pfleiderer's View of St. Paul's Doctrine", *Modern Review* 4: 81-96.

that submerged all the school questions in weight, urgency, and poignancy. I was turned from a Christian to a believer, from a lover of love to an object of grace.¹⁰⁴

"Theocentric Religion" was published in 1910 yet we can discern already a definite shift in Forsyth's thought with the appearance of an essay entitled "Revelation and the Person of Christ" in 1893.¹⁰⁵ Even prior to this date, however, Forsyth had written of the need for a "conversion from self as a centre to God."¹⁰⁶ "Revelation and the Person of Christ" stands in clear opposition to what Forsyth called "natural piety" which "emphasizes what starts from us rather than what starts from God."¹⁰⁷ This essay is written from within a clearly Ritschlian framework and it is permeated by key Ritschlian themes.¹⁰⁸ First, Forsyth

¹⁰⁴ *PPMM*, pp.192-193. According to R.M. Brown, part of the explanation for Forsyth's "conversion" may be his propensity for "going against the stream". Forsyth was a liberal during the declining days of Victorian evangelicalism with its emphases on the literal truth of the Bible and individual salvation, and he rediscovered orthodoxy during a time when evangelicalism was giving way to a popular and superficial liberalism. ("The Conversion of P.T. Forsyth", p.238.)

¹⁰⁵ See A.M. Hunter, *P.T. Forsyth: Per Crucem ad Lucem* (London: SCM Press, 1974), p.16; Brown "Conversion of P.T. Forsyth", p.237; Brown, *P.T. Forsyth, Prophet for Today*, p.14.

¹⁰⁶ "Sunday Schools and Modern Theology", *Christian World Pulpit* 31 (Feb. 1887): 123.

¹⁰⁷ *RPC*, p.101.

¹⁰⁸ I do not share the view that Forsyth "repudiated" Ritschl. (See Brown, *PTF*, p.31.) In fact, Ritschl remained one of the most dominant influences on Forsyth throughout the

understands revelation in terms of the opposition of nature and grace¹⁰⁹, a characteristically Ritschlian idea. Nature, for Ritschl, was the realm of necessity and by the grace of God human beings are able to attain mastery [*Herrschaft*] over its hostility and indifference.¹¹⁰ God's dealings with humankind do not take place on the plane of nature, but in the realm of freedom and personality. Revelation, according to Ritschl, is the relation between two personalities -- that of God and that of the believer. God does not exist as an object which can be analyzed with scientific detachment, but as the supreme moral personality.¹¹¹ The goal of religion is to enable the believer to develop into a free moral personality, a state in which "man becomes a whole, a spiritual character supreme over the world."¹¹² This development of personality takes place within *history* which, for Ritschl, is the realm of freedom as distinct from the nature which is the realm of necessity. Forsyth follows this line of thought in emphasizing the historical character of revelation.¹¹³ There

latter's life. There is a need for a detailed study of the relationship between them to make this point clear.

¹⁰⁹ See also *JG*, p.7.

¹¹⁰ See *JR*, pp.292-293.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.226-238. "Personality is the form in which the idea of God is given through Revelation." (p.237)

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.203.

¹¹³ *RPC*, p.99.

is no revelation in nature, according to Forsyth, because nature is an impersonal process that leaves no room for personal events such as forgiveness, reconciliation, change of conscience or moral purpose.¹¹⁴

Secondly, Forsyth shows Ritschl's influence in stating that theology deals with "God himself as truth" rather than with "truth about God."¹¹⁵ For both of them, this distinction means that revelation cannot be equated with doctrine on the one hand or experience on the other. The reality of God cannot be grasped in the form of disinterested propositions that treat God as an object to be investigated but do not engage the will or the conscience.¹¹⁶ God cannot be handled as an object of knowledge apart from the question of the personal effect which it exerts upon us, in other words, apart from the question of value.¹¹⁷ Forsyth

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ "[T]he Scholastic distinction between the thing in itself and its effects upon us, between the proper life of the spirit and its active functions, is alien to our minds." Ritschl, *JR*, p.23.

¹¹⁷ "An object of disinterested knowledge can never be God for us..." *RPC* p.103. Cf. Ritschl, *JR*: "... Luther admits no 'disinterested' knowledge of God, but recognises as a religious datum only such knowledge of Him as takes the form of unconditional trust." (p.6) "... we ought not to strive after a purely theoretical and 'disinterested' knowledge of God.... The truth rather is that we know the nature of God and Christ only in their worth for us." (p.212) "Every cognition of a religious sort is a direct judgment of value. The nature of God and the Divine we can only know in its essence by determining its value for our salvation.... My opponents ... imagine that they can establish the Godhead of Christ upon

positioned himself against what he called "Confessionalism" by which he meant Protestant scholasticism or orthodoxy.¹¹⁸ This amounts, he argues, to a false emphasis on the past insofar as its proponents equated revelation with a past event or with the Bible itself.¹¹⁹ However, although divine revelation is something that is personally experienced, experience itself is not the content of revelation. This would amount to mysticism, something which Ritschl as well as Forsyth rejected because mysticism equates revelation with an immediate experience or intuition of the divine.¹²⁰ Revelation is always mediated, but is mediated through no other means than the historic person of Jesus Christ:

... it is a mysticism fatal to Revelation when the affections of the individual or the ideas of a school supersede the historic Christ as the voice of the living God, and when the echo of Christ's influence is turned into the criterion of His Revelation.¹²¹

In addition to his double antipathy to mysticism and

the basis of a scientific idea, that is, through an act of disinterested cognition, previous to all possible experience, and apart from all religious experience of the matter." (p.398)

¹¹⁸ *RPC*, p.105.

¹¹⁹ Ritschl regarded orthodoxy as a form of "theological naturalism" in the sense that it attempted to dispense with historical revelation and to appeal to natural reason as the criterion for judging the truth of revelation. *JR* pp.181, 625.

¹²⁰ *RPC*, p.100; see also *JR*, p. 162, 180.

¹²¹ *RPC*, p.107.

scholasticism, Ritschl developed his account of revelation in opposition to Hegelian Idealism.¹²² Revelation does not exist in the form of timeless ideals that transcend the historical events which bear them. D.F. Strauss had separated Christ from what he called the "Christian principle." Strauss was a disciple of Hegel and his criticism was guided by the Hegelian principle that while phenomena are vehicles in which ideas are transported through history, no phenomenon, no single historical moment or occurrence can be the absolute realization of an idea.¹²³ The Jesus who existed in history must be distinguished from, and in the end subordinated to, the transcendent ideal which he embodied. Ritschl had broken with his own Hegelian teacher, F.C. Baur, because he believed that the line taken by Strauss and Baur trivialized the Jesus who actually appeared in history.¹²⁴ Ritschl believed that

¹²² Hefner, *Faith and the Vitalities of History*, p.21.

¹²³ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* 3rd ed. (1906) trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1968) , p.79.

¹²⁴ Ritschl learned from Baur the importance of conceiving of Christian history as a dynamic movement or development. However, he broke with Baur over the question of the proper way to interpret this development. Baur and the Tübingen school saw the history of Christianity as the process of the dialectical emergence of *Geist* (Spirit). History was "the career of *Geist* (or *Idee*, or God) as it comes to actuality through the process of self-objectification." (Hefner, *Faith and the Vitalities of History*, p.25.) Ritschl's study of the development of early Catholicism and of the Reformation convinced him that this history was not to be accounted for in terms of an ideal process but of the personal relation between God and humankind -- that is, in terms of the fundamental principle of moral reconciliation. (Hefner, p.28.)

the emphasis of the Reformers on Jesus as the final revelation of God had to be recovered in order to counteract the influence of Hegelian Idealism on Christian thought. It is God's free self-disclosure that furnishes the ground and content of the Christian message and the sole principle for interpreting the historical development of that message. According to Philip Hefner, Ritschl believed that

the history of God's people is constituted by God's redemptive presence which is in turn his action of self-revelation; the totality of this history, as it is focused in any present movement, constitutes the only adequate principle of knowledge and certainty that the Christian theologian has at his disposal.¹²⁵

Ritschl's pupil P.T. Forsyth followed the line of his teacher in insisting that revelation be grounded in historical events. Specifically, the revelatory events which are normative for Christianity are the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Forsyth concurred with Ritschl in arguing that Christ is revealed to us essentially as the Redeemer. Consciousness of redemption is an aspect of the essence of faith, according to Ritschl.¹²⁶ Forsyth echoes Ritschl when he states that

¹²⁵ Hefner, p.9.

¹²⁶ "Christianity ... is the monotheistic, completely spiritual and ethical religion, which, based on the life of its Author as Redeemer and as Founder of the Kingdom of God, consists in the freedom of the children of God, involves the impulse to conduct from the motive of love, aims at the moral reorganisation of mankind, and grounds blessedness on the relation of sonship to God, as well as on the Kingdom of God." *JR*, p.13.

"real revelation is always Christ revealed in us, and revealed as Redeemer."¹²⁷ Related to this last conviction is Forsyth's belief that revelation cannot be reduced to the status of an object of critical reason or subjected to its criteria.¹²⁸ Revelation takes place within history but its ground and authority lie above history in the transcendent will of God.

6. *The concept of holiness and Forsyth's move away from Ritschlian Theology*

Ritschl continued to exercise a profound influence on Forsyth's theology long after 1893, the year in which "Revelation and the Person of Christ" was published. However, Forsyth found himself departing from the position of his teacher at significant points. The principle shortcoming of Ritschlian theology, according to Forsyth, was that it failed to grasp with sufficient profundity the holiness of God, and it failed to account for the manner in which that holiness can become a living power in the life of the believer. While Forsyth regarded Ritschl as having had an important corrective influence on Protestant theology by reestablishing the

¹²⁷ *RPC* p.121

¹²⁸ *RPC*, p.109. Forsyth acknowledges the influence of the most famous of the Ritschlians, Wilhelm Hermann, in the writing of "Revelation and the Person of Christ" (p.97). It was one of Hermann's main principles that historical criticism is an insufficient method for dealing with the spiritual realities of the Christian message. (*The Communion of the Christian with God* 2nd ed. [4th German ed., 1903], trans. J. Sandys Stanton [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1906, 1971]).

positive, historical ground of Christian belief, Ritschl's thought was open to the charge of being anthropocentric because it did not give sufficient value to the holiness of God. Prior to 1890, Forsyth's work was characterized by a call to free theology from the shackles of a stale orthodoxy and affirm the vitality of contemporary thinking.¹²⁹ If we turn to "Revelation and the Person of Christ" (1893), we can see that the opposition to "Confessionalism" is still present, but that there is also a new emphasis on the objectivity of Christ's atoning work, combined with an argument that the effects of the atonement must be deeply and personally experienced. Forsyth defines revelation as "the free, final and effective act of God's self-communication in Jesus Christ for man's redemption."¹³⁰ It is this stress on revelation as the *act* of God in Jesus Christ which is the ground and source of authentic *experience* that becomes more and more important in Forsyth's theology. God's action is the basic reality for the Christian, which is to say that a theological account of that reality must be theocentric.

Forsyth's developing sense that holiness is the category which safeguards the theocentric nature of the Christian message from being anthropocentrized caused him to part company with Ritschl at certain important points in "Revelation and the Person of Christ." First, Forsyth

¹²⁹ "Sunday Schools and Modern Theology", pp.123ff.

¹³⁰ *RPC*, p.116.

affirmed unequivocally the *dissimilarity* between Christ and the human race. For Ritschl, Jesus was "unique in His own order" as the founder of Christianity and the bearer of revelation.¹³¹ However, the Christian life is based on the similarity between Christ's experience and ours. Christ himself was the paradigm of lordship over the world, the model for believers to follow. Christ's "self-end" of reconciliation to God becomes that of the believer who experiences Christ's influence.¹³² Forsyth became increasingly unambiguous in stating that Christ's relation to God and his consciousness of that relation are qualitatively different than those of other human beings, and that it is this very dissimilarity that makes Christ's work effective for salvation.¹³³ Christ is not the founder of a religion, according to Forsyth, but God himself, the object of worship.¹³⁴ The notion of a founder suggests that Christ's experience was analogous to ours, that he was the "first Christian" and that faith means appropriating or imitating his prototypical experience of God. It was this that Forsyth emphatically denied. "It is in His difference from us rather than in His resemblance, that the core and name of His

¹³¹ *JR*, p.465.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.609.

¹³³ *RPC*, p.128.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.113.

revelation lies."¹³⁵ As we shall see, this denial of the essential similarity of Christ and the human race formed the basis of Forsyth's christology which was increasingly centred on the traditional affirmations of Christ's divinity, incarnation and atonement.

A second point on which Forsyth moved away from Ritschl was in his reading of the moral situation of humankind and of the nature of sin. To be sure, Forsyth shares with Ritschl the overall conceptual framework of Christianity as involving justification, justification involving forgiveness of sins and unmerited grace, and faith as the human response to that grace.¹³⁶ However, Forsyth came to define sin in much more radical terms than Ritschl. For Ritschl, sin is an impediment to the freedom which comes about through gaining mastery over the world. Guilt, for Ritschl, consists essentially of "guilt-consciousness", the paralyzing awareness of unworthiness that stands in the way the sinner's acceptance of God's forgiveness.¹³⁷ Ritschl rejected the traditional doctrine of human depravity as articulated by Augustine and later generations of theologians.¹³⁸ According to Forsyth,

¹³⁵ *RPC*, p.112.

¹³⁶ See, for example, *JR*, pp.39-40, 59.

¹³⁷ "Forgiveness, as an attribute of ... Christian community, implies that in that community men may enjoy fellowship with God in spite of their sins and in spite of the *intensifying sense of their guilt*." *JR*, pp.543-544.

¹³⁸ *JR*, p.132.

this modern tendency to soften the reality of sin prevented people from understanding the full impact of God's action in Christ. Sin, Forsyth said, is "rebellion", the wilful spurning of God's holiness.¹³⁹ Sin is the inescapable tragedy of human existence, the unavoidable estrangement that separates humankind from God. It is the human being in revolt against his maker. For Ritschl, the central religious problem was the need to overcome the hostility and indifference of nature and to achieve a state of "blessedness" in reconciliation with God and humanity. For Forsyth, however, the problem was not to be defined in relation to the world, but in relation to the guilty conscience. It is not the world that needs to be overcome but guilt. Unless the full seriousness of sin is present in Christian theology, there can be no appreciation of the true meaning of the atonement, an atonement which could not be effected by any human creature.

The third point at which Forsyth parted company with Ritschl was the nature of Christ's work which Forsyth defined as the "practical recognition of God's holiness."

Without that [recognition of God's holiness] God cannot remain God; He would be Father, but a partial not sovereign Father. But it is the very thing that sinful man cannot and will not give. It is an expiation which must be found by God, and not by man; therefore in God. Jesus Christ is the human revelation that it is so found. In Him God honoured within man the law of His own changeless holiness; He condemned sin in the flesh. He made human response to His own holiness.... In Christ God

¹³⁹ RPC, p.141.

did not simply show pity on men, but God was in man expiating sin to His own holiness.¹⁴⁰

This statement expresses the heart of what would become Forsyth's mature christology. Christ confessed¹⁴¹ the holiness of God with a perfection that sinful humanity could not achieve. He took the penalty of human sin upon himself and satisfied the demands of God's holiness. This theocentric view of Christ's work, which will be discussed fully in Chapter 3, is stated here for the first time in Forsyth's published works.

A contemporary of Forsyth, James Orr, charged that "Ritschl ... derives his theology not immediately from the Person of the Redeemer as an *objective* source, but from the *subjective* apprehension of faith and of the Church."¹⁴² Orr claimed that Ritschl's denial that theology can take an objectively or scientifically detached position with respect to the source of its own faith was true, but at the same time opens the door to placing faith and not Christ at the centre. Forsyth was nowhere as critical of Ritschl as his more

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.141.

¹⁴¹ This expression to "confess" God's holiness is one that Forsyth used frequently. He means by it to actively acknowledge through the exercise of the will the goodness and rightness of God's holiness. It is not confession in the sense of mere assertion, but in the sense of accepting the demands of holiness existentially, and permitting one's will and conscience to be fundamentally shaped by those demands.

¹⁴² *The Ritschlian Theology*, p.51.

conservative counterpart, but in "Revelation and the Person of Christ" Forsyth does seem intent on clarifying the relation between faith and its objective ground which remains ambiguous in Ritschl's own formulation. Another of Forsyth's contemporaries, A.E. Garvie, summarized the theology of the "Ritschlian School" (including Hermann, Kaftan and others) under the following nine headings:

[1] the exclusion of metaphysics from theology; [2] the rejection, consequently, of speculative theism; [3] the condemnation of ecclesiastical dogma as an illegitimate mixture of theology and metaphysics; [4] the antagonism shown to religious mysticism as a metaphysical type of piety; [5] the practical conception of religion; [6] the consequent contrast between religious and theoretical knowledge; [7] the emphasis laid on the historical revelation of God in Christ as opposed to any natural revelation; [8] the use of the idea of the kingdom of God as the regulative principle of Christian dogmatics; [9] the tendency to limit theological investigation to the contents of religious consciousness.¹⁴³

Setting aside the question of whether Garvie's assessment is an accurate reading of Ritschl, it seems to me that Forsyth would not have quarrelled with the first seven of these points. However, numbers eight and nine he would have seen as the anthropocentric Achilles' heel of the Ritschlian program; for these points imply that it is the relation of faith to the world that is primary. Although, as I argued above, Forsyth was in many respects a "Ritschlian" theologian, he departed

¹⁴³ A. E. Garvie, *The Ritschlian Theology, Critical and Constructive: An Exposition and Estimate* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), pp. 23-24

sharply from the Ritschlian stream on the question of the essence of Christianity. Christianity is not primarily about humankind's relation to the world¹⁴⁴, or the value of God in solving the dilemma of that relation, but about the collision of divine holiness and human guilt.¹⁴⁵

Theology had become anthropocentric because it failed to centre itself on the twin themes of God's holiness and human guilt. The latter follows from the former. It is not the conflict of the moral personality with the constraints of nature but the revelation of the holy will of God that leads to a quickened awareness of the depth of human sin. Adolf Harnack, perhaps the quintessential liberal, defined the essence of Christianity as the fusion of ethics and religion in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.¹⁴⁶ This is the kernel, stripped of its husk of accumulated dogma and theology. Harnack summarized the teaching of Jesus in three points:

Firstly, the kingdom of God and its coming.
 Secondly, God the Father and the infinite value of the human soul.
 Thirdly, the higher righteousness and the commandment of love.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ PA, p.148: "In religious knowledge the object is God; it is not the world, it is not man."

¹⁴⁵ On Ritschl, see JR p.620; Orr, p.72; Garvie, p.162.

¹⁴⁶ *What is Christianity? (Das Wesen des Christentums, 1900)*, trans. Bailey Saunders, 2nd ed. (New York: G.P. Putnam; London: Williams and Norgate, 1904), p.80.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.55.

Some have argued that Harnack was atypical of the liberal theology of the early twentieth century in reducing the content of Christian theology so drastically.¹⁴⁸ However, Harnack was regarded by many of Forsyth's contemporaries as fairly representative of the liberal position that portrayed Jesus primarily in terms of an ethical teacher, and the focal point of Christian theology in terms of the Fatherhood of God.¹⁴⁹

Forsyth resolutely opposed the view expressed by Harnack. In an 1897 sermon entitled "God the Holy Father", Forsyth argued that the liberal version of the Fatherhood of God was merely the projection onto God of human virtues of sympathy, patience and compassion and the reduction of God to the apotheosis of human fatherhood.¹⁵⁰ Twelve years later, in 1909, Forsyth described anthropocentric religion as "the retirement of the holy."¹⁵¹ The de-emphasizing of the holiness of God leads to the practical consequence of "the decay of the sense of guilt and the sense of forgiveness."¹⁵² This trivialization of sin leads in turn to the exaggeration

¹⁴⁸ John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity Interpreted through its Development* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954) p.211.

¹⁴⁹ See Mozley, *The Doctrine of the Atonement*, p.33.

¹⁵⁰ *GHF*, p.3.

¹⁵¹ *PA*, p.380.

¹⁵² *Ibid*.

of the place of humanity in the religious equation. "Humanity tends to think of itself as indispensable to God's purpose" whereas the truth is that "it is God's holy purpose that is indispensable to Humanity."¹⁵³

By 1897 we see this theme occupying a place of prominence in Forsyth's theology. Removing the holiness of God from the centre of the Christian religion leads to anthropocentric theology. God, according to Forsyth, is absolute personality and the essence of personality is moral, that is, personality is not a speculative or ideal phenomenon but is formed through the exercise of the will.¹⁵⁴ God is holy because there is an absolute identification of his will and his nature. Holiness is therefore the foundational principle of creation.¹⁵⁵ The work of God the creator is an expression of his will. For this reason, Forsyth argued that reality has a "moral structure."¹⁵⁶ If creation is the work of God, it must reflect the nature of God, albeit imperfectly. God's nature is inherently moral and God's action is directed towards moral ends.

In a striking formulation, Forsyth argued that God's

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.381.

¹⁵⁴ See *PA*, pp.99-100, 183; *PPMM*, pp.178-179.

¹⁵⁵ *JG*, pp.60-61.

¹⁵⁶ McKay, "The Moral Structure of Reality in the Theology of Peter Taylor Forsyth".

first concern is not human need but his own holiness.¹⁵⁷ If it were otherwise, God's will would be oriented towards an end that is merely penultimate. As holy, God's first concern is that the demands of holiness be satisfied. Redemption does not mean the overcoming of the hostility between nature and spiritual man, but the satisfaction of divine holiness. Humankind is redeemed when sin no longer stands as a denial of and affront to that holiness. The Christian message concerns the alteration of the relation between God and humankind. This relation is not based on the father-like quality of God's attitude to the human race, however, but on the trinitarian relation between the Father and the Son. The Son made a full and adequate confession of God's holiness and lived a life of perfect obedience. Liberal theology promoted the compassionate Fatherhood of God in reaction to the "awful sternness of the Calvinistic God" of orthodox Protestantism.¹⁵⁸ However, Forsyth argued consistently that the concept of God's fatherhood makes sense only from a theocentric perspective. God is not so much our "Father" as he is the "*Holy* Father". "Holy" is an indispensable adjective here. It describes God whose first concern is the satisfaction of the moral principle that constitutes the essence of the divine will. If God is construed merely in sentimental terms as a kindly and

¹⁵⁷ *GHF*, p.4.

¹⁵⁸ Willis B. Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Independent Press, 1954), p.92.

forgiving father, it has no saving value. It might comfort or inspire, but it cannot redeem.¹⁵⁹ The moral situation of the human race is one of rebellion rather than ignorance and of mutiny rather than frustration.¹⁶⁰ Until that situation is effectively addressed, Forsyth maintained, grace and reconciliation are hollow terms. "To redeem, the sin must be destroyed, a universe re-organized."¹⁶¹ Anthropocentric Christianity trivializes sin. This trivialization is a defensive strategy on the part of the autonomous human subject to avoid divine judgment.¹⁶² God deals with sin on the basis of his holy law and that law cannot be waived or it would be less than holy. Nor can it be merely declared, but it must be brought into actual effect.¹⁶³ However, for sin to be dealt with effectively it must be atoned for, that is, dealt with in such a way that the holiness of God is satisfied. Only then can the relation of God and humankind be changed and real reconciliation be effected. (See Chapter 3.)

On this key point, Forsyth grew farther away from the Ritschlian tradition. Ritschl had defined God as "loving will" and dismissed holiness as an Old Testament concept that is too obscure to be of religious value to the modern

¹⁵⁹ *GHF*, p.9.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *PPMM*, p.149.

¹⁶² "Immanence and Incarnation", pp.50-52.

¹⁶³ *GHF*, p.10.

situation.¹⁶⁴ Unless love is grounded in holiness, Forsyth countered, it is merely the deification of a human attribute or sentiment. "Holiness does not rest on love but love on holiness" he wrote.¹⁶⁵

We put too little, therefore, into the Fatherhood of God if we say that He is the Father of us sinners without more ado, that nothing beyond our repentance was due to His holiness, that His love could not be trusted if He let His holiness go, that He could show His heart's affections simply by choosing not to press His nature's demands But too much no son of man can put into that hallowed Fatherhood which is the whole of God and the fullness of Christ.¹⁶⁶

It is the concept of holiness that gives the concept of divine love its morally compelling, transcendent and permanent value.

Never did human pity and affection mean so much as to-day; but neither to-day nor to-morrow will it be clear or solemn enough for that primeval, endless love of God.... Holiness is that in the love of God which fixes and assures it for ever The holiness which demanded that Christ should die is, by its satisfaction, our one guarantee of the love that cannot die. If God had taken His holiness lightly, how could we be sure He would never be light of love?¹⁶⁷

Forsyth's theology became theocentric when he came to see the

¹⁶⁴ *JR*, p.274.

¹⁶⁵ "A Holy Church the Moral Guide to Society" (1905) in *The Church, the Gospel and Society* (London: Independent Press, 1962) p.30.

¹⁶⁶ *GHF*, p.24.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.26.

concept of divine holiness as permanent and normative.

This discussion of holiness is essential in order to clarify what Forsyth meant by another key term, namely, the "moral" nature of Christianity. Protestant theology, generally speaking, interprets Christianity as a moral religion because Christianity deals with the conformity of the human will to the will of God, and not merely with speculative ideas. For example, Kant, who exerted a great influence on Protestant theology up to the First World War, identified the universal moral law as the point of contact with the transcendent.¹⁶⁸ Schleiermacher set the tone for nineteenth century Protestantism when he described Christianity as the highest form of ethical monotheism.¹⁶⁹ Ritschl defined the Kingdom of God as the practical end of Christianity, consisting of a fusion of religion and ethics.¹⁷⁰ Forsyth's emphasis on the fundamentally *moral* character of Christianity places him, broadly speaking, in continuity with a theological tradition running through Kant to Schleiermacher to Ritschl. He is of one mind with them in viewing Christianity as a

¹⁶⁸ Dillenberger and Welch, *Protestant Christianity*, p.157.

¹⁶⁹ "Christianity is a monotheistic faith, belonging to the teleological type of religion, and is essentially distinguished from other such faiths by the fact that in it everything is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ." Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §11, p.52.

¹⁷⁰ *Introduction to the Theology of Albrecht Ritschl*, p.134; Ritschl, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion* (1875) (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1966).

practical rather than a theoretical or speculative concern. However, Forsyth's use of the term "moral" is quite idiosyncratic and differs from the way it was conventionally used by Protestant theologians in the Schleiermacherian and Ritschlian molds. This can be seen by comparing him briefly with three thinkers with whom he has much in common but from whom he is distinguished on this key point. The three are Kant, Ritschl and Ernst Troeltsch.

Kant's moral philosophy is exceedingly complex, but his key ideas are outlined perhaps most succinctly in the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. According to Kant, moral philosophy involves "the laws ... according to which everything ought to happen", versus natural philosophy which investigates the laws according to which everything actually does happen.¹⁷¹ Moral thought is a branch of metaphysics because it is derived from a priori, non-empirical principles.¹⁷² The metaphysics of morals is concerned with laws that are absolutely necessary and universally valid. Morally worthy actions, therefore, are performed out of a sense of duty without regard for purposes or consequences. The moral law, Kant argued, is an end in itself.¹⁷³ God can only be conceived meaningfully as the "highest good" in terms

¹⁷¹ "Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals", trans. James W. Ellington, in *Immanuel Kant: Ethical Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), p.1.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, pp.2-3.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp.12-13.

of the idea of moral perfection. God, in other words, is the source of the innate, universal, categorical moral law.¹⁷⁴ More precisely, God is the name that is given to this law, for the moral law is the only form in which transcendent, noumenal reality is experienced immediately.

According to Ritschl, the idea of the moral law in Christianity is governed by the ruling religious idea of the Kingdom of God, which is the final end of God. The moral law is "the system of ends which are the means to the common final end."¹⁷⁵ This is significantly different from the Kantian formulation, because the moral law is no longer an end in itself, but a means to a higher end. This end is defined in a twofold manner as communion with God, leading to the blessedness of eternal life and communion with neighbour leading to the fraternal kingdom of reconciliation. Confusion results, Ritschl argued, when the moral law is not interpreted in light of the overarching final end of the Kingdom of God. This failure to interpret the moral law aright occurs when it is mistakenly conceived of as strictly analogous to civil law. Civil law governs the merely relative ends of the state, while the moral law "is the system which embraces those dispositions, intentions and actions which necessarily follow from the all-comprehensive end of the Kingdom of God, and from

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.21.

¹⁷⁵ *JR*, p.58.

the subjective motive of universal love."¹⁷⁶ The law of morality is not, as it was for Kant, the law of duty, but the "law of love." That this law differs fundamentally from civil law can be seen by the fact that the law of the state may require actions that are immoral when judged with reference to the Kingdom of God. Because the moral law differs qualitatively from civil law by virtue of its divine telos, it cannot be regarded as punitive in nature.¹⁷⁷ The end of this law is the overcoming of the world, including the old economy of sin and retribution upon which orthodox Protestantism had based its dogmas. Retribution is transcended by love. Civil law and the moral law, although both sharing the name "law", are fundamentally dissimilar principles. Ritschl regarded civil law as a form of natural law, governing particular motives and actions to which punishments for acts of disobedience may be attached. The moral law, however, cannot be reduced to a statutory system "for it is addressed ... not to our activities, but to our disposition."¹⁷⁸

For Kant the moral law was a principle of universal reason and an end in itself, unaffected by empirical motives

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p.252.

¹⁷⁷ "... any theology which keeps to the standpoint of the reconciled community must assert that into the life of the reconciled there can come from God's side no curse or damnatory punishment, and that God's love, as the antecedent ground of reconciliation, cannot be modified by any such feeling or action on His part towards those who are to be reconciled." *JR*, p.324.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p.526.

or consequences. For Ritschl, the moral law is a means leading to the ultimate end of the Kingdom of God. For Ernst Troeltsch, the moral law cannot be conceived as a postulate of universal reason or as an aspect of traditional Christian teleology, but must, like all manifestations of the human spirit, be defined in terms of the historical development of values. Troeltsch attempted to link the apparently chaotic flow of history to the enduring values of the human spirit which become manifest within the relativities of history.

Troeltsch's last thoughts on this matter are contained in a series of lectures which he prepared to give in England in 1923 but which were never delivered owing to his death in that year.¹⁷⁹ Troeltsch argued that the purpose of ethics and moral thought is the "controlling and damming" of the relativism of "the great stream of history" which threatens to sweep away everything of enduring value.¹⁸⁰

[Ethics] consists in the determinations of what we call Conscience; in the general moral demands of the traditional doctrine of virtues and the duties; in the demands of personal moral dignity, of strength of character and self-conquest on the one hand, and of justice, benevolence and public spirit on the other.... These are, in reality, the general formal standards which proceed from the nature of the Moral Consciousness. But if we are determined to deduce them more precisely from this consciousness, we shall not be able, like the most

¹⁷⁹ Troeltsch, *Christian Thought: Its History and Application* (Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press, 1979) (reprint of the 1923 edition published by the University of London Press.)

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., pp.42-43.

severe of the modern ethical thinkers, to deduce them simply from the universality and objectivity of the Moral Reason, or only and immediately from the conception of a categorical imperative. We shall have to consider that Ethics is an action; that all action is a realisation of ends; and, therefore, that the unity of Ethics too can only be deduced from the end, as indeed even Kant finally realised.... Now, the end of moral action which first appears in an obvious manner is the attainment and the defence of a free personality, which has its foundations in itself and possesses a certain unity of its own. The idea of personality is the decisive idea. Out of the flux and confusion of the life of the instincts, the unity and compactness of personality has first to be created and acquired.¹⁸¹

Ethics, according to Troeltsch, is directed towards the triumph of free moral personality over an impersonal and hostile world.

One is struck by the centrality of the term "moral" in the writings of Forsyth. However, one also has the sense that he meant something very different by it than many other writers lying along the Kantian trajectory; because while Kant himself, as well as Ritschl and Troeltsch, defines morality in terms of ends, Forsyth uses the language of ends only secondarily. He speaks, instead of the *moral centre*, from which the purposes and power of God radiate outwards, transforming reality and its experience.¹⁸² It is a rhetorical distinction which is profoundly important for Forsyth's thought and his view of himself in relation to

¹⁸¹ Ibid., pp.50-51.

¹⁸² For example, Forsyth referred to the cross as Christianity's "centre of gravity". *PPJC*, p.83.

liberal Protestantism.

Forsyth used the term "moral" virtually as a synonym for the word "holy". Morality is not a law of human reason, nor an expression of human autonomy, but is completely determined by the holy will of God.¹⁸³ Morality, in its authentic sense, was, for Forsyth, that orientation to life which comes about through the faithful response of the believer to the holy will of God. Forsyth believed that a theology grounded in a concept of universal moral law, or a theology which sought merely to explicate moral ends, was inadequate to the basic theological task of describing the nature and will of God. The similarity of Forsyth's theology to that of Karl Barth has been remarked upon frequently.¹⁸⁴ However, by organizing his theology around the concept of the "centre" and in describing morality not in terms of universal laws but of faithful response to the will of God, Forsyth bears a striking resemblance to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology of "responsible action."¹⁸⁵ There is no evidence whatsoever

¹⁸³ *PPJC*, p.223.

¹⁸⁴ Robert F. Thompson, "Peter Taylor Forsyth: A Pre-Barthian", Ph.D. Dissertation, Drew University, 1940; "Peter Taylor Forsyth" in *Der Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft* 3te Auflage (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr, 1958) 2: 1006; Markus Barth, "Peter Taylor Forsyth: The Theologian of the Practical Man", *Congregational Quarterly* 17 (1939): 436-442.

¹⁸⁵ "Who stands fast? Only the man whose final standard is not his reason, his principles, his conscience, his freedom, or his virtue, but who is ready to sacrifice all this when he is called to obedient and responsible action in faith and in exclusive allegiance to God -- the responsible man, who

that Bonhoeffer ever read Forsyth or even heard of him. What Forsyth sensed at the beginning of the century, however, Bonhoeffer realized fully in the middle of the century: that the old ethical systems, built with such confidence on the Kantian notion of universal and unconditional moral maxims, self-evidently accessible to practical reason¹⁸⁶, were inadequate to deal with the moral perplexities of modern times, when those who would be faithful found themselves with so little "ground under their feet".¹⁸⁷ For both Forsyth and Bonhoeffer, the ground of morality was not in a categorical imperative, but in a dynamic relationship with the holy God.

A distinction proposed by Peter Berger illuminates Forsyth's use of the term "moral". Berger distinguishes between "cognitive" judgments which describe the way things are from "normative" judgments which attempt to describe the way things *ought to be*. Religious statements, from Berger's sociological perspective, are cognitive because "religion defines the nature of reality.... It tells us what *is*."¹⁸⁸

tries to make his whole life an answer to the question and call of God." "Ten Years After", *Letters and Papers from Prison*, enlarged edition (New York: Macmillan, 1953, 1967, 1971), p.5.

¹⁸⁶ See Ernst Cassirer, *Kant's Life and Thought* (1918), trans. James Haden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp.245-249.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p.3 Note also the similarities between this metaphor of Bonhoeffer's and Forsyth's description of the need to find some "footing in reality", *PA*, pp.178ff.

¹⁸⁸ Peter L. Berger, *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), p.193.

Strictly speaking (that is to say, within the ends-oriented idiom of Kantian moral philosophy) morality is not cognitive but normative. Berger makes the further distinction that cognitive-religious statements deal with a transcendent reality that extends beyond the mundane world of time and space into the realm of the numinous or the holy, while normative-moral statements deal with the day-to-day concerns of this world. Once we make the terminological shift from the Kantian matrix of concepts to that of Berger, we can see that when Forsyth uses the term "moral", he does so in a way that can more properly be described as cognitive than normative. Christianity is moral, not because it seeks to set down practical norms and guidelines for daily living, but because it *points to the holiness of God*. This is clear from the following description of the "holy" Church which, in Forsyth's mind, is called to act as "the moral guide of society":

I desire to write of a holy Church as the moral guide of society. By a holy Church I mean a Church holy in its calling rather than its attainment either in work or truth. I do not allude to the Church as an authority, but as the apostle and agent of the authority. It is not the light, but the candlestick. It is not the word, but the witness. The authority is the word of grace committed to the Church in trust. *Therefore, I do not think of the Church as the moral example, but as Christ's executor, as the trustee of the moral principle of Redemption.* This principle it has to apply as a standard to certain practices of society; but it has also to do much more. It has to infuse it into the very structure of society as its organizing principle.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ "A Holy Church the Moral Guide of Society" in *The Church, The Gospel and Society*, p.5. My italics.

The Church is not a "moral community" in the sense that it exemplifies certain moral virtues or dispositions. Its "moral" task is to point, to bear witness to the reality that it has heard, known and experienced -- the reality of the judgment and grace of a holy God. Only in a secondary and derivative sense did Forsyth use the word "moral" normatively. Anthropocentric Christianity, on the other, represented a moral crisis because it pointed away from that transcendent reality that is the ground of Christian faith and praxis.

In assessing Forsyth's account, we are faced with the undeniable fact that, while holiness occupies a position of great practical and conceptual importance in his thought, he does not fully explicate its content. Forsyth never really deals with the practical implications of the principle that the human will is to be controlled by the will of God. Kant's maxims at least have the virtue of providing a method by which the implications of the moral law can be determined. One might well put the question to Forsyth, "How do we know what holiness is?" Is the answer to this question found in the witness of the Bible? That was the solution of Protestant orthodoxy, which Forsyth rejected. Is the answer found in the consensus of the Church? This response took both Roman Catholic and Schleiermacherian forms and, Forsyth charged, both approaches shift the emphasis illegitimately from God to a human institution. Is the answer found in the operation of

the Holy Spirit? The danger arises here of an uncontrolled subjectivism. As we shall see, Forsyth did describe the existential reality of the Christian life as the interplay between the historically-grounded Word and the freely moving Spirit. And, indeed, his major work *The Principle of Authority* deals with the critical question of how it is possible to test Christian experience according to an objective standard. But, considering the centrality of holiness to his theological project, he does not deal in an extended way with its practical impact.

We have referred to Bonhoeffer's concept of "responsible action". Bonhoeffer's ethical struggles took place in the context of opposition to the Third Reich when traditional appeals to duty and principle seemed impotent. This was a morally extreme situation, however, which Forsyth could scarcely have imagined. How, precisely, he thought that Christians should "infuse" the "moral principle of Redemption" into "the very structure of society" is not clear. This criticism is important because so much rides on Forsyth's argument that the objective reality of Christianity is confirmed by its power to bring about moral transformation. While Forsyth has raised an important question -- how Christian ethics can be grounded in an experience of God's holiness -- his working-out of the answer to this question is not adequate.

All the same, Forsyth believed he had advanced

beyond both Ritschlianism and liberalism which, he argued, could not deal with the moral crisis of the world that was rooted not in ignorance but in sin, in a state of rebellion against the holiness of God. The prevailing theologies of the day could not account for the morally transformative power that was required to overcome the alienation brought about by sin. At this point, Forsyth resembles Erich Schaeder, the one from whom he seems to have adopted the term "theocentric". There is no explicit proof of this, but in *The Principle of Authority* Forsyth acknowledges Schaeder's *Theozentrische Theologie* as one of three works that had a decisive influence on him¹⁹⁰. Since Forsyth's use of the term "theocentric" does not antedate the publication of Schaeder's book, it seems reasonable to assume that he picked it up from Schaeder. Whether this is the case or not, however, a comparison of Forsyth and Schaeder is useful for clarifying the way in which Forsyth used the term since there are close parallels between the two theologians.

Schaeder was influenced in his development by Hermann Cremer and Martin Kähler and was a member of the "Greifswald School" centred around Cremer. "[Schaeder] was impressed both by Cremer's emphasis on the objective nature of saving events, and by Kähler's soteriologically subjective

¹⁹⁰ PA, Preface, p.v.

approach to the message of salvation."¹⁹¹ This two-fold emphasis on the subjective apprehension of objective, divine acts by means of faith represented, for Schaefer, the properly conceived relation between subjectivity and objectivity, and the source of evangelical Protestantism's spiritual power. In his doctoral dissertation, Schaefer had criticized Ritschl's account of justification because Ritschl had limited the basis of justification to the crucifixion and resurrection as past historical occurrences and did not account for the manner in which those events become powerfully transformative in the life of the believer. Over against Ritschl he placed Paul, whose understanding of justification was grounded not merely in the objective historical events of the crucifixion and resurrection, but in the ongoing, contemporary presence and power of the "living Christ".¹⁹² Schaefer's life's work was his attempt to develop a theology of the Holy Spirit that would account for the power of Christ to bring about real change in the lives of believers here and now. He sought to develop a doctrine of the Spirit that, in his mind, was grounded in the New Testament and the Reformation, and that stood in conscious opposition to the usage of the concept of the Spirit by German Idealism.¹⁹³ In 1909 he published the

¹⁹¹ Hans-Jürgen Göertz, *Geist und Wirklichkeit: Studie zur Pneumatologie Erich Schaefers* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980) p.8.

¹⁹² Ibid., p.18.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p.35.

first volume of his *Theozentrische Theologie*. This was followed by a second volume in 1914 and two subsequent volumes in the 1920s.

The thesis of *Theozentrische Theologie* is stated clearly at the beginning of the first volume: "One cannot help but conclude that theology in the 19th and 20th centuries, as it has developed from and been influenced by Schleiermacher, is anthropocentric."¹⁹⁴ If dogmatic theology is going to survive, Schaeder argued, then its theocentric character must be "clearly and decisively claimed."¹⁹⁵ Schleiermacher had an anthropocentrizing influence on Protestant thought for two reasons. First, he subsumed Christianity under the general heading of religion which he regarded in turn as a universal and necessary aspect of human nature. Christianity, Schaeder argues, has become "naturalized" in Schleiermacher's thought.¹⁹⁶ Secondly, by defining God as the "Whence" of faith, Schleiermacher makes faith prior to God.¹⁹⁷ Schleiermacher begins with the experience of the self and traces it back to its cause; and only then "do we have God."¹⁹⁸ There is, however, no

¹⁹⁴ *Theozentrische Theologie* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1909) 1: 3.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p.11.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

necessary path from experience to God. Schleiermacher's error was in positing a causal nexus with experience as the effect and God as the cause. The relation of cause and effect, however, is a *natural* relation, whereas the relation between God and the world is determined solely by the freedom of God in his self-disclosure.¹⁹⁹ Unless the freedom of God is maintained at the centre, the experience of God, Schaeder argues, is only the experience of the self.²⁰⁰

The source and origin of Christian faith, according to Schaeder, is not a natural, universal feeling of dependence on or communion with the Absolute, but the revelation of God's will in Jesus Christ and the contemporizing of that revelation through the power of the Holy Spirit in the experience of faith:

Faith is essentially the experience of God, but the experience of God through the Word of God and the living Spirit of God. The Word of God, however, is also the Word of Christ; indeed its governing content is bound to Christ. And the Spirit of God which permits us to experience God truly through the Word in the immediate present, permits us to experience him so that he gives us the same experience of Christ -- the direct, contemporary Christ.²⁰¹

Schaeder saw anthropocentric theology as arising from two separate but related causes. First, an overemphasis on the

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p.13.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p.14.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p.22.

subjective impulse of religious faith subordinated the freedom of God to the consciousness of the believer or community of believers. This was the failure of Schleiermacher. On the other hand, an overemphasis on revelation as historical event subordinated the freedom of God to the data of the past. This was the failure of Ritschl and the Ritschlian school down to and including the *Religionswissenschaftler*.²⁰² It is by the union of the historic Word and the free Spirit that God exercises the sovereignty of his will in the world.

Forsyth bears a close resemblance to Schaeder on these key points. Both insisted on the importance of safeguarding the objective reality of divine revelation and of not shifting the centre of theology from the action of God to its human experience. However, the second point is equally decisive. Theocentric theology requires a clear affirmation of the work of the Holy Spirit, for the power to appropriate the redemptive benefits of Christ is itself a work of grace. Both the historic revelation and its contemporary appropriation are equally under the control of the freedom and sovereignty of God. It is the Word plus the Spirit that constitutes God's redemptive activity and it is only by resisting the temptation to devalue either the historic Word or the living Spirit that Christian theology is preserved from anthropocentric distortions. The historic Word safeguards theology from becoming too subjective. God has really

²⁰² Ibid., pp.123ff.

revealed himself in historic events that cannot be sidestepped in our haste to cultivate a religiously moving experience. However, God is not confined to those events and the Christ who was both revelation and revealer is also a living, present power through the agency of the Holy Spirit. It is this reality that protects Christianity from being reduced to an object of detached and disinterested investigation.

In subsequent chapters we will examine more thoroughly Forsyth's view of the nature of the historic revelation in Jesus Christ and the way in which the content of that revelation is appropriated by later generations of believers. First, however, we will explore Forsyth's method for arriving at a theology that was dogmatic, positive, *theocentric* -- and relevant to modern thought.

CHAPTER 2: FORSYTH'S THEOCENTRIC METHOD

Forsyth saw the excessive claims of historical method as one of the primary sources of the anthropocentric impulse. In this chapter I will examine Forsyth's method for articulating a theocentric theology. Forsyth saw a renewal of a "dogmatic" approach to theology as the only way to counteract the tyranny of historical criticism. Dogmatic theology, according to Forsyth, was the means for dealing with the specifically theological concern of the appropriation of truth as opposed to the scientific concern with the verification of facts. The purpose of dogmatic theology, he argued, was to identify and to enable the church to concentrate on the doctrines which express what is essential to Christian faith -- the encounter of the sinful human being with the redemptive grace of God.

To deal with questions of method separately from the constructive content of Forsyth's theology could be considered somewhat artificial because Forsyth himself never treated methodology in this way. Partly owing to the fact that most of his works were collections of lectures and sermons delivered to audiences of non-specialists, Forsyth did not, as a rule, take up explicitly the question of theological method. However, this was more than a stylistic feature of his thought. As we saw in the last chapter, one of the

preoccupations of liberalism was with methodology. Forsyth saw this as a misplaced emphasis, not because methodology is irrelevant to theology in itself, but because liberal theology placed the authority of its method above the authority of the events which it claimed to have the power to explain. I have suggested that Forsyth regarded liberal theology as essentially anthropocentric theology. He anticipated Karl Barth who wrote that liberal theology is

a theology in the succession of Descartes, primarily and definitely interested in human, and particularly the Christian, religion within a framework of our modern outlook on the world, considering God [and God's] work and ... word from this point of view, and adopting the critical attitude towards the message of the Bible and ecclesiastical tradition -- to this extent, an anthropocentric theology.¹

Such a theology is anthropocentric, according to Barth, because it is dependent in its essence not only on a consciousness of God but on the method by which such an awareness may be achieved. This method reduces the action of God to an object of critical investigation. The key to adopting such a critical attitude towards the Bible and tradition is the formulation of a method by which such criticism can be carried out.²

For Forsyth, method was always subordinate to a

¹ Quoted in Rumscheidt, *Adolf von Harnack*, p.34.

² *Ibid.*

source of authority. A positive theology is self-conscious about its authority before it formulates its method. That authority is the positive act of God in history, rather than historical development itself.³ The authority for scientific rationalism, although not always acknowledged explicitly, was the human mind and human reason. The primary question, though, was the question of the authority from which method proceeds and which gives that method its legitimacy. The relation of methodological questions to the nature of divine authority was a major issue between anthropocentric and theocentric formulations of Christianity, according to Forsyth. A theocentric method is one which deals with God's revelation and self-disclosure and not merely with the evolution of religious culture.

Having said that method was not a question of independent status in Forsyth's mind, it was also far from irrelevant. Forsyth recognized that for a new theology to emerge from the old faith, some method must be followed. Forsyth's method was consciously intended to steer his thought away from the distorted extremes of "intellectualism" on the one hand and "impressionism" on the other, between the hegemony of the intellect and the hegemony of the affections

³ "The Need for a Positive Gospel", *London Quarterly Review* 101 (1904): 81.

in determining theological truth.⁴ A theocentric method is one which puts theology at the service of the experience of God which, in turn, arises only in response to the gracious action of God.

2. *Dogmatic versus historical method*

Questions of method were important for Forsyth, but belonged to what he called "secondary" rather than "primary" theology. Primary theology deals with the knowledge of God that comes from the real, experienced confrontation between God and the conscience -- what Forsyth referred to as "evangelical experience".⁵ Primary theology attempts to illuminate the moral reality of the human encounter with God. It gives an account of the "what" of theology, its substance or objective content. Method involves the "how" of theology, the analysis of the ways in which we come to know what we know. This is a secondary question that can never be permitted to exert a controlling influence over the actual content of revelation. Revelation is an expression of God's sovereign freedom and is not subject to the criteria of human rationality. This primary/secondary distinction, which we will discuss more fully later, is a key to Forsyth's response to liberalism.

⁴ See "Intellectualism and Faith", *Hibbert Journal* 11 (1913): 311-328.

⁵ *PA*, pp.184-185, 189.

Perhaps the best way to understand Forsyth's method is to contrast him with Ernst Troeltsch. Forsyth referred to Troeltsch's work fairly frequently and, although he found Troeltsch's understanding of Christianity highly problematic, he regarded him with the deepest respect as a scholar.⁶ Troeltsch stated with great clarity the issues raised by the application of historical method to theological questions. This is seen most clearly in his famous essay of 1898, "Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology."⁷ This paper was a response to F. Niebergall's *Über die Absolutheit des Christentums*. Niebergall was a pupil of the conservative Ritschlian Julius Kaftan and, according to Troeltsch, he shared his mentor's "authoritarian concept of revelation".⁸ Niebergall had attempted to intervene on Kaftan's behalf in the latter's ongoing dispute with Troeltsch over the nature of revelation. Niebergall argued that the absoluteness of Christianity meant that Christianity was not only "the pinnacle of the development of religion", but the

⁶ Forsyth referred to Troeltsch's "extraordinary insight" and the fact that "in his analysis of historic causes and movements ... Troeltsch is admirable and original...." *FFF*, pp.89-90. Although I do not have space to demonstrate this thoroughly, I believe that Forsyth's account of the rise of British Dissent and of the distinct types of Christianity (Church, sect and mysticism) in *Faith, Freedom and the Future* closely parallels Troeltsch's in *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (1912) (2 volumes, trans. Olive Wyon [Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1931, 1992]).

⁷ In Adams and Bense, ed., *Religion and History*, pp.11-32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.29.

"communication [*Mitteilung*] of the divine life itself."⁹

Troeltsch argued that Niebergall's efforts are an example of the futile attempt to erect a bulwark of faith against the rising tide of historical consciousness. In Troeltsch's analysis of the development of western culture, the modern world had been constructed on the rubble of "the Christian world of ideas."¹⁰ Modernity, according to Troeltsch, is a cultural complex unique in human history which began during the Enlightenment with the revolt against dogmatism and supernaturalism.¹¹ The modern world-view regards everything, without exception, from the perspective of history and employs the methods and presuppositions of history to arrive at "a dynamic principle for obtaining a comprehensive view of everything human."¹² The old Christian synthesis which, prior to the Enlightenment, served as a unifying principle in western culture, has disintegrated. The problem with Niebergall and the entire Ritschlian approach,

⁹ Anonymous review of Niebergall in *Theologischer Jahresbericht* 19 (1900): 812.

¹⁰ "Historical and Dogmatic Method", p.12.

¹¹ "It may be taken for granted that the modern world, in the great and dominating forms it has assumed since the eighteenth century, represents a unique type of culture ... in contrast to the culture of antiquity and to medieval Catholic culture, from the latter of which the culture of early Protestant orthodoxy did not make an altogether clean break." *The Absoluteness of Christianity* p. 45. See also, "The Essence of the Modern Spirit" in Adams and Bense, *Religion in History*, pp.237-272; *Protestantism and Progress*, (New York: Beacon Press, 1912, 1958), passim.

¹² *The Absoluteness of Christianity*, p.45.

according to Troeltsch, is that they are all too quick to abandon historical methods when their "authoritarian concept of revelation" is threatened.¹³

To an extent, Troeltsch's quarrel was less with Ritschl himself than with his conservative followers who accentuated Ritschl's concept of revelation. However, the seeds of contradiction were planted in the master's own system, even if they were only brought to fruition by his disciples. In Troeltsch's mind, religion has no absolutely autonomous subject matter which can be isolated from other manifestations of human culture, nor is there an independent realm of religious knowledge insulated from the critical method that can be applied to other phenomena of human experience. Troeltsch agreed with Dilthey, that what separates the *Geisteswissenschaften* (cultural sciences) from the *Naturwissenschaften* (natural sciences) is not a distinct subject matter or class of facts, but a distinct method.¹⁴ This premise was incorporated into the neo-Kantianism of Wilhelm Windelband in particular, whose influence on Troeltsch was decisive.¹⁵ There is only one order of reality which encompasses everything in the world, but it is within the power of the human intellect to develop different *methods* for

¹³ "Historical and Dogmatic Method", p.11.

¹⁴ Thomas E. Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860-1914*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), p.137.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.138.

comprehending its multifaceted nature. Natural science searches for general laws by which nature can be classified. History, on the other hand, deals with the singular and particular events of human affairs. The indispensable tool for grasping the place and role of the human spirit and its manifestations in culture, according to Troeltsch, is the historical method. The modern view of history is what permits the application to religion of the concept of "principle", that is, the recognition of inner structure, unity and continuity within the flux and uniqueness of historical manifestations.¹⁶ One must choose between historical and dogmatic method. It is impossible to combine them, as the Ritschlians attempted to do.

According to Troeltsch, three principles comprise the historical method. First is the principle of *criticism* which states that, with respect to historical data, only judgments of greater or lesser probability can be admitted.¹⁷ This is in opposition to the dogmatic method which seeks to make statements of categorical certainty based on miracle.

The second principle is that of *analogy*.¹⁸ This is the key instrument which makes criticism possible. "The

¹⁶ Troeltsch, "Religious Principle" in Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Twentieth Century Theology in the Making*, 2 volumes, trans. R.A. Wilson, (London: William Collins & Sons, 1970), 2: 334-341.

¹⁷ "Historical and Dogmatic Method", p.13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.14.

observation of analogies between similar events in the past provides the possibility of imputing probability to them and of what is unknown about the one with reference to what is known about the other."¹⁹ The underlying assumption is "the similarity (in principle) of all historical events."²⁰ Any appeal to qualitatively unique miraculous events which have no parallel or analogy elsewhere is excluded in principle. For example, Troeltsch charged, Ritschl followed Christian tradition in ascribing to Jesus an absolutely unique relationship to God, in comparison with which all other divine-human relationships are merely dependent and derivative. "Insofar as He realizes the final goal of the Kingdom of God in his own personal life, Jesus is one of a kind. Everyone who aspires to fulfill the same task as completely as Jesus would be unlike Him because he would be dependent upon Him."²¹ As we shall see, Ritschl himself was somewhat ambiguous on the question of the uniqueness of Jesus so that it was possible for more conservative theologians to accuse him of denying that Jesus' relationship with God was fundamentally dissimilar from ours.²² Furthermore, Troeltsch

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*, § 22, p.26.

²² I have noted above that Forsyth interpreted Ritschl in precisely the opposite way, accusing him of obscuring the qualitative dissimilarity between Jesus and the rest of the human race. This shows that Forsyth regarded Troeltsch and his position as even more radically anthropocentric than

saw the appeal to miracle as occurring more in the writings of Ritschl's followers than in Ritschl's.²³ However, it is such statements as the one just quoted that Troeltsch regarded as violating the principle of analogy.

Thirdly, the principle of *correlation* assumes "the interaction of all phenomena in the history of civilization."²⁴ No phenomenon, in other words, can be treated in isolation. The historian must investigate the larger contexts in which a given phenomenon arose and developed. The Ritschlians violated this principle, Troeltsch charged, by viewing Christianity as a unique phenomenon in the sense of being different in essence from everything non-Christian. In Troeltsch's view, the Ritschlians tried to isolate Christianity from its historical context by means of miraculous revelation.²⁵ All phenomena, of course, possess an element of uniqueness and individuality, but these qualities must be integrated into a unified view of the whole.

The Ritschlians, according to Troeltsch, claim to regard Christianity as a positive, historical religion, but this conviction is compromised by their continuing adherence to vestiges of the old dogmatic method, a method which "starts

Ritschl. What Ritschl hinted at, Troeltsch and the history of religions school made explicit.

²³ *Absoluteness of Christianity*, p.80.

²⁴ Troeltsch, "Historical and Dogmatic Theology", p.14.

²⁵ Robert Morgan, Introduction to *Ernst Troeltsch: Writings on Religion* pp.3-4.

from a firm point of origin, completely beyond the relativity of historical scholarship and then arrives at absolutely certain positions", and which relies on an authority "separate from the total context of history, not analogous to other happenings and therefore not subject to historical criticism."²⁶ This, Troeltsch says, is "pure obscurantism".²⁷

"What theology is concerned with" Troeltsch wrote, "is not the history of religion in general but normative knowledge acquired through the scientific study of religion."²⁸ The philosophical underpinnings of Troeltsch's thought can be traced to the influence of the Southwest German school of Neo-Kantianism led by Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert. This school was particularly interested in the logic of historical study and "believed in a world under the order of rational moral precepts, a historical process infused with the ideal purposes of man, and a cultural life measured by enduring, universal standards of value."²⁹ History is teleological in the sense that it is concerned with purpose, meaning and value, and is therefore a study of the utmost importance for philosophers.³⁰ This view of history

²⁶ "Historical and Dogmatic Method", p.30.

²⁷ Ibid., p.21.

²⁸ *The Absoluteness of Christianity*, p.24.

²⁹ Willey, *Back to Kant*, p.132.

³⁰ Ibid., pp.138, 144.

was a direct challenge to the pessimistic relativism of historicism in its more radical forms. While Windelband and Rickert investigated the logical and methodological distinctions between the natural sciences and the humanities in a theoretical sense, Ernst Troeltsch undertook the task of applying their methodology to the concrete study of historical data with a view to establishing "enduring, universal standards of value." Troeltsch was convinced that it would be possible to abstract what is invariably valid from the change and flux of individual phenomena.³¹ The study of the history of religion is the attempt to discern the principles or laws of comparison that make the evaluation of rival truth claims possible.³² He believed it was possible to do so without falling into the Ritschlian trap of claiming to establish the absoluteness of Christianity by resorting to an independent "Christian epistemology" based on miraculous revelation.³³

Forsyth, on the other hand, argued that the integrity and future of Christianity depend on doing precisely what Troeltsch said was impossible: reviving dogmatic method in theology. Criticism assumes that human reason can achieve objectivity through the application of critical method and can arrive at truth that is not colored by the subjective

³¹ *Absoluteness of Christianity*, p. 65.

³² Sarah Coakley, *Christ Without Absolutes: A Study of the Christology of Ernst Troeltsch* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.54.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.91.

involvement of the knower. Forsyth insisted that when it comes to religious questions there can be no disinterested perspective:

... in religion a scientific impartiality and personal disinterestedness is impossible; and at the root of all we have a venture of faith and the dogmatic method.³⁴

It must be noted that Troeltsch also made the same affirmation, that religious questions of value cannot be pursued without reference to the subjective commitment of the inquirer³⁵. However, the authority for making such a commitment differed radically for Troeltsch and Forsyth. "The essential thing in a New Testament Christianity", Forsyth wrote, "is that it comes to settle in a final way the issue between a holy God and the guilt of man. All else is secondary."³⁶ Therefore, critical questions recede in the face of dogmatic affirmations. The great dogmatic questions with respect to Jesus Christ are "Who is He? What did He do? What does He do? What is His present relation to us and to the future?"³⁷ Next to these essential matters, criticism plays a decidedly secondary role. It may be established critically

³⁴ *PPJC*, p.267.

³⁵ "What Does 'Essence of Christianity' Mean?" in Morgan and Pye, *Writings on Theology and Religion*, p.159; Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century* 2: 297.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.5.

³⁷ *PPMM*, p.187.

that "Jesus loved, taught, blessed and died" and that the Church believed he rose from the dead; but it cannot settle in any final way whether in this Jesus "we have the living God."³⁸ It is this dogmatic interest, the affirmation of the saving truth of Jesus Christ, that is central to the New Testament and to contemporary faith.³⁹ This view sets the position of Forsyth decisively at odds with that of Troeltsch for whom critical and scientific knowledge is the ground for making a serious and authentic commitment to religious values.

Dogmatic method in a modern context presupposes that human subjects are conscious of separate orders of truth or reality, the very thing that Troeltsch argued was rendered impossible in principle by the historical outlook.⁴⁰ In the discussion of the positivity of Christianity above⁴¹, we saw that Ritschl distinguished between a fact and the value of that fact for the inquirer. Religion, he said, has to do with the realm of value. The truth of religion is not subject to the verification of scientific inquiry. Most Ritschlians were agreed that scientific methods, including those of the science of history, cannot account for the truth or the value of the

³⁸ Ibid., p.188.

³⁹ *The Cruciality of the Cross* (1909) 2nd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1948) p.12. (Hereafter cited as CC.)

⁴⁰ "Historical and Dogmatic Method", p.14.

⁴¹ See above, pp.30ff.

Christian religion.⁴² Forsyth followed this line of thought in insisting on the essential distinction between scientific and religious truth. This is especially important with regard to a positive religion such as Christianity.

A positive gospel has its own science, as it posits its own distinctive premises.... [It] does not start from the universal data of religious experience or rational principles, but from a fixed point with a specific datum ... the historic fact, act and gift of God in Christ and His Cross.⁴³

Proponents of the history of religions school would have denied that an account of such a gospel merited the designation of a "science" because it did not adhere to scientific methods. But the main source of contention between them and the type of theology promoted by Forsyth was precisely that the latter granted cognitive status to revelation and experience which the former denied.

Forsyth's thought is closely related to that of Martin Kähler at this point. Several scholars have noted the similarity between them.⁴⁴ Kähler helped to create a distinction that became commonplace and still forms the basis

⁴² See, for example, Wilhelm Hermann, *The Communion of the Christian With God*, p.76.

⁴³ "The Need for a Positive Gospel", pp.87-88.

⁴⁴ See for instance Daniel L. Deegan, "Martin Kähler: Kerygma and Gospel History" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 16:1 (1963):50-2; Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century* 2 volumes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) 2:236.

of many attempts to grapple with history from a Christian perspective.⁴⁵ Kähler turned the semantic distinction between the German words *Historie* and *Geschichte* into a philosophical and methodological principle. *Historie*, he said, refers to the past as it can be determined by the methods of historical-critical research. Since Kähler was concerned with the specific question of the life of Jesus, this means the "facts" of Jesus' life insofar as they can be made the object of historical investigation. *Geschichte* on the other hand refers to the inner meaning or significance of those facts. Again, with reference to the problem Kähler was attempting to solve, the *geschichtlich* Christ was Christ as confessed by the early Church and who became the object of the Church's subsequent faith. As we saw in the last chapter, Kähler argued that such a distinction was necessary because of the extreme limitations of the *historisch* approach to Jesus' life. The evidence was so shaky that a faith built on the so-called "historical Jesus" amounts to little more than faith in a phantom, a ghost. The "historic Christ" who appeared in history but whose influence transcends mere historical facts is the sole secure basis for the Christian experience of faith. The facts in the *historisch* sense can be established by science but cannot as such become experiences of faith, of

⁴⁵ Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 2: 113; Braaten, Introduction to Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964, 1988), p.20. (Hereafter cited as *SHJ*.)

inner conviction.⁴⁶ The claim of certain Ritschlian theologians to build faith on a minimum of "directly attainable data"⁴⁷ seeks certainty where it can never be found. In a statement to which the position of P.T. Forsyth is very close, Kähler argued that the true historic meaning of Jesus, as with any *geschichtlich* figure, is that he has the power to exert a permanent influence in history.⁴⁸

Georg Wobbermin explored the distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte* more thoroughly than Kähler in his book *Geschichte und Historie in der Religionswissenschaft*.⁴⁹ Wobbermin argued that religions, especially higher religions, possess "an inherent and direct connection to history" because they arise in and progress through history.⁵⁰ However,

genuine religion must stand in contrast to everything merely historical (*historisch*) ... [and is] completely and totally unconditioned by the methods of historical research.⁵¹

Wobbermin, like Kähler, defines "*Historie*" and "*historisch*" as referring to the reconstruction of the past as carried out

⁴⁶ *SHJ*, p.74.

⁴⁷ Among these were F. Kattenbusch and Otto Ritschl. See Kähler, *SHJ*, pp.27, 119.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.63.

⁴⁹ (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1911).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.2.

by scientific-historical research.⁵² *Historie*, according to Wobbermin, is therefore not so much "discovered" as "constructed". As the product of research it can never be more than relatively certain and hypothetical. Yet human beings live in history and encounter truth as it is historically mediated. Literally everything that happens in the course of human relations is "historical" because it takes place in history. *Geschichte*, or the course of history in which everything occurs, is therefore to be distinguished from the *Historie* that is reconstructed by historical research. In fact, *Geschichte* refers to "the spiritual-moral relatedness of human beings to one another."⁵³ Spiritual and moral truths that are eternally and universally valid are experienced historically, that is through relations between spiritual-moral beings, but their validity cannot be established in an *historisch* sense. It is only through the power of religious belief that the truths which are mediated by history can be grasped as eternally and universally true.⁵⁴

Forsyth adopted this view of history.⁵⁵ Truth cannot be established as existentially valid by means of historical method but only through faith. It was Troeltsch's

⁵² Ibid., p.5.

⁵³ Ibid., p.15.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.20.

⁵⁵ See his reference to Wobbermin's work, *PA*, pp.112-113.

hope that the historical method would provide the basis for arriving at a "comprehensive view of all things human."⁵⁶ Through the analysis of historical facts together with the philosophy of history and ethics, Troeltsch believed that humankind could arrive at a knowledge of enduring values.⁵⁷ For Forsyth, this amounted to a reduction of the will and sovereignty of God to the development of human culture. The quest for truth that proceeded from historical analysis alone was another form of "dogmatism" because it interposes between the revelation of God and the response of faith an alien principle derived from the demands of human reason.⁵⁸ Only

⁵⁶ *Absoluteness of Christianity*, p.45.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, chapter 3, "Historical Relativity and Norms of Value", especially p.106: "History is a unique sphere of knowledge because it is the sphere of the individual and nonrecurrent. But within the individual and nonrecurrent, is something universally valid.... Thus the problem is to define the scope of the relative and individual with ever increasing exactness and to understand with ever increasing comprehensiveness the universally valid that works teleologically within history. Then we will see that the relative contains an indication of the unconditional."

⁵⁸ All forms of dogmatism are inimical to the experience of grace, Forsyth argued, but, given the choice, it "is better to have the dogma of Melanchthon or even Calvin, than of Wellhausen or Schmiedel.... The one has the possibility of infinite revelation, the other the positivism of the present age." *PPJC*, p.263. Forsyth does not elaborate on what he means, precisely, by "positivism", but from the context of his remarks I take him to be referring to positivism as the belief that history operates according to laws analogous to those of the natural sciences. According to Maurice Mandelbaum, "positivism may be said to be characterized by three interlocking theses: first, a rejection of metaphysics; second, the contention that science constitutes the ideal form of knowledge; third, a particular interpretation of the nature

positive truth as revealed by the holy God in history is effective and redemptive. This principle was the controlling assertion in Forsyth's dogmatic method.

Historical method is not sufficient to deal with revelation in history because revelation, by definition, cannot be judged by external criteria. This was the presupposition which Troeltsch condemned the Ritschlians for holding, but which Forsyth believed was essential in dealing with religious truth. The assertion that historical method exerts a normative influence over religious truth is a manifestation of what Forsyth called rationalism and

rationalism, whether orthodox or heterodox, consists in measuring Revelation by something outside itself. But it must be borne in mind that Revelation is a religious idea, that its counterpart and response is not knowledge ... but faith. It is for faith, it is not for science, that Revelation is final. It is the *soul's* certainty and power that it assures.... The Revelation of Christ is final, and was by Him meant to be final, for all that concerns God's decisive will, purpose, and act for our salvation. Christ is Himself the final expression of that. He is not final in the sense of exhausting knowledge.⁵⁹

Two decades after Forsyth's death, H.R. Niebuhr made a similar

and limits of scientific explanation", meaning that science deals only with observable phenomena (*History, Man and Reason: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, [Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971, p.11). Forsyth argued that radical historical critics were "dogmatic" in their approach because they deny the supernatural claim of revelation in principle, arguing that this claim violates the "laws" of historical development and analogy.

⁵⁹ RPC, p.109.

point. Niebuhr criticized Schleiermacher and Ritschl for speaking about revelation but then subordinating it to criteria external to revelation itself.⁶⁰ In the case of Schleiermacher this prior criterion was faith rather than the object of faith and for Ritschl it was the relation of the human person to the world rather than to God.⁶¹ Once revelation becomes an instrument to achieve an end apart from itself, it ceases to merit the name of revelation, according to Niebuhr. Revelation, by definition, must become the criterion by which the meaning of events is judged, rather than being judged by those events.⁶²

Theocentric theology, according to Forsyth, is theology that views reality from the standpoint of revelation, that is, from the perspective of God.⁶³ The morally crucial question is not what we think of God but what God has revealed himself as thinking about us.⁶⁴ As we shall see in the next chapter, Forsyth attempted to construct a christology "from above", from the perspective of God's transcendent act. Christology begins with dogmatic affirmations that provide a framework for the interpretation of the historical data of

⁶⁰ *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p.27.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.30.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.54.

⁶³ "Need for a Positive Gospel", p.77.

⁶⁴ *CC*, p.59.

Jesus' earthly life. This was in opposition to the tradition of theology beginning with Schleiermacher that attempted to proceed *von unten nach oben* ("from below to above") beginning with Jesus' humanly historical existence and the religious consciousness of the community and inferring doctrine therefrom.⁶⁵ It has been argued that this is the only viable procedure in modern theology. Pannenberg, for example, states that historical analogy is involved necessarily in any attempt to deal with historical realities, and that "all analogies 'from above to below' already presuppose the construction of a concept of God by means of an analogy 'from below to above.'"⁶⁶ In other words, the very acknowledgement that Christianity is grounded in historical events renders theology *von oben nach unten* ("from above to below") untenable. Forsyth was not unaware of the difficulties in attempting to proceed "from above to below." He recognized that dogmatic assertions which claim to bring to expression transcendent reality are inescapably products of the synthetic activity of the mind. But he was still convinced that theology must regard itself as dealing *primarily* with the reality of God and only secondarily with our apprehension of it.

⁶⁵ Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 2:83.

⁶⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology: Collected Essays*, trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 1:52.

Forsyth approaches this problem of the apparent unreality of attempting to see things from the perspective of God by presupposing the personal nature of the relationship between God and human beings, a relationship whose reality is confirmed in experience. Revelation is an act which is experienced "from below" but which can only be conceptualized as originating "from above". It is a moral transaction between persons. This strategy does not entirely solve the problem of the hermeneutical circularity of proceeding from experience to a knowledge of the reality that brings about that experience. We must keep in mind, however, that Forsyth's concerns were mainly pastoral and practical. He sought some practical means of enabling Christians of his day to experience faith as a transformative power. Unless that power originates from above, he argued, its effect will not be morally transformative.

3. *"Appropriation" versus "verification"*

We have seen that Forsyth denied the power of scientific or historical method to lead to judgments concerning the truth of Christian revelation. He did not do this as the result of a thoroughly worked-out critique of historicist logic but from a general sense that historical method undermined the revealed basis of Christian truth. He

regarded the foundation of Christianity in revelation as axiomatic and was convinced that if this presupposition were surrendered Christianity would not survive. He saw the issue between dogmatic and liberal Christianity as essentially a choice of presuppositions.

Forsyth attempted to develop a dogmatic method to deal with the dogmatic nature of revelation. The goal of this method was not scientific "verification" but personal "appropriation."⁶⁷ Forsyth discusses the implications of this distinction with reference to the criticism of the Bible, when he writes:

There is an autonomy and finality in the Bible for faith. Experience in this region does not mean a prior standard in us by which we accept or reject the Gospel's claims.... The Gospel is not something which is there for our assent in the degree in which we can verify it by our previous experience.... Our very response to it is created in us before it is confessed by us. It creates assent rather than accepts it.... The Christian experience is not something we bring rationally to the Bible to test scriptural truth; it is something miraculously created in us by the Bible to respond to divine power acting as grace.... It is not our independent verification but our appropriation and completion of God's gift and revelation of Himself of the most intimate, and therefore mysterious, kind. It is the assimilation of this by our hungry personality The two things [appropriation and verification] are very distinct. In the one case we begin by *owning* an authority *in which* we "place" ourselves; in the other we either begin by *scrutinising* an authority *in front of which* we place ourselves till it convince us (or fail); or we accept it as provisional till it is found to work (or not). In the one case we make personal surrender of ourselves to a real creative object, in the other we accept a hypothesis till it approve itself as more, till

⁶⁷ Cf. Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, p.115.

we find it works.⁶⁸

This passage clearly distinguishes the difference between theocentric and anthropocentric methods of dealing with the work of God and the witness to that work in the Bible. Anthropocentric method presupposes some experience outside what God has revealed that becomes the norm for judging the truth of that revelation. Theocentric method begins with an acceptance of the authority of God's revelation as a condition for understanding it as religious truth. It should be recalled that Forsyth distinguished between faith and knowledge. If one were to put it in the terms used by classical Protestantism, there is a distinction between *notitia* (knowledge) and *assensus* (assent to that knowledge) on the one hand, and *fiducia* or personal trust on the other.⁶⁹ Anthropocentrism in its various forms regards knowledge and assent as the primary goal of doctrine. They seek to make a provisional or hypothetical verification of the validity of revelation according to some criterion derived from general experience. Such verifications can be falsified in principle if new data become available. This, it seems to me, is an accurate representation of historical method as it was described by Ernst Troeltsch, and Forsyth placed himself

⁶⁸ PA, pp.33-34.

⁶⁹ Forsyth himself employed the traditional Latin terms. See PA, p.400.

resolutely in opposition to it.

Forsyth was one of the first English theologians to be influenced by Kierkegaard⁷⁰ and, in language that echoes Kierkegaard, he referred to the importance of a "leap of faith" in the appropriation of the truth of revelation. However, it is difficult to determine the extent to which Forsyth drew on Kierkegaard's thought. A more immediate influence seems to be the Reformation. Like Luther and Calvin, Forsyth believed that there is no real revelation apart from personal experience. Calvin described this experience as the *testimonium sancti Spiritus* or "the testimony of the Holy Spirit."⁷¹ It is only through the inner working of the Holy Spirit that Scripture, for example, can be known as the Word of God. Furthermore, the ability to approach the revelation of God in faith is itself a work of the Holy Spirit.⁷² Forsyth picked up on this idea that faith is a creative work of God, and that the ability to comprehend revelation is given by the same Spirit who was present when

⁷⁰ See Forsyth, "Ibsen's Treatment of Guilt", *Hibbert Journal* 14 (1915): 122; Brown, *PTF*, pp.31ff. Robert Johnson, *Authority in Protestant Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), pp.89-107.

⁷¹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2 volumes, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill, (Philadelphia: Westminster Pres, 1960), 1.7.1 (1:74, 78-9), 3.1.1 (1:538).

⁷² "... faith is the proper and entire work of the Holy Spirit, illumined by whom we recognize God and the treasures of His kindness, and without whose light our mind is so blinded that it can see nothing; so dull that it can sense nothing of spiritual things." *Ibid.*, 4.14.9 (2:1248).

revelation occurred. There can be no "disinterested" knowledge of the truth of the Gospel but only an experience which involves the whole personality rather than the intellect alone.⁷³

This is the difference between the Reformation and the Enlightenment, according to Forsyth. The Reformation stands for a personal appropriation of the power of God, which is itself brought about by God.⁷⁴ The Enlightenment stands for the hegemony of the intellect which presupposes that it can arrive at truth through objective analysis and apart from personal commitment. The Gospel of grace appeals to a deeper reality that cannot be comprehended by reason alone. This insight, Forsyth claimed, was one that was beginning to dawn on the modern era as it

has come to realise the inadequacy of thought for reality. It has therefore given more room and rank to faith as an organ of knowledge. It has admitted that all real knowledge is not scientific in form. Indeed it sees that science cannot give us reality (but only method), whereas faith can.... Those who use rationality as the test of reality, however modernist they may be, are not yet out of the medieval ban; and when they apply the rational principle destructively they are only victims of an inverted scholasticism.... The greatest things we believe we cannot comprehend, not only in religion, but in practical life.⁷⁵

⁷³ CC, p.18.

⁷⁴ *Rome, Reform and Reaction* pp.19-20; *PPJC*, p.42.

⁷⁵ *PPJC*, pp.69-70.

Faith, then, is the means by which human beings can gain access to fundamental reality, which is transcendent and spiritual in nature. Indeed, he is arguing, as Augustine, Luther and others did, that faith is an indispensable element in true knowledge. The knowledge of science and history do not penetrate to the mysterious core of existence. The realities of faith and revelation are no more accessible to critical rationality than they were to medieval scholasticism, according to Forsyth. Indeed, he is arguing here that the impulse to judge revelation according to an alien standard, which standard was Aristotelian philosophy and the authority of the Church in the Middle Ages, is being replayed in the efforts of historical critics to pass judgment on the sources and transmission of the Gospel according to their methods. The realities of faith, however, are finally inaccessible to critical analysis.

This does not mean that Forsyth was opposed in principle to the development of historical criticism. Criticism had an important, though supporting, role to play. In fact, Forsyth often incorporated recent critical verdicts into his arguments against the prevailing liberalism of his day.⁷⁶ Forsyth's attitude to criticism confirms W.B.

⁷⁶ "... 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." *CC*, p.12. See also *PPJC*, p.107 for a reference to Johannes Weiss and *PPMM*, p.8 for a reference to Adolf Jülicher to make the same point, that criticism itself supports a "dogmatic" interpretation of the

Glover's thesis who argues that higher criticism was accepted by British Nonconformists, so long as it did not contradict evangelical theology.⁷⁷ One of the central tenets of evangelical theology, according to Glover, was the belief in the supernatural character of revelation.⁷⁸ Most of those who embraced critical methods were able to reconcile them with this supernaturalist orientation. When they did so, critical judgments were accepted without much controversy.⁷⁹ This seems to me to be the essential difference between the development of historical criticism in Germany and its reception in Britain. In Germany, criticism led to the rejection of the supernatural basis of the Bible and the incarnation, because it developed out of an understanding of the nature of history that excluded such things in principle. Troeltsch's argument was that the modern consciousness of history simply left no room for any occurrences that stood outside the demands of the principles of analogy and correlation.⁸⁰ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to

New Testament.

⁷⁷ Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism*, p.185

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.48.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁸⁰ For a comprehensive study of the development of German historiography and its metaphysical underpinnings, see Georg Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought From Herder to the Present*, revised ed. (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1968, 1983).

explore in detail the differences between the German and the British understandings of history. Suffice it to say that in Britain, theologians in general did not regard a simultaneous acceptance of supernatural revelation and historical criticism to be as inherently problematic as it was perceived to be in Germany. Forsyth can be interpreted, then, within the context of what Glover has called "reverent criticism" which permitted the integration of current scholarship into theological judgments, to the extent that it did not undermine the fundamental affirmations of traditional Christianity.⁸¹

Scientific and historical-critical method was concerned with explaining *how* phenomena in history are caused. Insofar as this question is answerable, criticism has a role to play. Indeed, Forsyth believed that the meaning of Christ's appearance in history could not be fully understood without inquiring into the history of the development of religious ideas in Israel. For example, Forsyth offers an extensive analysis of sacrificial concepts and terminology in the Old Testament as a means of illuminating the atonement.⁸²

However, the reality of the Gospel is that, while it arose in history, it is not identical with the history in which it arose. The Gospel is about a supernatural and suprahistorical reality, radically discontinuous with and non-

⁸¹ *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism*, pp.251-256.

⁸² CC, pp.85-104.

analogous to other historical events. *How* this can be so is inexplicable. No method can account for the appearance of God in human form. Christian faith proceeds from the confession of *who* Jesus is, and this confession cannot be confirmed or refuted by any method. Forsyth's argument, from a practical perspective, was that if the events which gave rise to Christianity do not retain their status as revealed, then Christianity loses its saving power.⁸³

The dogmatic method itself, then, is a method derived from revelation. By definition the dogmatic method presupposes the existence of revelation and is therefore fundamentally at odds with historical method as outlined by Troeltsch, for example. Dogmatic method recognizes that its own concerns are purely secondary, namely, to articulate intelligibly the revelation of God and its appropriation in

⁸³ The distinction between the "what" and the "how" of Christian doctrine was a widespread one. It was the basis of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's lectures on Christology in 1933. Bonhoeffer argued that the Chalcedonian definition of the two natures of Christ will be misinterpreted if it is viewed as a metaphysical explanation of *how* God could become man. The traditional christological formula of Chalcedon was not intended to answer that question but to state *who* Christ was and is, and to provide boundaries within which the question of his person and work can be asked. See Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center* (translation of *Wer ist und wer war Jesus Christus?*) trans. Edwin H. Robertson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1960, 1978) especially pp.100-106. There is no direct, demonstrable link between Forsyth and Bonhoeffer. Germans were not influenced by Britons to the extent that Britons were influenced by Germans. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Bonhoeffer's teacher was Reinhold Seeberg, the leader of the *moderne-positive Theologie* movement in Germany, and that Forsyth was familiar with Seeberg's work (*PPJC*, p. vii).

faith by human beings. It does not attempt to set itself up as the criterion by which to judge revelation. Its interest is that which is primary to the experience of God's redemption in Jesus Christ. What is of primary interest to scientific method applied to history is the critical analysis of events and the integration of those events by means of analogy into a comprehensive picture of historical development. This is of only secondary interest to faith, however. Having begun this chapter with a brief description of Forsyth's distinction between primary and secondary theology, we are now in a position to fill out the content of each in more detail. Primary theology, as we have said, is that which gives an account of "experienced grace".⁸⁴ It is "practical" and "experimental" in contrast to secondary theology which is "speculative" and "curious".⁸⁵ Forsyth read Kant as saying that practical reason took precedence over theoretical when applied to religious questions, because it was through practical reason that we come in contact with the moral structure of reality.⁸⁶ Therefore, primary theology is fundamentally moral.⁸⁷ Primary theology is positive. The question it seeks to pose and answer is "have we the living

⁸⁴ *PPMM*, p.101..

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.180, 101.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.180..

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.181.

God" in Jesus Christ?⁸⁸ Secondary theology is critical. It merely asks "What did Jesus do?"⁸⁹ Primary theology is concerned with meaning, secondary theology with mere fact.⁹⁰ Primary theology deals not with the historical fact of Jesus' death but the "theological, spiritual, experimental fact" that Christ's death brings us God and destroys our guilt.⁹¹

Dogmatic method, according to Forsyth, is the method that enables the Church to clarify its own message and convictions. It is the method of theology that is carried out *within* the community of faith. Most Protestant theologians from Schleiermacher to Ritschl believed that the Christian community, and not culture in general, is the proper context for Christian theology. However, one of the characteristics of "culture-Protestantism" is the attempt to integrate the Christian religion into the general context of western culture. Schleiermacher, after all, attempted to mediate between Christianity and its "cultured despisers" and to demonstrate the basic compatibility of Christianity and culture.

Forsyth was one whom Troeltsch would have condemned for drawing a distinction between Christianity and "everything

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.188.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.190.

non-Christian".⁹² For Forsyth, the message of Christianity from within the experience of faith is fundamentally different from the way in which that message is perceived outside of such experience; and it is the experience of grace itself which determines the response. Dogmatics, therefore, has no obligation to make its content intelligible outside the presupposition of faith. In this way, Forsyth resembles Emil Brunner who credited Forsyth with the revival of "dogmatic" theology in Great Britain.⁹³ Brunner distinguished between the Church's tasks of coming to clarity regarding its own message, and of determining its relation to the world. Dogmatics refers to the former. This, it seems to me, was the central point of division -- and tension -- within Protestant theology in the period leading up to the First World War. Is the task of theology primarily limited to the context of belief, or should theology attempt to find some means of accomodating Christian belief and praxis to the general context of culture?⁹⁴ Forsyth was a theologian who was

⁹² *Absoluteness of Christianity*, p.82.

⁹³ *The Christian Doctrine of God*, (Dogmatics volume 1), trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1950) p.92.

⁹⁴ See H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), pp.83-115. George Rupp characterizes the attempt to reconcile the competing claims of "Christ and culture" as "culture-Protestantism", which he defines as "an expression of the Christian ethical imperative to inform and shape the whole of life so that it realizes the ultimately religious significance which is its ground and end." (*Culture-Protestantism: German Liberal Theology at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* [Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977], p.9.) It was Ernst Troeltsch's thesis that only the "church"

genuinely dogmatic in Brunner's sense of the word. Theology in its *primary* meaning is about the reality of evangelical experience.

4. *Theology as dogmatic "concentration"*

Forsyth's theology presupposed the uniqueness of the modern context. The theological task had to take into account the peculiar features of the time in which it was carried out. This requirement flows from the nature of the Gospel which is being ever renewed in new situations. The theological method proper to the modern era was the one which concentrated on those affirmations that are essential to the Christian faith and distinguished them from the peripheral doctrines that reflected the idiom of earlier periods.

Forsyth has more than one list of the features of modernity. In 1887, prior to his so-called "conversion" from liberalism, Forsyth listed the positive characteristics which he thought modernity had to offer to Christian theology.⁹⁵ First was a "more rational, humane and sympathetic spirit" that was replacing "arrogant and exclusive dogmatism." Second

type of religious society which develops "an ethic which accepts life in the world", and not the "sect" type which radically rejects the world, can be the true vehicle of enduring religious values. (*The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (1912), trans. Olive Wyon, 2 volumes [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1931, 1992], 2:494.)

⁹⁵ "Sunday Schools and Modern Theology", p.125.

was the new critical work that was being done on the Bible. He described the fruit of modern biblical study as the reconstruction of "the lost mind of Christ" and the discovery "in His character [of] the key to His saving work." (Forsyth later changed his mind on this score, concluding that criticism could never "reconstruct" the inner life of Jesus.) The third feature of modern thought was a sense of a "new worth to human life" rather than the old "gloomy views of God, man and the Future." The fourth feature was a decreasing emphasis on sin which, while having certain disadvantages, makes Christianity easier to impart to a younger generation. The fifth characteristic was an increased faith in education versus an exclusive stress on one "convulsive" conversion experience. This idea of spreading conversion over a longer period took place, according to Forsyth, under the influence of the concept of evolution. And finally, the modern era was characterized by a new stress on the ethical side of Christianity, rather than the old idea that salvation comes about through a forensic substitution of a divine victim for human sin.

This was in 1887. Within a few years, Forsyth's thinking had shifted significantly. Many of the features of modernity that he had hailed as positive advantages for Christian theology -- the "rational" spirit of modern thought, the emphasis on Jesus' inner life, the de-emphasizing of sin, the interpretation of Christian faith in terms of "education"

-- were precisely the characteristics which he would later hold responsible for the anthropocentrizing impulse in modern theology. And yet, Forsyth never stopped attempting to interpret "the old faith" in the new categories of the age. Forsyth stated in *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* that theology is modern insofar as it recognizes the following "modern principles":

- (1) The autonomy of the individual;
- (2) the Social Idea;
- (3) the development of personality;
- (4) the distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge
- (5) the need of popularisation;
- (6) the principle of Evolution;
- (7) the passion for reality.⁹⁶

Modern theology, therefore, had to accept the concept of the individual as a free moral agent whose ultimate source of authority for conduct and life has become internalized through an awareness of the moral law. This inner authority has superceded the old external authorities of "Bible, Church, or Dogma."⁹⁷ At the same time, modern theology must recognize that individuals live in a pattern of social and communal relations, and not in isolation.⁹⁸ This relational quality in human life means that human beings are to be understood as free, moral personalities.⁹⁹ This development in the modern

⁹⁶ *PPMM*, p.168.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.176.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.177.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.178.

understanding of human nature comes from Kant who distinguished theoretical and practical reason, and, Forsyth argued, theology "must fall in with the modern stress on the latter."¹⁰⁰ The priority of practical reason means that theology is pursued from an ethical standpoint, and this ethical standpoint means that the questions dealt with by theology are universal.¹⁰¹ Forsyth presupposed that the guilt of sin is a reality which afflicts the entire human race and not simply individual human beings, and that the solution to sin must be "racial", by which he meant universal. The moral dilemma solved by Christianity affects humankind universally. The modern era is characterized by its consciousness of historical development, related to the biological theory of evolution.¹⁰² The idea of evolution has profoundly changed the Christian understanding of truth, according to Forsyth. Finally, the modern mind is characterized by its "passion for reality" and its insistence that the claims of a religion be grounded in history and experience.¹⁰³

As we have seen already, Forsyth was not opposed to modern developments or ideas. The problem was that modern consciousness had removed God from the centre and substituted the autonomous self in his place. The two sources of autonomy

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.180.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.181.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.182.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.184.

since the Enlightenment were reason and experience. The only authentic centre, however, and the only source of true autonomy is the transcendent, holy will of God. Theocentric method, according to Forsyth, must lead to a theology that articulates the doctrines that illuminate the moral centre of human life.

Forsyth called this aspect of his method "concentration". In "Revelation and the Person of Christ" (1893), Forsyth argued that revelation applies only to what is redemptive and necessary for the soul's salvation. Anything that does not apply to practical redemption can be regarded as peripheral.¹⁰⁴ In *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* he argued for the need to "reduce" dogma to the essentials and yet retain a sense of the coherence of the Christian message.

We must not cut down [as the critics do] but work down. This reduction exercised on the old creeds is a moral act or process.... To throw beliefs overboard, like superfluous cargo, is only too easy.... [Y]ou cannot dismember at will systems whose parts are neither packed together, nor nailed together, but developed from a centre with some concinnity of thought. And such these orthodoxies were -- both the medieval scholasticism and the Protestant. The development may have proceeded under a mistaken idea, but it was done with great intellectual power, with rare acumen, and wonderful sequence. And it cannot be undone simply by smashing the machine and throwing it on the scrap heap.¹⁰⁵

This process of identifying the "centre" of the Gospel and

¹⁰⁴ *RPC*, p.103.

¹⁰⁵ *PPMM*, p.92.

rearticulating it in the situation of modernity Forsyth called "distillation".¹⁰⁶ It is the identification of what is the "living principle" or the essence of the Gospel.¹⁰⁷

The particular conditions of modernity required that the great dogmatic structures of orthodoxy, so powerfully communicative in the seventeenth century but so cumbersome in the twentieth, be trimmed down to their essentials. It was necessary, Forsyth wrote, to "reduce the burden of belief."¹⁰⁸ By this he meant that modern people ought not to be required to accept all that the orthodox systems of doctrine had insisted upon. Instead, it was sufficient to realize that the "one principle of holy grace carries in it all Christ and all Christianity."¹⁰⁹ The "reduction" of belief does not mean the attenuation of belief, according to Forsyth.¹¹⁰ It means shifting the emphasis from truths that are outside experience to those that stand at the centre of Christian experience, that pertain to "soul, conscience and destiny."¹¹¹ The practical outcome of this approach is that traditional doctrines are given greater or lesser priority according to the degree to which they describe these essential

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.93.

¹⁰⁷ "The Need for a Positive Gospel", p.84.

¹⁰⁸ *PPMM*, p.84.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.86.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.87.

matters. There is a need for a "redistribution of emphasis", according to Forsyth.¹¹²

Specifically, Forsyth arranged Christian doctrine in the following way. Most important was an affirmation of the "atoning Cross" because, as we shall see in more detail in the following chapter, the atonement was indispensable to an understanding of Christian experience. Christ's atonement is "the Alpha and Omega of grace."¹¹³ Second, but equally important, is the resurrection of Christ which is "the emergence into experience of the new life won for us on the cross."¹¹⁴ These doctrines were followed in order of importance by the life, character, teaching and miracles of the earthly Jesus (which liberals tended to place first.) Then comes the pre-existence of Christ which can be inferred from his work, but not directly from experience. And only after all of these affirmations came the virgin birth.¹¹⁵ As we shall see, the atonement and the resurrection were absolutely crucial in Forsyth's mind. If they were abandoned, Christianity ceased to be a message of God's grace. At the same time, belief in the virgin birth was entirely optional because it did not have a direct bearing on the experience of judgment, forgiveness and moral transformation that Forsyth

¹¹² Ibid., p.88.

¹¹³ Ibid., p.87.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

saw as the essence of Christianity.

In 1911 Forsyth went so far as to call for the formation of a "church of one article", united by its commitment to the Gospel of grace and its faith in Christ's salvation, and not divided by differing views on the nature of the Bible or by theological minutiae.¹¹⁶ Aside from that one concentrated, central affirmation that the Gospel is the power of God's grace for humankind, he argued that the evangelical churches should stand for religious liberty.

Forsyth, like Ritschl and Troeltsch, made experience the criterion for determining which beliefs ought to be maintained and which discarded. They arrived at quite different conclusions, however, because their understandings of experience varied so greatly. Ritschl took an agnostic stance towards doctrines such as the pre-existence of Christ. This aspect of Christ's being can have real meaning only for God and since "God's standpoint is impossible for us", "as pre-existent, Christ is hidden."¹¹⁷ Ritschl was arguing that since Christ is known only through his practical value or benefit for us, there can be no knowledge of the existence of Christ outside the world which we experience. For this reason, Ritschl regarded Christ's pre-existence as peripheral to theology. Troeltsch took a much more radical stand. He argued that the homogeneity of human experience results in the

¹¹⁶ *FFF*, p.308.

¹¹⁷ *JR*, p.471.

analogous nature of all experience. Not only Christ's pre-existence but the entire christology of traditional belief is rendered unintelligible to the modern mind. The incarnation, miracles, bodily resurrection and ascension are relics of pre-Enlightenment, pre-historical, pre-critical thought and cannot be retained.¹¹⁸

Both of these thinkers base their conclusions on their reading of the nature of experience. So does Forsyth; but Forsyth interprets experience theocentrically. He understands it as the "evangelical experience" of the conscience that is redeemed and regenerated by the power of God.¹¹⁹ That is the criterion by which Forsyth determines the meaning of experience and therefore the meaning of the theological affirmations that flow from it. As we will see in chapter 4, the experience of grace was for him the most incontrovertible of realities because it was an experience brought about by the action of God.

Forsyth provides us with a description of theocentric method at work in the theology of St. Paul. The liberal argument was that Paul had placed over the simple, ethical message of Jesus a layer of speculative dogma that was foreign to Christianity's original essence. One such allegedly alien addition to Jesus' Gospel was the doctrine of

¹¹⁸ See, for example, Troeltsch, *The Christian Faith*, pp.27, 38, 64.

¹¹⁹ *PA*, p.44.

Christ's eternal existence with God. In opposition to the liberal position, Forsyth argues that

St. Paul's belief in the pre-existence of Christ was mainly reached by the way of inspired, and I would say guided, inference. It did not rest on Christ's words. It was an inevitable rebound of spiritual logic under his faith's obsession with Christ in glory. Such glory, such Godhead, could not be acquired by any moral victory of a created being within the limits of a life so brief as that of Jesus. In a similar application he worked back from the faith that all things were made *for* Christ to the conviction that, as the end was in the beginning, all things were made *by* Christ; and by Christ as personal as the Christ who was their goal. And so, from the exalted glory of Christ, Paul's thought was cast back, by the very working of that Christ in him and in the whole consciousness of the Church's faith, to the same Christ from all Eternity by the Father's side.¹²⁰

Forsyth's meaning in this difficult and obscure passage is far from clear. However, he claims that the starting-point of Paul's understanding of Christ was Paul's own experience of Christ's glory. That would seem to refer to the vision Paul had of the exalted Christ as recorded in the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. This led to Paul's conclusion that the transformation in his own life of which he was keenly aware came from a supernatural source. Following the logic of these convictions, since this transformation (in Paul's mind) could not have been the work of anything created or human, it must have originated with God. Therefore, the Christ of Paul's conversion must have been God. If Christ is God, then

¹²⁰ *PPJC*, pp.268-269.

the goal and purpose of creation must be in him. Paul then "worked back" to the conviction that Christ, if he is God, must also be the source of all things created. If Christ is the source of all things created then he must have existed before anything created existed. This train of thought, according to Forsyth, came about through the "inevitable rebound of spiritual logic". What he means by this is obscure, but he seems to be answering the question, given the divine nature of Christ's work as experienced by Paul, what did Paul have to infer logically about Christ. His pre-existence with God before the foundation of the world is one of the doctrines that proceeds logically from Paul's experience.

The crucial place of Paul's thought in the development of Christianity leads Forsyth to concur with the traditional belief that Paul was divinely inspired. Paul's importance, according to Forsyth, is not in demonstrating the logical symmetry of Christian doctrine but in testifying to a life-changing experience of the reality of Christ. This description of the "logic of faith" in the structure of Paul's thought also serves our purpose of illustrating the way in which Forsyth believed dogmatic or theocentric method operates.

This passage provides a convenient conclusion to our discussion of Forsyth's method and leads into an analysis of the constructive features of his christology.

CHAPTER 3: "A THEOCENTRIC CHRISTOLOGY"

We have seen that Forsyth understood dogmatic method to be theocentric because it proceeded from central affirmations concerning the nature of God's dealing with human guilt through the gift of Jesus Christ. Theocentric theology has to do with God's self-revelation in history and it distinguishes the question of the truth of this revelation from the related but separate question of the experience which revelation engenders in human beings. Revelation has objective and independent status apart from human experience. At the same time, Forsyth argued, from a human point of view nothing would be known of revelation apart from experience. Revelation is not self-evidently accessible to human understanding apart from a personal encounter between the God who is revealed and the believing subject, even though revelation does not depend for its validity on its being experienced.

We have also seen that dogmatic method clashed most sharply with that trend which sought to bring theology itself under the constraints of historical consciousness and its methods. This trend, present in the theology of Ritschl and his school, was articulated most radically by the so-called *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (history of religions school) in Germany. This school included among its members the New

Testament scholar Wilhelm Bousset and the orientalist Paul de Lagarde, but its most prominent member was Ernst Troeltsch. The presuppositions of the history of religions school are outlined in Troeltsch's essay on "Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology", examined above.¹ Briefly stated, the *Religionswissenschaftler* believed that "Christianity is a historical reality and can only be understood as such" and that "in its origins and antecedents, Christianity cannot be viewed as an isolated and nonhistorical event."² As we have seen, the history of religions school opposed the dogmatic view of Christianity that was grounded in supernatural revelation rather than the emergence of religion as a phenomenon of culture.³ Forsyth argued vigorously that "there must surely be in every positive religion some point where it may so change as to lose its identity and become another religion."⁴ By its a priori rejection of the supernatural basis of revelation, and by denying that a single event in

¹ See above, pp.104ff.

² Welch, *Protestant Thought 2*: 171.

³ See Troeltsch, "The Dogmatics of the History of Religions School" in Adams and Bense, *Religion in History*, 87-108. Troeltsch himself defines the goal of history of religions school as "the recognition of the universally accepted twofold scientific conclusion that human religion exists only in multiple individual forms which develop in very complex relations of mutual contact and influence, and that a decision concerning these forms cannot be made with the old dogmatic expedient of distinguishing between a natural and a supernatural revelation." *Ibid.*, p.87.

⁴ PA, p.219.

history could contain revelation finally and absolutely,⁵ the history of religions school had crossed that point. Forsyth believed that if this history of religions approach was carried to its logical conclusion, it would spell the end of Christianity.⁶

It was in the area of christology that the destabilizing effects of the historical-critical method were felt most acutely.⁷ It was the peculiar Christian claim that divine revelation had appeared not provisionally but perfectly and absolutely at a particular moment in history that violated the canons of historical method. Harnack wrote of the need to

⁵ "Christ and the Christian Principle" in *London Theological Studies* (London: University of London Press, 1911), pp.162-163.

⁶ Forsyth regarded the error of the history of religions school as essentially that of idealism in general. It subordinated actual, historic personalities to a concept of the essence of religion and turned personality into an abstraction. Thus, the personality of Jesus became merely symbolic of the truth of revelation rather than the actual bearer of that revelation. This conclusion exerts an anthropocentrizing effect on theology by bringing the facts of what God has revealed under the control of a particular conceptual bias. Furthermore, "a change from being theocentric to being anthropocentric means a new religion." ("Christ and the Christian Principle", p.147.) In general, Forsyth argued that "criticism has of late passed into a new phase which really makes its results a new religion rather than a new stage." (PA, p.220.) Forsyth correctly regarded the history of religions school as the proponents of the most "up-to-date" and radical form of criticism.

⁷ See, for example, Wilhelm Bousset, "Moderne Positive Theologie", *Theologische Rundschau* 9 (1906): 289-290. Bousset is analyzing Kaftan's *Moderne Theologie des alten Glaubens*. He writes that when Kaftan deals with the Fatherhood of God his argument is relatively uncontroversial, but "when Kaftan turns to consider the second article [of the Apostles' Creed] he enters the region of real controversy."

ground theology in "historical knowledge and critical reflection."⁸ The basis of the liberal argument put forward by Harnack was that if the appearance of Jesus in history is the foundation of the Christian religion, and if the historicity of Jesus is going to be taken seriously, then there is no other way of demonstrating that seriousness than by a faithful use of the methods to historical study to determine the truth about him.⁹ Experience, and therefore the theology that seeks to give an account of that experience, can never be independent of the constraints of history, according to Harnack.

For P.T. Forsyth it was not "historical knowledge and critical reflection" that were determinative of theology

⁸ "Fifteen Questions to those among the Theologians who are contemptuous of the Scientific Theology" (correspondence with Karl Barth appearing in *Die Christliche Welt*, 1923) in James M. Robinson, ed., *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1968), pp.165-166.

⁹ This argument has been one of the most durable principles of liberal theology throughout the twentieth century. See, for example, D. M. Baillie, *God Was In Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p.28: "there is no stability in the position which accepts to the full the humanity of Christ but has no interest in its actual concrete manifestation and doubts whether it can be recaptured at all; which insists on the 'once-for-all-ness' of this divine incursion into history, but renounces all desire or claim to know what it was really like." See also Bousset, "Moderne Positive Theologie", p.291; James M. Robinson, *The New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1959) pp.9ff.; Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event and History" in *Basic Questions in Theology* 1: 57, passim. Although the term "liberal" may not be uniformly applicable to all of these writers, the same point is made by them all, that dealing with Jesus Christ historically necessitates the use of the tools of historical investigation.

but "past fact" and "present power".¹⁰ Christianity in its very essence concerns not only a person who lived in history and who continues to exert a psychological influence through the ideas that he represented, but a living personality with whom vibrant, redemptive, contemporary communion is a present possibility. Because the moral and religious consequences of communion with this person are so weighty, Forsyth believed that criticism is more problematic when applied to the New Testament than to the Old. The New Testament

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. [The New Testament deals with] the historic personality with whom the soul is in direct and living communion to-day, everything gathered round a final and eternal act of God as the continuation 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.¹¹

This passage contains in brief the main christological themes of Forsyth's thought. Christology describes the living communion believers have with the historic personality of Jesus Christ. Christ's appearance was the advent of "the final and eternal act of God... which fundamentally altered [our] whole moral relation to Him."

¹⁰ PA, pp.112ff.

¹¹ CC, p.vii.

The theological tension in attempting to define the person and work of Christ is the juxtaposition of two affirmations: first, that revelation occurred in history through an historic person; but secondly, that that person exists not merely as an historic datum, point of departure, or source of impression, but as one with whom direct communion is possible; and furthermore, the assertion that, unlike all other human lives, this one effected an objective change in the relation of God with the human race. For anyone who holds these views, the historical criticism of the Bible (reading the Bible like any other book) has wide-reaching christological implications. Given these affirmations, Forsyth asks, can the Bible really be treated like any other book without qualification? Liberals of a critical bent say it can and it must. What divided the critically-minded from the more dogmatically-inclined was the question whether theological judgments must be derived from "historical knowledge and critical reflection" or whether they possess an independent status.

Forsyth, as we have seen, was of the latter persuasion. He was not opposed to criticism in principle but, as we saw in the last chapter, he regarded it as a definitely secondary interest. What is of primary interest for christology is not the life and teachings of Jesus but the work of Christ -- the objective, supernatural, really effective work. Forsyth dealt with two principle issues in

his attempt to articulate a theocentric alternative to the liberal reading of Jesus. First, was "Jesus a part of his own Gospel?" In other words, is the Gospel about what Jesus did and who he was, or only about what he taught? And secondly, what is the meaning of the Atonement?

2. Was Jesus a part of his own Gospel?

In his response to this question, Forsyth was very similar to Martin Kähler. In *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, Forsyth addressed the critical question raised primarily by Harnack whether Jesus preached his own Messiahship, or simply the divine Fatherhood of God. Was Jesus, in other words, "a part of his own Gospel?"¹² Such questions were raised on the basis of the assumption that reliable historical data could be extracted mainly from the Synoptics, and that John and the Epistles with their more dogmatic representation of Christ as the Son of God, the redeemer and the final judge obscured the reality of Jesus with an overlay of theological speculation. Proceeding from this assumption, the critical task then becomes a matter of stripping away the dogmatic encrustations to get at the

¹² "The Gospel, as Jesus proclaimed it, has to do with the Father only, and not with the Son." Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, p.144. See also pp.127-131. For the opposite view, see Kähler, "Gehört Jesus in das Evangelium?" *Dogmatische Zeitfragen* (Leipzig: A Deichert) 2: 51-78.

historically more probable evidence. The goal was to reconstruct Jesus as an historical figure, again assuming that the more accurate the reconstruction, the nearer the truth about Jesus.

This approach to the Bible and christology was addressed by Kähler in the work for which he is best-remembered today, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ*. Kähler's thesis was that "the historical Jesus of modern authors conceals from us the living Christ."¹³ The historical Jesus does not refer here to the Jesus who lived in history, but to the picture of Jesus reconstructed by those who sought to write his biography. Kähler argued that efforts to do so produced results that were the products more of imagination and speculation than reality. To follow this path in search of the "historical Jesus", Kähler argued, was to go down a "blind alley".¹⁴

Why was this so? In the first place, it was because there are no sources that are historically reliable. This is not a function of the quality of the sources, according to Kähler, but of their nature. The New Testament was not written to be a source of information concerning Jesus' life, but to be a confession of faith. Kähler judged that it was virtually impossible to sift out the historical data from the interpretation of those data by the apostles. The New

¹³ *SHJ*, p.43.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.46.

Testament was a reliable source of information about the faith of the apostolic church, but could not be used to recapture Jesus' "inner life" or religious self-consciousness. The only picture of Jesus we have is one of a "unique sinless Person" who is the object of the church's faith.¹⁵ Faith seeks what it does not already see or know. This leads to one of Kähler's key theological conclusions: that the picture of Jesus who is the object of faith and which is given to us in the New Testament, is a picture of someone who is profoundly *unlike* us.¹⁶ The Jesus of the Bible is not the historical Jesus at all but the risen Lord. And "the risen Lord is not the historical Jesus *behind* the Gospels, but the Christ of the apostolic preaching, of the *whole* New Testament."¹⁷ Kähler rejects attempts to isolate the Synoptics from the rest of the New Testament as more historically "accurate" and therefore of greater significance to faith. The entire New Testament, indeed the entire Bible, points to Christ. This Christ is "historic" because he appeared in history; but he is "dogmatic" because his influence transcends history and because he cannot be grasped scientifically but only by means of a confession of faith. It is this dogmatic Christ of the Bible who appeals to the receptivity of believers and whose

¹⁵ Ibid., p.55, 59.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.59.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.65.

influence is felt down to the present day.¹⁸

That "influence" refers to Christ's saving work. Kähler is adamant that the foundation of a genuinely biblical christology is an adequate soteriology. The New Testament does not present Jesus as a religious genius whose inner life is the model for contemporary piety, but rather the Christ who redeems from sin. This Jesus is available to every Christian. Kähler is highly critical of modern scholarship on the grounds that it has created a modern priesthood which controls access to the truth. According to modern criticism, access to Jesus depends on "mastery of a sophisticated technique and a massive erudition."¹⁹ This is true of the so-called historical Jesus; but the biblical Christ is the object of faith to all who seek him and believers require no "ingenious investigation" to receive his benefits.²⁰

The decline of Christian faith and theology is largely attributable to the "mediating" theologians, according to Kähler; to those theologians in the tradition of Schleiermacher who regard it as their task to "critically [relate] the enduring substance of historical Christianity to the impressive developments in the empirical sciences, especially the study of history."²¹ This is a tempting

¹⁸ Ibid., p.92.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.62.

²⁰ Ibid., p.102.

²¹ Ibid., p.106.

course, but one fraught with danger. Kähler summarizes the mediating approach to the Bible as follows. In the Bible we come into direct contact with God through Jesus *historically*. Therefore, it is said, the first task is to show which of Jesus' words and deeds are historically authentic. The second task is to evaluate whether the writings of the apostles who witness to these facts are genuine or spurious. The third task is to show whether the writings of the Old Testament and the successors to the apostles are in harmony or conflict with the first two conclusions. The overall purpose is to establish a "historical connection between the biblical writings and those persons and events credited with mediation of divine revelation."²² The biblical writings are then regarded as revelation to the extent that this connection between event and source can be satisfactorily demonstrated. However, this procedure yields nothing in the way of certainty.²³ That is because such critical judgments are being constantly changed and revised. History can furnish us only with probabilities whereas the biblical picture of Christ, the object of faith, is one of dogmatic certainty. Kähler was concerned to discover a *sturmfreies Gebiet* (invulnerable area) in which faith could exist.²⁴ This area of certainty cannot be found in the historical Jesus or the "inner life of Jesus", either in the

²² Ibid., pp.106-107.

²³ Ibid., p.111.

²⁴ Carl E. Braaten, Introduction to *SHJ*, p.15.

subjectivism of private religious experience or in the objectivism of a "modern historicism" that attempted to make faith dependent on external criteria.

It is evident how closely Forsyth resembles Kähler. Forsyth's main works on christology are concentrated in a three-year period during which he prepared and published *The Cruciality of the Cross* (1909), *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (1909) and *The Work of Christ* (1910). According to Forsyth, the ground of Christian faith was the "dogmatic, biblical Christ", not the Jesus of history, or more accurately, the Jesus of the historians.²⁵ Forsyth developed his christological thought largely through the formulation of responses to the key issues of the day regarding the nature of revelation.

Chapter 2 of *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* is entitled "The Religion of Jesus and the Gospel of Christ." It was this alleged distinction between the religious consciousness of Jesus, supposedly outlined in the Synoptic Gospels, and the dogmatic additions of the rest of the New Testament that was at the heart of the anthropocentric conception of revelation, in Forsyth's view. He rehearses what is essentially Kähler's argument, that the so-called data of the New Testament are such that Jesus' "inner life" is

²⁵ *PPJC*, p.104.

virtually inaccessible.²⁶ What data there are "put the personal religion of Jesus beyond us."²⁷ In other words, we cannot identify with the inner life of Jesus because it arises from a religious awareness which is qualitatively different from our own. What is centrally important, according to Forsyth, is Jesus' unique relation to God, which is a function not of his human God-consciousness but of his divine status as the second Person of the Trinity. This relation is summarized in Matthew 11:27: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son has chosen to reveal Him."²⁸ This text, which Forsyth assumed to be authentically from the mouth of Jesus,²⁹ proves that Jesus proclaimed his own divinity and Messiahship. This "datum" is a key part of Forsyth's argument that the doctrines rejected by the critics as theological contaminations of the pure picture of Jesus were actually part of the Christian faith from the beginning. Contrary to Harnack and other liberal critics, Forsyth maintains that there never was a time when the religion of Jesus could be separated from the gospel

²⁶ *PPJC*, p.37.

²⁷ *Ibid.* Cf. Kaftan, *Moderne Theologie des Alten Glaubens*, p.28.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.111.

²⁹ Forsyth does not offer critical evidence for this beyond simply stating that it is undoubtedly authentic. The important point, though, is that he regarded it as the central text which defined the consciousness of Jesus, and cited it with great frequency. See *RPC* p.115, *PPJC* pp. 38, 11, 275.

of Christ as Redeemer, Lord and Saviour.³⁰ The choice between the critical position and what Forsyth refers to as the "evangelical" or "positive" position has profound implications for religious life. The liberal idea that Jesus represents the paradigmatic religious man suggests that Christianity is a matter of imitating his piety. Forsyth regards this as grossly misleading. Jesus' relation to the Father is one of unique and perfect obedience which cannot be emulated by mere human beings. Jesus was radically unlike the rest of the human race because he had no need of repentance as other human beings do.³¹ It is precisely this need for repentance which is absent from the religious life of contemporary Christianity, so confident in its own ability to recreate the piety of Jesus, according to Forsyth. The reason for the absence of repentance is the essential anthropocentric conceit that every human being is intrinsically able to seek and, in principle, to gain that "higher life" of which Jesus is the supreme example. Like Kierkegaard, Forsyth believed that fallen humanity needs to be given not only the truth but the conditions for learning the truth.³²

Forsyth makes one further point which brings him into proximity with the position of Martin Kähler. This is in

³⁰ Ibid., p.46.

³¹ Ibid., pp.51-52.

³² See Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments or a Fragment of Philosophy*, trans. David Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936, 1962), p.17.

regard to inspiration. Kähler reacted to what he regarded as the reduction of the Bible to an historical source.³³ As we saw above, he argued that the historical method amounts to an attempt to demonstrate the connection between the sources and the events they describe, and to judge their usefulness on that basis. Revelation, then, comes to depend on the reliability and accuracy of the sources and their correspondence with what is historically probable. Forsyth follows Kähler in rejecting this view. The Bible, he says, is part of revelation because it is a stage in the revelatory event but is not identical with revelation in itself, as Protestant orthodoxy had held. The Bible brings to expression the apostolic encounter with the risen Christ, making possible the transmission of knowledge of this event through history. As the word of the apostles, Forsyth argues, the Bible is a product of the same Spirit that created and continues to sustain the church.³⁴ It is the fact that the apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit, bore witness to the truth of God's revelation that makes the Bible the Word of God. It is, for Forsyth, a question of authority -- whether authority lies in the self-consciousness of Jesus uncovered by historical research, or whether it lies in Christ's *work*, that is, the effect of Jesus experienced in faith.³⁵ The New Testament

³³ *SHJ*, pp.106-107.

³⁴ *PPJC*, p.152.

³⁵ *PPJC*, p.141.

is the interpretative stage that was required to make the facts of revelation accessible to experience and faith.

The manifestation had to be closed by the interpretation or inspiration to complete the revelation The New Testament is not the first stage of the evolution [of Christianity] but the last phase of the revelatory fact and deed.³⁶

Revelation occurred in three stages. The first stage was the "fact" of Christ, Jesus' historical existence, death and resurrection. The second stage was the apostolic interpretation arising out of the apostles' experience of the risen Christ and communicated in a form that is able to evoke faith. The third stage is the appropriation of the New Testament Christ in the experience of the believer.³⁷ Forsyth argued that the discovery of facts alone, insofar as they can be established with reasonable certainty, does not give access to Christ apart from the inspired interpretation of the New Testament. Like Kähler, Forsyth consistently rejected the de facto reduction of the New Testament to the Synoptic Gospels. The Synoptics by themselves, he argued, are inadequate to reveal the biblical Christ in all his fullness.³⁸ The Gospel of John, the Epistles and other books

³⁶ Ibid., pp.151-152.

³⁷ Ibid., p.137.

³⁸Ibid., p.102.

of the New Testament also testify to "the whole Biblical Christ."³⁹ Forsyth rejected the liberal claim that the chief value of the Synoptics was as relatively unbiased historical sources in contrast to the fanciful theologizing of the fourth Gospel. This is to misunderstand not only the nature of the Gospel of John but of the Synoptics as well. All four Gospels, indeed all the books of the New Testament, are bound together by the unifying principle that they interpret the historical facts of the Word made flesh.⁴⁰ Following the accepted critical dating of the New Testament writings, Forsyth argues that the Synoptics were written for people "living in the theological atmosphere of the epistles", in other words, that the Synoptic writers knew and accepted the theology of the Epistles and that their purpose in writing the Gospels was not in conflict with the theology of Paul and the other New Testament authors.⁴¹ Even the Synoptics carry us beyond Jesus as teacher and preacher to "the dogmatic Christ

³⁹ Ibid., p.169.

⁴⁰ This judgment has far-reaching theological implications. The discrediting of John as an historical source was one of the prime factors in the nineteenth-century rejection of historic doctrines such as the Trinity and the pre-existence of Christ. (See Claude Welch, *The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* [London: SCM Press, 1953] p.4.) A great deal of the weight of Forsyth's argument regarding the validity of these doctrines rested on his attempt to restore the credibility of John as a source of truth concerning the nature and work of Christ.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.175.

the assumption that christology is absent from the Synoptics, but Forsyth argues that this verdict arises more from a priori judgments about the Bible than it does from the evidence.⁴³

Kähler's radical scepticism concerning the historical reliability of the New Testament sources has come in for a good deal of criticism from those who ask what point there is in basing faith on an historical event but then claiming that nothing can be known for certain about what constituted that event.⁴⁴ In making this judgment, however, it should be born in mind that scholarship has advanced considerably in the century since Kähler's book was written. The naive credulity of the life of Jesus movement no longer characterizes attempts to deal responsibly with the historical

⁴³ Forsyth takes what I believe to be a characteristically British line which is to endorse the critical enterprise, but to argue that the more liberal judgments are not warranted when the Bible is studied with a truly open and critical eye. Interestingly, he enlists some of the most radical German critics to support his point. For example, Forsyth makes polemical use of J. Weiss's attack on the typical liberal reading of the New Testament. Weiss was one of the earliest to argue that the New Testament presents Jesus as the eschatological Son of Man, rather than the exemplar of liberal piety. Weiss's purpose in doing so, of course, was to undermine traditional christology further, but Forsyth employs him to strengthen his case for the recovery of such christology. (See *PPJC*, p.107) It is an issue of the extent to which criticism corresponds with the confession of faith. The historical-critical trend leading from J. Weiss to Bultmann and beyond held that while the dogmatic Jesus is the one actually portrayed in the *Synoptics* as well as the rest of the New Testament, this portrayal must be "demythologized" in order to speak to contemporary life. Forsyth's view was that the dogmatic portrayal of Jesus is the nourishment upon which contemporary faith, like that of all ages, must feed.

⁴⁴ See W. Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event and History" in *Basic Questions in Theology* 1: 15.

life of Jesus. Most scholars would probably regard Forsyth's statement that the New Testament "puts the personal religion of Jesus beyond us"⁴⁵ as an exaggeration. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, to take only the most famous example, has contributed immeasurably to our knowledge of the religious context in which Jesus lived. Nevertheless, after we make allowance for refinements in scholarship, Kähler's and Forsyth's *theological* point still stands: what is revealed according to the New Testament witness is not only a series of facts capable of being reconstructed historically but a real power. This Forsyth articulated as early as 1893:

Revelation ... gives us in Christ the power, life, and certainty of reconciliation.... He breaks forth on us from the record. His inner self comes out, seizes us, turns us from historians to Christians, from inquirers to devotees.... No imperfections or accretions in the record prevent this result. Every line and limb is not there, there may even be some restoration in a later spirit, but the idea, the figure, the character, is distinct in our minds even as historians. And from within the historic figure there issues upon us, to make us Christians, the immortal reality itself as a living power, a present Lord, a really present God.⁴⁶

The problem Forsyth addressed was the need to construct a christology that would account for evangelical *experience* -- the experience of the transforming power of God which is able to turn judgment and condemnation into grace and freedom.

⁴⁵ *PPJC*, p.3.

⁴⁶ *RPC*, pp.121-122.

Liberal christology which saw Jesus merely as the greatest "witness to God's revelation"⁴⁷ could not help humanity transcend its own sin.

3. *The meaning of the Atonement*

In 1888, Forsyth predicted that

a time may come, I admit, and may not be too distant when we shall have ... to renew our emphasis on some theory of Atonement for the sake of a true view of the Incarnation.⁴⁸

That day came sooner than Forsyth anticipated. Within a few years he came to the conclusion that no adequate christology could fail to place the Atonement at the centre.⁴⁹ It is the doctrine of the Atonement that makes christology theocentric because it interprets Christ's person and work in terms of the holiness and the redemptive action of God. Liberal criticism, on the other hand, declares "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 ... apostolic theologoumena."⁵⁰ The Atonement is not a piece of theological speculation imposed on the Gospel message, however, but stands at the very

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.122.

⁴⁸ "Sunday Schools and Modern Theology", p.126.

⁴⁹ See H.F.L. Cocks, "The Message of P.T. Forsyth", *Congregational Quarterly* 26 (1948): 217.

⁵⁰ CC, p.48.

heart of christology, according to Forsyth.

Forsyth attempts to refute the argument that Paul invented the doctrine of the Atonement. Paul, he points out, says he received it from his earliest teachers (First Corinthians 15:3). Since Paul's first instruction in the Christian faith took place only three or four years after Jesus death, this takes the belief in the Atonement back to the very inception of Christianity itself. Rather than being an invention of Paul, it was already a tradition of long standing by the time he wrote First Corinthians. In fact, Forsyth argues, it only stands to reason that Christ himself was "the first teacher of the atonement."⁵¹ The liberal distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of the New Testament is a false dichotomy, according to Forsyth, especially if it is used to argue that an historically-reconstructed Jesus represents the true object of Christian faith in contrast to the corrupting influence of the New Testament Church's theologizing.⁵²

As we pointed out above, Forsyth's main works on the Atonement date from the period 1909-1911. His clearest exposition of the doctrine is found in *The Work of Christ*. Forsyth used the terms "work of Christ" and "atonement" virtually interchangeably. This was in clear differentiation from liberal theology which, Forsyth wrote, interpreted

⁵¹ Ibid., p.12.

⁵² Ibid., p.11.

Christ's death as merely the closing episode of his life and as a model of self-sacrifice to be imitated by all pious people.⁵³ Forsyth regarded Christ's death as having far more decisive importance for faith than his life. It was Christ's work carried out on the cross that is "crucial" for Christian experience and faith. The cross is the "crux", the centre-point of the positive Gospel.⁵⁴

The atoning work of Christ brought about the reconciliation of God and the world.⁵⁵ Paul, the "great expositor of the work of Christ" among the New Testament authors, describes this work in terms of reconciliation.⁵⁶ Forsyth places tremendous weight on the key verse of Second Corinthians 5:19 in arriving at this judgment.⁵⁷ Reconciliation is *the* moral issue in human history, made urgent by the alienating power of human sin. Briefly put, this issue can be outlined as follows: God is holy, humankind is sinful, and communion between them is impossible unless something is done to remove the barrier of guilt caused by sin. Reconciliation, in other words, requires the overcoming

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Brown, *PTF*, p.66.

⁵⁵ *WC*, p.30.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.44.

⁵⁷ "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them..." Ibid., p.82.

of guilt.⁵⁸ The need for this atoning reconciliation proceeds, then, from the nature of God as holy. God's holiness cannot do other than confront sin as judgment -- judgment which, apart from grace, is experienced on the human side as condemnation.

Because holiness demands to be acknowledged, guilt must be overcome by an obedient acknowledgement of the righteousness of God's judgment on sin⁵⁹, and by an adequate confession of that holiness.⁶⁰ This can come about only if sin is seen as God sees it. Only one who himself was holy could adequately confess God's holiness. "There is only one thing that can satisfy holiness", Forsyth wrote, "and that is holiness."⁶¹ No one but God himself would be able to make an offering that has the power to overcome guilt, and bring forgiveness into effect.⁶²

On this point it is worth noting Forsyth's similarity to the Scottish theologian John McLeod Campbell. Campbell was removed from the ministry Church of Scotland in

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.66.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.125.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.149. To repeat, Forsyth used the term "confession" to mean Christ's active acknowledgement of the rightness and justness of God's holy will through his submission to its decrees.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.125.

⁶² Ibid., pp.149, 151.

1831 on a charge of heresy.⁶³ Specifically, Campbell denied the Calvinist doctrine of limited Atonement which stated that Christ's death had saving power for the elect only and not for humanity in general. Forsyth read and admired Campbell's magnum opus *The Nature of the Atonement*⁶⁴ in which Campbell argued that the work of Christ has both a "retrospective" and a "prospective" dimension.⁶⁵ Retrospectively, the Atonement deals with the condition of sin in which the grace of God finds us.⁶⁶ This is the aspect of the Atonement that Calvinist theology emphasizes in its preoccupation with the legal satisfactory aspect of Christ's death.⁶⁷ However, the Atonement also works prospectively in that it deals with the condition of "sonship" to which the grace of God raises us.⁶⁸ In other words, Christ's Atonement not only brings about the cancellation of the penalty of sin, but positively creates a new, regenerated conscience.⁶⁹ Like Campbell, Forsyth made moral regeneration an aspect of his theology of

⁶³ Bernard M.G. Reardon, *From Coleridge to Gore: A Century of Religious Thought in Britain* (London: Longman, 1971), pp.404-410.

⁶⁴ *The Nature of the Atonement and its Relation to Remission of Sins and Eternal Life* (1856) (London: James Clarke & Co., 1956). Forsyth refers to Campbell in WC, p.148.

⁶⁵ *The Atonement*, p.27.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.129-150.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.27, 72.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.151-191.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.92.

the Atonement. Furthermore, Forsyth, like Campbell, identified the conscience as the place where the truth of Scripture and of the work of Christ is both revealed and appropriated.⁷⁰ The problem with the theory of limited Atonement, according to Campbell, is that it furnishes no basis for a personal appropriation of the Gospel by "awakened sinners".⁷¹ Campbell claimed that he derived this insight from Luther.⁷² The Calvinist conception of election makes the relationship between justification and faith completely arbitrary.⁷³

We can see the close affinity between Forsyth and his Scottish predecessor. However, Forsyth notes one point on which he differs from Campbell's book which, he says,

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 judgment.... How could Christ in any real sense confess a sin, even a racial sin, with whose guilt He had nothing in common?⁷⁴

Christ's confession of holiness is the primary source of the redeeming power of his work, according to Forsyth. Christ became the human being who gives God's holiness its due through the obedience of his life. Because Christ was fully human his practical, moral confession brings about the

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp.10-11, 112.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp.61-62.

⁷² Ibid., p.45.

⁷³ Ibid., pp.104-106.

⁷⁴ WC, p.148.

possibility of a "real, deep, permanent change in the sinner."⁷⁵ Here, actually existing in time and space, was a man whose will and conscience were not in radical rebellion against the will of God. Because Christ was God, his obedience was sufficient to bring about the reconciliation of fallen humanity to God.⁷⁶ Christ establishes a new relation between God and the world and unleashes the moral power sufficient to create a "new humanity", reconciled to the holiness of God.

According to Gustav Aulén, the history of christology has been marked by the conflict between an "objective" view of the Atonement, typified by Anselm, which interprets Christ's sacrifice as an objective transaction which satisfied God's justice, and a "subjective" view, represented classically by Abelard, "which explains the atonement as consisting essentially in a change taking place in men rather than a changed attitude on the part of God."⁷⁷. This conflict is based on a misunderstanding of the Atonement, according to Aulén, and can be resolved by recovering what he calls the "classic" or "dramatic" view. This interpretation holds that in the doctrine of the Atonement "the central theme [is] a Divine conflict and victory" in which "Christ fights

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.125.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.132.

⁷⁷ *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A.G. Hebert (London: S.P.C.K., 1953) pp.1ff.

against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world...."⁷⁸ By defeating these powers, God effects a reconciliation of the world which is under the dominion of evil, to himself. Forsyth anticipates Aulén in his own account of the Atonement by rejecting both a mechanically objective view in which Christ acts as a kind of "third party", standing between a wrathful God and a helpless humanity⁷⁹; and the sort of subjective view which suggests that it is only humankind that needs to be reconciled to God and not God to the world.⁸⁰ However, Forsyth differs significantly from Aulén because while the latter holds that "there is no satisfaction of God's justice" in the classic understanding of the Atonement, Forsyth placed the satisfaction of God's holiness⁸¹ at the very centre of his account.

The main affirmation of classical christology is that in Jesus Christ the human and the divine are united. Forsyth argued that a modernized christology had to conceive of this union not so much as a metaphysical union of two natures but as a moral union of two wills. Forsyth's emphasis was different from that of the school of High Church Anglican

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.20.

⁷⁹ WC, p.54.

⁸⁰ See WC, p.75.

⁸¹ Forsyth, in my view, would not have distinguished between the terms "justice" and "holiness". Because God is holy, all his ways are just. It seems to me that the justice of God's actions is grounded in the fact that he is holy.

theologians headed by Bishop Charles Gore who had produced *Lux Mundi* in 1889. This group based its christology on the idea of the divine Logos, the principle of creative Reason, who was incarnate in Jesus. One student of the period has described this approach in the following way:

Emphasis upon the *logos* doctrine made God's immanence in the world a primary theological postulate. Jesus Christ was to be understood first as Creator, the second Person of the Trinity, the Creative Word or Reason.... Understanding or rational comprehension was the desired goal with soteriological concerns taking a second place in theological interest.⁸²

Indeed, it was the stated objective of the *Lux Mundi* group to correct what it considered to be the one-sided emphasis of the Reformation on soteriology and atonement, and to bring to the fore the idea of divine immanence in creation through the principle of the Logos.⁸³ This shift in emphasis led to the Incarnation -- the communion of the divine and human principles, or the indwelling of the divine within the human -- being raised to the place of prime importance in christology. The *Lux Mundi* theologians believed that

in the incarnation ... there was provided the key for understanding the continuity of God and nature, of nature and man, of man and Jesus Christ, and of Jesus Christ and God. Hence, the *logos* theme made it possible to draw all reality into relation with the Divine Being.⁸⁴

⁸² Langford, *Foundations*, p.188.

⁸³ J.R. Illingworth, *Lux Mundi*, pp.152-153.

⁸⁴ Langford, p.188.

This assertion of the essential continuity between God and nature was, in Forsyth's mind, the slippery slope which led to anthropocentric theology. Although Gore, Illingworth and the others of their group were themselves thoughtful and distinguished churchmen and theologians, the result of their line of thought once it became popularized was evident in the pernicious New Theology, for example. Only a clear emphasis on the *sovereignty, holiness and transcendence* of God, and a subordination of any understanding of God's immanence to this principle, could prevent theology from drifting into a deification of human aspirations and achievements, according to Forsyth. In order to avoid confusion, Forsyth tended not even to talk about the Incarnation apart from the Atonement. The union of divine and the human in Jesus Christ, he argued, was the result of a decision and an act of the holy will of God in which Christ the Son of God identified himself morally with the human race. It was not a union that was an expression of some natural form of divine immanence, as Idealists of various kinds implied. For that reason, he tended to argue that the Incarnation was a union of wills rather than a union of natures. It was an act, furthermore, of divine omnipotence because only God himself could overcome the state of profound estrangement between holiness and sin.

Forsyth's distinction between the idea of a union of wills and that of a union of natures is not as sharp as it may seem at first. He did not mean, however, that the Incarnation

was a denial of the nature of God. Forsyth was a preacher more than a philosopher and his terminology, as we have remarked, did not always have a razor-sharp precision. While the will is the level on which the Incarnation affects us, it is still rooted in the nature of both God and humanity. Forsyth tended to avoid the language of nature because it is the language of metaphysics and, as a Ritschlian, he was uncomfortable with metaphysics. Unlike Ritschl, however, Forsyth did not retreat to an agnostic position with respect to the nature of God. To speak of the will of God is to speak of God's nature because God is fundamentally a moral reality. God, Forsyth argued, is a personality and the will is the unifying centre of personality.⁸⁵ Humankind, and indeed all of creation, are *moral* realities because they are the work of the holy God and it is moving towards their consummation in divine ends. Ritschl believed that experience could never permit us to say anything with assurance about the being of God. Forsyth did not agree. He avoided metaphysical language because he saw around him the confusion that resulted when theology began with a principle of metaphysical continuity between God and the world. Such an approach tended to divinize human nature and achievements and to underestimate the severity of sin. While there must be some connection between the divine nature and the nature of the cosmos (otherwise we could know nothing of God), Forsyth was clear that connection is solely the

⁸⁵ PA, pp.92-111.

result of God's free, creative, sovereign initiative. Anthropocentric theology used an analogy of being to create God in the image of humanity. To do so is not only to misunderstand the will of God but God's nature as well.

Forsyth described Jesus as having offered himself as the representative of the collective human race.⁸⁶ Christ brought about a change in human nature, in the moral constitution of authentic humanity. He believed that reconciliation took place first between God and the race as a whole and only through that primary reconciliation, with individuals. Each individual has a share in the reconciliation of humankind as a whole. The obedience of Christ stands for, or represents, the obedience of the human race which ideally should be offered to God.⁸⁷

What Christ offers to God is ... not simply an objective satisfaction outside His revolutionary effect on the soul of man in the way of faith, repentance and our whole sanctification. As the very judgment 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.⁸⁸

The faith and the experience of the believer amounts to a

⁸⁶ WC pp.96, 116.

⁸⁷ WC, p.187.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp.92-93.

personal response to the completed work of Christ which affects the human race. This view of the Atonement and Forsyth's anthropology belong together. Reconciliation takes place when the guilty conscience is first made to see the reality of sin, and then to acknowledge the righteousness of God. But it is through the conscience that human beings are united with one another as well. The conscience makes us all members of a "moral world", and "the changeless order of the moral world" emerges into our experience through the conscience.⁸⁹ The ability to transcend the merely natural and to have contact with the moral order of reality is what binds the human race into one. It is what is universally human. Christ identifies with us on this level. His union with us is described as "moral solidarity."⁹⁰ Jesus Christ represents both the holiness of God and the possibility of a conscience reconciled to that holiness.⁹¹

Christ makes this possibility of reconciliation an actuality by bearing the penalty of our sin. Forsyth rejected the old theories which described Christ variously as paying a ransom for the release of captives, of appeasing the wrath of an angry God, or of himself becoming a sinner and being punished in our stead. Christ bore the penalty of sin by accepting the righteousness of God's judgment on sin. In

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.122-123.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.190.

⁹¹ Ibid.

other words, Christ offered to God a perfect confession of his holiness. "Christ", he wrote,

submitted with all His heart to God's holy final judgment on the race. 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 judgment 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 judgment.⁹²

Since this confession originates in the conscience -- the universally human organ of judgment -- what Christ offered, according to Forsyth, was a "perfect racial obedience."⁹³ Christ stood for, not only ideally or potentially but really and actually, a "new penitent humanity."⁹⁴

It is through the conscience that each individual becomes united with Christ.⁹⁵ This union originates with the consciousness and conviction of sin.⁹⁶ However, because Christ identifies himself with the human race, the union involves our acknowledgement of and witness to God's holiness as well. Christ's work becomes actually and really

⁹² Ibid., pp.134-135.

⁹³ Ibid., p.129.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 81, 130, 193.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp.105-107.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.16.

regenerative for us as we experience the effect of the alteration of God's attitude towards us from one of wrath to one of grace. We recognize God's relation to us as gracious and we come to know that we have, indeed, been reconciled.⁹⁷

This is what Forsyth means when he talks about the objective nature of the Atonement. Atonement is not first of all a private transaction between the believer and God that comes about when each person attempts to repent of his or her own sin. This was the liberal view in which atonement was limited to "man's movement to God."⁹⁸ The recognition of the reality of sin can only come about as the result of grace. Atonement refers to the work of Christ in offering a perfect sacrifice of an obedient life and a perfect confession of the rightness of God's judgment on sin. Christ brings into being a conscience operating as it should, in harmonious submission to the holiness of God and the moral principle of the universe. "God Himself" made "the complete sacrifice" and in so doing created a fundamentally new relationship between humankind and himself.

Forsyth stated more boldly than almost anyone else in Britain at the time this doctrine of a real and effective

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.168.

⁹⁸ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, p.171. Mozley quotes Wilhelm Bousset, the New Testament scholar of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* as follows: "'The sin which you have committed no one can atone for instead of you, neither man nor God.... Sin and guilt can only be removed by the voluntary moral and personal act of one God, who forgives sin and remits guilt.'" (*The Doctrine of the Atonement*, p.168.)

Atonement. That is what, in my view, truly sets him apart from the mainstream of Protestant thought in the early twentieth century. Forsyth went so far as to say that without an intelligent grasp of the Atonement, Christian faith makes no sense:

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 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 religion which is all mind, from pietism with its lack of critical judgment, and from rationalism with its lack of everything else.⁹⁹

Liberal theology argued that the doctrine of the Atonement was unintelligible to a modern, ethical Christianity. One of the characteristic features of the Enlightenment, the spiritual and intellectual forerunner of liberalism, was its opposition to the key doctrines of orthodoxy¹⁰⁰, but most particularly the idea of "a miraculous salvation of a human race suffering

⁹⁹ CC. p.16.

¹⁰⁰ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, p.23.

from the mortal infection of sin."¹⁰¹ Liberalism was permeated by the anthropocentric orientation that stemmed from the Enlightenment and which transformed the classical understanding of an "objective" Atonement into the idea of personal conversion, amendment and illumination.¹⁰² Liberal Christianity believed that what is of real value is "the kindling of religious life" and doctrines that do not relate directly to that personal end are considered superfluous.¹⁰³

Forsyth consciously opposed this mind-set that was reflected so consistently in the liberalism of his day. His counter-argument was that apart from the doctrine of the Atonement there can be no real, moral Christianity because only in the cross of Christ did the "saving act of God" take place. A reaffirmation of the Atonement is the sole basis for avoiding the two modern distortions stemming from the "Illuminationist" tradition which included both pietism and rationalism. The Atonement enables Christianity to avoid pietism because it goes beneath the phenomenon of experience to search out the objective ground of divine reconciliation. It avoids rationalism because it recognizes that the full dimensions of God's saving grace go beyond what the intellect on its own can comprehend. The Atonement leads to a grasp of

¹⁰¹ Ernst Troeltsch, "On the Possibility of a Liberal Christianity" in Adams and Bense, ed., *Religion in History*, p.344.

¹⁰² Ibid. See also Aulén, pp.163-164.

¹⁰³ Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, p.10.

the moral nature of the gospel.

Forsyth affirmed the continuing power and relevance of the classical view of the Atonement which he associated with what he called "Athanasian" christology. Forsyth argued that the Atonement had been explicated in three different historic forms. The first was the Ebionite (later the Socinian) form which proclaimed "the individual saintliness and moral supereminence of Christ"¹⁰⁴ and "the idea that in Christ we have the greatest of created personalities completely filled with the Spirit of God."¹⁰⁵ The second form is Arianism which "is represented by those who see in Christ not merely the perfect prophet, but a personality unique in his supramundane nature, and not merely in his function and the way he discharged it."¹⁰⁶ In spite of Christ's sinless and supernatural nature, however, "yet he is not of one nature with God. He is a creature -- an intermediary creation."¹⁰⁷ Arian christology acknowledges that Christ is not a mere human being, but still regards him as a creature. The last and highest stage of christological thinking is the Athanasian which affirms that God himself appeared in Christ and brought about a final and effective Atonement through the cross.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ *PPJC*, p.7.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.78.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.78-79.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.79.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.84.

Only the Athanasian answer deals fully and adequately with the need of humankind for redemption and the willingness of God to meet that need.¹⁰⁹ Historically, Forsyth argued, Athanasian christology has found itself under assault by those who regarded it as unnecessarily metaphysical or obscure, and yet the Athanasian answer is the one that has prevailed because it alone captures the paradoxical truth of Christ and his atonement. The Athanasian answer has been the one that the great theologians of the Atonement such as Anselm have taken and adapted to the idiom of their own time.¹¹⁰ The task of positive modern theology, Forsyth argued, was to do what Anselm and Luther did for their time, and set a full account of the Atonement against the prevailing theological liberalism.

Forsyth's theology has been described as

¹⁰⁹ Forsyth was not entirely consistent in this view, however. At times he referred to "the Athanasian or Chalcedonian form of belief" as being "embalmed" in the metaphysics of two-natures christology (*PPJC*, p.217). See also *JG*, p.85: "Chalcedonianism is orthodox rationalism." We can account for this inconsistency by noting that Forsyth distinguishes (not always clearly) between the response of Athanasius to the theological issues of his time, and the insistence that only the Athanasian *form* of creedal statement is a true expression of Christian faith. The conditions of modernity are different from those of the third and fourth centuries, and therefore what Athanasius did must be redone, but his particular formulae cannot be rigidly imposed on the present.

¹¹⁰ *PA*, p.330.

"Christocentric".¹¹¹ In my view "theocentric" is a more adequate term to describe his work. That is because Forsyth believed that theology could be "christocentric" in the sense of placing the life and work of Jesus at the centre, while interpreting that life and work in an "anthropocentric" fashion. Liberal theology did just this. It professed great reverence for Jesus but treated him as the exemplary religious subject rather than the incarnation of God. Liberal theology failed to grasp the full dimensions of the *work* of Christ and to recognize it as the redemptive work of God. According to Forsyth,

We are driven to a vital choice, within Christianity itself, between an ego-centric and a theocentric religion. It is not clear enough when we talk about a Christo-centric Christianity. Even with Christ in the centre we must go on to ask a question which divides Christianity into two streams, one of which ends in the eternal kingdom of holy God, and the other in the brief sovereignty of spiritual man. We have to ask, in the Gospel's interest, whether Christ is central to a glorified humanity or to a glorious God; whether man's chief end is to develop, by Christ's aid, the innate spiritual resource of a splendid race, or to let the development flow from its reconciliation, redemption and subjection to God's holy will by Him.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Samuel J. Mikolaski, "P.T. Forsyth on the Atonement" *Evangelical Quarterly* 36 (1964): 78-91 ; Harry M. Gardner, "The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ in the Thought of Peter Taylor Forsyth and Emil Brunner", unpublished Th.D. Dissertation, Boston University, 1962, p.73. A.E. Garvie, a contemporary of Forsyth, referred to his theology as "Crucicentric" ("A Cross-Centred Theology", *Congregational Quarterly* 22 (1944): 325.)

¹¹² *PPJC*, pp.27-28.

The consequence of relinquishing or devaluing the Atonement was an anthropocentrized Christianity lacking in moral power. Anthropocentric Christianity trivializes the seriousness of sin.¹¹³ It reduces sin to ignorance, which can be cured by enlightenment or education, rather than salvation.¹¹⁴ Forsyth described the theological atmosphere prevailing in his day as the most serious movement of apostasy since the third century. Alongside the confident erudition of liberal scholarship, however, there was also a form of popular Christianity that appealed to "vague and romantic intuitions" which "borrow the mantle of Christianity" but cannot reproduce its redemptive power.¹¹⁵ "[R]omantic religion has submerged evangelical, the religion of affection and temperament has obscured the religion of will and conscience."¹¹⁶ The abandonment of the Atonement was symptomatic of a religion that had become anthropocentric in its outlook. As a result, Christianity was drifting farther away from the holy and transcendent reality that is its only true source.

So long as the chief value of the Cross is its value for man, so long as its first effect is upon man and not upon God, so long as its prime action is not upon reality but upon our feeling about that reality, then so long shall we be led away from direct contact with reality at our

¹¹³ *PPJC*, p.52.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *PPMM*, p.80.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.111.

religious centre; and we shall be induced to dwell more upon our experience of reconciliation than on the God by whose self-reconciliation we are reconciled.... There is something fatal to a real and thorough religion in a view which makes the finished work of God to depend for its fate upon human experience. It makes God a mere offerer, proposer, or promiser until we have become receivers.¹¹⁷

Not only does a clear understanding of the Atonement prevent religious thought from being taken into the realm of abstract speculation, but without it, Forsyth argued, it is hard to conceive of Christianity as a religion that deals with the moral reality of the human situation.

We may recapitulate the logic of Forsyth's understanding of the Atonement by referring to an appendix at the end of *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*.¹¹⁸ Forsyth is dealing with the attempt to restate Christianity in the categories of what he calls "voluntarism or pragmatism" which have personality as their controlling concept. His argument runs as follows. Action, according to modern thought, is the essence of truth. Truth is not merely speculative but ethical. Christianity, however, is concerned with more than human actions and ends. To stop with human action would be to stop short of real religion because religion deals with a transcendent spiritual world of value that will not allow human "needs, passions or energies" to be normative. Religion presupposes a normative centre of value that stands over our

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.121.

¹¹⁸ *PPMM*, pp.228-231.

motives and actions. This transcendent centre of value, this spiritual world is itself active. That means, however, that it is not a process, a mere continuation of what already exists, but that it refers to a creative act which brings forth new things. History, which, as we shall see, Forsyth regarded as the arena in which this spiritual world intersects with time, is not an impersonal process either. The activity of this spiritual world we come to recognize as the activity of an infinite, self-conscious, unitary personality. Only what is holy could have such infinite moral self-completeness. The transcendent norm for human action, therefore, is defined in terms of holiness, that is, of God. If this spiritual power is universal, as God is, then it will assert itself in history because no sphere of reality is outside its influence. But this power cannot be simply diffused throughout history in a general sense or it would not be "the action of a moral person." That action is concentrated at a single point in history, namely, in the cross. It is an act which is God's gift and can only be received in trust. It works upon us as redemption, and through it human beings actually receive a personality they did not have before. They acquire a new centre and a new foundation. This is the result of the grace of God who is

not simply a benevolent God, because He lets us exhaust, and even wreck, our private powers, instead of only guiding their education, so that with His free and creative act He may make of us what all our native force

could never do.¹¹⁹

It is clear what Forsyth was attempting to do through his account of the Atonement. He was trying to find some basis for centring an understanding of the work of Christ in God rather than in the religious consciousness of the human subject. In his day he was swimming against the tide by affirming both the objectivity of the Atonement and the centrality of personal experience in appropriating its benefits. The question which Forsyth's attempt raises is one that is crucial for modern theology. He has stated that the Atonement brings about an objective change in God's relation to humankind, but has he demonstrated it? Is it possible to understand the Atonement in more than a merely symbolic sense? Certainly it is possible to assert it as an article of faith, and Forsyth, like many Protestant theologians of his day regarded faith as an autonomous sphere of knowledge. But is it possible, then, to argue for the universal significance of that which is held as a matter of personal belief? This, it seems to me, is the problem that bedevils contemporary theology. On the one hand, Christianity claims to be grounded in events that have not only universal but eternal significance. But the sources of authority that legitimated that claim originally -- Bible, Church, metaphysics -- have been seriously challenged. The same challenge could be raised

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.231.

about Forsyth's argument that Christ "represents" the whole human race. How is this to be conceived of in ontological, rather than symbolic, terms? It is an issue of great importance because Forsyth places so much weight on the effects of the Atonement in bringing about moral transformation. Forsyth's theology is important precisely because he faces these difficult problems head-on.

With these questions in mind, we turn to a consideration of how Forsyth developed his doctrinal scheme from the basic concept of the Atonement.

4. *Christological doctrines derived from the centrality of the Atonement.*

We have seen that the Atonement occupies the central point in Forsyth's account of the Christian faith. Other doctrines emerge deductively from it. However, Forsyth argues, they emerge *theocentrically*, that is, they are not deduced from the *doctrine* of the Atonement per se, but from the atoning action of God. Theology is not formally a deductive science as it was for the Protestant scholastics.¹²⁰ Doctrines have value only as descriptions of divine reality which means reality as *known* and *experienced*. The experience of reconciliation leads, through the "logic of faith", to a vision of the "dogmatic" Christ in all its

¹²⁰ PA, p.93.

fullness. The Church's historic confession of Christ as the Son of God from before the foundation of the world, as fully God and fully human, as risen and glorified all proceed from the foundational experience of reconciliation through atonement. Chapters 10, 11 and 12 of *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* deal with the "Pre-Existence", the "Kenosis, or Self-Emptying" and the "Plerosis, or Self-Fulfilment" of Christ. These are the doctrines of the divinity of Christ, the Incarnation, and the Trinity, respectively. However, they are "moralized". They are related to the moral reality of the Cross and Christian experience.

Forsyth takes up the issue of the pre-existence of Christ first as a problem of theological method. The question underlying his analysis seems to be, How is it possible to affirm the pre-existence of Christ when a) it does not correspond to anything in human experience¹²¹ and b) it is not prominent in the teachings of Jesus as reconstructed by historical criticism?¹²²

The virgin birth and pre-existence were the two doctrines employed by the early Church to explain the supernatural finality of Christ's work, according to Forsyth.¹²³ We have already seen that Forsyth placed the virgin birth at the bottom of the scale of doctrinal

¹²¹ *PPJC*, p.278.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.265.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.261.

importance. This, he says, is in line with Paul who emphasized Christ's pre-existence as central, but ignored the virgin birth. Historical criticism, however, has had the effect of calling into doubt the pre-existence of Christ as well because the implicit criterion employed by the critics to determine an idea's significance is its importance in the explicit words of Jesus. Because Christ himself did not refer to his own pre-existence, the critical reasoning goes, pre-existence must be at best a derivative and non-essential concept. This, Forsyth argues, is a latter-day form of dogmatism which judges the Bible according to external standards. It is, furthermore, an impoverished form of dogmatism because it misses the moral grandeur of the gospel.

According to the critics, the fact that references to Christ's pre-existence are rare throughout the New Testament means that it does not figure prominently in the Christian message. But there is an alternative to this form of "concordance criticism", Forsyth argues, which is to see that the very rarity of testimony witnesses to a concept's importance. It requires a heightened level of theological imagination to see that the central christological truths are "unutterable except in an act.... These thoughts were too great and too engrossing to be spoken of."¹²⁴

... the first bearing of Christ's great and crowning

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.266.

action was upon God and not man. He was adjusting the relation between God and man, and not impressing individuals, or doing a thing calculated to impress posterity with a religious message in a religious way. He was dealing with God for the race.¹²⁵

The specific question of Christ's pre-existence Forsyth relates to one of the texts which, as I have observed above¹²⁶, he uses most often, Matthew 11:27:

All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

It is this unique relation of God the Father to the Son that is the starting-point for reflection on Christ's pre-existence because this relation is not one that could have arisen at any moment in time. Jesus came to exercise "God's prerogative of forgiveness, judgment and redemption"¹²⁷ and, according to Forsyth, no human creature could do this. The universal nature of Christ's work in itself points to his divinity. Jesus' perfect submission to the Father's will was not the result of human decision alone but of the eternal, inter-trinitarian relationship of the Son to the Father. For this reason, Forsyth argued that "Christ's earthly humiliation had to have its foundation laid in Heaven, and to be viewed but as

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ See above, p.155.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.269.

the working out of a renunciation before the world was."¹²⁸

The doctrine of Christ's pre-existence begins in the recognition that the doctrine is necessary in order to give

full and infinite effect to the condescending love of God, and ... range to the soul's greatness by displaying the vast postulates of redemption.¹²⁹

What Forsyth means by this rather cryptic reference is that a truly effective moral redemption requires a belief in a Christ whose existence goes beyond the historical limits of time and space. This conviction does not arise from "the necessities of a system", however, but "from a direct, intimate, and intense relation between the soul and the Saviour."¹³⁰ In other words, contrary to the prevailing verdict of theological liberalism, the doctrine of Christ's pre-existence is derived from experience. The work of Christ which is experienced in regeneration could not be confined to Jesus' earthly ministry of which we could have only analogous and not direct experience. The overcoming of guilt and the recreation of the race demand more than a prophet.

A man might reconcile us to God but he could not unite us for ever with God in the way that an eternal holiness requires.... The greatest thought and passion of the

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.270.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.277.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Church, its experience, and not its philosophy or its theology alone has been driven to postulate behind all the acts of Christ's will on earth, behind all his pity and power, an act of *his* (not merely of his God and ours) eternal in the heavens, an act which held all these earthly acts within it.... We are thus driven, by the real existence of an Eternal Father and our experience of his grace, to demand the existence of an equally real and eternal Son....¹³¹

We see clearly here how Forsyth believes that experience can be the starting-point for arriving at a true knowledge of the nature of God, but not become the criterion for determining the content of that knowledge. A knowledge of God only comes through the divine initiative -- through grace and faith, not through natural reason or intuition. The same "logic of faith" which led Paul to infer back from his experience of the risen Christ the divine existence of the Son prior to his incarnation in history is operative in the experience of the regenerate today.

The second major doctrinal theme Forsyth derives from his view of the Atonement is that of Christ's "self-emptying" or "kenosis". Forsyth developed this theme in Chapter 11 of *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* but he had dealt with it extensively fourteen years earlier in a sermon entitled "The Divine Self-Emptying".¹³² Forsyth was part of a widespread movement that attempted to construct an

¹³¹ Ibid., pp.282-283.

¹³² *Christian World Pulpit* 47 (1895): 276-280. Reprinted in *God the Holy Father*, pp.31-44.

interpretation of Christ's earthly life on the so-called "kenotic" passage in Philippians 2:5-8 which refers to Christ emptying himself and taking the nature of a servant.¹³³ Forsyth regarded the kenosis as something demanded by what has already been affirmed concerning Christ's atoning work and pre-existence. If Christ is God, then how do we account for his taking human form? It can only be by means of his voluntary renunciation of his divine status.

Kenotic christologies struggled with the logical difficulty of conceiving how God could lay aside his divine attributes (omniscience, omnipotence, etc.) and still remain God.¹³⁴ The solution proposed by Gottfried Thomasius in the nineteenth century was to distinguish between relative attributes such as omnipotence or omniscience that would have no meaning in the context of the created order, and immanent attributes which are ethical and spiritual qualities such as love or holiness, without which God could not be God.¹³⁵ When Christ emptied himself and took human form he laid aside the relative attributes but retained the immanent attributes of Godhead. This was the most common solution to the conceptual difficulties posed by kenotic christology.

Forsyth, apparently, did not regard this solution as

¹³³ John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM, 1990); Smith, "Dogma and History", especially pp.195ff.

¹³⁴ Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, p.249.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*; *PPJC* p.306.

satisfactory. He referred to it descriptively without judging its adequacy and then went on to describe a "happier course".¹³⁶ The problems with the theology of the Incarnation arise, he argued, when it is thought of as the union of two natures which are defined as distinct entities.¹³⁷ Rather than two natures, Forsyth proposed thinking of the Incarnation as the union of "two modes of being like quantitative and qualitative, or physical and moral."¹³⁸ From this perspective, rather than "speaking of certain attributes as renounced, may we not speak of a new mode of their being?"

Take the attribute of omniscience, for instance. In its eternal form, it is an intuitive and simultaneous knowledge of all things; but when the Eternal enters time it becomes a discursive and successive knowledge, with the power to know all things only potential, and enlarging to become actual only under the moral conditions that govern human growth and the extension of human knowledge.¹³⁹

In the Incarnation there occurred a "retraction of the mode of being of the divine attributes from actual to potential."¹⁴⁰ We can see here how Forsyth portrays the Incarnation as a

¹³⁶ *PPJC*, p.307.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.307-308.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.308.

stage in a divine process. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to refer to "the divine action within history" than divine "process" because Forsyth tended to avoid the language of process as implying something non-moral while history has an inherently moral connotation, constituting as it does with the realm of freedom and action. The movement of the second person of the Trinity from the eternal glory of the Godhead to his incarnate form in Jesus Christ and returning again to glorified fellowship with the Father are stages in God's redemptive activity in history.¹⁴¹

"The attributes of God ... are not destroyed when they are reduced to potentiality", Forsyth argued, "they are only concentrated."¹⁴² What he meant by this is made clear in an excerpt from "The Divine Self-Emptying" (1895). This concept of the "concentration" of God's attributes relates to Forsyth's principle that God is primarily a free moral agent.

¹⁴¹ Forsyth does not deal with the thorniest problem raised by kenotic christology, namely, "the question ... which inquires what was happening to the cosmic functions of the Logos during the Incarnation.... [Forsyth] seems to allow for the possibility that the Divine attributes exist in two modes -- the infinite and the finite -- concurrently." (H. Lovell Cocks, "P.T. Forsyth's *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*", *Expository Times* 64 (1953): 197.) Forsyth was aware of the difficulties in this position but regarded it as less problematic than either postulating the simultaneous existence of two separate consciousnesses in Christ, or of rejecting his divinity altogether.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Incarnation is not impossible to the Infinite; it is necessary. If He could not become incarnate His infinitude would be partial and limited.... It would be limited to all that is outside human nature. It would be limited by human nature in the sense of not being able to enter it, of being stopped at its gates.... The power to limit Himself into man is an essential part of His infinite power. Without it He could not create. And creation is the beginning of Incarnation. It is God's self-concentration. Limitation or concentration is one of the surest signs of power. Vague power, aimless and wild, is not divine.¹⁴³

If one attempts to account for the Incarnation philosophically or speculatively, one encounters the apparent contradiction of the infinite becoming finite. But when Incarnation is defined in moral terms, Forsyth argues, it becomes clear that the self-emptying of God is an expression of divine love and divine power. God limits himself in order to achieve his ends, in order to bring his will into effect. This was the principle operative in creation when God brought forth a world that was distinct from him and it was operative in the recreation of the human race when God united his divine nature with the nature of lost humanity in order to effect its redemption. This is not a denial of God's power but its most glorious manifestation. "The freedom that limits itself to create freedom is true omnipotence, as the love that can humble is truly almighty."¹⁴⁴ In this conclusion, Forsyth resembles very closely Thomasius, the originator of the

¹⁴³ "The Divine Self-Emptying", p.277.

¹⁴⁴ *PPJC* p.313; also *PPMM* P.152; *JG* P.152.

kenotic theory.¹⁴⁵

Forsyth offered this as a moral rather than a metaphysical solution to the most intractable of christological problems, namely, how God could become human. It is a solution that proceeds from effect to cause.¹⁴⁶ The effect is the experience of moral regeneration. Reasoning back from that experience one can arrive at the concept of the divine kenosis as the most satisfactory explanation of what took place in the Incarnation, according to Forsyth. In the kenosis God acted to bring about the reconciliation of divine

¹⁴⁵ "[I]t is the infinite love for the creature which determines him to this his most profound self-divestment; and the essence of love is precisely that it is able to give up everything except itself, that it is able to take upon itself every limitation, even the uttermost, even to make the greatest sacrifice, in order to satisfy its holy urgency to restore its created image which has fallen into corruption What on the one hand seems to be alienation [*Veraußerlichung*] or finitization of deity, is thus on the other hand the deepest internalization of deity itself, the concentration of its energies on one point which in its significance ... far outweighs the most inconclusive manifestation of omnipotence." Thomasius, *Christ's Person and Work* in Claude Welch, ed., *God and Incarnation in Mid-Nineteenth Century German Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) p.61.

¹⁴⁶ We have noted the similarity between Forsyth and Erich Schaeder. This argument of Forsyth appears to contradict Schaeder's criticism of Schleiermacher which was that Schleiermacher absorbed God and experience into a "natural" causal nexus. Schaeder's criticism, however, centres on the fact that Schleiermacher was content to define God as the source of religious experience in a general sense as that feeling which is proper to human nature as such. This is rather different than asking, on the basis of what is experienced, what kind of God could be active in producing that experience. The former view subordinates the being of God to a general theory of religion, while the latter takes its point of departure in an historical event that expresses God's freedom to act.

holiness and sinful humanity. Once again, we see Forsyth asserting what he believes is required dogmatically by the central reality of redemption.¹⁴⁷ This assertion defies scientific explanation. We cannot account for *how* it could happen, only *that* it has happened. Kenosis "takes us into a region where human thought seems to fail, human analogies break down, and human speech sounds meaningless."¹⁴⁸ However, we are brought nearer to the divine reality of redemption. Without this understanding of Christ's self-sacrifice as the voluntary self-emptying of God himself, Christianity is left with the pagan idea of a God who only receives sacrifices but never makes a sacrifice. The moral power of Christianity flows from its belief in a God who renounces himself in order to bring about the most gracious of ends.¹⁴⁹

The final stage in the history of redemption was the "plerosis" or "self-fulfilment" of the divine. As we have seen, Forsyth saw Christ's relation to the world as dependent on his eternal relation to the Father.¹⁵⁰ The relation between the Father and the Son is expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity. However, Forsyth writes, "any belief in either a Trinity or an Incarnation can only flow from a final

¹⁴⁷ "Divine Self-Emptying" p.320.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p.276.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p.280.

¹⁵⁰ *PPJC*, p.324.

experience of grace by the sinful soul."¹⁵¹ Against the theological current of his day, Forsyth argued that trinitarian christology is not affirmed in spite of Christian experience but as a result of that experience. Only the doctrines relating to Christ's divine nature can make sense of evangelical experience.

Forsyth dealt with the Trinity at a time in the history of Protestant theology when the doctrine had fallen into disfavour if not disuse. Claude Welch, in his study of trinitarian theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, argues that the Trinity became a "doctrine of the second rank."¹⁵² Schleiermacher had concluded that the union of divinity and humanity was essentially the same in both Christ and the Church, in other words, that there was nothing about the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ that was not available, at least potentially, to every believer.¹⁵³ Theology in the tradition of Schleiermacher and Ritschl made redemption the central dogma, but argued that nothing could be said directly concerning the *being* of God on the basis of the consciousness of redemption.¹⁵⁴ Welch places Forsyth among a group of theologians who offered a third conservative alternative to Hegelianism (which held that the Trinity is a

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.325.

¹⁵² *The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*, pp.4ff.

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp.5-7.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.9.

symbol of the highest truth of the world-process in which the antithesis of the human and the divine is overcome) and Ritschlianism (which held that the idea of the Trinity is a speculative distortion of revelation). This group included Seeberg and Kähler.¹⁵⁵

The twelfth chapter of *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* in which Forsyth deals with the Trinity is one of his most difficult and dialectical essays. It does not concern the Trinity per se but is a continuation of his discussion of the Incarnation from the perspective of Christ's resurrection and glorification. The problem of the Trinity is approached through the question of christology. This strategy is typical of the early twentieth century when the Trinity was regarded as an issue of decidedly secondary importance but the nature of Jesus Christ was seen as a critically important and hotly debated question.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, it is not always easy to tell whether Forsyth is responding to problems of christology or of the Trinity. Typically, the issues raised by the latter tend to blend into the former. Forsyth seeks to answer the question how Christ is related to "the eternal and invisible God."¹⁵⁷ This necessarily leads, however, into a discussion of the three-fold nature of God since, from Forsyth's perspective, Christ is God incarnate. The idea of kenosis "only carries us

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p.39.

¹⁵⁶ See Welch, *The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*.

¹⁵⁷ *PPJC*, p.327.

half-way", he says.¹⁵⁸ The negative renunciation of glory that is found in the man Jesus does not account for his return to glory, according to Forsyth. This is no speculative riddle but a concern of immense practical importance, Forsyth argues, because it is only as divinely powerful that Christ is able to extend his spiritual influence across the ages.

The deity of Christ, Forsyth maintains, is the key to christology. Deity, in turn, refers to Christ's existence with God "before the worlds".¹⁵⁹ It is this that is the basis of redemption and grace. Forsyth focuses on the Trinity from an "economic" perspective, that is from the point of view of the "three-fold manifestation of God in history, on the Trinity relative to man"¹⁶⁰ rather than on the "immanent" Trinity, that is, from the point of view of God's nature apart from the world. However, this does not mean that Forsyth believed that God's nature apart from the world is unimportant or unknowable. He departs from Ritschl here. The starting-point for the knowledge of the triune God is the *experience* of grace. The "Incarnate is immediately known to us only as Saviour", he argues.¹⁶¹ Forsyth, like a great many modern theologians, takes an instrumental view of the Trinity as a doctrinal formulation. The doctrine of the Trinity serves to

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.329.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.323.

¹⁶⁰ Welch, p.293.

¹⁶¹ *PPJC*, p.333.

illuminate the doctrine of reconciliation by making it clear that the Redeemer is God himself.¹⁶² But what is crucial is that Forsyth believed that evangelical experience -- the experience of divine grace -- leads to a true understanding of the reality of God since God is the source of experience. What we know of God from experience leads to an understanding of God as triune because the God who initiates the experience is the triune God.¹⁶³ Forsyth tends to refer to the Trinity in terms of action rather than being. The Trinity refers to "the eternal threefold action both within God and upon man."¹⁶⁴ The experience of God's action becomes the basis for thinking about the nature of God. The immanent Trinity -- the eternal relations between the persons of the Godhead -- can be inferred from the economic Trinity -- the action of the triune God upon humankind and the world.

Forsyth's comments on the Incarnation and the Trinity seem to be in reaction to the liberal line exemplified

¹⁶² Ibid., p.332.

¹⁶³ Richard Swinburne has argued that the three-fold nature of God can be demonstrated philosophically. Christian theism, he says, holds that "love is a supreme good." Furthermore, "love involves sharing, giving to the other what of one's own is good for him and receiving from the other what of his is good for one; and love involves co-operating with another to benefit third parties." It is this view of God as love which both shares and cooperates in sharing that is the foundation of the trinitarian understanding of God, according to Swinburne. (*The Christian God*, [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993], pp.277-278.)

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

by Harnack which represents the mindset of the patristic age as "a Greek product in Christian dress."¹⁶⁵ Harnack regarded the dubious achievements of this period as the triumph of "traditionalism" and "intellectualism", practically without redeeming features.¹⁶⁶ Greek Catholicism, according to Harnack, is an especially debased form of Christianity, a fossilized relic incapable of development. On the whole, Forsyth takes a more positive approach to the patristic age. He is concerned to reclaim the importance of early christology as a legitimate attempt to grasp the objective reality of God and the work of Christ. While the issues that preoccupy Christians in the twentieth century are radically different from those of the third, Forsyth contended that people in both centuries were confronted with the same reality -- that God had taken the initiative to reconcile the world to himself. In the context of modernity, trinitarian christology struggles mainly against a latter-day form of Socinianism -- the devaluation of Christ's divinity. We saw above that Forsyth rejected the traditional "two-natures" christology as inadequate¹⁶⁷ because it was never able to describe properly Christ's saving work. Either the two natures are merely juxtaposed, he says; or their union is taken simply as a postulate of faith that must be accepted dogmatically; or one

¹⁶⁵ *What is Christianity?*, p.236.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.244.

¹⁶⁷ See above, p.200.

nature is subordinated to the other.¹⁶⁸ The shortcomings of the traditional account have become more acute, Forsyth argued, now that personality has replaced substance as the primary theological category. An adequate modern christology has to account for the "communion of hearts and wills" that took place in Jesus.

It is "better", Forsyth wrote, "to describe the union of God and man in Christ as the mutual involution of two personal movements raised to the whole scale of the human soul and the divine" than to speak of two natures combined in one individual centre of consciousness.¹⁶⁹ This dynamic account as opposed to the allegedly static account of orthodox christology is essential if traditional doctrines are going to be reconciled to modern consciousness, according to Forsyth. The Incarnation, he states, is the ultimate expression of God's permanent relation to the world which comprises a two-fold "vertical" movement of "man seeking God" and "God reaching out to man."¹⁷⁰ God and humanity meet in the Incarnation

not as two entities or natures, but as two movements in mutual interplay, mutual struggle and reciprocal communion. On the one hand we have an initiative, creative, productive action, clear and sure on the part of eternal and absolute God, on the other we have the

¹⁶⁸ *PPJC*, p.330.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.333.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.334..

seeking, receptive, appropriate action of groping, erring, growing man. God finds a man who did not find Him, man finds a God who did find Him.... We have on the one hand the perfect God who cannot grow, and yet as the *living* God, he has in his changeless nature an eternal movement which He implanted as growth in the creature He made in his image. And on the other we have this waxing man, who only grow into the personality that communes with God.... We have these two movements permeating the whole life of historic humanity, and founding its spiritual psychology.¹⁷¹

Even in comparison to his other writings on the subject, this is an obscure passage. What is striking about it is the blatant way in which Christ's human nature is portrayed as "groping, erring and growing". Whereas Forsyth, in other places, is at pains to stress the dissimilarity between Christ and humanity in general, here he seems to be making the actual state of human nature one of the foundations of his view of the Incarnation. Although the rhetoric of this passage is somewhat murky, it is clear that christology, for Forsyth, is fundamentally a *moral* question. The union of the human and the divine in Christ consists of a harmony of wills. This union brings about the possibility of its being reproduced in the lives and experience of believers. What makes the account *theocentric* and distinguishes it from the liberal view, is that God stands behind this moral union (both in the Incarnation and in the life of the believer) as its ground and source. Forsyth argues that the personal interrelatedness which is at the eternal centre of God is the source of the

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p.336.

human desire for union with God because that desire is implanted through the creative Word, the second person of the Trinity. Forsyth did not work out a full Logos christology in which God's union with creation stands at the centre, perhaps because he was concerned about the vulnerability of such an account to anthropocentrizing distortion. However, he was deeply aware of the creative action of the second person of the Trinity in the world, and believed that the human soul's desire for God originates in the creation of humankind in the image of the triune God.

Forsyth takes the patristic concept of the *perichoresis* which the Fathers used to describe the mutual indwelling of the persons of the Trinity, and applies it to the mutual movement of the human and divine in the economy of salvation. God and humanity seek one another in a way which leads to communion. This two-way movement provides a rough analogy for understanding the Incarnation of the second person of the Trinity.¹⁷² Within God there is the movement of the Son in his relatedness and obedience to the Father and "in Christ's life and work we have that divine mobility in which the living God eternally was ... coming historically and psychologically, and ethically to be."¹⁷³ Christ's incarnate life on earth Forsyth defines as "a process of moral redintegration." Christ became a human soul and entered the

¹⁷² Ibid., p.338.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p.338.

world which he himself had made. His "divine mobility [was] translated into human growth" during his life on earth.¹⁷⁴ His earthly life, however, was a movement of return to its perfect state of union with the Father within the Trinity.

The Incarnation, therefore, refers to the union of the trinitarian God who is able to communicate himself without going out of himself and the human striving towards a spiritual destiny.¹⁷⁵ Christ, therefore, can be described as uniting "perfect revelation and perfect religion", the movement of God towards humankind and humankind towards God, the outgoing love of God and the obedient human response.¹⁷⁶ The Incarnation, Forsyth argues, is analogous in this way to creation. Like the world it is both the finished work of God and the progressive work of humankind.¹⁷⁷ Christ was the final revelation of God through the Incarnation of the eternal Word; but at the same time Jesus of Nazareth grew and developed in his spiritual return to communion with God. His revelation is final in the sense of being the completed self-communication of God; but Christ's body, the church, appropriates it progressively.

This extended discussion of Forsyth's trinitarian christology is important not only to make clear the content of

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p.339..

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p.34.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p.348.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

his own theology but also because it shows how he anticipates developments which took place later in the twentieth century. The similarity between the theology of Forsyth and that of Emil Brunner has been noted.¹⁷⁸ Specifically, Forsyth resembles Brunner on two points. Brunner described the Trinity as a "defensive doctrine" (*Schutzlehre*). By this he meant that while the Trinity is not actually part of the New Testament *kerygma*, the early church found it necessary to develop such a doctrine in order to protect that *kerygma* from heresy.¹⁷⁹ Essentially this is Forsyth's position as well. The Trinity is not present in the New Testament as a fully worked-out doctrine, but the elements of the doctrine are because the God to whom the New Testament bears witness is revealed as three-fold in nature and action. Forsyth regarded the dogmatic formulations of the church as efforts to safeguard the New Testament faith in Jesus expressed in the idiom of different periods of the church's history. Secondly, Brunner held that it was necessary to maintain "the order of successiveness of Father, Son and Spirit" in the "movement of divine self-

¹⁷⁸ Gardiner, "The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ"; S.J. Mikolaski, "P.T. Forsyth" in P.L. Hughes, ed., *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1966), pp.333-337.

¹⁷⁹ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God (Dogmatics volume 1)*, Olive Wyon, trans., (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), p.206: "The ecclesiastical doctrine of the Trinity, established by the dogma of the ancient Church, is not a Biblical *kerygma* of the Church, but it is a theological doctrine which defends the central faith of the Bible and the Church." On Brunner's view of the Trinity, see Claude Welch, *The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*, pp.65-76.

communication". Through "the Spirit we have the Son and through the Son we have the Father."¹⁸⁰ Again, Forsyth argued that it was only through the witness of the Spirit in Scripture and evangelical experience that we have authentic knowledge of the Son and only by the revelation of the Son that we know the Father. This is viewed from the human perspective, however. The divine reality which is recognized when God is known theocentrically is that the Father sends the Son and through the Son we have the Spirit.

Forsyth resembles even more strongly, however, a diverse group of theologians in the mid-twentieth century who, Claude Welch argues, have in common a desire to reaffirm the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity as the basis of an authentic christology. Included among these were Karl Barth, Leonard Hodgson, Charles Lowry, J.S. Whale, W.N. Pittenger and D.M. Baillie.¹⁸¹ Welch's description of the interests of this theological movement could well refer to Forsyth.

It is the genius of this renewed interest in the doctrine that it perceives trinitarian theology to be precisely derived from the experience of the Christian community -- or better, from the revelation of God in those events to which the faith and experience of the community are a response.... Revelation is not identified with the biblical texts but with that to which these texts point. This, broadly speaking, is a theory of revelation *in act*, rather than in proposition. The doctrine of the Trinity is not developed simply by piecing together trinitarian proof-texts, understood as divinely given truths, but is

¹⁸⁰ Brunner, pp.225, 229ff.; Welch, p.70.

¹⁸¹ Welch, p.126.

constructed as a consequence of the gospel taken as a whole.... The doctrine of the Trinity is thus not to be understood as *per se* a "revealed doctrine", but as a doctrine by which we seek to explicate the meaning of the revelation in Christ as it bears on the nature of God.¹⁸²

Unlike Ritschl and many of his other followers, Forsyth did not believe that christology and the doctrine of redemption made it impossible to speak of the nature of God. What was experienced by the faithful was truly the reality of God and while experience might be a starting-point, it can lead reliably to a knowledge of the God who was the origin of that experience. That is because "evangelical" experience itself is the work of the God who, by his nature, is personally interrelated within his own divine being.¹⁸³ It is this divine interrelatedness that stands behind genuine, "evangelical" experience and gives it its validity. While experience becomes the point of entry to the transcendent realm, that experience itself is not transcendent. It is by means of personal experience that christology becomes "real", that is, morally real in the sense of bringing about an experienceable effect on the will and the conscience.

In evaluating Forsyth's christology we may point to three principle strengths. First, he relates his christology to experience, an indispensable criterion for a modern

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ "Now the nature of ... God is Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit." *Marriage, Its Ethic and Religion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), p.70.

account. The concept of personality becomes the basis for developing his doctrines of the Incarnation and Atonement. Secondly, his christology is trinitarian. It is grounded in the nature of God, and is therefore a truly *theological* account. Forsyth offers a moderate version of the "social Trinitarianism" as advocated in the twentieth century by numerous theologians; that is, his reflections on the Trinity are grounded in the moral relation of the Son to the Father. However, he places a special emphasis on the work of Christ as the satisfaction of divine holiness, and on moral regeneration as the effect of Christ's work on the believer. These two characteristics contribute to a third, namely, that Forsyth's christology is an attempt to reestablish historic continuity with the main lines of Christian, and particularly Protestant, theology.

However, his account has its difficulties. In general, Forsyth is more effective at stating the problem than at giving a truly satisfying answer to perplexing theological questions. The main weakness in his christology centres on his account of the Incarnation. Forsyth shares with many other proponents of kenotic christology an inability to deal with the status of the divine attributes during the Incarnation. His description of what happens to the omniscience of God, described above,¹⁸⁴ effectively alters the meaning of the term. It is an open question whether attributes such as

¹⁸⁴ See above, p.197.

omniscience and omnipotence can really be made "relative", to use the terminology of the kenoticists, and distinguished from so-called "immanent" attributes, without fundamentally changing the Christian conception of God.¹⁸⁵

Forsyth's account of the Incarnation as the embodiment of two "personal movements", of God to humankind and humankind to God is especially problematic. Forsyth comes perilously close to making the Incarnation a mere symbol or representation of a general principle -- a symbolic expression of the human search for the divine and the divine search for the human. Ambiguity arises on this score, particularly in Chapter 12 of *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, when Forsyth describes the Incarnation in terms of two moral movements -- from God to humankind and from humankind to God. This scheme seems to imply that Jesus was the embodiment or the paradigm of a religious principle or a natural divine-human relation.¹⁸⁶ It sounds like the idealism which Forsyth accused of reducing the reality of revelation to an abstraction.¹⁸⁷ It seems curiously at odds with other descriptions of the Incarnation as the radical, free incursion of God into the world.

Finally, Forsyth's christology, at least in the last

¹⁸⁵ Swinburne, for one, argues that these attributes are necessary if God is to be God (*The Christian God*, pp.129-134.)

¹⁸⁶ See above, p.208.

¹⁸⁷ PA, p.179; "Christ and the Christian Principle", p.146.

chapters of the *Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, is formally incomplete because he does not have a carefully worked-out doctrine of the Holy Spirit. His views on the Holy Spirit may be gleaned from elsewhere in his writings, and he certainly regards the Spirit as the third Person of the Trinity. As we shall see, Forsyth drew on the Reformation typology of the historic Word in conjunction with the living Spirit to account for the reality of Christian experience. The Spirit was the Spirit of Christ the Lord and the continuation of Christ's presence in the world. However, Forsyth does not give a full response to one of the main questions in modern attempts to deal with the Trinity: Why, either on historical or theological grounds, should the Holy Spirit be given the status of a separate *hypostasis* within the Trinity?¹⁸⁸

Forsyth worked out his christology at a time when alternatives were being sought to a dogmatic orthodoxy that did not take account of modern consciousness, and a radical rejection of the traditional affirmations of Christian belief that resulted from thoroughgoing historical criticism. The weaknesses of Forsyth's christology point up the uncertainties of the time when a host of new insights were being incorporated into theology. Forsyth's concern was to deal with these new insights, but equally to maintain the theocentric

¹⁸⁸ See Sarah Coakley, "Why Three? Some Further Reflections on the Origins of the Doctrine of the Trinity" in Sarah Coakley and David A. Pailin, ed., *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 29-56.

orientation of Christianity. In spite of the weaknesses of his position, he did raise the vital question of the relation between theology and experience. It is to his account of the nature of experience that we turn.

CHAPTER 4: "A THEOCENTRIC ACCOUNT OF EXPERIENCE"

We have seen how Forsyth opposed the excessive claims of historical criticism which, he argued, evolved out the Enlightenment's view of the supremacy of reason. Forsyth also opposed another tendency that sprang from the eighteenth century, however, which he referred to as the romantic/affective tradition. We have had occasion as well, in our discussion of Forsyth's theological method and the application of that method to christology, to allude to the importance of experience in the determination of Christian doctrine.¹ It is not sufficient, he argued, to merely state the truth. The truth must become a spiritual power that effects inward change. An understanding of what Forsyth meant by experience is indispensable to his theocentric theology because he argued that God is not only the real source of historical revelation but of the experience of the effects of revelation as well.

In this chapter we will consider both Forsyth's understanding of experience and the related question of the theology of history. At first sight it may seem odd to reserve a discussion of the latter question until this point rather than including it in the discussion of method.

¹ See above, p.161-162.

However, Christian experience and Christian history belong together because, Forsyth argued, the history of Christianity is really the account of the development of Christian experience over generations or centuries. Forsyth believed that the experience of God in Jesus Christ is tied closely to the concept of personality. This experience is the result of the encounter of divine and human personality. This suggests, in turn, that experience is an inherently moral concept because God is essentially holiness and the experience of God produces a change in the conscience. These ideas are closely connected to history because, from Forsyth's point of view, history is the account of the career of human personality in its relation to the personality of God. I will demonstrate how Forsyth makes these arguments in his writings. I will also argue that he was profoundly shaped in this aspect of his thought by the tradition of English Puritanism with its strong emphasis on moral transformation as a work of divine grace.

We could, conceivably, have begun this study with Forsyth's account of religious experience because he believed that God's action in Jesus Christ is never known speculatively, or as a mere matter of empirical fact², but only through experience³. This would have been misleading, however, because the objective action of God always takes precedence over the experience of faith in Forsyth's theology.

² *CC*, p.79.

³ *GHF*, p.17.

It is true that our first acquaintance with God's revelation comes through experience, and that without experience we would know nothing of God. In an epistemological sense experience comes first. But, in a theological sense, experience is itself the product of the creative action of God.

There is a discernible change in Forsyth's thought between 1893 and 1907 that illustrates how he became increasingly concerned to deal with experience *theocentrically*. In "Revelation and the Person of Christ" (1893) Forsyth wrote:

God does not simply show Himself, He *gives* Himself; and a gift is not a gift (however genuine the giving) till it is received and realized as such.⁴

Revelation, Forsyth stated, "is only completed by its return on itself in man's experience and response."⁵ Forsyth would not have made this statement in 1907. While not going so far as to repudiate his earlier formulation of the relation between God's action and human experience, I believe he became more concerned to avoid the confusion that results when experience appears to have an equal status beside revelation. In *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* the definitely secondary place of experience is clearly stated. "God needs none of us as we all need Him", he wrote. "We are no partners

⁴ *RPC*, p.104.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.116.

with God, fellow-workers as we may be."⁶ "There is something fatal ... in a view which makes the finished work of God to depend for its fate upon human experience."⁷ Thus, although we would know nothing of God apart from experience, God does not depend on human experience to carry out his work.

Theology, according to Forsyth, must be theocentric in relation to experience. Theology gives an account of the effect of God's action on the Christian believer. Forsyth claimed to be formulating his theology as a corrective to the inadequacies of both the old orthodoxy and new forms of subjectivism that arose in reaction to the orthodoxies of the past. Christianity, he argued, needed to be protected from "three monopolies": the monopoly of feeling in which religion is reduced to mere aesthetic impression devoid of ethical content; the monopoly of the intellect in which theology is turned into philosophy and defined in terms of the universal categories of reason; and the monopoly of "debased intellect" in which, Forsyth wrote, religion is reduced to the kind of arid propositionalism which characterized Protestant orthodoxy.⁸ So we might summarize Forsyth's treatment of experience as a polemic against two distortions: against Christianity that is theocentric but not experiential (dogmatism); and against Christianity that is experiential but

⁶ *PPMM*, p.37.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.121.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.105-106.

not theocentric (subjectivism).

2. *Personality as the foundation of religious experience*

We have seen that Forsyth regarded the centrality of the category of personality as one of the principle features of the modern mind.⁹ It was proper to describe experience in terms of the interaction of personalities. This included, for Forsyth, the experience of God above all. The outlines of his understanding of personality were not original but were derived from a particular tradition of theological thought that saw personality as the solution to the inadequacies of scientific materialism or the tyranny of logic. Forsyth resembles Ritschl in the general shape of his thinking on this subject. Ritschl had argued that God was to be regarded as a living personality rather than a substance, an impersonal "first cause", or "limitless, indeterminate being".¹⁰ Forsyth found the concept of personality immensely useful for he argued that by it one is enabled to transcend rationalism. Rationalism's first loyalty is to the unity and consistency of reason; but a personality is more than an intellect and life is more than thought. Rationalism cannot deal with the antinomies and paradoxes that are part of the reality of existence. Personality is a far richer and more promising

⁹ *PPMM*, pp.178-180.

¹⁰ *JR*, p. 227.

category for arriving at an understanding of human existence before God, Forsyth argued.¹¹ Human existence possesses transcendent, spiritual meaning because it is lived in relation to God who himself is a person. The concept of the personality of God was a thoroughly modern development. C.C.J. Webb has traced its history in his 1918 Gifford Lectures. Prior to the nineteenth century, the application of the term "person" to God was confined to the internal relations of the persons of the Trinity. However, in the last half of the nineteenth century in particular, the terminology shifted to describe the relation between God and the believing subject. Religion came to be conceived as an encounter between two personalities, in effect, between two subjects.¹² As Webb pointed out, the doctrine of the personality of God requires that God be thought of as neither wholly transcendent nor wholly immanent.¹³ A God who is utterly transcendent would have no point of contact with the world and nothing could be known about such a God. On the other hand, a God completely immanent could not stand over against the world as an independent personality, but would be entirely absorbed into the world and effectively annihilated. The concept of

¹¹ *PPJC*, p.71. Forsyth argued that all forms of dogmatism are rationalistic because they force reality to conform to the canons of logical consistency.

¹² C.C.J. Webb, *God and Personality* (Gifford Lectures, 1918-1919) (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1919), chapter 3, "The History of the Idea of Personality as Applied to God".

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.73.

personality implies the existence of a unique combination of universal and particular aspects of reality.¹⁴

There are conceptual problems involved with the idea of the personality of God. Philosophically, God can be described as absolute being, unconditioned by the limitations of finite being. But the very idea of personality implies individuality and in the minds of many, at least, limitation. British Idealists like Bosanquet and Bradley¹⁵ argued that God as the object of religion could be a personality, but that this God could not be the absolute ground of being because the concept of personality and the concept of absoluteness are inherently contradictory. While neo-Hegelian Idealists found the notion of personality conceptually problematic, among theologians it was considered indispensable. Indeed, the attitude towards the concept of divine personality was one of the dividing points between idealistic philosophy and Protestant theology of the late nineteenth century. Those who described God in terms of personality were motivated by a desire to rethink God and theology in terms of an integrated

¹⁴ "Everything that is real ... is unique, this thing and no other. But just because it is unique it fills a place of its own in a system of Reality in which it has its being; it is describable by of relation to and distinction from other things, other elements in that Reality; so that a full description of it would state its relation to and distinction from every other such element or part of the whole.... The person, the rational individual, is not only recognized by others, but recognizes himself as unique and individual, just because he is aware of something beyond himself.... Ibid., p.96.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.52, 127-134.

being who could not be reduced to metaphysical ideals or logical propositions, or to a mere aggregate of divine attributes. Ritschl derived his understanding of the personality of God primarily from Hermann Lotze who argued that personality is the only adequate conception of God.¹⁶ God is "personal" in the sense of being an irreducible, self-conscious, willing being, and as such could not become the mere object of scientific analysis.¹⁷

It is this irreducible quality of personality that became central to the theology of Forsyth. "Life from its beginning is a vast vital contradiction", he wrote. Those aspects of life that can be analyzed either empirically or logically amount to only a fraction of reality. Science and logic cannot deal with the full moral and personal dimension of life. Only an understanding of personality as an integrated, irreducible unit of moral being can illuminate the depths of human existence.

We live, spiritually ... in a standing contradiction of liberty and dependence, freedom and grace, object and subject. Personality itself is -- I will not say an illogical -- but an alogical unity.... All scientific experience is paradoxically against the personality whose

¹⁶ David Livingstone Mueller, *Introduction to the Theology of Albrecht Ritschl* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p.26; Welch, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* 1: 6, 29.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.55-59.

unity and continuity alone make any experience possible.¹⁸

The affirmations of Christianity -- that God is a personal being, that God became incarnate in Jesus Christ, that God's power transcends the limitations of time and space while yet being known only within those limitations -- appear to defy rationality. Christianity, however, is not so much concerned with symmetry of logic as the encounter of persons. "The greatest things we believe we cannot comprehend", Forsyth wrote. Among these are the paradoxical union of freedom and responsibility which cannot be logically maintained but is observed practically in everyday experience.

Kant revealed a whole series of these rational antinomies. And it was thus that he broke the reign of dogma.... For the essence of authoritative dogma is to make faith depend on rational consistency for its being; and the essence of negative dogma is to think belief can be destroyed by being shown to be rationally inconsistent.... [R]econciliation lies, not as Hegel said, with a superrefined rationalism, in a higher truth which is also of the reason, but in a supreme and absolute personality, in whom the antinomies *work*.... It is the category of personality that adjusts the contradictions of reason...¹⁹

Forsyth employs this argument that logical contraries can be united practically in personality to counteract the critical deconstruction of the important doctrines of Christianity and

¹⁸ *PPMM*, p.202.

¹⁹ *PPJC*, p.71.

to establish an authoritative ground for Christian doctrine. The truth of doctrines is not confirmed rationally but experientially. We shall pick up this point later on.

3. *Experience as a relation between Subject and Object.*

Because Forsyth has been defined as a "dogmatic" theologian, his work could be described as an attempt to restore the objectivity of religious reality. As James Brown has pointed out, however, contemporary discussions of subjectivity and objectivity are very complex indeed. Neither subject nor object, neither subjectivity nor objectivity, has any content apart from the *relation* of one to the other. Taken by themselves they are mere abstractions.²⁰ Kant showed that *all* thinking is both subjective and objective, according to Brown. Modern theology therefore cannot be interpreted merely in terms of the rise of "subjectivity" or the quest for a renewed "objectivity", but must be seen as the search for the most adequate version of the relation between these two interdependent poles. Even Kierkegaard who discoursed on the need to "become subjective" and who announced that "truth is subjectivity"²¹ saw himself as correcting the balance between

²⁰ James Brown, *Subject and Object in Modern Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955), p.23.

²¹ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments* (1846), trans. David F. Swenson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941, 1968) pp.115ff.

subjectivity and objectivity rather than dispensing with objectivity -- a philosophical and practical impossibility.²² Kant had maintained that, even though noumenal reality is not directly accessible as an object of pure reason or theoretic knowledge, noumenal reality still exists. Kant's point, Brown argues, was that subject and object are so intertwined that they cannot be separated in the process of cognition; each requires the other.²³ And so we can interpret the theological debates of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries -- the period after Kant -- as revolving around the precise nature of the "objectivity" of transcendent reality -- in other words, of God -- and the relation of that reality to the phenomena in which it is made manifest to the believing subject.

Forsyth spoke of God, and more particularly of Jesus Christ, as "the object of our faith".²⁴ His concern, as we have seen was to ensure that there was some authoritative ground of experience, that experience itself did not become the authority on which the truth of Christianity rested. However, God is the object of faith only when the *relation* between God and the self is viewed from the perspective of the believing subject. God's objectivity, then, refers to his independence from human experience and his being the ground

²² Brown, chapter 2, "The Subject in Kierkegaard", chapter 3, "The Object in Kierkegaard".

²³ Ibid., p.22.

²⁴ PA, p.63.

and goal of that experience. But God is a personality and no personality can exist solely as an object to which we bring our own inquisitive and analytic methods.

God cannot be known, like an object of disinterested knowledge, by our discovery or arrival at Him. We might so know a mere historic fact -- even Christ. But that is not religion -- not even if we regard the fact with the most sympathetic interest. God can only be known as *the interested subject of knowledge*, i.e., as the Revealer, as the Giver of Himself to our most intimate case and need, for a purpose which engages us and our whole self absolutely. He is known as our Redeemer into His holy Kingdom, Whom we know as we are thus known into life and knowledge.²⁵

God is the object of our faith, but he can only be so when we realize that prior to being an object God is an active subject, a personal agent who takes the initiative to establish a moral relation between himself and his human creatures. Forsyth's thought on this is a striking anticipation of Barth's assertion that God is "indissolubly Subject."²⁶ The complexity of Forsyth's treatment of the

²⁵ Ibid., pp.163-4, italics added.

²⁶ "Communion with Him who reveals Himself there means for man, in every case and under all circumstances, that He confronts Him as a Thou confronts an I, and unites with him as a Thou unites with an I. Not otherwise! All communion with this God is barred, of the kind of communion we might have with creatures, such that the Thou can be changed by the I into an It or a He, over which or whom the I thereby acquires powers of disposal.... The Subject of revelation is the Subject that remains indissolubly Subject. We cannot get behind this Subject. It cannot become an object." Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God (Church Dogmatics 1.1)*, G.T. Thomson, trans., (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), p.438. See Brown, *Subject and Object*, pp.140-167.

by those who assert that Forsyth regards the activity of God as the objective pole and human response as the subjective pole of Christianity.²⁷ Christianity is founded on an experienced relation in which God is the subject of salvation and the object of faith, and humankind are the objects of salvation and the subjects of faith.

4. *How experience is mediated.*

The discussion of personality and of subjectivity and objectivity sets the context for a consideration of what is meant by religious experience. Forsyth regarded the "subjective" orientation of modern theology as originating with Schleiermacher, but having its roots in Pietism and before that in Anabaptism.²⁸ Forsyth, generally speaking, regarded this tradition as anthropocentric because it granted religious experience a normative significance which it did not truly possess. Forsyth turned to a different source for his own understanding of the nature of experience, to the English Puritans, particularly the seventeenth century Independents, and among those especially Thomas Goodwin. The purpose of the following discussion is to contrast two different understandings of what is meant by experience and to show that

²⁷ Gardner, "The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ in the Thought of P.T. Forsyth and Emil Brunner", p.237.

²⁸ *PPJC*, p.187.

understandings of what is meant by experience and to show that Forsyth belongs among the second group.

It is true that prior to World War I the whole discussion of experience in Protestant circles was carried out under the shadow of Schleiermacher. In 1799 Schleiermacher affirmed the *Selbständigkeit* of religion in his *Speeches on Religion to the Cultured among its Despisers*. Schleiermacher claimed to locate religion in a different psychological realm from that which governed either philosophy or morality -- namely in the realm of feeling.²⁹ Religion, he argued, is a direct intuition of the infinite and this moment of feeling is the irreducible core of religious experience.³⁰ Twenty-five years later, in his *Christliche Glaube*, Schleiermacher came to define religion as the "feeling of absolute dependence"³¹ and to describe Christianity as a specific manifestation of this feeling. Theology, in turn, Schleiermacher defined as the account of the consciousness of this feeling at any given point in history. Experience, then, according to Schleiermacher, is inextricably tied to historical context, for Christians at least. Ernst Troeltsch, who claimed to be the most faithful follower of Schleiermacher and who patterned

²⁹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.104ff.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *The Christian Faith*, §4, pp.12-18.

his *Glaubenslehre* explicitly after Schleiermacher's³², argued that contemporary dogmatics must have a three-fold structure. It is the exposition of the Christian consciousness which is constructed in various layers:

(a) the foundational certainties and impulses that flow from the *Bible*, in particular from the picture of Christ that it contains; (b) the great *historical developments* that followed, among which the Reformation occupies an essential place; and finally (c) the contemporary forms that *religious experience* takes under present-day conditions.³³

Troeltsch continues the tradition of Schleiermacher in arguing that religious experience is the contemporary form in which the phenomenon of Christian consciousness appears. It is the third layer in the development of that consciousness through history, the first two layers being the Bible and the historical development of Christian ideas.

The most searching examination in recent years of Schleiermacher's account and the religious tradition to which it gave birth is *Religious Experience* by Wayne Proudfoot.³⁴

³² Referring to himself, Troeltsch wrote that "no other contemporary theologian stays as close to Schleiermacher's method, nor feels himself in such inner agreement with him." *The Christian Faith* (based on Lectures delivered at the University of Heidelberg in 1912 and 1913) ed. Gertrud von le Fort, trans. Garrett E. Paul (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991) p.113.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.24.

³⁴ *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

Proudfoot directs his critique at Schleiermacher's basic contention that experience is a third, autonomous moment of "feeling" that stands independent of intellect and will and belongs to a fundamentally different order of experience from speculation or morality. Feeling, according to Schleiermacher, is immediate intuition and is independent of concepts and beliefs.³⁵ Schleiermacher was attempting deliberately to break with Kantian epistemology in which all knowledge is necessarily structured by concepts. Against this subordination of religion to the dictates of practical reason, Schleiermacher argued that "the religious is governed by its own rules."³⁶ His goal was to find some means of protecting religion from the kind of unsympathetic reductionism to which it had been subjected by the Enlightenment and, according to Proudfoot, his analysis led to a tradition in which experience, defined as an immediate, intuitive grasp of divine reality unmediated by concepts or laws, "has been regarded as the original and characteristic form of religion".³⁷

Proudfoot takes particular exception to Schleiermacher's claim that experience is neither expressed nor governed by concepts and language. The language of immediacy, he says, may be descriptively accurate when it is used to describe religious experience, but it does not provide

³⁵ p. xvii.

³⁶ Ibid., p.6.

³⁷ Ibid., p.2.

an adequate theoretical account.³⁸ Experience cannot be completely autonomous. It requires the conventional structure of language and occurs within a universe of shared ideas and concepts. Schleiermacher's piety presupposes a particular thought-world and constellation of concepts in order to come to expression. In Proudfoot's mind, this is axiomatic: "for something to be expressed it must have conceptual content."³⁹

For practical purposes, it may be sufficient to describe emotions and intuitions as unmediated or non-cognitive, but the fact is that they could have no meaningful existence outside the conventions of language and thought.

"The nineteenth-century interest in specifying the marks of religious experience", Proudfoot writes, "was aimed at providing a basis for the definition of religion."⁴⁰ It was thought that the distinctive character of religious experience could be isolated from the different religious traditions in which it is manifested. The purpose, as we have said, was to avoid the reduction of religion to non-religious categories and causes. The consequence, however, was that "efforts to establish a discipline for the comparative study of religion were often conflated with protective strategies that are more properly regarded as theological than

³⁸ Ibid., p.3.

³⁹ Ibid., p.36.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.156.

descriptive."⁴¹ The allegedly scientific and universal nature of the phenomenology of experience concealed the presuppositions of Christian piety, or more precisely, of European, Protestant piety. Proudfoot demonstrates the ambiguity that exists in the Schleiermacherian position between its supposed descriptive neutrality and the tradition-specific commitments that lie concealed just beneath the surface.

This ambiguity, Proudfoot argues, is found even in the work of William James. Two claims are at work in James's famous study *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. The first is that experience ought to be assessed without regard for how it is to be explained.⁴² James distinguishes between "existential judgments" that describe the nature of a phenomenon and "propositions of value" that assess the importance of the phenomenon.⁴³ The value of religious experience, James argues, is in its effect, not in its origin. James's pragmatist study of religion is concerned to describe its "fruits", not its "roots".⁴⁴ The second claim is that religion is characterized by a faith-state that more closely

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p.158.

⁴³ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion for 1901-1902) (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1978), p.25.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.39.

resembles feeling than thinking.⁴⁵ This element of religious faith-states is cross-cultural, according to James. It exhibits characteristics that are constant beneath variations of doctrine, belief and practice.

Proudfoot takes James to task for enlisting the support of Jonathan Edwards for his empiricist method.⁴⁶ James quotes Edwards to bolster his claim that experience deals with the fruits of religion and not its roots; that "the roots of a man's virtue are inaccessible to us" and that "our practice is the only sure evidence, even to ourselves, that we are Christians."⁴⁷ Edwards' *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* "makes exactly the opposite point", according to Proudfoot. For Edwards, what is most important about religious experience is its supernatural, divine, spiritual cause and origin.⁴⁸

This discussion is important for our understanding of Forsyth because, as we will argue, the Puritanism for which Edwards was a classic spokesman influenced Forsyth's outlook significantly. Proudfoot is most certainly correct in his assessment of Edwards and this will have implications for Forsyth's understanding of experience. In the case of Edwards and the Puritan tradition he represents, no accurate

⁴⁵ Proudfoot, p.159.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.166.

⁴⁷ James, p.39.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.168.

description of the phenomenon of religious experience is possible that does not give primacy to the origin of that experience. A cursory examination of the twelve signs that Edwards claims distinguish genuine religious affections from spurious enthusiasms is sufficient to demonstrate this. Edwards' psychology of religious experience remains quite subtle and incisive even after 250 years; but only if it is seen as an account of *Christian* experience, that is, of experience that is shaped by the total context of Puritan Christianity. As an account of some sort of general universal religious feeling it makes no sense whatever. Edwards does not support the contention running from Schleiermacher through James to the present day that there is some irreducible autonomous core of religious feeling that can be abstracted from the particular concepts, beliefs and practices in which it appears.

Edwards' first, fourth and fifth signs in particular show this. The first sign is that only religious affections that are of divine, supernatural and spiritual origin are to be regarded as genuine.⁴⁹ Those affections, in other words, are works of the Holy Spirit. Such experience, then, is not independent of, but firmly grounded in, a particular doctrinal framework. The Spirit, according to Edwards, works to bring about a new foundation for the exercise of the faculties of

⁴⁹ Jonathan Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections", *Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) 6:208. John E. Smith, "Introduction", p.24.

understanding and will as well the as emotions. The Holy Spirit effects a transformation or recreation of the total self and it is this work that becomes the basis of genuine religious experience.⁵⁰ According to Edwards, the affections do not even constitute an autonomous faculty or function of the psyche. They are "no other, than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination of the will of the soul."⁵¹ In fact, according to Edwards there are two faculties of the soul, not three. The first is "that which is capable of perception and speculation ... which is called the understanding." The other is the faculty which exercises either inclination or disinclination, attraction or repulsion. It is sometimes called "the inclination", as it affects a person's actions it is called "the will" and as it affects the intellect it is called "the heart".⁵² According to Edwards' description of the first sign, the affections are a mode of expression of moral awareness and not an independent component of a person's psychological make-up.

Edwards' fourth sign is the arousal of "spiritual understanding".⁵³ With his description of this sign Edwards means to counteract the enthusiasm of popular revivals and awakenings which he regarded as all heat and no light, and as

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp.200-203.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.96.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Edwards, pp.266ff.; Smith, p.31.

a form of piety "devoid of both understanding and instruction."⁵⁴ Furthermore, this sign demonstrates that "when understanding is absent, affections are vain."⁵⁵

Holy affections are not heat without light; but evermore arise from some information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge. The child of God is graciously affected, because he sees and understands something more of divine things than he did before... he has some clearer and better view than he had before⁵⁶

By the cultivation of spiritual understanding the Christian is able to transcend the false dichotomy between head and heart.⁵⁷ Feeling cannot be divorced from intellect or it becomes contentless and purposeless. What distinguished the Puritans from the more radical enthusiasts was their intellectual sobriety, their purity of doctrine as well as conduct and their conviction of the necessity of integrating head, heart and will under the sovereignty of God. As James I. Packer, a present-day Puritan writes:

Faith, said the Puritans, begins in the mind, with belief of the truth of the gospel message. It results from spiritual illumination. In illumination the Spirit both enlightens the mind, making it capable of receiving spiritual things, and impresses on the mind the objective

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.31.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.32.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.266.

⁵⁷ Smith, p.31.

reality of those things of which the word of God bears witness.⁵⁸

Here the substantial shift in the understanding of the psychology of religious experience that took place between the seventeenth century and the period of Schleiermacher becomes apparent. Affections, for the Puritans, did not represent an autonomous faculty but the mode of operation of both mind and will.

Edwards' fifth sign is that genuine religious affections are accompanied by "an immediate certainty of the truth of religion."⁵⁹ This sign deals, in other words, with conviction and inward certainty. This certainty is immediate; but it is important to realize that it is only relatively immediate. It is immediate in the sense of not requiring "any long chain of arguments" to demonstrate it.⁶⁰ The view of the time was that the grasping of spiritual reality is intuitive and analogous to the grasping of material objects by the senses.⁶¹ However, immediacy does not inhere in the nature of experience itself, but in direct contact with the object known, that is, God through the agency of the Holy

⁵⁸ J.I. Packer, *The Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990), p.180.

⁵⁹ Smith, p. 32.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.298.

⁶¹ Packer, p. 180.

Spirit. Direct knowledge of divine reality -- the very thing that Kant denied was possible -- forms the core of Puritan religious psychology. Such knowledge, while intuitive, is always mediated -- in a primary sense by "the moral excellence and beauty of the divine" communicated by the Holy Spirit;⁶² but in a secondary sense by doctrine, by the right understanding of God's ways, which is itself a gift of divine enlightenment. This doctrine in turn is always subject to testing by God's self-witness in inspired Scripture.⁶³

According to James, experience is the primary stuff of religion and the intellectual operations that are characteristic of religious states (myths, superstitions, dogmas, creeds) are derived from those primal experiences.⁶⁴ For Puritans like Jonathan Edwards, however, experience presupposes certain intellectual operations or at least a context of concepts and conventions. The very idea of an experience or faith-state divorced from the mind and the will would have been incomprehensible to Edwards. Roots, it seems, are just as important as fruits when it comes to religious experience.

While no one has explored the connection in detail, the Puritan consciousness, in my view, forms the basic conceptual framework out of which Forsyth operated. Forsyth

⁶² Edwards, pp.253-254.

⁶³ See Packer, pp.97-105, on Puritan exegesis.

⁶⁴ James, p.429.

saw himself as a representative of the Free Church tradition of Congregationalism that had its roots in the upheavals of the seventeenth century. He was concerned to preserve and adapt the central features of this Puritan consciousness to the requirements of the twentieth century; and the aspect of the Puritan tradition that was most essential in Forsyth's mind was its *theocentricity*.

In a recent study of P.T. Forsyth, David Widdicombe has suggested an affinity between Forsyth's views on experience and the pragmatism of William James.⁶⁵ Widdicombe argues that Forsyth viewed experience in "anti-rationalist" terms in the sense that experience counteracts rationalism's theoretical detachment of the knowing subject from the known object.⁶⁶ Furthermore, Forsyth's approach to experience was anti-empiricist because he took a more dynamic view of the interaction between the experiencing subject and the experienced object than the passive receptivity that characterizes classical empiricism.⁶⁷ Forsyth, in short, demonstrated a concern for the priority of experience over understanding and in this way resembled James.

Widdicombe relies for this judgment primarily on

⁶⁵ "Theology and Experience in the Thought of P.T. Forsyth", unpublished paper, Oxford University, 1995, p.38. As I write, this fine study is being revised for submission as a Ph.D. thesis. It was given to me privately.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.32.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp.37-38.

Forsyth's *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (1907) and the seventh chapter of *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (1909) which is entitled "The Testimony of Experience in the Soul and in the Church". Widdicombe's analysis is perceptive and for the most part accurate as it applies to these two works. It has been the argument of chapters 2 and 3 of this study that Forsyth resisted the excessive claims of critical rationality to exert control over divine revelation and religious experience. But while it is difficult to trace clear developmental shifts in Forsyth's thought, I would argue that a change took place somewhere around 1910 in which Forsyth moved increasingly far away from asserting the priority and primacy of experience as he reflected more deeply both on the dangers of anthropocentrism and the requirements of theocentrism. This change seems to be the result of a variety of factors. The first was Forsyth's observation of what he regarded as the effects of an anthropocentric view of God on British society. The year 1910 was a watershed of tremendous social upheaval in which British society was fundamentally changed. This mood of change was epitomized by the reduction of the traditional powers of the House of Lords, by widespread labour unrest and by the extreme militancy of the suffragist movement.⁶⁸ Forsyth attributed these social disturbances to an underlying spiritual malaise. For example, the working class, Forsyth argued, had been taught the

⁶⁸ See Langford, *Foundations*, pp.49-52.

anthropocentric lesson very well -- that God is there to be their servant.⁶⁹ The second factor was Forsyth's reading of certain more conservative German theologians such as Erich Schaeder and Ludwig Ihmels who were concerned to establish the objective ground of religious experience. The third factor, which can only be inferred indirectly, was Forsyth's increasing rediscovery of the writings of seventeenth century Puritans, chiefly Thomas Goodwin, but also John Owen, Richard Baxter and John Robinson.⁷⁰ In 1910 Forsyth wrote *The Work of Christ* and in 1912 there appeared two works that are clearly marked by what I would call a Puritan orientation -- *Faith, Freedom and the Future* and *The Principle of Authority*. Later in this chapter, we will look at *Faith, Freedom and the Future*. At this point we will examine *The Principle of Authority*, Forsyth's most extended treatment of the nature and the ground of experience.

In *The Principle of Authority*, Forsyth eschews the Jamesian approach explicitly. Remember, James's central pragmatist criterion was "fruit not root", the description of the phenomena of religious feeling without accounting for their origins. James was content to observe how a phenomenon "works" rather than describing how it arose. With respect to the experience of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Forsyth argues the need to go beyond pragmatism.

⁶⁹ *FFF*, pp.284-285.

⁷⁰ *FFF*, pp.97, 116, 122, 326, 346-347.

Before [the experience of God in Christ] "works", we know and are sure of its power to work.... We do not wait to believe in Christ till we see if he "works"; else how could men believe at the very first, before they could say if he was to work or not ...?⁷¹

In the end, Forsyth argued, a project like that of James is incapable of leading to a full understanding of Christian experience, first because Christian experience cannot be analyzed in terms of general religious feeling apart from its particular form, and secondly because Christian experience can only be grasped fully "from within". James's account omits the key element of the interpreter's own experience:

James and Starbuck examine with great effect such varieties of religious experience as are accessible by biographies, circulars and schedules. But they make no use of what is so indispensable to the true psychologist of Christian religion -- their own personal share in that experience. They are happy in their analysis, but the chief datum of the serious inquirer in this region is, first, his own experience.... He must know that supreme synthesis by which a man ceases to analyze his religion, lays hold on his God, and realises how God lays hold on him.⁷²

This assessment of the work of James and Starbuck seems to imply that Forsyth did give priority to experience. It is true, even in *The Principle of Authority*, that Forsyth regarded experience as the starting-point for theology in

⁷¹ PA, p.27.

⁷² Ibid., p.301.

opposition to any claim to disinterested knowledge. "We have too long been brought up in the belief that our certainty of faith concerns a *deposit of truths*, committed to us, and detachable from our personality and its history."⁷³ "It is not truth as cold fact that concerns us, but truth as living experience..."⁷⁴ Modern religion, that is, religion equal to the challenge of answering the concerns of the modern age, must be two things, according to Forsyth: it must be ethical (dealing with the conscience) and it must be psychological (dealing with experience.)⁷⁵ Forsyth simply took for granted the importance of experience as part of the general outlook of the modern mind.

However, experience has only a relative priority. Experience must be allowed its say over abstract ideas, but the decisive thing is not the experience itself, it is the object of that experience. William James's interest was in experience itself as an object of inquiry. *Christian* experience, however, cannot be understood except in an *evangelical* sense, in terms of the moral crisis of judgment and grace. Christian experience is concerned to establish certainty of the truth of the gospel and the authenticity of what is experienced. This leads in turn to the question of the authority which gives experience its ground and warrant.

⁷³ Ibid., p.30.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.36.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.63.

One of the major preoccupations of theology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the question of authority.⁷⁶ Old sources of authority -- the Bible, the Church, precritical metaphysics -- had collapsed (or at least the traditional way in which they had been used collapsed) and the ever-present question was what would replace them. The alternative to capitulating to a complete moral and religious relativism was to reconstruct a new authoritative foundation upon which theological affirmations could be made with assurance. Appeals to experience, Forsyth and others argued, are insufficient unless the authoritative ground of the experience is clearly understood. "Real authority is a thing that must be experienced", Forsyth wrote, "*but it is not the experience, which is but a mode of ourselves.*"⁷⁷ Following L. Ihmels, Forsyth deals with Christian experience in terms of its claim to be the truth.⁷⁸ Experience leads to certainty, but it is never to be forgotten that it must be certainty about something.⁷⁹ Experience may be the "seat" of authority, the "place" within the soul where one becomes conscious of the authority undergirding experience; but

⁷⁶ Langford, pp.88-142; Robert Clyde Johnston, *Authority in Protestant Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959). On Forsyth, see especially pp.100-107.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.49. My italics.

⁷⁸ D. Ludwig Ihmels, *Die Christliche Wahrheitsgewissheit: Ihr Letzter Grund and ihre Entstehung* 3rd ed. (1st ed. 1911) (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1914)

⁷⁹ *PA*, p.50

experience is not the source of authority. That must lie outside if it is to lay claim to the status of authority.⁸⁰ Contemporary Christianity, Forsyth argued, must come to terms with the psychology of experience; but it must do so recognizing that it is Christ who acts to bring about the experience.⁸¹ The nature of Christian experience is not determined by the psychological state of the subject, but by its object. What separates Forsyth's view from rationalistic or idealistic accounts is that experience is not the mere object of knowledge, but is knowledge of an Object (God) as the absolute Subject by whom we are known.⁸² It is experience itself of this God who knows us before we know him that becomes the ground of Christian authority. In this sense experience has replaced the external authorities of Church and Bible.⁸³

Forsyth asserts against James that it is not the experience or the faith-state per se that is decisive, but the *content* of that experience⁸⁴; which is to say that Forsyth remains closely bound to that tradition of evangelical Christianity which could not conceive of experience apart from the question of the *truth* of what is experienced. From the

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.49.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.63.

⁸² Ibid., pp.148, 35.

⁸³ Ibid., p.53.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.27.

perspective of this tradition, it would be pointless to try to evaluate the nature of Christian experience apart from its content. This content had to be theocentrically determined. It originated in the sovereign freedom of God's redemptive activity prior to its experience by human subjects.

5. *Conscience as the seat of experience*

Forsyth locates the seat of genuine Christian experience in the conscience. The reason Forsyth places it here is because he believes that the conscience is the point of contact between the personality of God and the human personality. "The essence of humanity is conscience", he wrote.⁸⁵ Furthermore, authentic experience of God is moral experience. It is grounded in the holiness of God and it is to the conscience that God's holiness appeals. Conscience is where the human subject becomes aware of the authoritative demand of God, and of his judgment on sin. Divine authority does not reside within the conscience naturally but "descends" on it through revelation. Authority

must come to us and not rise out of us. It must come down

⁸⁵ *PPJC*, p.351.

on man and not proceed from him.... The content of our conscience descends on us, it is no projection of ours.... Treat the autonomy of conscience as you will, but do not remove the accent from the *nomos* to the *autos*. If it be a *nomos* it is a product of more than ourselves, more than man -- it is of God. Otherwise it would be but a self-imposed condition from which at any time we might be self-released.... And then it would not be conscience but earnest whim.⁸⁶

We see here why Forsyth insists that experience cannot be a criterion of truth unless it is interpreted theocentrically. Experience can only be relied on to confirm the truth if that experience itself is the product of the authoritative working of God within the conscience, if the conscience is made aware of the law of God at work within it. The conscience internalizes authority, it becomes the sense of holiness and judgment active within the human psyche. However, the more truly authority is internalized, Forsyth argues, the more "external" it becomes.⁸⁷ By this he means that the more real divine authority appears to the conscience, the more we realize that authority originates from beyond ourselves; otherwise it would not be a true objective authority laying claim to our acknowledgement, but only the projection of our own longings:

The more we retire to our inner castle the more we feel the pressure of the not-ourselves, and the presence of our Overlord. The more spiritual we are the more we are

⁸⁶ *PPMM*, p.31.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

under law to another.... The more inward we go the more external the authority becomes, just because it becomes more of an authority, and more unmistakably, irresistibly so.⁸⁸

This is so because of two presuppositions that stand behind Forsyth's account of experience. First, an authority that is experienced inwardly is known more deeply, more fully, more personally than an authority that stands outside of experience. Secondly, Forsyth presupposes conscience as the point of contact with God. Through conscience human beings become aware that they are part of a moral, not just a natural or ideal, world.⁸⁹

There is a vital distinction to be made between the "natural conscience" and the "redeemed" or "evangelical" conscience. Private judgment and common sense operate in the conscience in its natural state. However, "the supernatural eternal Gospel" cannot appeal to "the healthy and untutored natural conscience" because the conscience in that state is unaware of the realities of sin and grace. The natural conscience regards itself as self-sufficient, possessing the power of judgment between right and wrong, but oblivious to the morally debilitating effects of sin. Because of sin, the authority of the Gospel will not be received by the "natural man". "It must first capture him and make him a supernatural

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ CC, p.122.

man."⁹⁰ The natural conscience can be educated and refined. The evangelical conscience, however, is convicted of sin and desirous of a power which will carry on the radical work of restoring the true moral self, crippled by sin.⁹¹ "Our supreme need from God ... is not the education of our conscience ... but our redemption."⁹² Forsyth strikingly refers to the redeemed conscience as

the *actual* conscience of the race ... the conscience taken as we find it, ... the conscience sinful and redeemed, the conscience struck into self-despair, horrified with the world's moral tragedy, and plucked into salvation by God's and man's last moral crisis in the Cross, where the greatest tragedy turns into the greatest triumph.⁹³

The fundamental realization of which the conscience alone can become aware is the inability of human beings to save themselves. It is the grace of God himself that brings about this consciousness and creates out of its despair the new life of grace.

Forsyth's account of the redeemed conscience was greatly influenced by his understanding of the Puritans. The Puritans conceived of conscience "as a rational faculty, a power of moral self-knowledge and judgment, dealing with

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.34.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.35.

⁹² Ibid., p.38.

⁹³ Ibid., p.41.

questions of right and wrong, duty and desert, and dealing with them authoritatively, as God's voice."⁹⁴ Thomas Goodwin, Forsyth's favourite seventeenth century theologian, described conscience as "one part of practical reason". In turn, "the office assigned unto practical reason ... is to incite the heart to action, by motives drawn from what is a man's end." Within the practical reason, the conscience serves the specific purpose of being "the proper judge of all moral good."⁹⁵ Conscience in its natural state is powerless to arrive at a true knowledge of the human being's chief end, which is God. In a passage expressing a position remarkably close to Forsyth's, Goodwin says that natural conscience may lead to a knowledge *about* God, but can never lead to a knowledge of God "*as God*" -- of God as the one who justifies and regenerates. By means of natural conscience, Goodwin writes,

you may love and respect God, as you do your dead benefactors; but if it be not as *God*, that is, suitable to, worthy of, and as so great a God is to be loved withal ... it is not that which he regards.⁹⁶

Natural conscience, in other words, may be capable of giving abstract knowledge about God, knowledge that is remote and

⁹⁴ Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, p.109.

⁹⁵ Thomas Goodwin, *Works* (Edinburgh: n.p., 1861) 6:272.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.269.

disinterested; but not of God as he is truly experienced in salvation. Evangelical conscience leads to a right *knowledge* of God. It works to turn the mind to God, and the mind then exercises an effect on the other faculties.

In conversion, then, it is not the conscience in its natural state that is at work, but the conscience as it is recreated by the power of God. Prior to any power of moral judgment that may be exercised by the conscience stands the unmerited grace of God.

Where God means to save he shines in with a new light of faith, superior to that which conscience had before. God himself riseth anew upon the heart with the light of himself; and as the sun riseth with its own light, and is seen only by its own beams, so in God's light you see light.⁹⁷

Forsyth follows the main lines of this account. He argues that conscience is "judge, not legislator".⁹⁸ It is the conscience that receives and appropriates what is done for it; and, since the conscience is the guide of action, it is the locus of regeneration.

By describing Christian experience in terms of the relation of divine and human personalities and by arguing that through the conscience human beings have access to a supersensible, moral world, Forsyth claims that experience can

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.270.

⁹⁸ PA, p.240.

stand as the confirmation of religious reality. He acknowledges the danger of making a shift from external dogma to internal experience, namely, that theology will be put at the mercy of psychology.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, he argues that the Christian experience involves a practical transformation whose effects are so real that they witness to an objective reality standing above experience as its source and authority.¹⁰⁰ Forsyth seems to be aware of the possibility that such an approach could lead to the very kind of subjectivism he opposed so vigorously. It is extremely tricky to move from a certainty of experience to a certainty of the reality that gives rise to that experience. Forsyth acknowledges that such certainty is not "objectively" demonstrable but involves a "leap" of faith.¹⁰¹ He also argues that the historical nature of the events which gave rise to Christianity and the historical development of the Christian faith work together to ground Christian experience in reality.

6. *History as the unfolding of the experience of grace.*

In my view, Forsyth's reading of the history of Christianity ought not to be considered independently of his views on experience. The reason is that history is the arena

⁹⁹ *PA*, p.74.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.194.

¹⁰¹ *PPJC*, p.334.

in which God's action is experienced by human beings.

... the interpretation of history comes not from scientific or inductive knowledge of the past but from the ideal of life's perfection, i.e., the revelation which makes the effectuation of life's destined holiness.¹⁰²

A reading of history from a theocentric perspective is the reading of the experience of God at different points in the development of the human race. It would be helpful in this regard to consider a later theologian's understanding of the theological interpretation of history. In his essay on writing a history of theology, Karl Barth raises the philosophical question whether the history of theology differs essentially from, say, the history of commerce or the history of war.¹⁰³ The answer to that question is not conditioned by the subject matter itself, but by the subjective stance of the inquirer. With this judgment Barth indicates his view that history in the proper sense can never be entirely detached.

We know history only when and in that something happens in us and for us, perhaps even happens against us; we know it only when and in that an event concerns us, so concerns us that we are there, that we participate in it.... We know history only in that another's action somehow becomes a question to which our own action has to

¹⁰² *PPMM*, p.210.

¹⁰³ "The Task of a History of Modern Protestant Theology" in *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, pp.15-29.

give some sort of answer.¹⁰⁴

The only person excluded from participating in this historical work is "the idle onlooker who thinks that he can see and talk about something that does not concern him."¹⁰⁵

In another important respect, however, the history of theology is primarily conditioned by its subject matter because that subject matter is a reality, a centre of value behind and above theology itself, a reality of which theology is merely descriptive. From the perspective of Christian belief, "history is meant to bear witness to the truth of God, not to our achievements."¹⁰⁶ This means that

to describe and understand the history of Protestant theology from the time of Schleiermacher onwards is a *theological* task. Even as an object of historical consideration, theology demands theological perception, theological thought and theological involvement.¹⁰⁷

The history of theology becomes the history of the account of the foundational reality given by figures in the past. The historical task is conditioned by the theological and it is only with the demands of theology in mind that the history of theology can be pursued with integrity. Through encountering

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp.15-16.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.22.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.15.

the voices of the past, Barth argued, there occurs a moment of theological recognition, a moment of *crisis* in which one recognizes the possibility that one is right, but not the certainty. Barth criticized the fundamentally non-historical moment of "intoxication" when the consciousness of the possibility of being right turns into the belief that one actually is right; when the whole of the past becomes subordinated to the consciousness of the rightness of one's perspective and position; when the past is no longer allowed to have its say.¹⁰⁸ In this sense, the intoxication of the modern era with its methods of analysis and investigation becomes a violation of the integrity of the past because it sees the past as merely the road to the present and the present as the overcoming of the inadequacies of the past. It is not the joy of occupying the pinnacle of human development that should captivate the one who seeks to grapple with the history of theology, but the work of God in history. The insights of those who have gone before are gifts that should be accepted in humility.

Forsyth would have agreed with Barth that the goal of writing a history of theology is to illuminate the meaning of human life under God. Forsyth himself approached the study of history in this way. Dealing with the past demands the acknowledgement of the subjective stance of the inquirer. History, in other words, *looks* different from within the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.19.

evangelical experience.¹⁰⁹ Christian history -- that is the account of the development of Christianity over the centuries -- is conditioned by its subject matter; and, interpreted theocentrically, that subject matter is the encounter of God and man. The study of this history is not only inductive, therefore.¹¹⁰ It is not merely a matter of interpreting empirical facts according to the canons of historical method, but of attempting to discern the influence of revelation on succeeding generations of believers.

The study of history, therefore, is not a speculative discipline, according to Forsyth, but the study of the real moral encounter of God with humankind. History is the experience of that encounter spread out over time. Forsyth referred to the study of history as "thinking in centuries."¹¹¹ The point of analogy between the present and the past is the nature of God's dealings with the human race. As we saw above in the discussion of the Incarnation, Forsyth saw history as the field of two movements, from God to man and from man to God.¹¹² Furthermore, the centre-point of history is the Cross because at the Cross the meaning of history was

¹⁰⁹ Fascinatingly, Forsyth quotes none other than Ernst Troeltsch in making the point that the subjective stance of the inquirer cannot be avoided in dealing with history. See *PPJC*, p.347.

¹¹⁰ *PPMM*, p.210.

¹¹¹ *WC*, p.174.

¹¹² *PPJC* pp.335-336.

disclosed in a final way.¹¹³ At the Cross the issue between the holy God and sinful humanity was settled. Previous history was the preparation for the central event of Christ's death and history since that point is the working-out of its implications. A theocentric account of human history seeks to give an account of the "spiritual career of the soul of the race."¹¹⁴ History, furthermore, is the "conductor of the Eternal".¹¹⁵ History is the vehicle through which God brings his redemptive power to bear on humankind.

Liberals like Harnack argued that the history of dogma should be studied in order to show how Christianity has either been related to or has departed from its "essence".¹¹⁶ Forsyth regarded this as an anthropocentric understanding because it focuses attention on Christianity as a product of culture rather than as the result of the "conquest of time by

¹¹³ Cf. Forsyth's expression and that of Paul Tillich who referred to Christ as "the center of history in which beginning and end, meaning and purpose of history are constituted." (*The Interpretation of History*, Elsa L. Talmey, trans., [New York, London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936], p.251.) Again, however, Forsyth is distinguished by the emphasis he places on the satisfaction of God's holiness and the moral transformation of the sinful conscience.

¹¹⁴ *GHF*, p.7.

¹¹⁵ "Christ and the Christian Principle" in *London Theological Studies* (London: University of London Press, 1911) p.141.

¹¹⁶ See Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians of the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp.130-131.

eternity", the inbreaking of divine power into the world.¹¹⁷ The history of doctrine, according to Forsyth, is not the account of the development of religious or cultural values in reference to some original "essence", but "the exegesis by time of the text of the Spirit."¹¹⁸ It is the activity of the Spirit of God and not the concept of an essence of Christianity that controls the study of Christian history from a theocentric perspective.

Forsyth's most sustained treatment of an historical problem is *Faith, Freedom and the Future*, an analysis of the development and influence of British Nonconformity. His purpose in undertaking this study was to use the past to illuminate the religious situation of the present.¹¹⁹ The Gospel, Forsyth argues, occurs in history in two distinct forms or modes of being: Word and Spirit.¹²⁰ This distinction is made by Calvin.¹²¹ By "the Word", Forsyth

¹¹⁷ *JG*, pp.217-232.

¹¹⁸ *WC*, p.200.

¹¹⁹ *FFF*, pp.22-23.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.1-43

¹²¹ *Institutes* 1.7.4 (1: 78-79); 1.9.3 (1:95): "For by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God's face, shines, and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize him in his own image, namely, the Word... [God] sent down the same Spirit by whose power he had dispensed the words to complete his work by the efficacious confirmation of his Word."

means the historic fact, the objective, outward life and work of Jesus as it is transmitted through the Bible and the historic faith of the Church. By "the Spirit" he means the free, changing, personally-experienced power of God, transforming the will and conscience.¹²² The history of Christianity is the history of the dialectic between the permanent, fixed Word and the free Spirit. This history is marked by the ever-present danger that they will become detached from one another. The Word detached from the Spirit leads to dogmatism, rigidity, lifelessness, the domination of fixed forms of doctrine, and the repudiation of experience. The Spirit detached from the Word leads to subjectivism, groundlessness, intellectual and spiritual anarchy, and the repudiation of history.¹²³ The history of Nonconformity is illuminating because English Dissent arose out of a religious conflict between the Reformers and the Anabaptists which is still raging today: "a final Word" versus "a free Spirit".¹²⁴ Great movements within Christianity have been the result of the interaction of these two modes in the history of the church. For example, Forsyth argues that the Judaism of the first century was completely dominated by the Word, but it was the great achievement of Paul to enliven that Word by establishing the importance of the Spirit. On the

¹²² Ibid., p.9.

¹²³ Ibid., p.91.

¹²⁴ Ibid., Preface, p. xi.

other hand, the historical contact of Christianity with Greek religion led to the serious challenge of Gnosticism which devalues the historical foundations of Christianity in Jesus.¹²⁵ Gnosticism, and later, Montanism were non-historical, non-moral movements which resulted from an emphasis on the freedom of the Spirit uncontrolled by the historic Word.¹²⁶ They provoked an orthodox reaction which led to the fixing of doctrine, canon and polity. It was F. C. Baur's thesis that the Gentile Christianity of Paul represented an affirmation of the power of the Spirit over against the legalism of Peter's Jewish Christianity. However, Forsyth argues, Paul was equally opposed to the extreme freedom of the spiritual libertines in his Corinthian church.¹²⁷ It is that uncontrolled subjectivity that has continued to assert itself in mysticism, Anabaptism, Pietism and speculative Idealism throughout the history of the church.¹²⁸ Each of these movements was the result of the illegitimate domination of the Spirit over the Word.

There is a tendency in the modern mind, according to Forsyth, to confuse "spirituality" with the work of the Holy Spirit. This is because Christian thought has become so anthropocentrized. In truth, however, the Christian faith is

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.10.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.17.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.22.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.171.

founded on two objective facts: the life of Jesus and the action of the Holy Spirit.¹²⁹ These are united inseparably in the New Testament. The life of Jesus is interpreted and enlivened by the action of the Spirit, but the latter is never to be confused with the subjectivity of the believer. The Spirit's work was paradigmatically present in the resurrection of Jesus, prior to any work of sanctification in the faithful.¹³⁰ It was Luther's great contribution that he reaffirmed the organic union of Word and Spirit. According to Luther, the Holy Spirit is immediately real to the soul, but only as it is mediated by the Word. Regeneration consists of one action in both Spirit and Word.¹³¹

The history of Christianity, according to Forsyth, is not a necessary dialectical process governed by the rules of historical development, but a series of moral crises provoked by the ever-present confrontation of the Gospel with the human soul. The essence of Christianity is not the Word without the Spirit or the Spirit without the Word, but Word and Spirit in continual and creative tension. That is because God revealed himself in history, and the facts of that revelation are normative for Christianity; but God is a present power who works to bring about the regeneration of

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.9.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.10.

¹³¹ Ibid., pp.29-30. On this point Forsyth was very close to Erich Schaeder. See above, p.95.

living human beings. It would be of tremendous value, Forsyth believed, if someone would undertake to write a history of the Church from this perspective of the interaction of the Word and the Spirit because "nothing would make it so clear how little novelty there is in much modernism" and how contemporary problems of theology are rooted in the perennial tension between the authoritative Word and the free Spirit.¹³²

Forsyth, like Harnack, regards the Reformation as a reassertion of the true essence of Christianity.¹³³ Specifically, he defines it in terms of the recovery of the Spirit against the aridity of medieval Scholasticism.¹³⁴ However, there is another side to it as well. The Reformation also represented the recovery of the historic basis of Christianity against the non-historical, non-moral tradition of medieval mysticism. This antithesis became especially relevant in the conflict of the Reformers with the radical Anabaptist and Spiritualist sects. These sects were not really a part of the Reformation, Forsyth argues, but a continuation of two aspects of the medieval period, one social and the other religious: the revolt of the medieval peasantry

¹³² Ibid., p.21.

¹³³ See Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, pp.287ff. Harnack described the Reformation as "a *critical reduction* to principles", a return to the essentials that define what Christianity is (p.289, Harnack's emphasis).

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.116.

against feudal authority on the one hand, and of the search for unmediated, mystical experience of the divine on the other.¹³⁵

It is important to see the role which all of these developments played in the work of the Gospel in history. Forsyth concludes that the Anabaptists and the Spiritualists made a necessary contribution to Protestantism, preserving the religion of the heart in the face of a re-emerging scholasticism. On the other hand, he argues that if the followers of Luther had not crushed the radical sects, the Reformation as a whole may have failed, overwhelmed in a sea of social and religious anarchy. In Germany the suppression of the radical Reformation was followed by a period of extremely rigid orthodoxy. It was Calvin who brought the Spirit back into its proper relation, under the control of the Word.¹³⁶ It is not sufficient, therefore, to measure a particular historical manifestation against a supposed "essence", as if that essence existed as a nut inside a shell. Christianity exists in history because God is continually confronting human beings with the demands of obedience, and this demand involves both a grounding in historical revelation and an openness to spiritual transformation. Christianity is such a richly diverse and dynamic phenomenon because it embodies the interaction, fusion and, at times, collision of the two

¹³⁵ Ibid., p.45.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.46.

principles of the Word and the Spirit.¹³⁷

The real heart of Forsyth's thesis in *Faith, Freedom and the Future* is that a synthesis of three influences occurred during the seventeenth century which produced the unique form of Dissent known as Independency: Dutch Anabaptism transplanted into England during the Netherlands' war with Spain; the Calvinist theology of English Puritanism; and the emerging English tradition of civic freedom.¹³⁸ The Independency of Cromwell and the Commonwealth was a successful balance of the Word with the Spirit.¹³⁹ Forsyth is viewing history from a theocentric perspective. This development which can be analyzed merely in terms of causality, can also be interpreted as the operation of God's grace in history. Without dialectical advances leading to phenomena like Independency, the contributions of both poles would be lost by being overstated and provoking fatal reactions.¹⁴⁰ The radical Reformation was stamped out in Europe, but in a confluence of the right historical conditions, re-emerged in

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.21.

¹³⁸ Forsyth draws on Douglas Campbell's massive study *The Puritan in Holland, England and America: An Introduction to American History* 2 vol. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1892). Campbell stresses the impact of Netherlands refugees on the development of English Puritanism. Forsyth adopts this view (*Faith, Freedom and the Future*, p.136), but attenuates Campbell's unabashed admiration for the Dutch and thinly concealed disdain for the English.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p.114.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.107.

a new, creative form in England. The Independency that resulted was "the Reformation coming to its true self."¹⁴¹ However, the development of Independency had far-reaching consequences for western civilization because it was one of the major contributing factors in bringing about democracy. Cromwell's Commonwealth may have been short-lived, but Forsyth believed that it had bequeathed a heritage of social, political and religious principles that have deeply shaped western consciousness and society.¹⁴² It was Cromwell who demonstrated the proper connection between Christian religion and Christian citizenship. It was not through the direct interference of religion in public affairs as the Stuarts and Laud had attempted, but through moral regeneration that a true public ethic was developed.¹⁴³ The redeemed State, Cromwell understood, requires regenerated Christians.¹⁴⁴

Forsyth's concern in *Faith, Freedom and the Future* was to trace the development of the two principles of Word and Spirit in Christian history. The interdependency of Word and Spirit becomes a critical principle for distinguishing periods of growth and decline in the history of Christianity. This critical function has contemporary relevance. Forsyth

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.47.

¹⁴² Ibid., pp.152, 160.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p.126.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.153. See also Geoffrey Nuttall, *Visible Saints: The Congregational Way, 1640-1660* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), pp.152-167.

maintained that the religious developments taking place within the Protestantism of his day were nothing new but were a reemergence of an imbalance between Spirit and Word that had occurred at least twice before. Gnosticism, Anabaptism and modern Idealism all represent attempts to assert the primacy of the Spirit over the Word and ultimately are devaluations of the historical nature of Christian faith.¹⁴⁵ Their effect is "to naturalise faith", to see it as the expression of natural spiritual impulses, "and so to idealise Christianity as to dehistoricise it."¹⁴⁶ When the Spirit is detached from the Word, both lose their critical stance over against the world, and the work of the Spirit easily becomes mistaken for the evolution of the human spirit. It is possible to understand how these movements arose in reaction to the Word-dominated orthodoxies of Jewish Christianity, medieval scholasticism and eighteenth-century Protestantism. However, the critical function of the Gospel, which is both Word and Spirit, is to constantly bring Christianity back to a proper equilibrium. When this is acknowledged it becomes possible to assess what the position of positive Christianity should be in the contemporary ethos. Forsyth's position was that modern Protestantism suffered from an ahistorical consciousness which sought immanence at the expense of transcendence and focused on natural religious impulses versus supernatural grace; but

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.95.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

which also stressed the immediacy of spiritual experience at the expense of the authority of historic revelation.¹⁴⁷ This was a great irony in a time that seemed so infatuated with history. Forsyth commented caustically on chairs of theology in great universities "brilliantly absorbed in history" but unfamiliar with the theology that "unravels God's revelation of His ultimate nature, purpose and thought."¹⁴⁸ It is not a preoccupation with history or with subjective experience that counts. Both are anthropocentric conceits. What English Independency succeeded in discovering and passing on to western Christianity was the concept of the Gospel as "founded freedom"¹⁴⁹ -- the possibility of human liberation, but liberation arising from submission to the holy will of God.

7. *The consequences of an anthropocentric interpretation of history*

Authentic Christian experience is the experience of the transcendent holiness of God who encounters humankind in judgment on sin and in reconciling grace. Christian history is the account of divine judgment and grace over centuries. Late in his life, Forsyth faced his most severe theological challenge -- to maintain a theocentric theology in the face of

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.87-88, 91.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p.270.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p.290.

the outbreak of World War I. In fact, Forsyth viewed the War as a vindication of his position. The grim conflict between Germany and Britain was the direct result, he argued, of an anthropocentrized understanding of God and the Gospel.

The War was regarded by many as a terrible catastrophe for western civilization. It appeared to signal the end of what Troeltsch identified as one of the main characteristics of the modern spirit, namely, "a self-confident optimism and belief in progress."¹⁵⁰ According to Troeltsch, the modern world view believed that

[t]he old cosmic conceptions dominated by the Fall, the redemption of the world, and the final Judgment have fallen away. To-day everything is filled with the thought of development and progress upward from the depths of darkness to unknown heights. The despairing sense of sin, the sense of a great world-suffering imposed on us for our purification and punishment -- the two presuppositions of redemption... -- have been banished.¹⁵¹

The shattering of this world-view did not occur overnight. Since the 1890s international tensions had been rising. In England a series of social upheavals preceded the War and led to a sense that the foundations that had long been taken for granted were now being shaken. George Dangerfield has written

¹⁵⁰ Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress*, p.25.

¹⁵¹ *Protestantism and Progress*, p.25. See also *The Christian Faith*, p. 36: "The concept of a world perverted through original sin and then subsequently redeemed has lost all meaning. (My italics.)"

perceptively on the "strange death of Liberal England" which came about around 1910, when the ideals of Gladstonian liberalism finally perished.¹⁵² The work of P.T. Forsyth during these years was permeated by a sense of the fragility of western civilization and the inadequacy of the old pieties and the old answers.¹⁵³

The war caused Forsyth to reflect deeply on basic questions of history -- is it possible to discern meaning within history? is a teleology possible? is a theodicy possible? -- but one has the sense that these questions as he raised them in 1916 were simply a continuation of what he had been thinking and writing for two decades. Forsyth believed, in fact, that the War was simply the logical outcome of a culture that had become completely anthropocentrized. If God is too closely identified with civilization and its progress, then the collapse of civilization and the arrest of its progress can hardly be understood as anything but the failure of God.¹⁵⁴ Nothing in fact illustrated the far-reaching implications of anthropocentric religion more starkly than the war that was devouring Europe. Forsyth regarded this

¹⁵² Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*.

¹⁵³ "Village politics and village piety have been set aside for the moment by the question of Europe and of civilisation. And it was time. For thought was raising much larger questions than a kindly and pedestrian piety could cope with -- questions not only beyond the dear old piety of Hodge, but also beyond the new piety of culture, with its mild anti-theology, and its modest discipleship...." *JG*, p.4.

¹⁵⁴ *JG*, p.8.

melancholy judgment in *The Justification of God* as the confirmation of his warnings in the previous years.

There were two reasons for offering a religious explanation for the War, according to Forsyth. First, he was convinced that the unity of western civilization was to be found in its moral centre. The crisis civilization was currently undergoing resulted from the abandonment of that centre.¹⁵⁵ Anthropocentrism amounts to the elevating of the human and the exploitation of God for human ends¹⁵⁶ versus theocentrism which gives due regard to the "absolute supremacy of the holy".¹⁵⁷ Modern civilization was the search for faith in the order of the world rather than in the transcendent ground of that order.¹⁵⁸ For that reason, civilization had lost its permanent and enduring centre.

The second reason is that anthropocentric religion cannot -- or will not -- deal with the depth and reality of human sin.¹⁵⁹ Troeltsch argued that the dogma of universal sin was one aspect of pre-Enlightenment belief that was gone forever.¹⁶⁰ However, Forsyth maintained that sin is only intelligible when measured against the absolute criterion of

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p.17.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.114.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.108.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.68.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.88.

¹⁶⁰ *The Christian Faith*, pp.36, 78, 241-53.

the holiness of God. Religion and culture that remove God from the centre and replace him with human progress cannot withstand the catastrophe of human wickedness.¹⁶¹ "God's problem with the world is much more serious than we dreamed", he wrote.¹⁶² The goal of God's relation to the world is always redemption, and redemption involves the "collision" of the Holy with human wickedness. It is this history and not the evolution of natural civilization that was starkly exposed in the Europe of 1914.¹⁶³ For these two reasons, Forsyth made the rather unorthodox suggestion that the collapse of Europe into total destruction could be traced directly to the anthropocentric turn that Christianity had taken beginning in the Enlightenment.

Forsyth shared the view held by almost everybody in Great Britain that Germany was the culprit in the War. He attributed Germany's aggression to a century of cultural-religious development in which a philosophical, immanentist and pantheistic conception of the Absolute had replaced a theological, transcendental and personal conception of God. This change represented an abandonment of evangelical, moral becoming in favor of a philosophy of the absoluteness of being.¹⁶⁴ Germany had chosen a non-moral God of natural

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.22.

¹⁶² Ibid., p.23.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p.66.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p.68.

force and process and the result was a deification of the German State and a belief that the ambitions of that state were themselves an expression of divine progress in history.¹⁶⁵ However, it was insufficient to cast Germany in the role of the aggressor and to hold Britain blameless in the outbreak of War. What was happening in Germany was an extreme case of the malaise afflicting western civilization in general. "The German military system" Forsyth wrote, "is like the rest of civilisation for the moment -- an organisation of colossal forces handled by mediocre personalities."¹⁶⁶ The supreme irony for Forsyth was the spectacle of the two nations which had given birth to evangelical Christianity embroiled in a conflict of immense destruction and savagery.¹⁶⁷ The only escape from this catastrophe would come about if "the growing sense of personal power ... in the race includes the witness in conscience and history to a personal Lord and God."¹⁶⁸

Two terms are especially important in *The Justification of God* -- "centre" and "crisis". The holiness of God is the moral centre around which human life with all of its varied manifestations in culture revolve -- and by which

¹⁶⁵ Iggers has noted the effect of German historiography on the development of the idea of the State from von Humboldt and Ranke to Bismarck. See *The German Conception of History*, especially pp.1-89.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p.134.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p.99.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p.135.

they are ultimately judged. The crisis of civilization is brought about by the response of an "egoist" civilization to God's demand for obedience. The result of this moral "de-centring" is a misplaced confidence in the order of civilization itself. "In the seeming failure of a God of order we are cast upon a God of crisis", Forsyth wrote¹⁶⁹, anticipating with this dramatic statement the emergence of Barth's dialectic theology and Gogarten's theology of crisis. Any order or purposeful movement within history can only be seen by evaluating historical events against the transcendent criteria of God's judgment and grace, not by seeking out some principle immanent within the historical process itself.¹⁷⁰ The transcendent criteria of God's judgment and grace focus on the point at which time and eternity intersect -- the Cross of Christ.¹⁷¹ The Cross, Forsyth argues, is the centrepoint of history where sin collides decisively with divine holiness and where God emerges as finally victorious, changing the relation of the world towards both God and evil.¹⁷² The cross is where "the whole of warring history is condensed."¹⁷³ Forsyth approach to the study of history was conditioned by the view that history consists of manifestations of the permanent in

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., pp.39-40.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p.42.

¹⁷² Ibid., pp.151-152.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p.124.

transient forms. However, the element of permanence is the ever-present crisis confronting humankind.¹⁷⁴ The moral purpose of the universe is the growth of moral personality, and authentic personality grows only through the influence of sanctifying grace.¹⁷⁵ The study of history furthermore involves the interrogation of "classic souls" in whom this moral crisis is played out.¹⁷⁶ A theocentric account of history can only be pursued with an awareness of this crisis. History can never be reduced to a mere stream or process in which the moral crisis of the soul is obscured.

History interpreted in terms of crisis is history that reveals judgement. Forsyth in fact viewed history not as the realm of the triumph of the human spirit, but as the realm of God's judgment. By this he meant that it is within history that the human response to God's grace must take place. Through history God places before humankind a radical dilemma, an "either-or".¹⁷⁷ He described judgment as the negative side of righteousness, that is, the result of a human decision against the righteousness of God.¹⁷⁸ Judgment is the category by which the Bible views a sinful world, a world which has decided against God. Judgment has been pronounced

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p.45.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p.61.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p.63.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p.190.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p.186.

on the world, and its consequences are being worked out in historical events.

Christianity interprets history as "the conquest of time by eternity", according to Forsyth. This is the title of the concluding chapter of *The Justification of God*.¹⁷⁹ Forsyth deals with the relationship between empirical experience and faith on the scale of human history. "Life begins as a problem", he states.¹⁸⁰ Experience of the world demonstrates the gulf that exists between the ideal and the actual. The War, he writes, has thrown that problem into sharper relief. The answer, however, cannot be found within the framework of experience but only through the revelation of God's grace. The World War has made clear the truly tragic dimensions of human existence to an extent scarcely realized in the nineteenth century.¹⁸¹ The nineteenth century was an age of optimism when life was treated as an interesting puzzle rather than a moral problem, "a tragic battle for existence, for power, for eternal life."¹⁸² D.F. Strauss represented the spirit of the old age of rationalism and optimism.

He represented civilization, culture without tragedy, sanity with its aplomb and its self-satisfaction. He

¹⁷⁹ Also published as a sermon in *The Christian World Pulpit* 87 (Feb., 1915): 104-108.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.217.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.218.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

came with a Hegelian system into which everything could be fitted and where everything was right. He saw life as a vast plane in which everything was to be 'placed' or taken up.¹⁸³

It is Nietzsche, and not thinkers of the earlier nineteenth century like Strauss, who are the true prophets of the modern world. Forsyth wrote that

Nietzsche saw life as a vast depth, as a throbbing reality, a tragic tangle, a debacle of the soul and not as a varied landscape or a cosmic process.... Nietzsche felt, as millions feel, that life culminated in its tragic experiences, and that whatever solved the tragedy of life solved all life. That is why I say his challenge of Christianity is greater, more incisive, more searching and taxing than that of Strauss, and therefore more promising and more sympathetic, for all his contempt. He was not a spectator but an actor in this tragedy, so much so that it unhinged his mind.¹⁸⁴

Nietzsche's response to modern existence was natural, according to Forsyth:

To grasp the real, deep tragedy of life is enough to unhinge any mind which does not find God's solution of it in the central tragedy of the Cross and its redemption.¹⁸⁵

The solution to the world's tragedy, therefore, does not come from within the world of experience but from beyond.

¹⁸³ Ibid., pp.217-218.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p.218.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

"God is in human affairs, and not simply as an immanence ... but as a control. All life has God and His vast providence and purpose in it."¹⁸⁶ Because of the tragic quality of life, this purpose and end are not always apparent. Historical events do not end neatly, satisfyingly and conclusively. Forsyth quotes Flaubert who wrote: "Real life is always misrepresented by those who wish to make it lead up to a conclusion. God alone may do that."¹⁸⁷ The plane of experience then is insufficient grounds on its own for confirming that God's purpose is being worked out in the course of history.

The paradigmatic tragedy was the cross. Christ's life did not end on a conclusive note. His death did not solve any problem or dilemma but only deepened them. It was only the solution to the death of Christ from beyond the plane of history and experience that revealed the meaning of the cross. The triumph of the resurrection superseded the tragedy of the crucifixion. By the same token, the vast drama of human history cannot be interpreted by means of induction from history itself because it is not complete. "What is it in history", Forsyth asked, "that makes us believe in man, in a glorious future and completed destiny for him?"¹⁸⁸ Many had despaired of answering that question. Clearly, Forsyth

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p.221.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., pp.222-223.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p.225.

argued, the final answer cannot be extrapolated from history itself.

History, man, can only be understood by something which is final in history as well as beyond history, something in it but not of it, given to it but not rising from it, something that stands victorious and creative within it and says, 'You are from below, I am from above. You are evolving from beneath, I am descending from above. I bring God to explain man and complete him, as he can never explain or complete himself. I assure man of his eternal future because it is I who secure it.... I bring His Word who alone sees man's end, His Deed who alone secures it. I bring the Creator with a new Creation. I am He.'

The world thus finds its consummation not in finding itself but in finding its Master; not in coming to its true self but in meeting its true Lord and Saviour; not in overcoming but in being overcome. We are more than conquerors; we are redeemed.¹⁸⁹

The Christian message is not that God is love, but that God is holy and redeeming love. The Gospel is "the voice of Christ - - raised from the midst of time, and its chaos, and its convulsions, from the depths of eternity."¹⁹⁰ It is this voice from beyond history that reveals the key to history. It is through union with Christ that human beings can come to know and share in Christ's conquest of the moral problem of the world.¹⁹¹

History, Forsyth argues, contains its own end, its own *telos*, only because history is the arena of God's

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.226-227.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p.227.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., pp.229-230.

redemptive activity. This teleology, this establishment of the goal of history in advance by an event within history is the only adequate basis for a theodicy. Since theodicy attempts to justify the ways of God it must be derived from theology, from the doctrine of God. God's ways can only be justified from God's nature. However, this justification cannot occur abstractly but only through profound reflection on God's nature and will. Theology is not a self-contained system of propositions but an account of divine activity as it is experienced by human faith, and a true theodicy must attempt to give a coherent account of God's acts within the reality of history. What takes place within history that forms the foundation for a theodicy is the conquest of guilt by grace.¹⁹² The nature of theodicy is "to see the glory of God in things as they are."¹⁹³ The church can only proclaim an effective theodicy by grasping the nature of God's grace, and God's grace always involves God's redemptive judgment on the world. The ground for a theodicy cannot be arrived at inductively from within history¹⁹⁴ but can only be derived from what Forsyth called "the great theologies of redemption."¹⁹⁵ These were the classic theologies of the past. Forsyth saw a close analogy between Europe in 1914 and

¹⁹² Ibid., p.76.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p.7.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 140.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.128.

Rome in the fourth and fifth centuries. In both cases humane and liberal civilization was being devoured by barbarity. A theodicy adequate for the terrible events of a world war would have to possess a power equal to Augustine's *City of God*.¹⁹⁶ It was Augustine's genius to be able to discern divine order in the midst of human chaos and no less profound insight was needed to interpret the catastrophe presently engulfing European civilization. Augustine did so on the basis of a conviction of God's sovereignty, and only such a conviction would suffice in the twentieth century.

When your happy world goes to pieces, you cannot believe in a moral world except in the faith of such a revelation as took effect in the moral redemption of the universal conscience, and which secured for ever the holiness of God out of the worst that man can do.¹⁹⁷

Troeltsch had argued that traditional Christianity based on revelation and redemption was a thing of the past because it could no longer sustain a Church civilization.¹⁹⁸ Christianity no longer had the power to act as a unifying force holding culture together. In Forsyth's opinion, to believe this was to apply an anthropocentric criterion to Christianity. It is not Christianity's power to bind together

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p.104.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p.156.

¹⁹⁸ *Protestantism and Progress*, pp.44-45.

a civilization by the force of its own ideals, but rather the conviction of God's sovereignty that was the inner force establishing Christianity's lasting influence in history. Where this conviction ruled, Christianity exerted a permanent religious influence. The most significant periods of Christian history were not those that seemed most relevant to the detached study of history. Independency, for example, forms a minor chapter in the political and religious history of the west; but because of the way in which it united Word and Spirit, and preserved ideas that had a powerful influence on western democracy, it plays a major role in the unfolding of *God's* redemptive history. Forsyth wrote that the great movement of world missions set in motion in the eighteenth century was carried out by churches espousing a "third-rate Calvinism".¹⁹⁹ But those who pursued these missionary efforts maintained what was essential, and so furthered the advance of the Gospel out of proportion to their apparent importance. The responsibility of evangelical Christianity at this new crisis in the career of civilization was to continue to confess the sovereignty of God. Present conditions demanded of the church

not only a fresh submission of her conduct to the testing light of the Gospel, but a fresh grasp and construction of that Gospel; so as to bring, indeed, the old searching ray to bear on her deeds, but, still more, so as to create and kindle a new ideal standard, and power in the

¹⁹⁹ *JG*, p.81.

spiritual society itself.²⁰⁰

Forsyth attempted to formulate an account of Christian experience and a Christian interpretation of history that were grounded in the same fundamental reality -- the Gospel of God's gracious action in Jesus Christ. The past, present and future are all to be comprehended alike according to the same theocentric criterion. God's redemptive activity is the authoritative reality which gives to experience its authenticity, and which furnishes the principle according to which history is interpreted.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p.16.

CONCLUSIONS

Theocentric theology, according to P.T. Forsyth, responded to the specific problems which preoccupied Protestantism at the turn of the twentieth century -- the nature of history and the nature of experience. I have been arguing that Forsyth formulated a theocentric theology in response, first, to the distorting influence of rationalism in the specific form of an all-encompassing historical criticism, and secondly, to subjectivism in the form of the elevation of experience to a position of primacy.

The question is, did Forsyth succeed? On the level of internal consistency and coherence, the answer must be yes. Forsyth's ideas remained remarkably constant over the years and he argued them repeatedly with eloquence and force. However, as he himself maintained, inner coherence is not the final test of religious or theological truth. The question of the "successfulness" of Forsyth's theology really turns on whether he was able to articulate a statement of Christian faith that was able to communicate the truth and power of Christian revelation to the modern age.

First, with regard to his treatment of the problem of history, Forsyth's thought is not without its conceptual

difficulties. One of his central affirmations was that Jesus was the incarnation of God in history. Specifically, Forsyth meant that the second person of the Trinity, in an act of divine obedience, became incarnate in order to satisfy, in the existence of a human being, the holiness of God. In doing so, Christ brought about an objective transformation in the relation between God and humankind. The alienation of sin and rebellion was replaced with the communion of reconciliation. It is possible for human beings to share in this divinely instituted reconciliation because Christ has made possible the transformation of the human conscience. A life of obedience is now possible for all human creatures. Those who share in the life of Christ by faith can also satisfy the demands of God's holiness.

The main difficulty with Forsyth's line of reasoning is that he is not clear about the *content* of holiness. Considering the important place that holiness occupies in his thought, he never spells out precisely what it means. While formally it possible to see where holiness fits into the economy of salvation, Forsyth does not specify how Jesus' life constituted an adequate confession of that holiness or what its practical effect is on human moral action. Without a thorough examination of the biblical concept of holiness and its relation to the historical life of Jesus, it is hard to know how this concept could be rendered fully meaningful. Indeed, the historical life of Jesus recedes somewhat behind

the dogmatic scheme of Christ's pre-existence, kenosis and return to glory. The question arises -- posed by this issue of holiness -- whether Forsyth does justice to the actual revelation of God in history; and whether the Christ of Forsyth's theology actually is the Christ who appeared historically.

Because of the polemically charged nature of the discussion of the historical Jesus at the time, Forsyth's relative neglect of this question is understandable. He, along with Martin Kähler principally, attempted to correct the imbalance which they perceived had arisen from an over-emphasis on the historical Jesus. However, the issue of the relationship between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith remains a perplexing one for modern theology. Pannenberg criticizes christologies which subordinate Christ's historicity to an a priori concept of his divinity.¹ According to Forsyth, the doctrines of Christ's deity, pre-existence and glorification are not metaphysical propositions or historical facts but actually do arise from experience. The verdict on his overall treatment must be, however, that in his attempt to re-establish the dogmatic basis of christology, Forsyth has not dealt adequately with his own central assertion: that the Christ who entered history really did meet the eternal criteria of holiness.

A similar criticism could be applied to Forsyth's

¹ *Jesus -- God and Man*, pp.34ff.

statement that in the incarnation Christ became the representative of the human race. Christ's work had universal significance, he argues, and led to the creation of a "new humanity". We might ask what these terms, "representative" and "new humanity", really mean? Does "the human race" exist apart from the individuals that constitute it? And is it legitimate to speak of the moral transformation of the human race apart from the manifestation of that effect in individuals? In attempting to account for the significance of Christ's work of reconciliation, Forsyth seems to have resorted to rather contentless abstractions. This is an important criticism since Forsyth makes the universality of Christ's work the basis of the objectivity of his theology.

Following these preliminary observations, a deeper assessment of Forsyth's position regarding history and historical criticism can be made alongside Pannenberg's essay "Redemptive Event and History" in which he discusses the issues of redemptive history and the anthropocentric outlook.

The consciousness of history arose in Israel, according to Pannenberg. The religion of Israel was characterized by the motif of promise and fulfilment. History arises because God makes and fulfils promises. This original insight evolved into the conviction that history constitutes all of reality. It is, in effect, the stage on which God acts and brings about new things.² This redemptive history is in

² "Redemptive Event and History", p.18.

no way separate from universal history.

In spite of the modern commitment to the historicity of existence, the anthropocentric turn which characterizes modernity has had the effect of dissolving the unity of history that existed in the consciousness of Israel by making "man ... the center which bears history" rather than God.³ At the same time, however, Pannenberg argues that there is no other way of dealing with history than by means of historical method. Historical methodology is inherently anthropocentric because its tools are correlation and analogy which are used to illuminate what is unknown from what is known. An understanding of history begins with an awareness of analogies with one's own experience. The meaning of history is discerned on this basis and not as the result of a search for suprahistorical meaning.⁴ However, this methodological anthropocentricity does not necessarily presuppose an anthropocentric worldview in which God is displaced and transcendence is excluded in principle.⁵ The proper bounds of historical method are exceeded, he argues, when analogy is taken to mean homogeneity; when the possibility of certain events is excluded a priori; when no room is left for the freedom of God; and when absolute judgments are made on the basis of analogy with one's own experience. Nevertheless,

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p.38.

⁵ Ibid., p.40.

Pannenberg argues, revelation must be seen as historical; and if historical, then subject to the methods of historical investigation.⁶ There can be no legitimate appeal to faith as a means of compensating for "defective knowledge."⁷

The theological interpretation of history depends on seeing God and God's freedom as the principle of unity that binds history together. This is because the very concept of universal history is itself the product of the Jewish-Christian world view.⁸ It is the demise of that world view that has led to the dissolution of history into relativism. Apart from the God who is free to act in history, there is nothing but the chaos of events.⁹

Pannenberg would certainly take Forsyth to task for seeking to avoid anthropocentrism by introducing suprahistorical categories, such as pre-existence or atonement, as interpretive principles brought to bear on historical events. However, while granting that Forsyth's thought is open to this charge, his theology can be defended by shifting the focus of historicity to a different ground. One of Forsyth's motives in developing a theocentrically-oriented theology was to maintain the continuity of the present and the future with those in the past who claim to

⁶ Ibid., p.50.

⁷ Ibid., p.64.

⁸ Ibid., p.76.

⁹ Ibid., p.76.

have been in communion with God through Jesus Christ. The historical nature of Christianity does not involve only the appearance of the divine in Jesus of Nazareth but also the appropriation of the power of his life throughout history. The question of Christianity as an historical religion cannot be restricted to the question of founding events, as essential as they may be.

The main point made by Forsyth, and before him by Martin Kähler, was that the historian who is also a person of faith does not deal with Christ himself as a bare historical datum but with the witness of the first century church to Christ. This distinction between Jesus the historical figure and the Jesus of the New Testament has been recognized since the end of the life of Jesus movement. Virtually the only evidence we have that gives us access to the Jesus who lived historically is the testimony of those who claimed to have seen him alive, along with the traditions that bear their names. Historical method is able to make probable judgments regarding the reliability of these sources, the relationship between the various New Testament witnesses, the context in which their accounts were written, and their relationship to the historically existing Jesus of Nazareth. However, if Christian *faith* affirms that in this Jesus we have God in a unique and somehow complete way, and that we know this because of his resurrection (an event without historical analogy); and if Christian faith is concerned not only with Jesus as "past

fact" but as a "present power", in what sense can these judgments of historical probability become the final criterion in these matters? Pannenberg argues that the theocentric concept of God as the principle that binds all history together "should really be indispensable for the historian."¹⁰ That is well and good. But keeping in mind the observation at the beginning of the first chapter of this study, that affirmation always implies denial of something, we can see that P.T. Forsyth worked in a context in which the historian had not become sufficiently aware of his limitations. Even within the Christian context, Forsyth believed that many historians had permitted their methodological and scientific judgments to become the criterion of faith.

Forsyth's central point was that theology, if it is to remain "evangelical" in the sense of being in continuity with the Reformation, must preserve its adherence to the freedom and sovereignty of God, and do so in dialogue with those who have made this principle their foundation throughout history. It seems to me that Forsyth and even Kähler were not so much concerned to separate out a distinct realm of "redemptive history" from universal history as they were to raise the question of the legitimate boundaries of the province of historical science. Kähler reached his pessimistic conclusions regarding the historical Jesus at a time when so-

¹⁰ Ibid., p.76.

called life of Jesus research put fanciful speculation in place of sound historical judgment. Forsyth, on the other hand, wrote in an atmosphere of optimistic liberalism which, he believed, had lost sight of the moral demands of Christianity and replaced them with the self-centred needs of *homo religiosus*. While Forsyth may be criticized for failing to develop the precise meaning of terms such as "holiness" and their relation to historical revelation, one of the strongest features of his theology was his clear affirmation that Christianity confronts egocentric humanity with a transcendent moral imperative. He saw through the tendency of pre-World War I liberalism to deify its own intellectual and ethical triumphs.

In conclusion, Forsyth succeeded in pointing up the anthropocentric dangers in a theology that took its cue from historical method. In evaluating Forsyth, this should be kept in mind; that he was motivated by the conviction that the far-reaching conclusions of liberal theology and the history of religion threatened to obliterate the unique features of Christianity. He was not unaware of the conceptual difficulties in trying to reconcile theocentricity with modern, post-Enlightenment consciousness. But he was convinced that the moral force and the religious value of the Christian message -- two aspects that liberals were especially concerned to promote -- could not survive if they were not seen as originating from a transcendent source.

The second aspect of Forsyth's theology is the nature of experience. It was absolutely essential, he thought, to interpret experience theocentrically. By that he meant that authentic experience must be seen as originating with God. It is the operation of divine grace that makes Christian experience truly transformative and recreative, and distinguishes it from mere human sentiment. Forsyth's thoughts on experience anticipate the issues raised by another theologian, H. Richard Niebuhr.

In his book *The Meaning of Revelation*, Niebuhr argues for the need to distinguish clearly between revelation and the subjective standpoint from which revelation is seen and interpreted.¹¹ Revelation cannot be confused with the particular point in history from which it is perceived. At the same time, revelation cannot be dealt with in a detached or impersonal way. Revelation is inherently historical. It both occurs in and is perceived in a particular historical context. However, a distinction needs to be made between what he called "inner history" and "outer history".¹² Inner history is the history of "selves", outer history is the history of "objects." Inner history is "our" history, and revelation considered from this perspective is always a question of an I-Thou relation. Revelation is experienced personally and faith in revelation is confessed in a community

¹¹ *The Meaning of Revelation*, p.54.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.65.

of persons. The error that has often been made, Niebuhr argues, is to locate revelation in external, "non-participating" history.¹³ When revelation is correctly perceived, it possesses the power to be "that part of our inner history which illuminates the rest of it."¹⁴ It becomes the criterion by which experience is evaluated and by which we make sense of the past.¹⁵

A similar distinction runs through Forsyth's theology. The meaning of what has happened historically is only truly perceived when it is experienced not only as "past fact" but as "present power". However, that experience is wholly dependent upon what has been revealed and not vice versa. If the theocentric view of God furnishes a unifying principle for the interpretation of God's redemptive activity in history, this view at the same time safeguards Christianity from becoming merely the name given to the meanderings of the religious subject. The Christian message has to do with the tension and balance between the Word and the Spirit, between what has happened in the past and what is experienced in the present. While his theology may be faulted for its lack of conceptual precision at certain key points, and while these faults are significant, Forsyth has made a valuable contribution to twentieth century theology by insisting that

¹³ Ibid., p.74.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.93.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.110.

this balance be maintained and that both historic revelation and contemporary experience be defined in relation to the sovereign freedom of God.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(An exhaustive bibliography of primary and secondary sources is found in Donald G. Miller, Browne Barr and Robert S. Paul, *P.T. Forsyth: The Man, The Preacher's Theologian, Prophet for the 20th Century*, pp.25-41.)

1. Works by Forsyth

"Christ and the Christian Principle". In *London Theological Studies*. London: University of London Press, 1911, pp.133-166.

The Church, the Gospel and Society. London: Independent Press 1962.

The Cruciality of the Cross (1909), 2nd edition. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1948.

Faith, Freedom and the Future. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912.

God the Holy Father. London: Independent Press, 1957.

"Ibsen's Treatment of Guilt". *Hibbert Journal* 14 (October, 1915): 105-122.

"Immanence and Incarnation". In C.H. Vine, ed., *The Old Faith and the New*. New York: Eaton and Mains; Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1907.

"Intellectualism and Faith". *Hibbert Journal* (January, 1913): 311-328.

The Justification of God: Lectures for War-Time on a Christian Theodicy. London: Duckworth and Co., 1916.

Marriage: Its Ethic and Religion. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912.

"The Need for a Positive Gospel". *London Quarterly Review* 101 (1904): 64-99.

The Person and Place of Jesus Christ (1909). London: Independent Press, 1930.

"Pfleiderer's View of St. Paul's Doctrine". *Modern Review* 4 (1883): 81-96.

"The Place of Spiritual Experience in the Making of Modern Theology". *Christian World Pulpit* 69 (March, 1906): 184-187.

Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind (1907). Third edition, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949, 1964.

The Principle of Authority in Relation to Certainty, Sanctity and Society (1912). Second edition, London: Independent Press, 1952.

"Revelation and the Person of Christ" in *Faith and Criticism: Essays by Congregationalists*. Second edition, London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1893, pp.95-144.

Rome, Reform and Reaction: Four Lectures on the Religious Situation. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899.

"Some Christian Aspects of Evolution". *London Quarterly Review* 104 (October, 1905): 209-239.

"Sunday Schools and Modern Theology". *Christian World Pulpit* 31 (February, 1887): 123-127.

"Theological Liberalism versus Liberal Theology". *British Weekly* 47 (February 17, 1910): 557-558.

The Work of Christ (1910). London: Independent Press, 1938.

2. Works on Forsyth

Barth, Markus. "P.T. Forsyth: The Theologian for the Practical Man". *Congregational Quarterly* 17 (1939): 436-442.

Brown, Robert McAfee. "The 'Conversion' of P.T. Forsyth". *Congregational Quarterly* 30 (1952): 236-244.

_____. *P.T. Forsyth: Prophet for Today*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952.

Cave, Sydney. "P.T. Forsyth: The Man and His Writings". *Congregational Quarterly* 26 (1948): 107-118.

Cocks, H. F. L. "The Message of P.T. Forsyth". *Congregational Quarterly* 26 (1948): 214-221.

- _____. "P.T. Forsyth's *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*". *Expository Times* 64 (1953): 195-198.
- Gardiner, Harry M. "The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ in the Thought of Peter Taylor Forsyth and Emil Brunner". Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston University, 1962.
- Garvie, A.E. "A Cross-Centred Theology". *Congregational Quarterly* 22 (1944): 324-330.
- Griffith, Gwilym C. *The Theology of P.T. Forsyth*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1948.
- Hunter, A. M. *P.T. Forsyth: Per Crucem ad Lucem*. London: SCM Press, 1974.
- McKay, Clifford Anderson. "The Moral Structure of Reality in the Theology of Peter Taylor Forsyth". Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1970.
- Mikolaski, Samuel J. "P.T. Forsyth on the Atonement". *Evangelical Quarterly* 36 (1964): 78-91.
- _____. "P.T. Forsyth" in P.L. Hughes, ed. *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1966, pp.307-337.
- Miller, Donald G., Browne Barr and Robert S. Paul. *P.T. Forsyth: The Man, The Preacher's Theologian, Prophet for the 20th Century*. Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1981.
- "Peter Taylor Forsyth". *Der Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*. Dritte Auflage, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1958, 2: 1006.
- Rodgers, John H. *The Theology of P.T. Forsyth*. London: Independent Press, 1965.
- Rosenthal, Klaus. "Die Bedeutung des Kreuzesgeschehens für Lehre und Bekenntnis nach Peter Taylor Forsyth". *Kerygma und Dogma: Zeitschrift für Theologische Forschung un Kirchliche Lehre* 7 (1961): 237-259.
- Simpson, A.F. "P.T. Forsyth: The Prophet of Judgment". *Scottish Journal of Theology* 4 (1951): 148-156.
- Thompson, Robert F. "Peter Taylor Forsyth: A Pre-Barthian." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation. Drew University, 1940.

3. Other Works

- Aulén, Gustav. *Christus Victor: A Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*. Trans. A. G. Herbert. London: S.P.C.K., 1953.
- Baillie, Donald M. *God Was In Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement*. London: Faber and Faber, 1948.
- Barth, Karl. *The Doctrine of the Word of God (Church Dogmatics 1.1)*. Trans. G.T. Thomson. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936.
- _____. *The Humanity of God*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1960.
- _____. *Theology and Church*. Trans. Louise Pettibone Smith. New York: Harper, 1962.
- _____. *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*. Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 19 .
- Berger, Peter. *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity*. New York: The Free Press, 1992.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Christ the Center*. Trans. Edwin H. Robertson. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1960, 1978.
- _____. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Enlarged edition. New York: Macmillan, 1953, 1968, 1971.
- Bousset, Wilhelm. "Moderne Positive Theologie". *Theologische Rundschau* 9 (1906): 287-302, 327-340.
- Brown, James. *Subject and Object in Modern Theology*. London: SCM Press, 1955.
- Brunner, Emil. *The Christian Doctrine of God (Dogmatics 1)*. Trans. Olive Wyon. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1950.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 2 volumes. Ed. John T. McNeill. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960.
- Campbell, Douglas. *The Puritan in Holland, England and America: An Introduction to American History*. 2 volumes. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1892.

- Campbell, John McLeod. *The Nature of the Atonement and Its Relation to Remission of Sins and Eternal Life* (1856). London: James Clarke & Co., 1956.
- Campbell, R.J. *The New Theology*. New York: Macmillan, 1907.
- Caponigri, A. Robert. *A History of Western Philosophy*. 4 volumes. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963.
- Carlston, Charles E. "Biblicism or Historicism? Some Remarks on the Conflict Between Kähler and Hermann on the Historical Jesus". *Biblical Research* 13 (1968): 26-40.
- Cassirer, Ernst. *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*. Trans. Fritz C.A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941.
- _____. *Kant's Life and Thought*. Trans. James Haden. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981.
- Coakley, Sarah. *Christ Without Absolutes: A Study of the Christology of Ernst Troeltsch*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- _____. and David Paillin, ed. *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- Dangerfield, George. *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1935). New York: Capricorn Books, 1961.
- Deegan, Daniel L. "Martin Kähler: Kerygma and Gospel History". *Scottish Journal of Theology* 16:1 (1963): 50-67.
- Dillenberger, John and Claude Welch. *Protestant Christianity Interpreted Through its Development*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954.
- Edwards, Jonathan. *Religious Affections (Works 2)*. Ed. John E. Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.
- Elliott-Binns, L.E. *English Thought, 1860-1900: The Theological Aspect*. Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury Press, 1956.
- Ensor, Robert C.K. *England, 1870-1914*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936.

- Garvie, A.E. *The Ritschlian Theology, Critical and Constructive: An Exposition and Estimate*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902.
- Glover, Willis B. *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Independent Press, 1954.
- Göertz, Hans-Jürgen. *Geist und Wirklichkeit: Studie zur Pneumatologie Erich Schaeders*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980.
- Goodwin, Thomas. *Works*. 8 volumes. Edinburgh: n.p., 1861.
- Gore, Charles, ed. *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation* (1889). Fifth edition. New York: John W. Lovell, n.d.
- Grant, John Webster. *Freechurchmanship in England, 1870-1940: With Special Reference to Congregationalism*. London: Independent Press, 1962.
- Harnack, Adolf. *What is Christianity?* (1900). Second edition, trans. Bailey Saunders. New York: G.P. Putnam; London: Williams and Norgate, 1904.
- Hefner, Philip. *Faith and the Vitalities of History*. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- Hermann, Wilhelm. *The Communion of the Christian with God: Described on the Basis of Luther's Statements* (Fourth German edition, 1903.) Second English edition, trans. J. Standys Stanton. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.
- Houghton, Walter E. *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1957.
- Iggers, Georg G. *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present*. Revised edition. Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1968.
- Ihmels, D. Ludwig. *Die Christliche Wahrheitsgewissheit: Ihr Letzter Grund und Ihre Entstehung* (1911). Third edition. Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1914.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1978.
- Johnson, Robert Clyde. *Authority in Protestant Theology*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959.

- Kaftan, Theodor. *Moderne Theologie des Alten Glaubens*. Second edition. Schleswig: Julius Bergas, 1906.
- Kähler, Martin. *Dogmatische Zeitfragen*. 2 volumes. Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1908.
- _____. *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ* (1896). Trans. Carl E. Braaten. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964, 1988.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Ethical Philosophy*. Trans. James W. Ellington. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983.
- Kierkegaard, Soren. *Philosophical Fragments, or A Fragment of Philosophy* (1834). Trans. David Swenson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936, 1962.
- _____. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments* (1846). Trans. David Swenson and Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941, 1968.
- Langford, Thomas. *In Search of Foundations: British Theology, 1900-1920*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1969.
- Macquarrie, John. *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*. London: SCM Press, 1990.
- Mandelbaum, Maurice. *History, Man and Reason: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971.
- McKim, Donald K. and Jack B. Rogers. *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979.
- Mozley, John Kenneth. *Some Tendencies in British Theology (From the Publication of Lux Mundi to the Present Day)*. London: S.P.C.K., 1951.
- Muehler, David Livingstone. *Introduction to the Theology of Albrecht Ritschl*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper & Row, 1951.
- _____. *The Meaning of Revelation*. New York: Macmillan, 1941.
- Nuttall, Geoffrey. *Visible Saints: The Congregational Way, 1640-1660*. London: Basil Blackwell, 1957.

- Orr, James. *The Ritschlian Theology and the Evangelical Faith*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898.
- Packer, James I. *The Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Basic Questions in Theology: Collected Essays*. Trans. George H. Kehm. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970.
- _____. *Jesus -- God and Man*. Trans. Lewis Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968.
- Proudfoot, Wayne. *Religious Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
- Reardon, Bernard M. G. *From Coleridge to Gore: A Century of Religious Thought in Britain*. London: Longman, 1971.
- Ritschl, Albrecht. *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*. Trans. A.B. Macauley, et al. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900.
- _____. *Three Essays*. Trans. Philip Hefner. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972.
- _____. *Unterricht in der Christlichen Religion (1875)*. Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1966.
- Robinson, James M., ed. *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology*. Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1968.
- _____. *The New Quest of the Historical Jesus*. London: SCM Press, 1959.
- Rumscheidt, Martin, ed. *Adolf von Harnack: Liberal Theology at its Height*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988.
- Rupp, George. *Culture-Protestantism: German Liberal Theology at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977.
- Schaeder, D. Erich. *Theozentrische Theologie*. Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1909.
- Schleiermacher, Freidrich. *The Christian Faith*. 2 volumes, ed. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

- _____. *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1799). Trans. Richard Crouter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Schweitzer, Albert. *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (1906). Third edition, trans. W. Montgomery. New York: Macmillan, 1968.
- Smith, Stephen McCray. "Dogma and History: The Creative Ferment in British Christology, 1890-1920." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation. Claremont Graduate School, 1980.
- Stephan, Horst and Martin Schmidt. *Geschichte der Deutschen Evangelischen Theologie*. Second edition. Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1960.
- Strauss, David Friedrich. *Der Alte und der Neue Glaube*. Bonn: E. Strauss, 1875.
- Streeter, B.H., ed. *Foundations: A Statement of Christian Belief in Terms of Modern Thought by Seven Oxford Men*. London: Macmillan, 1912, 1922.
- Swinburne, Richard. *The Christian God*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- Sykes, Stephen. *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians of the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
- Tillich, Paul. *The Interpretation of History*. Trans. Elsa L. Talmey. New York, London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936.
- Troeltsch, Ernst. *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions* (1902, 1912). Trans. David Reid. Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1971.
- _____. *The Christian Faith* (1912-1913). Ed. Gertrud von le Fort, trans. Garrett E. Paul. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991.
- _____. *Christian Thought: Its History and Application* (1923). Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press, 1979.
- _____. *Protestantism and Progress: A Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World* (1912). Trans. W. Montgomery. Boston: Beacon Press, 1958.

- _____. *Religion and History*. Trans. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991.
- _____. "Religious Principle". Trans. R.A. Wilson. In Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Twentieth Century Theology in the Making*. London: William Collins & Sons, 1970, 2:334-341.
- _____. *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (1912). 2 volumes, trans. Olive Wyon. Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1931, 1992.
- _____. *Writings on Theology and Religion*. Ed. Robert Morgan and Michael Pye. Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1977, 1990.
- Webb, C.C.J. *God and Personality*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1919.
- Welch, Claude, ed. *God and Incarnation in Mid-Nineteenth Century German Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- _____. *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*. 2 volumes. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- _____. *The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*. London: SCM Press, 1953.
- Widdicombe, David. "Theology and Experience in the Thought of P.T. Forsyth". Unpublished paper. Oxford University, 1995.
- Willey, Thomas E. *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860-1914*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978.